



# **GAUHATI UNIVERSITY** **Institute of Distance and Open Learning**

**Semester- I**

## **MA in English**

**Paper - II (ENG-02-I-1026)**  
**16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> Century DRAMA**

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**ENG-02-I-1026**

**GAUHATI UNIVERSITY**  
**Institute of Distance and Open Learning**

**M.A. First Semester**  
**(under CBCS)**

**ENGLISH**

**Paper: ENG-1026**  
**16<sup>th</sup> AND 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY DRAMA**



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## Unit 1

### General Introduction to English Renaissance Drama

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- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction-Origins of Drama in England
- 1.3 Drama and Society -
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- 1.4 Playhouses and Players
  - 1.4.1 The Arena Theatres
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## OBJECTIVES

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

With the help of this unit you should be able to

*recognize* the value of the intellectual climate in which the plays were written

*evaluate* the importance of the theatres and the acting companies in the actual production of the plays prescribed for you.

*identify* themes and contemporary issues that are repeated in several plays.

*relate* the information in this section to the plays more profitably, effectively and creatively.

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## 1.2 INTRODUCTION - ORIGINS OF DRAMA IN ENGLAND

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

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### 1.2.1 Tropes to Liturgical Drama

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

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

Simple chanting between priest and the congregation or the choir which represented it.

More elaborate acting out of a scene between two characters or sets of characters.

The processions, the ritual of movement and the gesture of church ceremonies.

What do Tropes mean in Drama?

The ceremonies designed to commemorate special Christian events like Christmas and Easter naturally lent themselves to dramatization.

These ceremonial dramatizations were known as tropes - simple but dramatic elaborations of parts of the liturgy - and they represent the beginnings of medieval drama.

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

"Whom do you seek?"

"Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified."

"He is not here. He is risen."

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

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

What is a Passion Play?

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

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

and then later they moved into an even larger space, traditionally the marketplace of the town or even a convenient meadow.

**SAQ:**

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

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.....

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

.....  
.....

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## **1.2.2 Miracle and Mystery Plays**

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

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

**Corpus Christi**

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

Corpus Christi also involved a professional observance with the Host carried about and displayed at various stations. Plays were generally presented on wagons or pageant carts, which were in effect moving stages. Each pageant cart presented a different scene of the cycle and

the wagons followed each other, repeating their scenes at successive stations. Carts were often very elaborate, equipped with a changing room, a stage proper, and two areas which represented hell (usually a painted dragon's head) and heaven (a balcony). Stage machinery and sound effects became integral parts of the plotting. The duration of the performances varied with the number of plays in a cycle, but always extended over several days. In Chester for example where there were only twenty-four plays the performances continued for three days while at York where forty-eight plays were enacted, performances continued for a longer period.

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

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

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

### **Stop to Consider**

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

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

One cannot say that drama was fully developed in the fifteenth century, but this was the period during which most of the cycles of the



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

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

**Stop to Consider**

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

**SAQ**

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

.....  
.....

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

.....  
.....

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**1.2.3 Moralities and Interludes**

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While the miracle plays were still going strong, another medieval dramatic form - the morality play - emerged in the 14th century and flourished in the 15th-16th centuries. The morality plays seem less

alive and more artificially constructed than the miracle plays, but they mark a necessary stage, and in a sense, a considerable advance in the progress towards the Elizabethan drama. The morality play differs from the miracle play in that it does not deal with a biblical or pseudo-biblical story but with personified abstractions of virtues and vices who struggle for man's soul. Simply put, morality plays deal with man's search for salvation. They are at their origin as much imbued with Christian teaching as the miracle plays but have a more intellectual character.

#### The differences between miracle and morality plays

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

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

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

The moralities had one plot.

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

#### Key Elements & Themes of Morality Plays

Morality plays held several elements in common:

The hero represents Mankind or Everyman.

Among the other characters are personifications of virtues, vices and Death, as well as angels and demons who battle for the possession of the soul of man.

The psychomachia, the battle for the soul, was a common medieval theme and bound up with the whole idea of medieval allegory, and it found its way into medieval drama - and even into some Renaissance drama, as Dr. Faustus indicates.

A character known as the Vice often played the role of the tempter in a fashion both sinister and comic.

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

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

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

**SAQ:**

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

.....

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

.....

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

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

Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Luces* written at the end of the 15th century is the earliest extant purely secular play in English. He had already written a morality play entitled *Nature*. Medwall was one of a group of early Tudor playwrights that included John Rastell and John Heywood, who ended up being the most important dramatist of them all. Heywood's interludes were often written as part of the evening's

entertainment at a nobleman's house and their emphasis is more on amusement than instruction. Heywood's art resembles the modern music-hall or vaudeville sketch. The plots are very basic.

**SAQ:**

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

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.....

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### **1.2.4 Classical Influences on Comedies and Tragedies**

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

Taking its theme from the *Milos Gloriosus* of Roman playwright Plautus, about 1553, Nicholas Udall wrote the comic *Ralph Roister Doister*. This play brings the braggart soldier for the first time into English drama. Udall's characters function both as traditional vices/virtues and as traditional characters in Latin comedy (for example, the Parasite, who also shows up in the plays of Ben Jonson). The plot is simple, but it does include a complication and a resolution, which shows a firmer grasp on structure.

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

It was not until George Gascoigne produced his comic play *Supposes* at Gray's Inn in 1566 that prose made its first appearance in English drama. Gascoigne's play is another comedy adapted from a foreign source, from the Italian of Ariosto. Gascoigne's play is far more

sophisticated and subtle than *Ralph Roister Doister* or *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. In fact, it is the first of many witty Italianate comedies in English which includes Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

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

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

**Stop to Consider**

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

**SAQ:**

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

.....

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

.....

.....

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

.....

.....

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

#### Senecan Tragedy

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

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

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

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

It is divided into 5 acts,

It follows the classical manner in avoiding violence on the stage (instead, it presents it offstage), and

It is written in blank verse, the first English play to be so.

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### 1.3 DRAMA AND SOCIETY

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

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

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

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

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

**SAQ:**

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

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.....

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### 1.3.1 The Condition of England

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

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

In many of the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries the reader will come across encounters between characters belonging to the nobility - those in power, and characters from the marginalized sections of societies. *The Jew of Malta*, *Measure for Measure*, *Henry IV Part I*, *King Lear*, *As you Like It*, *Hamlet* and many other plays provide such examples. These encounters become crucial because they show that although English society of that time was based on a system of institutionalized social inequality, it was being challenged and dismantled by other forces.

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

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



### **Stop to Consider**

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

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

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

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

### **"The University Wits"**

There was a substantial increase in the number of university-educated younger or dispossessed sons of the ruling elite who were not members of the clergy. This led in the 16th century to a new literary phenomenon, the secular professional playwright. The first to exploit this situation was a group of writers known as the University Wits, young men who had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge with no patrons to sponsor their literary efforts and no

desire to enter the Church. They turned to playwriting to make a living. In doing so they made Elizabethan drama more literary and more dramatic--and they also had an important influence on both private and public theaters because they worked for both. They set the course for later Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

**SAQ:**

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

.....  
.....

Some of the University wits were:

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

George Peele (1558 - 98) wrote *The Arraignment of Paris* he began writing courtly mythological pastoral plays like Lyly's, and also wrote histories and biblical plays.

Robert Greene (1558 - 92), who is said to have founded romantic comedy, wrote plays that combined realistic native backgrounds with an atmosphere of romance, as well as comedies. He is also well known for *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay*.

Thomas Lodge (1557 - 1625) tended toward eupheistic prose romances. His *Rosalynde* provided Shakespeare with the basis for *As You Like It*. His most important work is his picaresque tale *The Unfortunate Traveller*, an early novel.

Thomas Kyd (1558 - 94), founded romantic tragedy. He wrote plays mingling the themes of love, conspiracy, murder and revenge. He adapted elements of Senecan drama to melodrama. His *The Spanish Tragedy* (1580s) is the first of the series of revenge plays which captured the Elizabethan and Jacobean imaginations.

Christopher Marlowe (1564 - 93) was the most impressive dramatist among the University Wits. His first play was the two-part *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587-88), which was important because it introduced his style of blank verse. He also wrote *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*, *Edward II* and *The Jew of Malta*.

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

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## 1.4 PLAYHOUSES AND PLAYERS

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

**Stop to Consider**

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

**SAQ:**

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

.....

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

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### 1.4.1 The Arena Theatres

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A tradition of playing by adult groups of players and companies of boys was already established by the time Queen Elizabeth came to the throne. There was a tradition of acting plays in the Grammar schools and this led to boy companies providing entertainment at court during Christmas and Shrovetide. Plays had been staged in court from the time of Henry IV and Queen Elizabeth continued this tradition.

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

These restrictions stimulated entrepreneurs to borrow money and set up the first professional playhouse outside the jurisdiction of the city authorities. The earliest was the Red Lion, built in 1567 in Stepney to the east of London. This was followed by The Theatre (1576), The Curtain (1577) and The Rose (1587), the Swan (1595). The Theatre was dismantled and the Globe was set up in 1599. The Red Bull (1605) was the last open air theatre to be built apart from the Hope (1614) which also functioned as a bear-baiting arena. By this time

performances were being offered daily and the new playhouses offered spectators more comfort than the inn yards. The city's attempt to restrain playing in inn yards actually had the opposite effect; it contributed to the development of professional companies playing regularly on most days.

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

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

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

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

**SAQ:**

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

.....  
.....

**Stop to Consider**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Induction, 267-72)

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

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

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

**SAQ:**

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

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### **1.4.2 The Early Private Playhouses**

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

The dramatic activities of the boy players took on a quasi- professional status with the establishment of a hall within St Paul's Cathedral and the establishment of the second Blackfriars theatre in 1600. The boys staged plays by Marston, Chapman and Middleton. From about 1600 the indoor playhouses at Blackfriars and St Paul's came to be known as 'private' theatres in contrast to the 'public' theatres. The private theatres staged plays less frequently and they began plays at a later time, 3 or 4 in the afternoon as against 2 o'clock the customary time at the public



theatres. The private playhouses also charged much higher prices than the public ones. All the audiences were seated in the private theatres, and higher prices meant that these theatres attracted gallants and gentlewomen. The boys acted by candlelight and provided music between acts of a play.

This was an innovation, for act divisions were not observed as intervals in the public theatres, and music was not played. At Blackfriars music was played before performance began, and sometimes there was dancing and singing between acts. Music was a feature of small enclosed theatres, where soft sounds could be heard, and a range of instruments used. Another innovation that became a feature of private theatres was the practice of allowing members of the audience, who paid extra for the privilege, to have a stool and sit on the stage during the show.

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

#### Players & Theatres: Facts to Remember

In 1583 Queen Elizabeth's Master of the Revels formed a company of players for the Queen.

In 1576, James Burbage, leader of the Earl of Leicester's men, built the first permanent theater, called "The Theatre," in a field near Shoreditch, out of the city and thus out of the control of the Lord Mayor, who was the official "censor" of plays.

Other permanent, public theatres soon followed: the Curtain, in 1577; the Rose, in 1588; the Swan, in 1595.

Shakespeare's theatre, the Globe, was built in 1599.

In addition to the public theatres, there were private ones, chief among them the Blackfriars (1576). They were different from public theatres because they:

- o were roofed,
- o had more elaborate interior arrangements, and presented plays originally acted by child players.

**SAQ:**

1. As you read this section try and see how the plays prescribed for you were influenced by the stage practices of the time they were written in.

Can you relate the different kinds of plays that were written in this period to the development of the 'private' and 'public' theatres? ( 30 words)

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.....

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

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## **1.5 PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE CONDITIONS OF PRODUCTION**

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The stage conditions for which Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote were ideally suited to reflecting issues of importance in the society. The Elizabethans reaped the advantages of Burbage's first public commercial theatre, which was built in London in 1576. Its significance was twofold. In the first place the building of a permanent public theatre in London guaranteed the professional status of both the playwright and the acting companies. The strolling players of the sixteenth century had been outlawed as vagabonds. The companies, which played in the new theatres, were normally associated with a noble household, but in practice they were independent of patronage

because they were financed on a commercial basis by their own earnings in the theatres. The willingness of the new theatre companies to pay for the plays created, for the first time in England a paying market for literature. The playwrights instead of being wholly dependent on patronage and on command performances in the court were now employed by the acting companies, as Shakespeare was for the Chamberlain's Men, and then the King's Men, and as Heywood was for the Red Bull. This gave them security, for they were not dependent on personal favours to make a living. Early plays were written for the Children's companies attached to the Chapel Royal and St Paul's. In the period before 1600 these companies were strictly amateur; their performances were given at court about twice a year; even at Blackfriars theatre performances other than those specifically requested by the court were billed as rehearsals. When playwrights wrote with an eye to court performances their plays needed the court audiences for their completion, and they had to acknowledge the presence of the Queen. For the professional playwrights in the public theatre the situation was completely different. They were not indebted to a patron or monarch, and were answerable to the audience - an audience very different from the court audience.

As you read this section try and remember what has been said about players and playhouses in the section before this.

Try and recollect what you have already learnt about boy actors and public theatres.

Now read the plays prescribed for you and see how these factors controlled the playwright.

Plays cannot be fully appreciated in their complexity if modes of production are not taken into account. The form, as well as the theme a playwright chooses, is closely connected to the theatres and actors at his disposal.

The plays enacted in the public theatres had to appeal to an extremely diverse group of people - gallants and courtiers, as well as a large following of tradesmen, citizens, merchants, artisans and workers, and their wives and children. The theatre was no longer the preserve of the wealthy, the poorer sections of society could afford this entertainment

because standing seats cost only a penny while seats in the gallery could be procured for two or three pence. The commercialization of the theatre in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period forced playwrights to leave academic school drama and elegant court interludes and get in touch with the concerns of the London world at a time when it was seething with new ideas and activities.

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

### **1.6 Check Your Progress**

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

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## **1.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS**

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## Unit 2

### *The Spanish Tragedy*

### Introduction and Stage History

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- 2.1 Objective
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Date
- 2.4 Sources
- 2.5 Contexts
- 2.6 The play on the stage
- 2.7 Critical reception/adaptations
- 2.8 Summing up
- 2.9 Reference and Suggested Reading

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#### 2.1 Objectives:

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- At the end of this unit, you shall be able to understand the following issues:
- The dates of publication and, initial performances of *The Spanish Tragedy*
- The sources that Thomas Kyd sought inspiration from in writing *The Spanish Tragedy*
- The context and background of the play that includes:
  - A brief history of English drama and the theatres and playhouses
  - The Role of the University Wits in raising English drama to its most resplendent position.
  - The position of Thomas Kyd among the University Wits and as a pioneer of the English Tragedy.
  - Understanding the genre of Elizabethan Tragedy
  - Understanding the Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy
- The performance of the play on stage, and its reception by the audience and critics.

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#### 2.2 Introduction

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The Renaissance in England was one of the richest periods in the history of English literature. English drama had flourished in this period unlike any other time that preceded it. Although, Shakespeare has been declared as the most brilliant of playwrights of the English Renaissance, including the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, seen from a perspective of the theatre goers of that time, he was just one of the many good playwrights and actors. Before the arrival of Shakespeare on the dramatic stage, a group very intelligent and professional playwrights had dominated the scene, which in

retrospect, had paved the way for the genius of Shakespeare. These were the University Wits.

Even as Christopher Marlowe can be considered as the most talented of the playwrights among the University Wits, Thomas Kyd had brought to the Elizabethan stage, a kind of drama that would dominate the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre for quite some time. This was the revenge tragedy, inspired by the Senecan model. Theatre going was one of the most important and favourite pastimes of the Elizabethan public, and hence, an account of the performance of this particular play and its critical reception and later adaptations, are important aspects of understanding the significance of the play.

Literature is never produced in a vacuum. As such, it is always essential to understand the context within which a particular piece of literature has been produced. The Renaissance revival of classical learning and its focus on the human individual in all epistemological endeavours, contributed to a renewed interest in drama. Nevertheless, the origin of drama in England has a long history, before it evolved into its most refined state during the Elizabethan period. It is, therefore, our objective in this unit, to introduce the students to a brief background of English drama, its formative masters, and the stage on which these plays were performed. The discussion of the context must include an understanding of the genre of Elizabethan Tragedy, with special reference to the revenge tragedy, as it became popular among the theatre goers of that time.

Biographically, much is not known about Thomas Kyd. Nor do we have an extensive extant of his works that could enable a detailed understanding of him as a writer. It is his most popular work, *The Spanish Tragedy*, that dominated the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, that requires intensive attention, to understand the overwhelming response received by the tragedies, of which it was a pioneer, during that time.

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### 1.3 Date:

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Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* was first published in 1592. It was revised, with addition of new material, by Ben Jonson, under the solicitation of Philip Henslowe, a theatrical entrepreneur. Until 1633, the play is believed to have gone through at least nine reprinting.

### 1.4 Source:

The Elizabethan playwright had always found inspiration in multiple sources from the Greco-Roman literary tradition, especially since a neo-classical trend had already become predominant with the Renaissance revival of classical learning. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, Thomas Kyd had derived the theme of revenge, the style and language of the play from Seneca. The ghost of Don Andrea seeking revenge, and the presence of violence and blood are inspired by the Senecan tragedies. In fact, Kyd borrowed quotes directly from Seneca, in his revenge tragedy. On the other hand, Virgil's *Aeneid*

had supplied Kyd with much of the description of Hades, as is evident in Andrea's account of it.

The inset narrative of Hieronimo's revenge seems to be inspired by Henry Wotton's translation of *A Courtly Controversy of Cupid's Cautels* by Jacques Yver, which deals with the story of the lovers Erastus and Perseda, which is evident from the play being used as the stage of their revenge, by Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia.

Kyd derived his representation of the Machiavellian villain in Lorenzo, from a pamphlet that exposed the betrayal and villainies of the Earl of Leicester, a favourite of Queen Elizabeth, against one of his followers.

The post-Reformation atmosphere of mistrust and shifting loyalties, had rendered the justice system vulnerable to violations from within. Private and internecine politics of betrayal, within a monarchy wherein the divinely ordained king himself seemed to be ridden with personal prejudices, had inflected the individual to seek retribution through personal actions of revenge, rather than seek the intervention of law. It was during this time that Francis Bacon had written his essay "Of Revenge" that where a wrong deed disturbs the law, revenge puts it out of its office, thus referring to revenge as "wild justice" (Neil, W.W Norton & Company, 2014). This conflict between the law, as inadequate to do justice, and the desire for justice at the cost of defying the law, in the contemporary English society, as highlighted in Bacon's tract, is an important source of inspiration for Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*.

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## 1.5 Contexts:

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Literature is the product of the collective social, cultural, political, and other factors, playing upon the contemporary society. Hence, a close understanding of the socio-cultural milieu within which the work of literature is produced is very crucial to the holistic understanding of the text. *The Spanish Tragedy* had caught the imagination and attention of the Elizabethan audience unlike any other play at that time, and this popularity needs to be scrutinised in terms of the context within which the play was written and performed. Although the literary merit of *The Spanish Tragedy* has seen some decline with Marlowe and Shakespeare surpassing Kyd in the eyes of the critics, its position as a pioneering work of tragedy in general, and a revenge tragedy in particular, renders the critical scrutiny of its background decisive of our complete and comprehensive appreciation of the literature, especially the tragic drama of the Elizabethan period. In order to fully grasp the importance of *The Spanish Tragedy*, not only in itself, but as a part of the entire Elizabethan dramatic tradition, we have to study the history of English drama, and the Elizabethan dramatic tragedy.

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### 1.5.i Brief History of English Drama:

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Like anywhere else, drama in England too had a religious origin. Stories were drawn from the life of Christ and from the lives of the saints to deliver moral and religious lessons. The first religious plays were known as the Miracle and Mystery plays. The Miracle plays derived their plot from the lives of the saints, while the Mystery plays depicted scenes from the life of Christ. The difference between the Miracle and Mystery plays was not watertight in England.

In England, all plays having liturgical origin were called Miracle plays. Initially, these plays were performed inside the Church during special occasions and feast days as embellishments. However, as elaborations in terms of plot and actors happened, these plays first moved out into the churchyard and then to the marketplaces. The plays which were originally performed in Latin, were taken over by the vernacular, and the stories moved away from the liturgy to make full use of the Biblical stories, from the Creation to the Judgement Day. The guilds took over the production and performance of the plays, outside the Church. They also introduced comic elements into the miracle plays to attract the rustic audience.

At this point of time, the miracle plays began to be considered sinful by the church for the license taken in their production. However, the popularity of the miracle plays grew. The establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi proved to be one of the most important occasions for the performance of these plays. Every guild had a cycle of plays they performed. The dramatic performances happened at market squares, on top of wagons, which were modified to function as a stage at the upper level, and a dressing room for the actors at the lower level. Each wagon displayed one of the plays from the cycle followed by the next wagon presenting the next play from the cycle. These wagons continued to move from one station to the next after each performance.

Another important form of medieval drama that gained popularity and that had direct links with Elizabethan drama, was the Morality play. Here, virtues and vices were personified by the actors and the stories were derived from both Biblical and secular sources. The Morality play offered the writers liberty to construct different plots, which did not necessarily have Biblical sources, to convey moral lessons. The most well-known morality play from the fifteenth century is *Everyman*.

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, there developed another kind of morality play. It was called the Interlude. It dealt with moral problems in the allegorical manner (just like the morality play), with more realistic and comic elements.

The Interlude plays of the Tudor period marked a movement from morality to humanist morality. These plays were set in the modern context of a Humanist education and growth in the scientific temper, and education of science and geography. They highlighted the problems associated with modern humanist education, laying emphasis on the difficulties of education rather than salvation. An example of such a play is John Redford's *Wit and Science*.

The shift from religion and morality to education as a theme of plays, also initiated a shift towards ethical and political questions.

This led to the focus being laid on individual characters like kings and princes and their education in ethics and politics. The centrality of the individual character allowed new experiments with tragedy and comedy, marking a progress towards a more mature art of drama.

This period was also marked by a combined influence of classical influence and morality play, on the newly emerging English drama. *Ralph Roister Doister*, by Nicholas Udall, for example uses a Plautine comic plot along with the classical character of the parasite and the character of Vice from the medieval morality play. This can be said to be the first English play structured into acts, reflecting the classical influence.

*Gammer Gurton's Needle* is another comedy derived from a Plautine plot, structured into five acts, and depicting English rural life. This again uses both the classical Parasite and medieval Vice as central characters, highlighting the combined influence of classical drama and medieval morality play.

Just as renewed classical studies influenced the comedies, it is only natural that it also was instrumental in introducing the new English tragedy. The first noteworthy English tragedy is *Gorboduc*, written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton. It was built on the Senecan model, maintaining the classical unities of time and place, where scenes of bloodshed occurred offstage, conveyed by a messenger. Sir Philip Sidney in his "Defence of Poesie" approved of only this English tragedy for its very Senecan style, condemning others of violating the unities as well as forcefully mixing comedy and tragedy.

With the growing popularity of drama, public and private theatres began to emerge under the aegis of the court. Many groups of professional, semi-professional groups of actors and writers, along with children's groups attached to churches and courts emerged. This led to emergence of secular professional group of playwrights, the most famous of whom were the University's Wits. Exploiting this opportunity to earn money without joining the church, these playwrights made the Elizabethan drama more literary and more dramatic. The educated, ambitious, opportunistic University Wits had tremendous influences over the public and private theatre and paved the way for Shakespeare.

The University Wits consisted of John Lyly, Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Nashe, and Christopher Marlowe.

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## **1.5.ii Pre-Shakespearean Elizabethan Drama**

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### **1.5.ii.A The Playhouses and Theatres**

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The reign of Queen Elizabeth I (17 November 1558 - 24 March 1603) was marked by religious tolerance, political stability, especially after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, social contentment and security, growth of manufacturing towns, and

advancement in the explorations and navigational enterprises. Such an overall environment of peace, security, stability, and economic growth, led to the flourishing of literature at an unprecedented level, of which the revival of the drama and the theatre was one of the most significant.

There cannot be a clean cut between Renaissance drama and Elizabethan drama, as the latter emerges from the former, while continuing to patronise the dramatic art, given the relatively socio-political constancy and security during that time. An important indicator of the popularity that the dramatic art had achieved during this period is the mushrooming of playhouses and theatres. The adult groups toured the towns and companies of young boys performed at court during festive season and celebrations. The public theatre was mostly restricted to the inn-yards, and the companies usually had license issued to them from their noble patrons. Without a license, these companies were rendered Rogue-Vagabonds who could be arrested. The civic authorities of London were hostile towards these companies, for it meant that the workers gathered around the town squares or the inn-yards, wasting valuable hours of work.

With the opposition between the City Corporation and the royal patronage steadily growing, James Burbage, leader of the Earl of Leicester's men erected the Theatre, the first permanent theatre in a field near Shoreditch, which was outside the jurisdiction of the Corporation. Other theatres like the Curtain, the Rose, the Swan and, the Globe, the most famous of them all, followed suit. These public theatres were round or octagonal in their layout, with the main stage area without any roof. The stage, divided into the outer and the inner stage, which could be curtained off to be used as a green room, jutted out, with the audience from the lower rung of the society sitting right in front of the actors. There were tiers of covered galleries reserved for the more refined audience. There was stage setting to depict a particular location for a scene, and the onus was on the action and language to help people imagine the setting of the action. These public theatres catered to the taste of its diverse audience. On the other hand, private theatres like the Blackfriars were originally used by the children's groups like those from St. Paul's or Chapel Royal, and also by adult groups like Shakespeare's Company. An important characteristic of the Renaissance theatre was that, women were not allowed on the stage, and hence, young boys played the roles of women.

According to A.R Braunmuller, as he writes in the essay "The Arts of the Dramatists", the fact that entrepreneurs invested in these theatres, reflected the growing demand from an audience from all strata of the society, for a wide-ranging dramatical experience, (Braunmuller and Hattaway, CUP, 2003, pp. 53). In their desire to make most of this opportunity, a class of playwrights, referred to as the University Wits, offered the companies of professional adult actors, and the semi-professional children's groups with a diverse collection of plays, which were more sophisticated, in their repertorial presence as well as literary brilliance, than the secular drama that had ruled the stage so far.

### Check Your Progress

1. What are the factors responsible for the growth and popularity of English drama in the Elizabethan Period?
2. Did the structure of the playhouses affect the performance and popularity of a play in the Elizabethan Period?
3. What are factors responsible for movement of the dramatic art, from its religious origins to its secular form?

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### 1.5.ii.B The University Wits and the Author of *The Spanish Tragedy*

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In the Elizabethan period, theatre became an integral part of the socio-cultural life of the people. The University Wits, through their flexibility and experimentation left behind a rich legacy plays written in the vernacular language, for Shakespeare, which is not to say that, they did not seek inspiration from the models of the classical masters.

While the Latin origins of the plays, which began with the school boys performing plays by Latin playwrights as a part of their lessons, adhered to the classical unities, the University Wits, disregarded the dramatic unities in favour of heeding to the audiences' desire to see life as it is, which allowed them to be most versatile. Here follows a brief introduction to the University Wits:

John Lyly (1554-1606) had his first success with *Euphues*. He used an artificial courtly prose which, although not the best medium for dramatic dialogue, was an improvement on the earlier "fourteeners." He mostly wrote court comedies, performed by the boys' companies, except *The Woman in the Moon*. Lyly also incorporated characters and themes from the Greek myths and legends in his plays. His most well-known plays were *Campaspe*, *Sappho and Phao*, *Gallathea*, *Endymion: The Man on the Moon*, *Love's Metamorphosis*, and *Mother Bombie*.

Robert Greene (1558-1592), better known for his autobiographical prose, turned to play-writing out of pecuniary needs. His plays are folk comedies, with elements of romance, portrayed with a skilful craftsmanship. Greene's most well-known plays are *The Honorable History Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, and *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*. However, none of them are history plays, unlike the titles suggest, but, comedies. *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, which involves the element of magic, is also a mocking representation of the clergy. The most notable feature of this play is Greene's skill in neatly carrying forward two plots.

George Peele (1558-1596) began his dramatic career with *The Arraignment of Paris*, a curly mythological pastoral play, performed by the Children of the Chapel, for the Queen, as a compliment to

Elizabeth I. In this play, Peele experimented with various verse forms from the fourteeners to the blank verse, as well as lyrics. *Old Wives' Tale* is an important play by Peele, which deals with the ideas of enchantment, true love, in a colloquial prose. The different genres that Peele dabbled in can be seen in the host of plays, historical, pastoral, farce, and biblical, that he had written, which included the *The Battle of Alcazar*, *Edward I*, and *The Love of King David and Far Bethsabe*.

Thomas Lodge (1557-1625) wrote the "euphuistic prose romance" (Daiches, Mandarin Paperback, 1994, pp. 230) *Rosalynde*, and then collaborated with Robert Greene on the play *A Looking Glass for London and England*. His only known original play is *The Wounds of Civil War*, about the civil war between Marius and Sulla.

Thomas Nashe (1567-1601) wrote the allegorical play about the seasons, *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. It is a satirical comedy popular in the court.

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) is the most talented of the University Wits. He emerged on the dramatic stage with *Tamburlaine the Great*. *The Jew Malta*, a tragedy which, nevertheless, is ridden with dark comedy and farce, is another very powerful play by Marlowe. *Dr. Faustus*, based on the German legend of Faust, is Marlowe's most famous play, where explores the conflict between morality and the Renaissance humanism. One of Marlowe's most important contributions to the dramatic art, is the use of the blank verse.

Thomas Kyd (1558-94) is most well-known for the melodramatic revenge tragedy, *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is a "tragedy of blood" (Choudhury, Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd, 2008, pp. 75) that combines the themes of "love, conspiracy, murder, and revenge" (Daiches, Mandarin Paperback, 1994, pp. 230). These were the main elements of Senecan tragedy, the classical model for Renaissance tragedies, which Kyd had converted into a most powerful melodramatic representation. *The Spanish Tragedy* can be said to be the first and one of the most powerful of the many revenge tragedies that awed the audience of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre.

Thomas Kyd was born in 1558, to Francis Kyd, a London scrivener and his wife Anna. His career as a writer began under the patronage of a nobleman, either Earl of Sussex or Lord Strange. Apart from *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd is also said to have written a play named *Hamlet*, staged during the late 1580s, although no manuscript or quarto of it survives. The translations of Torquato Tasso's *The Householder's Philosophy* and Robert Garnier's tragedy *Cornelia* are also attributed to Kyd. Thomas Kyd died on 15 August 1594. Although Kyd had a short career as a writer, with much of what he had written remaining unknown, it is undoubtable that, as a playwright, Thomas Kyd was able to carve a niche for himself, as his play was reprinted numerous times, at least nine times before 1633 (Introduction to *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. Michael Neill, W.W Norton & Company, 2014), along with the revival of its

performance time and again, until 1642, when the theatres were closed.

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### 1.5.ii.C Elizabethan Tragedy

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While ‘tragedy’, in one form or other, had always been a part of English literary practice, as exemplified by Chaucer’s *The Monk’s Tale*, which was later included in *The Canterbury Tales*, or his narrative poem, *Troilus and Criseyde*, as well as, the influence of *The Mirror for Magistrates*, as the go-to reference in understanding the tragic narrative, even for the Elizabethans, the advent of the tragedy in English drama was prominently significant during the Elizabethan period. The Renaissance revival of classical learning led the university educated writers and critics to seek inspiration and guidance from the works of the ancient Greek and Roman writers, in their literary endeavours, and the genre of the tragedy in drama was treated no differently. Hence, Senecan plays became the touchstone of tragedies for the English writers and critics. It is important to highlight here that, for critics like Sir Philip Sidney and Roger Ascham, the conformation to the classical traditions of drama, especially in terms of the technicalities like the unities of time, place, and action, and style was of foremost importance, even in the vernacular imitations or appropriations.

The first and most famous example of the classical English Tragedy is *Gorboduc* by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville written in 1560-61. Its faithfulness to the classical Senecan model, especially in its “stately speeches and well sounding phrases, climbing to the height of Seneca his style and as full of notable morality which it doth most delightfully teach” (Daiches, *Mandarin Paperback*, 1994, pp. 222), had rendered it worth praise from Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defence of Poesie*. This is substantiated by the fact that, it was performed at the Inner Temple, which was one of the four Inns of Court in London, established as centres for academic theatrical activity for the Tudor gentry (from “English Renaissance tragedy: theories and antecedents” by Mike Pincombe, ed. Smith and Sullivan Jr., CUP, 2010, pp. 7). Nevertheless, according to Mike Pincombe, *Gorboduc* did contain vernacular elements like entertainment spectacles before each act, the the kind of experiment that highlighted that native English elements would find their way into the tragedies inspired by the classical masters like Seneca.

The interweaving of native elements with the Senecan model can be seen in the dramatic tragedies of the 1560s-70s, like Richard Edwards’ *Damon and Pythias*, the revenge story of *John Pickering’s New Interlude of Vice Containing the History of Horestes, Apius and Virginia* by R.B, and *Cambises* by Thomas Preston. The mixing of the tragic and comic in the last two plays can be seen as the precursor to most of Elizabethan tragicomedies, especially those of Shakespeare.

The plays, henceforth, that determined the course of English dramatic tragedies were, *Tamburlaine* by Christopher Marlowe, and

*The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd, in the late 1580s. These tragedies offered the essential admixture of popular elements that appealed to the audience, as well as to the academic reader. Among the two, *The Spanish Tragedy*, as the revenge tragedy, established a dominant position, with recurrent performances and reprinting.

*Tamburlaine, the Great*, brought to the English stage, themes that appealed to the Elizabethan audience with much more fervour, using the blank verse with an eloquence hitherto unseen. Rhetoric of unbound power and ambition, images of riches, and blood and lust, are poured onto the stage with such force and allurements that gave the Elizabethan imagination a new ground of luxuriant growth. The play ending the lust for power only through death, underlined the idea of the “fall of the mighty”, which had been the subject of tragic narratives right from Boccaccio to *The Mirror for Magistrates*.

Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, is the next tragedy that again deals with the subject of desire for power, but here it is intellectual power. The element of commonality between these two of Marlowe’s tragedy is the rise and the tragic fall of heroic men. The blank verse in *Tamburlaine, the Great*, and *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, are the most dramatically eloquent and powerful till Shakespeare emerges on the scene. *The Jew of Malta* is again a tragedy, which, however, is constantly punctuated with comic ironies and satires.

After Marlowe, it is in Shakespeare that we find the English tragedy reaching a new height through innumerable experiments with Senecan, neo-classical, and vernacular elements coming together. It must be borne in mind that Elizabethan Tragedy wasn’t a singular genre of standard formulaic presentations. The early modern dramatic tragedy was a rich diversity of different kinds of tragedies like the domestic tragedy, revenge tragedy, satiric tragedy, tragedy of state, to name a few.

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### **1.5.ii.D Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy**

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Many critics, including Tanya Pollard, refer to the revenge tragedy as the “most popular form of English Renaissance tragedy, and arguably of the period’s drama altogether” (from “Tragedy and Revenge” by Tanya Pollard, ed. Smith and Sullivan Jr., CUP, 2010, pp. 58). Now, as we talk of *The Spanish Tragedy* as the first revenge tragedy in English, being foundational in the construction of the tradition of revenge tragedies, with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* being at the top, it is essential to grasp the appeal it had for the early modern audience. Although, tragedy is believed to be appealing to an audience of higher culture, it is interesting to see the revenge tragedy gain popularity with all classes of theatregoers. It is to be highlighted here that, the factors responsible for the popularity of the revenge tragedy during the Elizabethan era, may also be considered as some important characteristics of the revenge tragedy of that time.

The popularity of revenge tragedy on the stage is accounted for by the idea that the audience found a cathartic satiation through the performance of revenge. The dramatic representation of a victim of

tyranny and wrongdoing, avenging his/her suffering by punishing the powerful perpetrator helped the audience achieve a sense of justice and psychological balance. It was a representation of severe emotional turmoil and the way the people deal with grief brought upon them, unfairly, and hence had a therapeutic effect on the audience.

In addition to the emotional purging, critics like Fredson Bowers, suggest that the sense of private justice had always been favoured by the Elizabethans, although it was still, legally, unapproved. The idea that revenge is considered to be a familial inheritance for the Elizabethans, especially with the legal system being less effective in many cases, is put forward by Gregory Semenza, and that the Elizabethans did not see private justice and revenge as against divine sanction, as is evident from Hieronimo claiming that the Saints in heaven too are waiting for vengeance on the murderers (ed. Cadman, Duxfield, and Hopkins. Manchester University Press, 2019, pp. 134-135). However, this is not to say that the popularity of the range tragedy is a clear marker of the people actively seeking revenge, defying the law and legal system.

Whilst the socio-political conditions of Elizabethan England like the change in favours and emergence of the market economy, along with an inadequate legal system, which forced many to seek settlement of their grievances through other means like duelling, instead of litigation, did heighten the appeal of the revenge tragedy, wherein the audiences sympathised with the aggrieved revenger, the model of the revenge tragedy itself was borrowed from Seneca and other classical Greek playwrights. For example, the Senecan tragedies, which were also inspired by the works of Euripides, Aeschylus, and Sophocles, like *Medea*, *Agamemnon*, etc. gave the English playwright with a theme and structure for a kind of tragedy that had not received much attention in the vernacular language. The theme of bloodthirsty revenge, the scenes of blood and gore, and the stage-machinery like the presence of a ghost, well-attracted the English audience to these revenge tragedies, cathartic or not.

Revenge, at least for the Elizabethan audience, is a solitary journey, most often symbolised by the soliloquies of the revenger. It might be contested that, revenge involves plotting that cannot be acted on alone. Yet, what needs to be understood is that, in the trauma, anxiety, the fears, and doubts, the revenger is alienated and isolated from everyone else. The alienation, apart from the moral dilemma, also emerges out of the position of the revenger as a disempowered individual, who had been unjustly victimised. Tragedy as being the story of the fall of great men, notwithstanding, requires the greatness to lie in the noble virtues, which makes the fall tragic. In regard to the lineage, the position of the revenger must be of high significance, yet not completely in control of power. The lack of absolute control, makes the very decision to avenge the injustice a complicated matter, lending the play with the quintessential excitement and anticipation for the audience. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, for instance, Hieronimo is a noble character, but his son has been murdered by a much more powerful man, which



makes the revenge difficult and the plot more intriguing. In validating this idea, Andrew Sanders refers to Hieronimo as a “new kind of central character, an obsessive, brooding, mistrustful and alienated plotter...” (Sanders, OUP, pp.148), which set a precedent for the revenge tragedy

According to Pollard, the revival of the classical dramatic traditions and a renewed interest in the tragedies of Seneca, acted as a catalyst in arousing interest of the English theatregoers in the revenge tragedy, in particular. The desire of the playwrights like Thomas Kyd, and Marlowe, followed by Shakespeare, to experiment with the material handed down to them from the ages of the past, and to recreate something that would attract the audience of their own times, reinvigorated the genre, popularising it among the public. As these dramatists infused the ancient models with native elements, the revenge tragedy attained a distinctly English flavour, catering to the needs of the native audience, which can be first seen in *The Spanish Tragedy*. While the idea of the presence of ghost, and the madness of the revenger have been a part of revenge tragedy since its Greek days, some of the elements of the revenge tragedy of the early modern era were added through the experiments of the Renaissance playwrights. Renaissance conventions added to the revenge tragedy are, foreign settings, violence onstage as opposed to announced by a character, comic elements, and metatheatricality. An explanation of the vernacular elements, added by the English Renaissance playwrights, to the revenge tragedy, is important to fully grasp the characteristics of the Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy.

The violence, and moral and political challenges posed by the theme of revenge, made it convenient for the setting of the play to be in a foreign place. For instance, the portrayal of the corrupt Spanish Court by Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy* seemed ideal in a situation when England was contesting Spain for supremacy, which finally led to the Spanish Armada in 1588.

Comedy has always been the source of entertainment and attraction for the majority of the theatre audience. This was well-understood by the playwrights of the Elizabethan Age, and in spite of the censure of critics, and at the risk of defying the classical models, the English playwright used comic material in the otherwise grim and gory performance of revenge on the stage. The charmless approach of Balthazar towards Bel-Imperia, and the moments of romantic comedy between Bel-Imperia and Horatio, who is below her social class, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, are examples of light, comic elements within the tragic situation, that became an essential part of the Elizabethan Tragedy.

Revenge tragedy as metatheatre is another Renaissance addition to the genre. This feature too, appeared with *The Spanish Tragedy*. The self-conscious nature of the tragedy can be seen from the classical times of the Greeks. While in the Greek plays, the chorus represented this self-conscious element, the tragedies, especially the revenge tragedies of the early modern period sought to express this through the motif of the metatheatre. However, more importantly, the play within the play in the Elizabethan revenge tragedies like,

*The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, or *The Duchess of Malfi*, become the stage on which the act of private revenge, is carried out in front of a public witness, to enunciate the substantiality of the act, and make the revenge worth the suffering of the revenger.

Thus, before passing onto a sensational representation of violence, sex, and unbridled vigilantism, over the years, the revenge tragedy had a great claim over the English dramatic scene. It not only provided the audience with a cathartic enjoyment, it also raised questions on the legal system and challenged tyranny. Beyond it all, it contributed to establish the English dramatic tragedy at its zenith.

### Self Asking Questions

How is the Revenge Tragedy different from other forms of the tragic drama? What are the factors responsible for the popularity of the Revenge Tragedy among the Elizabethan audience? (200 words)

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## 1.6 The play on the stage:

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The date of the first performance of *The Spanish Tragedy* is not known. However, there are records of it being performed twenty-nine times, after its publication in 1592. The play was registered in the Stationers' Register, the record book of the Stationers' Company that held the monopoly of printing and publication in the Elizabethan times, in October 1592. During the last years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign, the play was staged by different companies, of which the Lord Strange's Company performed the play as "Hieronimo" 16 times in 1592. It was again performed by the Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men in the last few years of the 1590s. It continued to be performed on stage by different groups, numerous times, until the closing of theatres in 1642.

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## 1.7 Critical Reception and Adaptations:

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The critical reception of a play is determined, primarily, by the response of its audience. The overwhelming response received by *The Spanish Tragedy* from its Elizabethan audience resonates with Kyd's success with the theatricality of his play. Although, his technical skill as a playwright could not reach the mark left by the likes of Marlowe and Shakespeare, the revenge tragedy would not have had such an explosive start on the English stage, had it not been for *The Spanish Tragedy*.

The theme of revenge, emboldened by a weak system of justice, has been popular ever since, and the dramatisation of this theme in

*The Spanish Tragedy*, has inspired many adaptations of the play, on stage, in movies, as well as in other literary genres.

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### **1.7.i Critical Reception:**

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Critics, overall, converge on the point that Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* was not just the first revenge tragedy in English, but, it had also enjoyed a predominant status in theatre for quite a long time. After its publication in 1592, it had seen at least twenty-nine performances, by more than four different companies, within the span of five years. The popularity of the performances was such that, Philip Henslowe, an entrepreneur paid Ben Jonson to update the play with new material in 1602. Such revisions of the play and its performance continued till 1642, as it was not only popular on the stage, but had an unusual demand in print too. Till 1633, there happen to have been over nine reprinting of the text. An anonymously written ballad on *The Spanish Tragedy* is evident from, which is said to have been printed at London for some H. Gosson, narrates the entire story of the play in the lyrical form. This is to say that, the story of revenge had caught the imagination of the audience/reader in its grasp so powerfully that, it found itself renewed in various forms of the literary art, by its admirers. David Daiches makes an important observation regarding the theatrical and literary merit of *The Spanish Tragedy*, when he says that Shakespeare too borrowed many of the devices used in the play. Daiches refers to *The Spanish Tragedy* as the "great property-room of Elizabethan tragic devices" (Daiches, Mandarin Paperback, 1994, pp. 233) which have been time and again used or alluded to by other dramatists.

Inspite of the overwhelming response from the audience some critics saw in the play, the shortfalls of the long rhetorical speeches and soliloquies, and crude characterisation. These flaws resulted the play being disapproved and parodied by many dramatists, including Jonson. In the induction to *Bartholomew Fair*, Ben Jonson mocks at *The Spanish Tragedy* for being preoccupied by the disconcerting idea of revenge as justice. However, within the context of the play, the rhetorical devices of sudden outbursts, the swift moving action, skilled plotting, and the crude passion of the characters, which allowed for the intense violent action, allowed for the theme of revenge to be overwhelmingly powerful, that appealed to the audience and critics alike.

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### **1.7.ii Adaptations:**

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The violence of the revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy* has managed to hold the attention of playwrights and audiences even today. Its production by the Hyperion Shakespeare Company at the New College Theatre, directed by Meryl H. Federman, compares the violence of revenge in the play to the raw and gory violence seen in the movies by Quentin Tarantino.

After the seventeenth century, *The Spanish Tragedy* had receded in its popularity. Nevertheless, the vigilantism of the revenger, who finds no justice through the legal system, first dramatically represented by *The Spanish Tragedy*, continues to be a dominant theme in plays and movies. Yet, one of most important adaptations of *The Spanish Tragedy* in the modern times is the novel *Snow* by Orhan Pamuk. Rachel E. Hile, in the essay “*The Spanish Tragedy* as Intertext for Orhan Pamuk’s *Kar (Snow)*”. In the novel, Sunay Zarim actually stages the play, when, ironically, he is shot and killed by Kadife, as revenge. Such adaptations of the play are innumerable, and although there may not be direct allusions or references to the play, the pioneering of the revenge tragedy on stage by *The Spanish Tragedy*, unquestionably remains a seminal influence on such adaptations and performances.

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## 1.8. Summing Up

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In this unit, discussions on the publication, performance, and sources of *The Spanish Tragedy* have been held. Additionally, a background of English drama, with special reference to the Elizabethan Tragedy and Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy has been given, to facilitate the students with an understanding of the context within which Kyd’s play found its bearings and popularity. This background reading seeks to enable the students to relate the text to the time and milieu of its production, which is an integral aspect of literary studies. The context involves a short representation of the theatres and playhouses of the Elizabethan Age, for the technicalities of the stage machinery is always crucial to the performance of a play and its understanding by the audience.

Critical analysis of a play is incomplete without an idea of its reception by the audience at the time of its performance, and hence, some important points regarding the critical reception of play, during its performances on the Elizabethan stage, have been included in the discussion of the play. Moreover, the critical and literary value of a play is further highlighted by the way it is adopted and adapted by the successive generations. Although, Kyd could not achieve the greatness of Marlowe or Shakespeare, his *The Spanish Tragedy* has left an indelible mark on the history of English literature and theatre, which is clearly visible from its adaptations in the modern/contemporary context. Innumerable adaptations and performances continue to honour the play even today.

This unit, as such, intends to help the students understand the background of the play, as a clear comprehension of the context is crucial to the understanding of a literary text.

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## Unit 3

### *The Spanish Tragedy*

#### Reading the Play

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- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 Act-wise Summary
- 3.4 List of Characters/Characterisation
- 3.5 Major Themes
- 3.6 A Note on Language
- 3.7 Summing Up
- 3.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

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### 3.1 Objectives

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In this unit, the students shall be able to understand *The Spanish Tragedy* from multiple critical perspectives, such as:

- i. They will be able to understand the plot through the act-wise summary of the play
- ii. The art of characterisation of Thomas Kyd in the play, will be clear to the students through the given critical analysis of some of the main characters.
- iii. The major themes of the play like revenge and justice, madness, and metatheatricality will be introduced and explained, enabling the students to dwell on various issues of importance in the play.
- iv. The language of the play, given its context and background, and its relevance in the performance, to bring about a certain effect, will be discussed.

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### 3.2 Introduction

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Literature is never produced in a vacuum. As such, it is always essential to understand the context within which a particular piece of literature has been produced. The Renaissance revival of classical learning and its focus on the human individual in all epistemological endeavours, contributed to a renewed interest in drama. Nevertheless, the origin of drama in England has a long history, before it evolved into its most refined state during the Elizabethan period. It is, therefore, our objective in this unit, to introduce the students to a brief background of English drama, its formative masters, and the stage on which these plays were performed. The

discussion of the context must include an understanding of the genre of Elizabethan Tragedy, with special reference to the revenge tragedy, as it became popular among the theatre goers of that time.

Biographically, much is not known about Thomas Kyd. Nor do we have an extensive extant of his works that could enable a detailed understanding of him as a writer. It is his most popular work, *The Spanish Tragedy*, that dominated the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, that requires intensive attention, to understand the overwhelming response received by the tragedies, of which it was a pioneer, during that time.

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### 3.3 Act-wise Summary

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#### ACT I

Scene I of the play is called the “Induction”, for it introduces the play — its major theme. It shows the ghost of Don Andrea, enter the stage with Revenge. The ghost Andrea delivers a long speech informing the audience that, he was a courtier in the Spanish Court, who had achieved much fame and glory, that surpassed his relatively low birth. Moreover, he loved and was loved by a beautiful lady named Bel-Imperia, before he was separated from her by his death in the war against Portugal, where he had fought heroically.

The ghost goes on to describe, to the audience, of his journey to Hades. He was allowed on to the boat to Hades, only after his friend, Don Horatio, the son of the Knight Marshal, had performed his funeral rites, whence he was ferried to the presence of Minos, Eacus, and Rhadamant, the three judges of the underworld, that decided on the fate of the souls. As the three judges could not arrive at a consensus as to where should the soul of Andrea be sent, he was henceforth sent to court of Pluto. The soul of Andrea arrived at a place with three paths — the right led to the fields of lovers and martialists, while the left path led to the deepest recesses of hell, where the sinners were tormented. Andrea took the path in the middle, that led him to the Elysian Fields, in the midst of which was the palace of Pluto and Prosperine. Prosperine beseeched Pluto to decide the fate of Andrea’s soul, and hence asked Revenge to lead Andrea through the gates of Horn, to the land of the mortals. The lines, “...through the gates of Horn, Where dreams have passage in the silent night”, convey the idea of Andrea waking into a dream, during his eternal sleep, where he avenges his death by haunting the mortals with his vengeance.



Revenge tells Andrea that they are in the mortal realm to see Don Balthazar, who had killed Andrea, to be murdered by Bel-Imperia, as a fulfilment of his revenge. Revenge invites Don Andrea's soul to witness the tragedy and act as its chorus, presenting the idea of metatheatricity, wherein they become a part of the audience of the tragedy of Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia's revenge.

The second scene shows the General bringing in the celebratory news of Spain's victory over Portugal. The King is elated and wants to hear every detail of the war, to feel the excitement of the victory in its entirety. It is interesting to note that, the King equates the fortune of victory with heavenly justice, which is ironic because, it is the lack of justice that eventually leads to the tragedy in the Spanish court. In the description given by the General, we are told how the two armies put up a brave fight, and Andrea was killed by Balthazar, the son of the Viceroy of Portugal. But, soon enough, Horatio fought Balthazar and made him fall from his horse, after which he was taken prisoner by the Spanish army.

On the King enquiring about the treaty of peace, the General says that peace between Spain and Portugal is conditional, depending on Portugal's homage of tribute to Spain, and that the Viceroy of Portugal has in fact ensured the payment during his lifetime. The king congratulates Hieronimo on the bravery of his son and invites him to celebrate the victory. Meanwhile, as the soldiers march with their prisoner, Balthazar, the King decides to treat him honourably. At this point, Lorenzo, the nephew of the King and Horatio, lay contesting claims on defeating and capturing Balthazar, but the King attempts to settle their debate amicably, showing an example of his unprejudiced justice.

In the third scene, the Viceroy of Portugal, is anxious, thinking that his son Balthazar is dead. The long speech by the Viceroy may seem exaggerated, with all the melodramatic gestures, but it is essential to communicate the pathos of his situation, to the audience, by alluding to the divine intervention in the life of great men and their fall. Alexandro tries to convince him that, Balthazar is alive, until Villuppo accuses Alexandro of betrayal and shooting at Balthazar, resulting in his capture. As the Viceroy orders for Alexandro to be imprisoned, Villuppo reveals to the audience that he villainously framed Alexandro, his enemy, and deceived the King, hoping to be rewarded for this betrayal.

Scene IV shows Horatio coming to meet Bel-Imperia. She implores him to relate the event of Andrea's death, and in spite of overtaken by grief, Horatio does as he is asked, telling Bel-Imperia about how Balthazar killed her lover in the most unheroic way.

Horatio has brought the scarf from Andrea's lifeless body and now wears it as a remembrance of his friend. Bel-Imperia recognises the scarf as the one given to Andrea by her, when they had last met. But, she asks Horatio to wear it for they sake of his friendship and her love for Andrea. Before Horatio leaves, Bel-Imperia calls him her second love and seeks his help in avenging the death of her beloved Andrea. Just then, Lorenzo, the son of Duke of Castle, and Bel-Imperia's brother, enters with Balthazar.

As Balthazar expresses his admiration for Bel-Imperia, encouraged by Lorenzo, Bel-Imperia shows her inclination for Horatio by asking him to take her glove with him, a token of her favour. The dialogues of Balthazar, addressed to Bel-Imperia is an exhibition of the stylistic device of Kyd, where superfluous and verbose courtly speech is acted out to woo a lady. This is vexing for a Machiavellian like Lorenzo, for whom such language is to be used only in matters of falsehood and disguise. Horatio, Lorenzo, and Balthazar go ahead to the feast in honour of the Portuguese Ambassador.

In Scene V, as King and the Ambassador, along with Balthazar and Lorenzo sit down for the feast, the King boasts of the kind and hospitable treatment of their prisoner, Balthazar, to the Ambassador. Balthazar, on the other hand, confesses to have been enjoying the pleasures of the Spanish Court, and claims to have been struck by love. At this moment, Hieronimo makes his appearance, ready to entertain the court with a masque. The masque is a glorification of English victories over Portugal and Spain. This is a theatrical device employed by Kyd to glorify the English monarchy, which would have had a much fervent effect on his audience.

As Andrea and Revenge watch this mirth and merry-making, in science six, Andrea is revolted by his murderer being treated with so much cordiality. But, Revenge warns him from leaving too soon, for he promises that soon their joys will be turned to sorrow, their friendship into enmity, their bliss to misery, as befits of Revenge.

## **ACT II**

In the first scene of Act II, Lorenzo consoles Balthazar that, even though Bel-Imperia seems cold towards him, she will eventually give in to his love. However, Balthazar is pained by Bel-Imperia's rejection and suspects that she is in love with some other knight. Just then, Lorenzo seizes Pedringano, Bel-Imperia's faithful servant, and forces him, through threat and bribe, to reveal that the maiden is in love with Horatio. Balthazar, now wants revenge from Horatio, for not only he had wounded and captured him war, but has now also

purloined love. Lorenzo assures Balthazar that he shall have his revenge and his love, with the death of Horatio. We see that Lorenzo is not a man of words, rather of policies and strategies, unlike Balthazar, who is given to long rhythmic speeches.

In the second scene of this act, Bel-Imperia and Horatio are engaged in a dialogue of love, while Pedringano has secretly brought in Lorenzo and Balthazar to witness this delight of the lovers. Each design of the lovers to rejoice in their love, Lorenzo and Balthazar counter with a scheme to turn their bliss into suffering, with Lorenzo reasserting his plan to kill Horatio.

Scene III shows the King of Spain, in consultation with Duke of Castile, and the Ambassador of Spain. They are planning for the marriage of Bel-Imperia with Balthazar. The King says that, this marriage shall further strengthen the friendship between the two nations. As the Ambassador leaves, promising to consult the matter with his King, Duke of Castile is warned by the King that if Bel-Imperia does not submit to this marriage, with will not bode well for her as well as for the nation of Spain.

In Scene IV, Bel-Imperia and Horatio retire to the garden of Hieronimo's home, in the night, to share some time in love. Although, this is a happy hour, Bel-Imperia has a foreboding of something evil. She, thus, requests her trusted servant, Pedringano to keep a watch, but in his greed, Pedringano goes and brings forth Lorenzo and Balthazar to scene of the lovers' meeting.

Lorenzo, Balthazar, and their servants attack Horatio, and forcefully take away Bel-Imperia. They stab Horatio and hang him in the Arbor.

Scene V shows Hieronimo come to the garden on hearing the screams of Bel-Imperia. Hieronimo sees the body of his beloved son hanging from a tree and bewails his loss. Isabella, Horatio's mother too comes out to find that her son has been betrayed and brutally murdered. Hieronimo takes the blood-smeared handkerchief from Horatio's body and swears that till he has had his revenge, he will not part with. He will not entomb his son until his vengeance is satiated.

In the meantime, Andrea rebukes Revenge for having him brought to witness the foul murder of his dear friend, while he had expected to find his own revenge in the death of Balthazar. But, Revenge bids to be patient, for time exacts its due in when the right moment comes. So, he must wait to witness the fall of Balthazar.

### **ACT III**

It is the Court of the Viceroy of Portugal, in scene one, where the fate of Alexandro, who has been accused of betraying Balthazar is being decided. The Viceroy makes an important reference to the “wheel of chance” which never stays the same. Fortune turns its wheel, bringing ruin to even the most powerful and favoured kings. He says that, being a king means the sword of doubt and danger constantly hangs over one’s head.

As Alexandro is ordered to be executed by the Viceroy, Alexandro swears that his “guiltless death will be avenged” on the villainous Villuppo. But as the audience expect to witness more bloodthirsty revenge, good news is brought in by the Ambassador, of Balthazar being alive. Thus, everyone is made aware of Villuppo’s treachery, not for revenge, but for money, and he is imprisoned. The Viceroy reads the letters sent to him by the King of Spain and begins his deliberations with his council.

In Scene II, as Hieronimo is cursing the heavens and the earth for the foul murder of his son, and resolving to seek the murderers, a letter, written with blood, falls into his hands. The letter is from Bel-Imperia, who reveals to Hieronimo that it was Lorenzo, her brother, and Balthazar who had murdered Horatio. At that moment, as Hieronimo doubts that, the letter may be a trap set for him, enters Lorenzo and Pedringano. Hieronimo asks Pedringano about the whereabouts of Bel-Imperia, but as he desists from revealing his intention for meeting her to Lorenzo, Lorenzo becomes suspicious. Lorenzo now becomes suspicious of Hieronimo’s motives, as well as, doubts that Serberine, who was a part of the murder plot, must have told the truth to Hieronimo. Lorenzo, thus, plots for Serberine to be murdered by Pedringano. Lorenzo’s soliloquy points out the fact that, he had always bought the favours and discretion of the servants through bribery, and they are for him expendable, to serve his selfish intentions. As he plans for the grounds to be closely guarded that night, it is a hint that there is more to his scheme, than what he expresses in words, and that he intends to keep no loose ends.

In Scene III, Pedringano murders Serberine, sure of the fact that, even if any disaster befalls him, his master, Lorenzo would save him. He is caught by the guards who had been watching the ground, and they decide to take him to Hieronimo. Pedringano is, however, fearless, for he believes that Lorenzo will come to his rescue.

Scene IV begins with Balthazar visiting Lorenzo, who seems to be worried and anxious about having been exposed to Hieronimo by the servants who had been a part of the murderous plot. Lorenzo’s words are cut short with the entry of a page-boy, bringing the news

of Serberine's death by Pedringano. Balthazar is furious at the murder of his trusted servant, but Lorenzo sees Balthazar as undoing his plans. In the meantime, Lorenzo sends another servant to ensure Pedringano that his pardon has already been set in motion.

In Scene V, the servant carrying the box from Lorenzo mirths at the fact that the box contains no letter of pardon for Pedringano.

Scene VI shows that Pedringano is hanged till death, although he believes till his last moment that he shall be pardoned.

In Scene VII, the hangman comes to Hieronimo with a letter from Pedringano, addressed to Lorenzo, where he confesses to have killed Serberine under his command. He also reveals how he had been a part Horatio's murder for the sake of Balthazar and Lorenzo. On reading the letter, Hieronimo decides to seek justice from the king, which if unrequited, he shall threaten revenge.

Isabella, tormented by the death and memories of her son, bemoans, in Scene VIII. The stage direction suggests that she is driven mad by her grief. Although, she imagines her son to be at peace in heaven, she too seeks revenge from the murderers of her son.

Bel-Imperia is held captive by Lorenzo, and she grows anxious for the delay of Hieronimo's revenge. Yet, she has no choice, but to wait for time and the heavenly powers to set her free of her misery.

In Scene X, Lorenzo sends for Bel-Imperia, and advises Balthazar to assuage her suspicions with jest, feigned. As Bel-Imperia arrives, accusing her brother of Horatio's murder and holding her captive, Lorenzo very cunningly convinces his sister that, it was only to avoid the wrath of their father that he had sent Horatio away to the King, and kept Bel-Imperia, thus hidden from their father, who had been displeased with her relations with Andrea. Bel-Imperia's cryptic dialogue that she fears herself, refers to her own strong desire for revenge and blood of the murderers, which will lead to her own destruction too.

In Scene XI, when two men from Portugal ask Hieronimo the way to find Duke of Castile or his son, Lorenzo, the grief-stricken father raves, as if in a fit of madness, about Lorenzo's murderous guilt, having made hell his home. It seems as if Hieronimo has lost all semblance of sanity in his sorrow and fury.

Scene XII shows Hieronimo coming to meet the King, prepared with his implements of suicide. However, he decides against it, as his desire for revenge is stronger. As the King enters with the Ambassador, Castile, and Lorenzo, Hieronimo seeks the King to intervene for justice. But, Lorenzo prevents him from meeting the

King, who is discussing the wedding arrangements for Balthazar and Bel-Imperia.

Hieronimo is maddened with fury and accuses Lorenzo of having robbed him of his son. In his feverish madness, he begins to dig the earth, as if to bring back his son, and show to king what heinous crime had been committed upon him. Lorenzo, nevertheless, cunningly persuades the king that, Hieronimo has gone mad and wants the ransom due to Horatio. Although, he tries to have Hieronimo removed from his marshalship, the King shows pity upon Hieronimo.

It is Hieronimo's contemplation to avenge the murder of his son in the most unsuspecting of ways, that is most significant in Scene XIII of Act III. It makes us question if his madness is real or feigned, or whether his thirst for bloody revenge has rendered him both mad and brilliant.

When some citizens come to Hieronimo with their litigations, one of them being an old man, Don Bazulto, whose son has been murdered too, Hieronimo reverts to his manic ramblings. Ashamed of dallying in his revenge, in a fit, he tears the documents brought in by the people, as if tearing the limbs of the murderers. Such is the injury to his psyche that, on seeing the old man before him, once imagines this old man to be Horatio, having come back from the depths of Hades, his death still unavenged, and the next moment invites the old man to share their misery. Throughout his rants and bouts of frenzy, Hieronimo reiterates that justice cannot be found in the kings' courts, but must be brought down upon the culprits from the fiery depths of hell.

In Scene XIV, the Duke of Castile is shown to have been made aware of Lorenzo's dishonourable murder of Horatio, the Duke's suspicion is raised further by Lorenzo's constant preventing Hieronimo's meeting with the king. He warns Lorenzo that Hieronimo is an honourable man, whose accusations against Lorenzo might jeopardise his sister's and Spain's prospective relationship with Portugal. Lorenzo, the Machiavellian villain that he is, convinces his father of Hieronimo being insane, and that he has committed no such villainy, as claimed by Hieronimo.

Hieronimo comes to meet the Duke, who directly addresses his concern with Hieronimo's accusations that Lorenzo mischievously prevents his meeting with the king. However, Hieronimo pretends to have had no such misgiving against Lorenzo, and offering a friendly gesture, accedes to the duke's invitation.

Scene XV is set between the ghost of Andrea and revenge. Andrea is getting angrier for Hieronimo, now, seems to have reconciled with

the murderers of his son, while Revenge has been asleep all this while. Revenge reassures Andrea that, although he sleeps, he still has bloody plans for them. To explain this, he presents a kind of play where as a couple rejoices in their marriage, Hymen, the god of marriage descends to blowout the torches of their marriage and drenches them in blood. This is another example of the play-within-a play. Andrea is satisfied after he realises the meaning of this and lets Revenge get back to his rest.

This scene portrays the menacing idea that the human world is completely unaware of the tricks of fortune. Revenge being asleep, does not imply its complete retreat from its working in the mortal world. Hence, as the humans relish the fulfilment of their own schemes, they are caught unaware by the supernatural forces, that thwart their every design.

#### ACT IV

Scene I begins with Bel-Imperia rebuking Hieronimo for having forgotten about his son, and swears to avenge Horatio's death on her own, if need be. But, Hieronimo allays her doubts and requests her to conceal his true intentions, for already has a plan in mind. They both are now united in their thirst for revenge, which shall, however, remain inconspicuous to their enemies.

Balthazar and Lorenzo enter to entreat Hieronimo to entertain the Viceroy, on his arrival, as he did for the Ambassador. Hieronimo readily agrees, bringing out a tragedy, he had supposedly written while he was studying in Tolledo, and he wants Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-Imperia to act in the play. Hieronimo calls the tragedy as the *The Chronicles of Spain*, wherein the Knight of Rhodes is betrothed to the beautiful Italian dame, Perseda. But, as Soliman is smitten by Perseda, after seeking the advice of his friend, a Bashaw, he kills the knight to win her. However, Perseda has her revenge by killing Soliman and committing suicide. This inset play is actually the *Tragedy of Soliman and Perseda* by Thomas Kyd, adapted from the story of Soiman and Perseda in SirHenry Wotton's translation of Jacques Yver's *A CourtyContorversy of Cupid's Cautels*.

Hieronimo is to play the role of Bashaw, the murderer, Balthazar, the role of Soliman, the Turkish Emperor, Lorenzo, Erastus, the Knight of Rhodes, and Bel-Imperia is to play Perseda. To the amazement of Lorenzo and Balthazar, Hieronimo suggests that all the characters must speak in different language, while he will have a side show in which he will explain the action on the stage. Lorenzo,

unsuspecting, decides to humour Hieronimo, and agrees to the design.

The end remark made by Hieronimo, in this scene, is of grave significance. His reference to the Tower of Babylon signifies the divine justice that Hieronimo seeks against the collaborative villainy of Lorenzo and Balthazar.

In Scene II, Isabella commits suicide, as she rebukes Hieronimo for his delay in exacting revenge, and asks him to join her in death.

Hieronimo is setting the stage, literally and metaphorically, for his revenge, in Scene III.

It is Scene IV and the play begins. Hieronimo, as Bashaw stabs Lorenzo, followed by Bel-Imperia stabbing Balthazar, and then herself. As the play ends, and the audience expects Hieronimo to offer the concluding remarks, he shocks them by bringing in the dead body of Horatio on the stage. Hieronimo exposes the villainy of Lorenzo and Balthazar, and attempt to hang himself, but he is caught and the King, and the Viceroy interrogate his motives for bringing upon them such a tragedy. As they compel Hieronimo to reveal the names of his co-conspirators, Hieronimo bites off his tongue. But as they pursue him to write the names, he stabs himself and Castile with a knife.

Scene V, shows the ghost of Andrea finally finding some relief as he has had his revenge. He wishes to plead with Prosperine, the wife of Pluto, to let his friends find peace in their afterlife, while the murderers shall suffer for their sins. Revenge assures Andrea that the sinners shall suffer in the deepest hell, to which the ghost of Andrea replies by asking to be allowed to announce their fitting punishments. Revenge tells Andrea that they must make haste then, for as their miseries have ended in death, their tragedy will begin now.

#### **Check Your Progress**

1. What is the significance of the scenes of the Portuguese Court?
2. Can you draw a comparison between the play and the playlet, "Soliman and Perseda"?
3. Can you list all the soliloquies of Hieronimo?

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### **3.4 List of Characters/Characterisation**

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There are many characters in the play. However, there are among them, those that become a part of the murder of Horatio and/or are



pivotal to the revenge plot, require to be mentioned. The most important characters, major and minor, that are crucial to the plot of the play, are divided into those belonging to Spain and those from Portugal. The characters are listed below:

#### Spain

- i. Ghost of Don Andrea, knight
- ii. Revenge
- iii. The Spanish King
- iv. Don Cyprian, Duke of Castile, the King's brother
- v. Don Lorenzo, the Duke of Castile's son
- vi. Bel-imperia, the Duke of Castile's daughter
- vii. Pedringano, Bel-imperia's servant
- viii. Don Hieronimo, Knight Marshal of Spain
- ix. Isabella, his wife
- x. Don Horatio, their son

#### Portugal

- i. Viceroy of Portugal
- ii. Prince Balthazar, son of the Viceroy
- iii. Ambassador of Portugal
- iv. Alexandro and Villuppo, Portuguese noblemen
- v. The Portuguese Ambassador
- vi. Serberine, Balthazar's serving-man

David Daiches refers to the characterisation of the play as, “crude to the point of non-existence; the characters have passions and nothing else...” (Daiches, Mandarin Paperback, 1994, pp. 233). Yet, it is to be noted that, the characters in *The Spanish Tragedy* are not altogether devoid of any complexity. In keeping with the theme of revenge and the sense of immediacy it entails, where passion reigns over every other emotion, the characters in the play do represent a multi-layered complexity of madness, villainy, manipulation, and cold contemplation of revenge, especially in Hieronimo, Bel-Imperia, and Lorenzo. Kyd’s brilliance in characterisation is revealed in the way he lets gestural communication, flared up by passion, takeover when language ceases to work, or breaks down. In this section, we are going to discuss the most important characters of the play, namely, the ghost of Andrea, Revenge, Hieronimo, Bel-Imperia, and Lorenzo.

### **(i) Andrea, the Ghost:**

Don Andrea was a knight in the Spanish Army, and in love with Bel-Imperia, the daughter of Duke of Castile. As he is killed in the war, the Duke and Lorenzo are in a way relieved, as they did not approve the relationship between Andrea and Bel-Imperia. But, it is his death that becomes the cause of the tragedy in the play.

When Andrea is ferried to Hades, Prosperine, the wife of Pluto, takes it upon herself to decide his fate. She decides to send him back to the mortal world, accompanied by the spirit of Revenge, implying that divine order finds something unresolved in the death of Andrea. This is also indicative of the fact that the mortal world of nobility and chivalry is not real, rather ridden with corruption. It is through the ghost of Andrea that the supernatural machinery intervenes in the lives of the characters, leading to the tragedy. So, it is the Ghost of Andrea with Revenge, now desiring revenge from Balthazar, who sets in motion the revenge action of the play. They are the frame figures of the play. It is important to understand that. it is the lack of chivalry and honour in Balthazar's attack on Andrea, after he was thrown off his horse by the halberdiers, that could account for the desire for Andrea's revenge against Balthazar.

The death of Andrea, and his pursuit of revenge, thus, becomes the primary narrative within which is set the inset narrative of Hieronimo's revenge, and it is through the intervention of the supernatural machinery, through the ghost of Andrea, that justice is served in a world where law fails. So, the Ghost of Andrea is the also one through whom the issue of justice introduced in the play.

Andrea's coming back to the mortal world, as a ghost, accompanied by Revenge, seems to be a part of some inconspicuous divine scheme. He is new to the supernatural world and its devices, hence, when Hieronimo seems to delaying his revenge, and reconciling with the murderers, he frustrated by seeing Revenge sleep. He pleads with Revenge, "Awake, *Revenge*, ore we are woe begone", for he is worried that their devise shall fail. But, the playwright has a horror-filled view ahead for the audience, that seems to include the ghost of Andrea, and hence Revenge ominously replies, "Behold, *Andrea*, for an instance, how *Revenge* hath slept, and then imagine thou/What 'tis to be subject to destiny." Through this exchange between the ghost of Andrea and Revenge, Kyd seems to be hinting towards an appalling end beyond the limits of law and Christian morality, because of Andrea's request for revenge.

### **(ii) Revenge:**

The incarnate figure of Revenge is an instrument of divine justice, where human laws and morality fail, as exemplified by the spectacles of banquets, wedding preparations, and the dumb show by Hieronimo, and his dalliance in taking revenge show. But as Revenge assures Andrea's ghost, that although Revenge sleeps for a while, it is only a temporary hiatus before tragedy befalls all.

The role of the chorus, played by the ghost of Andrea and Revenge, is very significant. The Chorus gives the audience a picture of the world beyond the mortal realm, where divine justice reigns. They act both as the audience to the actions of the mortal world, yet constantly reminding the audience that its plotting are mere dumb shows for the divine realm. The Chorus also enables Kyd to go beyond the traditions, wherein the modern villains replace the classical figures in Hades, as the ghost of Andrea begins to decide on the punishments of the sinners.

Another purpose of the chorus is Kyd's deliberate use of the metatheatrical device, that seeks to establish a distinction between the audience and actors. Such a distance allows for the free flow of pathos, and the suspension of judgement in regard to moral and ethical questions of justice and revenge. Moreover, as a part of the audience, the doubts voiced by the ghost of Andrea about the fulfilment of the revenge, also reflects and heightens the excited anticipation of the audience regarding the end, while Revenge constantly allays these doubts in order to avoid the pleasure of watching the play being overwhelmed by the uncertainty.

### **(.iii ) Hieronimo:**

Hieronimo is the Knight-Marshall of Spain, who is a judge. When Hieronimo's son, the brave Horatio, is treacherously murdered by Lorenzo and Balthazar, Hieronimo's position from being the law-giver changes to the revenger who takes the law into his own hands. This is a problem, that many critics feel, disrupts the idea of Christian morality of justice, that seems to have been overwhelming present in the consciousness of the Elizabethan public. Moreover, the transformation of Hieronimo, an honest giver of justice, into the Machiavellian villain, too poses a problem for the critics.

Until the murder of Horatio, Hieronimo remains a minor character, who is favoured by the king to join the banquet as a reward of his, Horatio's bravery. At the banquet, Hieronimo presents a dumb show portraying the glorious victories of the English over Spain and Portugal and England. This is a political device used by Kyd to draw

the sympathy of the English audience towards Hieronimo, right from the beginning of the play. But, the moment Hieronimo begins to identify himself solely as the bereaved and wronged father of a son who has been brutally murdered, revenge becomes his only end, and justice takes a very different definition — “To know the author were of some ease of grief, For in revenge my hart would find relief.” It is to be noted here that, the revenge of Andrea becomes connected to and is ensured, only through Hieronimo’s pledge to avenge Horatio’s death, symbolised by the blood-smearred handkerchief of Horatio, which might have been the scarf that Horatio had taken from Andrea’s body, that Hieronimo vows not to part with until his revenge is fulfilled.

The transformation of Hieronimo’s character is evidently and strongly portrayed through his soliloquies. Hieronimo’s distrust of the law, of the sovereign and divine, begins with his eyes being opened to a world of “masses of public wrongs, Confused and filed with murder and misdeeds”, and the “sacred heavens” letting these heinous acts remain “unrevealed and unrevenged pass...” But, as he receives the letter written by Bel-Imperia in her blood, we see Hieronimo turning into the revenger that trusts no one, but himself. As he dispenses justice in punishing Pedringano, he laments that he has found no justice yet, from the law or from the Gods. This is an initiation of his transformation, which yet much be stayed, for confirmation of Lorenzo and Balthazar’s crime is still to be had. But, as the letter from Pedringano clears any doubts he might have, Hieronimo decides to seek justice from the King, or “tire them all with my revenging threats.”

Hieronimo’s fury and desire for revenge is also reflected in the breakdown of language, and it is his gestural fall into madness that becomes significant. When the Portugals ask Hieronimo for directions to Castile, he rants about the fiery depths of hell where sinners and murderers like Lorenzo are to be found. Hieronimo’s only attempt at communication, with the King, is thwarted by Lorenzo, who ironically accuses him of having gone mad and desiring the ransom due to his son. Denied justice from the King, Hieronimo had imagined suicide to be his only way to escape his anguish. But, now he throws away the dagger, only to pick it up again, in front of the king, to dig up the earth, as if act out his case, by unearthing the brutalised body of his son, and give proof of the crime committed, for language has failed — “Away, He rip the bowels of the earth, And Ferry over to th’ Elisian plains, And bring my Son to show his deadly wounds.”

Before Hieronimo decides to counterfeit an unsuspecting state, he asks the painter to paint his suffering and grief, for language can no more express his passions, which will inevitably bring “death and madness.” Madness allows Hieronimo to conceal his vengeance and the time to plot his revenge. It works as a deception, that finally makes Lorenzo convince Balthazar to allow for Hieronimo’s absurd idea that each character speak in a different language, in the tragedy they are to present before the Viceroy of Spain. The breakdown of language is complete as Hieronimo bites off his tongue, implicating that justice is a rearrangement of language, and hence, when justice itself fails, language has no use.

At the end of the play within the play, Hieronimo’s anguish is spread to the Viceroy, Castile, and even the King, as Lorenzo is killed by Hieronimo, and Balthazar is killed by Bel-Imperia, before she stabs herself.

#### **(iv) Bel-Imperia:**

Bel-Imperia is the daughter of the Duke of Castile, sister of Lorenzo, and the niece of the King of Spain. In Act I, the theme of revenge is concerned only with Andrea, which, till now, finds no relevance for the characters in the mortal realm. It is only with the “double passion” (Lamb, Margaret. “Beyond Revenge: ‘The Spanish Tragedy.’” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1975, pp. 33–40. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/24778382](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24778382). Accessed 15 Aug. 2021) that the revenge plots of Andrea and Hieronimo become one.

Bel-Imperia was in love with Don Andrea, but after he is killed in war, she finds solace and love in Horatio. It is Horatio’s revealing of how Balthazar, the Prince of Portugal, had, in the most unheroic manner, slaughtered Andrea in the battlefield, that Bel-Imperia seeks revenge. The scarf she had given to Andrea, now becomes both a token of love and a reminder of revenge, for Horatio. But, ironically, before Horatio is able to avenge the death of his friend and bring justice to Bel-Imperia’s tortured heart, he is murdered for having become the lover of Bel-Imperia. Thus, Bel-Imperia is devised as the string that connects both plots of revenge, of Andrea and Hieronimo.

Kyd has infused the character of Bel-Imperia with much strength and passion, as well as intelligence. In the scenes with Balthazar, she indulges in witty stichomythia, wherein she is able to express her loathing of him within clever conceits of seemingly no consequence. She is patient and does not fall into frenzied fits of madness, although revenge is the only thing she constantly meditate upon. An

important fact that often risks remaining unnoticed is that, Bel-Imperia's silence is crucial to the fulfilment of revenge and serving of justice, as it she who has been deceived most awfully, by her own brother, by the man who claims to love her, and by her most trusted servant. The fact that she is held captive, highlights the lack of any empathy for her sufferings on the part of her father and brother.

Refusing to play the hapless victim, Bel-Imperia exposes the villainy of her brother Lorenzo and Balthazar, in murdering Horatio, to Hieronimo, through a letter written in her own blood. Her thirst for revenge is enervated by Hieronimo's delay, and swears revenge even if Hieronimo fails — "Nor shall his death be unrevenged by me...Myself should send their hateful souls to hell, That wrought his downfall with extremest death." In spite of her burning rage, Bel-Imperia remains cold-blooded till the moment of her revenge, thus, effects a Machiavellian transformation in her. As she remains unflustered and indifferent while meditating revenge, when the time comes, she is unapologetically determined, as she participates in the plot to murder Lorenzo and Balthazar, in the guise of the play. Bel-Imperia completes her revenge by killing Balthazar, the murderer of Andrea and Horatio, before she commits suicide by stabbing herself. Notwithstanding, what seems to be a cold, manipulative persons, it must be understood here that, Kyd was portraying a world deficient in its system of legal justice. Hence, rather than vilifying Bel-Imperia for her determination to exact justice, through revenge, she must be looked as one of the most powerful women characters on the English stage, to the fact that, had she not conceded to play her part of Perseda, the revenge plot could never come to its desired culmination.

**(.v) Lorenzo:**

Lorenzo, the son of Duke Castile, is considered to be the first Machiavellian hero of the English stage. His jealousy of Don Horatio is evident in Act I, when he attempts to deprive Horatio of the honour of having defeated Balthazar in the battle. The King, his father, seems to turn a blind eye to the faults of Lorenzo, as is evident from the way he decides upon the matter by dividing the prize of capturing Balthazar between his son and Lorenzo. This is also the first instance of the king's inability to discharge justice, which shall finally lead to the tragedy.

Out of family honour, as out of jealousy, Lorenzo plots to murder Horatio. He includes Balthazar in his ploy, by manipulating his desire for Bel-Imperia, and thus arousing envy against Horatio. Lorenzo also bribes Pedringano, Bel-Imperia's trusted servant, into

colluding with him in the murder. But, Lorenzo's villainy does not stop at that. As he begins to suspect that his crime has been exposed in front of Hieronimo, he decides to tie all loose ends, to protect himself. He, once again, convinces Pedringano to murder Serberine, Balthazar's faithful servant, who was a part of their murderous plot, on the assurance that he will get Pedringano pardoned from any punishment for the crime. However, when the time comes, Pedringano is betrayed by Lorenzo, and is hanged. On the other hand, when Hieronimo tries to approach the King, seeking justice for the murder of his son, Lorenzo not only prevents the meeting, but is able to convince the King that Hieronimo has gone mad, and his covetous of his son's due ransom.

The fall of Lorenzo is caused by his arrogant oversight of Hieronimo's sudden reversal, and friendly overtures and reconciliation. Dismissing any probability of Hieronimo as a potential enemy in disguise, because of his pride, he participates in Hieronimo's play, that is to be presented before the Viceroy, as a gesture to appease Hieronimo. This finally leads to his death at the hands of Hieronimo, whose son, he had brutally murdered.

Unlike Horatio or Balthazar, Lorenzo is a man of few words, his dialectic reserved for the soliloquies that reveal his psyche. He is critical of the superfluity of courtly language, which he deigns to be unnecessary, empty and fallacious expressions. As Balthazar tries to woo Bel-Imperia, in the extravagantly ceremonious and conceited way, Lorenzo makes his impatience known — "Tush, tush, my Lord, let go these ambages, And in plain terms acquaint her with your love." Language, for Lorenzo, is "an instrument of policy" and deception, where force cannot prevail. In his attempts to keep Balthazar pacified, as Bel-Imperia constantly rejects him, Lorenzo's language is guised in the most ornate, polite and courtly expressions. On the contrary, for instance, Lorenzo's soliloquy, in Act III, Scene II, "As for myself, I know my secret fault, And so do they; but I have dealt for them. They that for coin their souls endangered, To save my life, for coin shall venture theirs: And better its that base companions dye, Then by their life to hazard our good haps. Nor shall they live, for me to fear their faith: He trust myself, myself shall be my Friend; For dye they shall, slaves are ordained to no other end", gives the audience a peek at the ruthless, manipulative, and Machiavellian character of his, where his lack of (preference for) language is a dangerous foreboding.

Although, the political implications of Lorenzo's deprecation of language is ominous, it is also sinisterly portent for himself. When he dismisses Balthazar's reservations regarding Hieronimo's idea

that the play about Soliman and Perseda must have each character speaking in a different language, Lorenzo's silence becomes the consent to his death warrant.

#### Check Your Progress

1. What is the relevance of the character of Andrea in the play?
2. How is Bel-Imperia different from other tragic heroines like Ophelia from *Hamlet*?

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### 3.5 Major Themes

#### 3.5.1 Revenge and Justice:

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In *The Spanish Tragedy*, revenge is the central theme around which the action of the play revolves. The play begins with the ghost of Andrea trying to find his place in Hades. His ghost is sent back to the mortal world, by Prosperine, accompanied by Revenge. The ghost of Andrea, as such, sets the plot line as one of revenge, as he desires to avenge his death through the killing of Balthazar. The significance of the monologue of Andrea's ghost, as he sits beside Revenge, waiting for the plot to unfold, lies in the fact that, Andrea's soul had been placed before the judges of Hades, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus, who could not arrive at an unanimous decision, as to what would account as justice for Andrea's soul. Hence, it is undoubtable that the themes of revenge and justice are inextricably intertwined in the play. Even though many critics see the motif of revenge as a superimposition on the theme of justice, which fails to take off at least till the murder of Horatio, it must be understood that an act that is vicious enough to raise the question of justice, must also arouse the desire for revenge in the hearts of the one who has been wronged. Justice, sometimes stands for lawful revenge, and in this play justice and revenge become complicated and at times antithetical because the question asked is about the method of revenge.

Kyd borrows the revenge theme from Seneca, highlighted by the fact that Hieronimo, in his soliloquy in Act III, as talks of private revenge, quotes lines from Seneca. But, Kyd refurbishes the theme by weaving into it questions of Christian morality and the politics of contemporary England. The animosity between England and Spain



heightened the popularity of the play, as it portrayed the Spanish court infested with corruption and the king as fallible in dispensing justice. Again, the bloody conflicts at home after the Reformation, which established the king as the representative of divine (Christian) law on earth, capable of dispensing justice equitably, and the dissension of many, who felt the law had failed them, also made the very idea of private revenge quite appealing to a lot of the audience. Under the impression that, the blatant defiance of Christian virtues and ideals of forgiveness and divine justice, in the play could, actually scandalise the Elizabethan theatregoers, Kyd's distancing of the whole plot and issue from home, and placing it a foreign locale with a antithetical brand of Christianity in practice, ensures neutralising the adverse effects of the way the ideas of revenge and justice are dealt with in the play. It is to be highlighted here that, the Elizabethan audience were as familiar to the medieval system of *wergild*, as they were to the Christian morality advocating, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord '(Romans 12:19)" (Gregory M. Colon Semenza, "The Spanish Tragedy and Metatheatre", from Smith and Sullivan Jr. ed, CUP, 2010, p. 155). As such, the revenge plot as being completely abhorrent to the Elizabethan audience is dubious, and it can be said that, Hieronimo did find sympathisers among the audience.

Hieronimo's unmitigated passion for revenge is undoubtedly legitimate, but when one questions his own transformation into the Machiavellian villain to exact the same, we tend to overlook the delay in his action. Not only is his love for his son questioned by Bel-Imperia, when she sees him lagging in exacting his revenge, but the ghost of Andrea too is exasperated and worried when he sees Hieronimo extend a hand of friendships towards the murderers of Horatio. There is a duality to this situation, wherein Hieronimo is still pursuing the king expecting justice, and his attempts are constantly thwarted by the cunning Lorenzo. On the other hand, Hieronimo seems to be buying time for the perfect time to get his revenge. This, nevertheless, does not diminish the sincerity of his hope for justice from the law, presided and represented by the king.

It is the lack of justice that turns both Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia into Machiavellian characters, raising questions about the ethical legitimacy of revenge. But, when we hear Revenge say, "Behold, Andrea, for an instance, how Revenge hath slept, and then imagine thou What 'tis to be subject to destiny" we are reminded that everything in the human world happens because of "a predetermined

and omniscient justice that they (the characters) cannot see and never really understand” (Hunter, “Ironies of Justice in “The Spanish Tragedy”), and the idea of human law and justice is a construct, that is catastrophically inefficient. Hieronimo is the perfect character through whom the complexity of the issue of justice is explored in the play. He is the keeper of state justice, under the aegis of the king, and yet, he becomes the one who is so cruelly wronged as his son, Horatio is murdered. So, when Hieronimo seeks the intervention of heavenly justice, he is referring to a pre-Christian order of divine justice.

With the denial of state justice, and the delay and uncertainty of divine justice, Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia, turn into the Machiavellian counterparts of Lorenzo and Balthazar. But, their crossing over to the darker side, places them at the receiving end of divine justice, too. So, when punishment is served to Lorenzo and Balthazar, it has to be followed by the rule of the, inscrutable to human, justice of the Gods.

In conformity to the theme of revenge and justice, as divinely designed and ordained, the idea of the metatheatrical works to represent human actions as a performance directed by the supernatural powers. Just as the ghost of Andrea and Revenge, watch the action of Hieronimo and Bel-Imperia’s revenge unfolding, so the king, the Viceroy, and the rest of the audience get to glimpse the fulfilment of what is divinely predetermined. Just as the actors have no ill, so the actors in the play within the play too, have no will. Thus, the theme of revenge and justice in Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy*, work at a level beyond the grasp of human free will, and the end of the play suggests that no human can escape the tyranny of destiny and the judgement of divine justice.

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### **3.5.2 Madness:**

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Hieronimo is the Knight-Marshal of Spain. At the beginning of the play, he is just a marginal figure gloating on the glories of his son’s bravery in the battlefield. Horatio has the promises of greatness in action and, a great fall, that the narrative will centre around. But, when Lorenzo and Balthazar murder Horatio, Hieronimo’s son, and hang him on the bower of a tree in his own garden, Hieronimo, the justice-giver, and Hieronimo, the father, sinks into madness. The confusion of Hieronimo, is emphasised when the citizens, who come seeking justice from the Knight-Marshal, are faced with mad fury of a father, who has torn their documents as if the limbs of the

murderers of his son. He is driven mad for he cannot comprehend the paradoxical irony that being a judge, he cannot find justice for himself. As G.K Hunter says, “His madness is a direct result of the collision of his human sense of justice with the quite different processes of divine justice; for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a just God”, (Hunter, “Ironies of Justice in “The Spanish Tragedy”, p. 101).

One of the most significant scenes of madness in the play is when Hieronimo meets the painter, the fourth passage of additions in the play. He invites the painter to “talk wisely” with, for both have suffered the same anguish of a murdered son, and as Hieronimo seems to commission a painting, his madness wishes for the painter to paint him his life, from its happy promises to his catastrophic madness. As the painter asks Hieronimo, if he has any other requests, Hieronimo replies, “Oh no, there is no end: the end is death and madness. As I am never better then when I am mad: then methinks I am a brave fellow; then I do wonders: but reason abuseth me, and there's the torment, there's the hell.” Here again, the acknowledgement by Hieronimo of his madness predicates his understanding that, he has to let go of the semblance of wisdom and faith in justice, to be able to avenge his son’s murder. Ironically, however, in his mad fury for revenge, that he performs the gesture of friendship towards Lorenzo, which will allow him to unleash his vengeful madness on the murderers of his son. Madness, thus, becomes a spectacle in itself in the character of Hieronimo, just as the painting becomes an aesthetic representation of his madness, and the play itself a metatheatrical representation of it all — “Nor ought avails it me to menace them Who, as a wintry storm upon a plain, Will bear me down with their nobility. No, no, Hieronimo, thou must enjoin Thine eyes to observation, and thy tongue To milder speeches then thy spirit affords; Thy heart to patience, and thy hands to rest, Thy Cap to curtsy, and thy knee to bow, Till to revenge thou know when, where, and how.”

The madness of Hieronimo, renders language to fail, and his incoherent rants, constantly calling on the rulers of Hades to serve justice, becomes the only way to get a look into his psyche. In his confusion and frenzy, Hieronimo mistakes Don Bazulto, whose son too has been murdered, to be the young Horatio, and then recognises in Don Bazulto the image of his own grief. The significance of Hieronimo’s speeches lie in the fact that, his faculties are now playing tricks on him, and hence, language spoken by him is insufficient to portray the inner turmoil and anguish of Hieronimo. We must rely on the spectacle that this breakdown of language

creates, to understand Hieronimo's madness. Moreover, the silence of this old man, on the tragedy of his own life, expecting to find expression in the legal documents he has brought to Hieronimo for justice, is a strong reiteration of the mental confusion and anguish that drives Hieronimo mad. He has already learnt that law does not serve justice, and so Hieronimo tears the documents, as a sign of this truth, as much as a sign of his own madness. The culmination of his madness is not in the act of murder, but in his self-inflicted glossectomy, which symbolises the complete negation of any possibility of arriving at a conclusive vindication of the ideas of justice or revenge.

Isabella, mother of Horatio, too, displays signs of madness, but her madness is a more private kind, in so far that, aware of her limitations in the public masculine world of law, justice, and revenge, she has recourse to none. Isabella, like Hieronimo, berates the failure of justice, and wants revenge for her son. She calls on Hieronimo to share in her vision of Horatio with Rhadamanth, asking "Revenge on her that should revenge his death." Her madness is exacerbated by Hieronimo's delay in revenge, and the fact that she is the only one stirred in her passions for revenge, but "to no end." In her impotent rage, she curses and kills the tree that stands as the instrument and witness of her son's murder, and stabs herself, transferring her anger on the murderers onto herself. While Hieronimo's madness works outwards towards a display of his anguish and fury, attempting the destruction of everything within his path, Isabella's madness is a more ominous kind, wherein her curse on the "tree from further fruit," and on her womb, is a foreboding of the utter destruction of the Spanish and Portuguese court; justice, aroused by her curse, rising up from the depths of hell, spreading like the very roots and branches of that tree, bringing with it revenge and death.

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### 3.5.3 Metatheatre:

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One of the most important features and significant contributions of *The Spanish Tragedy*, to English dramaturgy is its metatheatricality. It indulges in self-awareness and self-scrutiny structurally, while exploring the idea of "*theatrum mundi* topos" (Gregory M. Colon Semenza, "The Spanish Tragedy and Metatheatre", from Smith and Sullivan Jr. ed, CUP, 2010, p. 154), as a thematic concern. Metatheatrical narratives can be understood to work in concentric circles of inset narratives or dramatic actions. So, in *The Spanish*

*Tragedy*, the first overarching action is that of the play by Kyd and his Elizabethan audience. Within this is set, the action of the ghost of Andrea and Revenge, along with the rest of the audience, watching the action involving murder, revenge, and justice, in the mortal realm of the play. In the third circle takes place, the play-within-a-play of “Soliman and Perseda”, written and directed by Hieronimo, as the conclusive action of revenge and justice, where another set of audience, the King of Spain, and the Viceroy of Portugal, are added, to their tragic fate. While the second and third circles of the dramatic action can be taken as a spectacle for the Elizabethan audience, the thematic concern of the “*theatrum mundi* topos” or the world as a stage, makes “the play’s questions are also our questions, its horrors our horrors” (ibid.).

The primary concern of the play is the idea of justice and its association with revenge. The audience of the play is introduced to this subject at the very beginning, when the soul of Andrea stands before the judges of the underworld, for his fate of his soul to be decided. As Prosperine sends him back to the mortal realm, as a ghost, with the incarnation of Revenge, the audience realises that justice for Andrea’s soul will be incomplete, without some kind of action reaching its finality in the mortal realm. To this action, as Andrea’s ghost and Revenge become a part of the audience, it is also undoubtedly hinted at that, the supernatural world of heaven and hell directs as well as witnesses the action of the mortal realm, and human beings are like mere puppets in the hands of the divine will. So, within the play, all of human action is a performance directed by a higher power. This is one of the reasons why the ideas of revenge and justice become so inscrutable to the human world, whether of the Elizabethan audience, or the characters like Hieronimo, Isabella, Bel-Imperia, and even to Andrea.

The metatheatricality of the play places the characters and situations as mirror images of each other, to address the questions of justice and the moral and ethical issue of revenge. The human world of justice, presided over by the king, and where Hieronimo, the Knight-Marshal acts as the judge, is mirrored by Hades with its three judges, Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus, and the ruler Pluto. Just as the judges of the underworld fail to decide on the fate of Andrea, Hieronimo too finds no justice for his son’s murder. Again, as Semenza points out in the essay “*The Spanish Tragedy* and Metatheatre”, Pluto yields his responsibility to Prosperine, as easily as the King of Spain puts up a facade of justice in deciding who shall be honoured for the capture of Balthazar, Horatio or his son, Lorenzo. This is to show that, the issue of justice is as contestable

and incomprehensible in the world of the gods, as it is in the human world. However, justice, as dispensed by the gods, abounds human action in its entirety, and hence, it becomes so incomprehensible to the human individual. As Hieronimo feels betrayed by the justice system of which he himself is a judge, he seeks the intervention of the gods in heaven and hell. However, symbolised by the sleeping of Revenge, the supernatural world too seems to have abandoned him, because of which he chooses the oath of private revenge. Hieronimo, himself, ends up committing murder and putting the Viceroy and Castile, along with the King, through the same pain and anguish that he had suffered. But, this in the underworld, too, shall be punished the same way the murderers of Andrea and Lorenzo, when Revenge wakes up.

Hieronimo's madness is another instance of the metatheatrical aspect of the play. His madness becomes a spectacle for the audience, while he, in his madness, directs the most horrifying spectacle of murder and revenge. So, in the same way, as he questions the idea of justice, the audience, too, questions his Christian morality for having committed such a heinous act. The questions, nevertheless, left behind by the play is reflected in the final scene where Hieronimo bites off his tongue, not only to protect Bel-Imperia's implication in the revengeful murder, but also to highlight that nothing is finally resolved. With Hieronimo's power of speech being lost, the play too refuses to give a final verdict to the wondering and confused audience, as to the right and wrong of things. Yet, it is important to mention here that, critics like Semenza, believe that the play is intended to give a sense of meaning and knowledge about the fatalities of a flawed judicial system and the individual's resort to private revenge.

The use of the metatheatrical element by Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy*, revolutionised the tragic genre of drama. As he moves away from the mimetic centrality of the dramatic art, to bring in to focus a very modern concept of the relationship between reality and representation, it empowers the genre not just to present a story of fall, but to involve the audiences in the questions and issues highlighted in the play. As the audience, too, becomes a part of the play by issuing their interpretations and judgements, the tragic genre moves beyond a spectacle for entertainment.

#### STOP TO CONSIDER

Metatheatricality breaks away from the Aristotelean concept of dramatic art as being mimetic. In blurring the boundaries between

reality and illusion, actors and audience, metatheatre indulges in existential questions. Thus, tragedy, during the English Renaissance, became an exploration of the human consciousness, rather than just the fall of great men.

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### **3.6 A Note on the Language of *The Spanish Tragedy***

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Thomas Kyd uses the blank verse in *The Spanish Tragedy*, which was a relatively new introduction to English drama. Jonas A. Barish says that, Kyd's language had substantial elements of the "the rhetoric of the schemes, tropes, and figures," (Barish, "*From The Spanish Tragedy, or The Pleasures and Perils of Rhetoric*, from Neill ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), used by the poets of the later sixteenth century. Kyd's language was not only a brilliant amalgamation of the blank verse and the figurative style, but it came to be a pioneering dramatic language, just as his play was.

The significance of the language of *The Spanish Tragedy* lies in the way Kyd uses it to concretise the dramatic context. It is marked by a lively interchange between different dialectical forms and rhetorics, within and between scenes, casting a reflection upon each other. For instance, the narration of the battle scene happens in both the Spanish and the Portuguese Courts, there is a symmetry to the actions and counteraction of each army. But the symmetry also works to emphasise on the antithesis of the celebratory note in the Spanish Court, and the gloomy and ominous atmosphere in the Portuguese Court. In the scene where Bel-Imperia and Horatio meet in his father's garden, and Lorenzo and Balthazar, along with their collaborators, are hiding to attack Horatio at the right time, the amorous repartee of lovers is contrasted with the envious and murderous conversation between Lorenzo and Balthazar, with great symmetry. In the courtly manner, as Horatio pleads his lady love to be more yielding, "Now, Madame, since by favor of your love Our hidden smoke is turned to open flame, And that with looks and words we feed our thoughts (Two chief contents, where more cannot be had); Thus in the midst of loves fair blandishments, Why show you sign of inward languishments?", Balthazar too resorts to the Petrarchan tradition to rue his lady's cruelty towards him. However, the most significant aspect of the use of language in this scene is that, while Lorenzo's manipulative assurance to Balthazar is spoken in a most articulate quatrain, borrowed from a sonnet of Thomas Watson, Balthazar's despair and envy is allotted only the refrain of the couplet.

This scene is also a fine example of how language is used as mirror to the relationships and characters on stage. Lorenzo is able to cut-short his crafty rhetoric, because he is cold and conniving, and at this crucial point, where a murder is about to happen, Balthazar's conceited verbosity might be the end to Lorenzo's schemes. It is interesting to note that, Balthazar becomes the captive of Lorenzo both literally and metaphorically, through the device of language, as he is constantly silenced by Lorenzo. Here, again, the working of symmetry and antithesis, through language is achieved by Kyd, to a very brilliant end.

A play's language is both verbal and gestural. A synchronised movement of both, even if in a paradoxical manner, is seminal to the dramatic action. In the scenes mentioned before, there is a marching rhythm to the language, that complements the action — one army moving ahead, followed by the other army; the silence of Horatio and Bel-Imperia, as she is waiting for an answer from Horatio, filled in by the conceited words of anguish of Balthazar, and the cold, murderous meditation of Lorenzo. But, after Horatio is murdered, the language, in the scenes with Hieronimo, become slanted inwardly to make sense of the inner world of Hieronimo in his suffering. Barish is quite accurate in pointing out that the soliloquy of Hieronimo in Act III, Scene II, "Oh eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears; Oh life, no life, but lively forum of death...See, search, show, send some man, some mean, that may—", reflects the gradual transformation in Hieronimo's world, which begins to stop making sense to him. He had ordered his life on the ideals of justice and honour, as the Knight-Marshal, and domestic bliss, but denial of justice, by the very system that he is supposed to be guarding, wreaks havoc on the order. It needs to be observed that, language still works in a symmetrical, rhythmic, rhetorical style, in case of Hieronimo's passionate outbursts. But, there is a breakdown in its ability to convey something meaningful. The meaning of these mad rantings lie buried under the facade of incoherence, and they can be deciphered only by correlating the gestural language of the speaker.

The final incongruity of language, in all its poetic glory, is represented in the playlet "Soliman and Perseda." Hieronimo has already been engulfed in confusion by the perversion of the order in his world. So, now he wants to impose the same confusion on the agents of his suffering, and it is achieved through the import of the Babylonian allusion. The fall of Babylon, brought on by God, by confusing their languages, has both political and religious connotations. Spain and England were mortal enemies, especially due religious differences. So, the Babylonian reference can be



understood to refer to the excesses of the Catholic Church, of which Spain is a follower, being brought to an end by the truly Christian and God's Chosen, England. This connects Hieronimo to the idea of him having become Andrea's avenger and the instrument of justice of the God of the Old Testament, which is one of the main concerns of the play in terms of the supernatural machinery at work, while it is also able to gather sympathy for Hieronimo from the audience, due to its political connotation.

With the revealing of Horatio's mutilated body, language is silenced, and only a spectacle of justice and revenge remains. Language and style, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, is not only ingeniously employed to underline the symmetries and antitheses in the play, or to draw out the characters' psyche betrayed through language, but it also hints at how language can become a symbol of conspiratorial collaborative efforts, and its breakdown, the doom of both wrong and the wronged.

#### Self Asking Questions

1. **Make a comparison between the characters of Lorenzo and Balthazar, based on their use of language. (200 words)**
2. **Analyse the idea of 'madness as a spectacle'. (100 words)**

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### 3.7 Summing Up:

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Hope you have now been familiar with the plot of the play through the act-wise summary of the play. You have also learned about the art of characterisation of Thomas Kyd in the play, and known about the main characters and critically assessed them. The major themes of the play like revenge and justice, madness, and metatheatricality are also introduced and explained, and you are able to dwell on various issues of importance in the play. The language of the play, given its context and background, and its relevance in the performance, to bring about a certain effect, have also been discussed. As you go through the unit, please attend to the 'Self-asking Questions' and 'Check your Progress' sections. These will enable to assess how you have grappled with the unit as well as the text.

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### 3.8 Reference and Suggested Reading

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## Unit 4

### *The Spanish Tragedy*

### Supplementary Unit

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- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers
- 4.3 Other Study Suggestions
- 4.4 Summing Up
- 4.5 References and Suggested Readings

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#### 4.1 Objectives

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This unit is primarily a questions and answers section. It will enable the readers get a fair idea as to how to approach some of the most important questions related to the play from a critical point of view. On reading this unit the students shall be able to understand and discuss the following topics:

- i. The significance of the title of *The Spanish Tragedy*.
- ii. The significance of the Portuguese subplot.
- iii. The significance of the supernatural machinery in the play.
- iv. The significance of the handkerchief in the play
- iii. The relevance of the scenes with Don Bazulto and the painter.
- iv. Importance of Hieronimo's soliloquies.

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#### 4.2 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

##### 4.2.1 Critically analyse the significance of the title of *The Spanish Tragedy*.

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*The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd was a very popular play for a long time after, its initial performance in the 1580s. Thomas Kyd was one of the University Wits, who had taken up play writing as a professional, very conscious of the necessity to cater to the audience's taste. When he wrote a play like *The Spanish Tragedy*, considered to be the first revenge tragedy on the English stage, setting the genre up for immense popularity and critical attention, it is only logical that the title of the play, too, had much to offer in terms of attracting the theatregoers.

The religious and political animosity between England and Spain, was an appropriate condition to lure the English audience to witness the tragedy of their enemy. The play begins with the Spanish Court basking in the glory of its win against Portugal, and as it sees itself at the height of its power, the idea of the "fall of the mighty", is not only characteristic of a tragedy that the English audience have become familiar with, but it also offered them a more than cathartic

pleasure, in terms of the strong patriotic fervour that was becoming an essential feature of the English identity. The silent masque parading the victories of England over, both, Spain and Portugal, presented before the Ambassador of Portugal, is not an unintentional addition on the playwright's part. Moreover, the appreciation by the King of Spain, for this entertainment presented by Hieronimo, resonates with the English audience, as an acceptance of its inferior status, by Spain. Creating such a context, is a preparation by Kyd, to distance the audience from the ethical issues of revenge and justice portrayed in the play, that might be disturbing to the Elizabethan audience, given their Christian ethical and legal perspectives. Although, this is not to say that, Kyd was anxious about a disapproving backlash, it did put the audience at ease before they were faced with the more difficult questions to be explored in the play. This idea of preparing the audience, can be substantiated by what Barry B. Adams says in the essay "The Audiences of "The Spanish Tragedy"", regarding Kyd's theatricality, "it involves the selection, control, and manipulation of an audience's responses, actual or potential, as well as their stimulation."

When Kyd introduces the challenges posed by the questions of revenge and justice, Kyd eventually engages everyone in this debate of ambiguous interpretations and cloudy judgements, by use of metatheatricality. The failure of the legal system of justice, and the incomprehensibility of divine justice, drives Hieronimo mad, culminating in his brutal private revenge, —"Oh sacred heavens, if this unhallowed deed, If this inhumane and barbarous attempt, If this incomparable murder thus Of mine, but now no more my son, Shall unrevealed and unrevenged pass, How should we term your dealings to be just, If you unjustly deal with those, that in your justice trust?" So, as the Elizabethan audience begin to, suspend their judgement, and sympathise with the old, lonely Hieronimo, whose suffering only intensifies with the suicide of his wife, the tragic effect really takes on, and the issues become universally relevant, engaging the audience as well. From here on, the title of *The Spanish Tragedy* gathers an ambiguous connotation, for now "Spanish" could very well be taken to mean "England" or any the very human condition, where fairness is never guaranteed. The internecine wars after the Reformation, and the inherent corruption in any power structure, Hieronimo is potentially any member of the audience. Thus, as the audience still believes the tragedy to be of the Spanish Court, they are inevitably included into the ambit of the individual's tragic fate in a world where justice is sparse and faith in religious and moral ideals become shaky. The appendage "Hieronimo is Mad Again", to the main title of *The Spanish Tragedy* is very significant in this aspect. It draws attention to the fact that, regardless of the location of the text, the tragedy is still concerned about the individual character of Hieronimo, and the very idea of tragedy emerges from the fact that, in the convoluted debate between justice and revenge, the man fails to find respite from his sufferings, and hence in the end there is only "death and madness."

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#### 4.2.2 Discuss the significance of the Portuguese plot in *The Spanish Tragedy*.

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The beginning of the play shows Spain having won a battle against Portugal, which was to prove momentarily important for both the nations. Hence, a scene or two involving the Portuguese Court is inevitable. However, most critics, who take the elaborately designed scenes in the Portuguese Court, as superfluous and a poor attempt of lengthen the plot, seem to have overlooked the theatrical ingenuity of it. Kyd's metatheatricality manoeuvres to locate mirror images in the play, with the intention of complicating the possibility of judgement. As the everyone becomes a spectator to the playlet of Hieronimo, the audience inescapably become a part of the audience. The motif of the mirror image, as such, works to highlight and address the questions of justice and revenge, and Kyd's use of language in doing so.

The first time we witness a scene of the Portuguese Court is when, the Viceroy is in conversation with Alexandro and Villuppo, about their defeat in the battle with Spain. The Viceroy bemoans the supposed death of his son, Balthazar, abusing fortune for his grave loss. On the other hand, at the Spanish Court, the King is elated by the win, and Hieronimo is proud of his son's heroism, who is still alive. However, fortune is truly going to take a turn, when Horatio is killed by Balthazar and Lorenzo, and one father's loss becomes the others gain. The grief expressed by the Viceroy in this scene, will be mirrored by Hieronimo later. This scene is also important in regard to exposing the corruption of justice in both the courts, for as the Viceroy wrongfully sentences Alexandro to be executed, the King of Spain unwittingly reveals his blindness to the idea of justice, in trying to appease his villainous son. The mirror image is reinforced when the King says, "Spain is Portugal And Portugal is Spain", and Balthazar has replaced Horatio, both at court, and as the prospective groom for Bel-Imperia. As the Ambassador of Portugal, and the King of Spain, watch Hieronimo's dumb show, it is very subtly implied that the two nations shall witness their fall together, too. It is again interesting to note that, Bel-Imperia shall be the undoing of the both the royal families.

In Act III, Scene I, we see that Alexandro is miraculously saved from death, with the arrival of the Ambassador at the nick of time. According to G.K. Hunter, this scene is a reiteration of the idea of "human fallibility and divine concern..." (Hunter, "Ironies of Justice in "The Spanish Tragedy""), that also works to keep everyone hopeful of justice finally being served, just as the presence of Andrea's ghost along with Revenge, gives the audience an assurance of divine justice. It is this hope that also causes the delay in Hieronimo's revenge. However, what the hope of justice in the two plots direct towards is that, since Balthazar and Lorenzo were equally responsible of murdering Horatio, they too have to face death, resulting in the same tragic fate for Castile, the Viceroy, and, consequently, the King, for he had failed to serve justice.

Hieronimo's revenge works as the antithesis of the hope of justice represented by the saving of Alexandro, and finally the King and Viceroy realise, like Hieronimo, that, at the end, there is only "death and sorrow" (Donna B. Hamilton, "*The Spanish Tragedy: A Speaking Picture*"). Thus, if we look at the juxtaposition of the two plots, there is a skewed sense of symmetry, the dismantling and reconstruction of which works to focus on the issues undertaken to be explored in the play. There might still be a question regarding the essentiality of the Portuguese subplot in the play, as it might seem that the questions of revenge and justice could still be as relevant and navigable, without it. However, it must be understood that, the playwright asserts the notion that, although revenge can be private, divine justice works in a more elaborate and holistic way. It encompasses humanity in entirety, and hence the role of Balthazar, and more importantly, the deficiency of justice in both the King and the Viceroy, will have to answer for itself, when justice comes seeking answers. The subplot builds up the idea of cause and effect, which works like a chain reaction, put to an end only by supernatural intervention, and which no one can escape.

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#### **4.2.3 Discuss the significance of the supernatural machinery in *The Spanish Tragedy*.**

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The supernatural machinery in *The Spanish Tragedy* performs some vital functions, in terms of the plot, the structure, and the theme. The play opens with the ghost of Andrea, who has been killed in the battle, narrating his experience of the underworld, where souls are taken to be judged upon. That, Horatio had performed the obsequies and funeral rites for Andrea, without which his soul could not be allowed into the land of the dead, is of great significance here. It is an implication of Horatio replacing Andrea in the mortal world, which actually works to invite the attention of the supernatural machinery to his life and death. As the judges of Hell, Eacus, Rhadamant, and Minos, are not able to come to a decision regarding the soul of Andrea, he is told to go to Pluto's Court, the ruler of Hell. At Pluto's court, Prosperine, wife of Pluto, requests to be allowed to decide on Andrea's fate. In a strange manner, she decides to send the ghost of Andrea back to the mortal realm, accompanied by the incarnation of Revenge. At the very beginning of the play, as such, it is hinted that justice and revenge, intertwined with each other, shall guide the action of the play. It is interesting to note that, Andrea's ghost does not speak of revenge for himself, and it is only after the interim judgement passed by Prosperine that, Andrea suddenly becomes conscious of a necessity for his death to be avenged. Hence, the very idea of revenge is initiated into the play by the supernatural machinery.

The ghost of Andrea and Revenge arrive on the mortal plane, through the Gates of Horn, to watch the revenge plot unfold, playing the role of the Chorus throughout the play. This again, highly remarkable because, as the Chorus they are qualified to intervene in narrative, and so, in a way guide the plot. This is an indication of the

idea that, the supernatural machinery is driving the plot, while the human actors are mere puppets in its hands. It is clear, right from the beginning that, all questions of justice and revenge, are to be looked at as the doing of the supernatural powers, and human free will is just an illusion. This is the first time that the metatheatrical element is apparent in the play, wherein the ghost of Andrea and Revenge become a part of the audience, bringing to fore the concerns of reality and illusion. This also works to encompass the audience into a dialectic with the issues addressed in the play; the distinction between the performers and the audience being blurred. This is again highlighted by Revenge's dumb show for Andrea, where the audience too becomes a witness to the conspiracy of the supernatural forces in deciding people's destiny, something that the other characters are not aware of.

Horatio has replaced Andrea in the mortal realm, taking Bel-Imperia, Andrea's lover, as his own. He is to wear the scarf gifted to Andrea by Bel-Imperia, both as a token of his friendship and his love. So, the revenge that Prosperine, curiously, wishes for Andrea, must be accomplished through Horatio, and the ball has been set in motion. The murder of Horatio by Lorenzo and Balthazar becomes the central event of the play, raising the issues of revenge and justice. However, by the end of the play it seems to be realised that, since human free will is an illusion, the acts of revenge and justice are beyond the control of humans, and mere instruments of the supernatural machinery to assert its will and judgement. The recurrent reference to fortune as the giver of victory or loss, by the King and the Viceroy, is a reiteration of the overarching power of the supernatural forces over human destiny, and so, Hieronimo too is constantly crying out to the Gods in heaven, to grant him justice for the cruel murder of his son — "Eyes, life, world, heavens, hell, night and day, See, search, show, send some man, some mean, that may—".

The delay in divine justice, signified by the sleeping Revenge, forces Hieronimo to seek redressal in private revenge. But, as Revenge says, "...though I sleep, Yet is my mood solliciting their souls. Sufficeth thee that poor Hieronimo Cannot forget his son Horatio. Nor dies Revenge, although he sleep awhile", the delay in justice is another ploy of the supernatural machinery to incite Hieronimo's vengeance, without which revenge shall not be fulfilled, and divine justice prevail. Now, the audience that has been cultivated with the ideals of Christian morality and the rule of law, stand in opposition to the other set of audience, Andrea's ghost and Revenge. On the other hand, these agents of the supernatural forces making revenge seem as inevitable and necessary, forces the audience to open up to the possibilities beyond the standards of the human world.

The playlet of "Soliman and Perseda" is the final set-up for revenge to be exacted by Hieronimo, and in being so, Hieronimo becomes the instrument of the supernatural machinery to finally assert its power of justice over the humans. As Hieronimo announces, like God, that he shall bring upon the fall of everyone



responsible for Horatio's death and the injustice done to him, just as God brought the fall of mankind in Babylon — "Now shall I see the fall of Babylon, Wrought by the heavens in this confusion. And if the world like not this Tragedy, Hard is the hap of old Hieronimo", we see that he is still unaware of the higher presence that shall take into account his own actions of violence in dispensing its justice. Hieronimo's biting off his tongue here, is symbolic of the end of human agency, and the beginning of the execution of justice by the supernatural powers — "For here, though death hath end their misery, He there begin their endless Tragedy." Andrea's revenge has been fulfilled, and he is now a part of the supernatural machinery as he now replaces Prosperine in deciding the fates of those involved in the action of begetting his revenge.

#### Self Asking Questions

What is the significance of the dumb show presented by Revenge in front of Andrea? Also highlights its relevance in terms of the metatheatrical theme of *The Spanish Tragedy*?

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#### 4.2.4 What is the symbolic relevance of the handkerchief in *The Spanish Tragedy*?

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In reference to the bloodied handkerchief, Andrew Sofer, in the essay "Absorbing Interests: Kyd's Bloody Handkerchief as Palimpsest", says, "By turns failedlove-charm, martial memento, and bloody revenge token, the property continually acquires new connotations for the spectator as it passes from hand to hand in performance." The bloodied handkerchief that Hieronimo takes from Horatio's body becomes the symbol of revenge sought for the murder of a loved one — "Seest thou this handkerchief besmeared with blood? It shall not from me, till I take revenge." Very possibly, this is the same scarf that was gifted to Andrea by Bel-Imperia, before he went to battle, as a token of love. Horatio takes it off the body of Andrea on his death, which, Bel-Imperia then asks him to keep it — "But now wear thou it both for him and me, For after him thou hast deserved it best." Thus, the handkerchief, first smeared with Andrea's blood, and then by Horatio's becomes a symbol of love as well as desire for revenge. By transferring the ownership of the handkerchief to Horatio, Bel-Imperia also transfers her desire for revenge for Andrea's death onto Horatio, as she does her love from Andrea to him. Through the transference of the handkerchief, Horatio has now replaced Andrea, and the instrument through which Andrea's revenge shall be fulfilled.

When the senex, Don Bazulto comes to see the Knight-Marshal, Hieronimo offers it to the senex to wipe his tears, for he too has gone through the sorrow of having his son murdered. For a moment, the handkerchief, therefore, becomes a representation of the desire for justice, of both these men. But, as Hieronimo recoils from handing

over the piece of cloth to the old man, it is a sign that the plot shall, for now, focus only on the revenge of Hieronimo for it it “was a token twixt thy soul and me,” as Hieronimo says. The handkerchief, that reminds Hieronimo of the mortal wounds of his son, becomes a festering wound for Hieronimo himself, which, unhealed, drives him mad.

The next time that we see the handkerchief on the stage is when Hieronimo has murdered Lorenzo, and Bel-Imperia has killed Balthazar, and Hieronimo shows it to the King, Duke of Castile, and the Viceroy, as the proof not just of Horatio’s murder, but also the satiation of his revenge against the murderers. It is interesting how, what had been the cruel reminder of his son’s murder for Hieronimo, now becomes “propitious”. After the murder of his son, as Hieronimo grew mad, this handkerchief seemed to be the only connection between him and the reality, constantly reminding of his one unfulfilled duty, that of exacting revenge. In conjunction with the fact that, Isabella had destroyed the tree where Horatio was hung, cursing her womb for bringing to the world, her child with such a cruel fate, the handkerchief remained the last proof of Horatio’s existence, and consequently the love that bound Hieronimo to his son. Moreover, beyond “death and madness”, in his afterlife too, the handkerchief symbolises the possibility of Hieronimo reuniting with his son and wife, just as it has played a significant role in avenging Andrea’s death.

The handkerchief becomes the only signifier with meaning, for Hieronimo, where language has failed. So, the Babylonian tragedy in the play, directed by the vengefully mad Hieronimo, that the King, Castile, and the Viceroy fail to understand, can only be explained by the handkerchief, which Hieronimo presents before the audience at the end of the play.

#### **STOP TO CONSIDER**

The bloodied handkerchief also has religious connotations, wherein it is compared to the medieval relics like the Corpus Christi Veronica cloth. This comparison relies on the image of Horatio being hung on the tree and stabbed with a knife, as being a parallel to the crucifixion of Christ. Taken together with the visual of Hieronimo dipping the cloth in Horatio’s blood, and consequently, the cloth metonymically replacing the actual body, it invokes a sense of Hieronimo performing a Catholic Mass. However, when Hieronimo imagines himself in the court of Pluto, appealing for justice, the Christian allusion is perverted. Although, this perversion might intensify the audience’s distrust and detest for the Catholic insinuations, it remains primarily remains an object of ominous sign of doom for whoever holds it.

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#### **4.2.5 Analyse the importance of the scene with Don Bazulto and the addition of the scene with the painter in *The Spanish Tragedy*.**

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In Act III, Scene XIII, the character of Don Bazulto, a senex, appears in the court of the Knight-Marshal. Like Hieronimo, he too is father whose son has been murdered. But, unlike Hieronimo, his grief does not find expression in words. He brings a legal document to the Knight-Marshal, that states his grievous condition, which Hieronimo tears apart, as if unwilling to allow language of the legal document to express this man's anguish, because language and justice from the law has failed him. However, it noteworthy that, while Hieronimo continues his furious rants, Don Bazulto remains silent. By tearing the documents brought in by Bazulto, Hieronimo frees himself from the present, where he must act his part as the Knight-Marshal, and give in to his insanity which sees nothing but, his dead son, and thinks only of revenge. In losing the faculty of "meaningful" language, Hieronimo has lost his self too, to the overarching presence of the supernatural machinery that has appointed Hieronimo as its instrument of revenge. So, Hieronimo sees in the old man the face of his dead son, Horatio, as if having come back from the underworld, to remind his father to avenge his death. This hallucination of Hieronimo is significant when seen in context of the scene beginning with the quote "*Vindicta mihi*". It has been long since Hieronimo swore revenge, but his delay, occasioned by a hope for justice from the King, has given way to a sense of guilt. So, although he has finally resolved to avenge Horatio's murder, even a slight deviation from his vow, whether to fulfil his official duties, especially since he has been denied by legal justice, arouses his guilt.

When the old man clarifies that he is not Horatio, nor a ghost sent from the infernal realm, to summon Hieronimo to the judges of the world, asking the same question about the delay in his revenge, Hieronimo has a moment of lucidity. He remembers that the old man too is suffering from the murder of his son, and now Hieronimo sees his own reflection on the face of Bazulto. The silence of Bazulto, now resembles, for Hieronimo, the loss of his own language, and so Hieronimo invites the old man to share his grief with Hieronimo and Isabella. The song that Hieronimo says, the three of them will sing, is an indication of the spectacle that he will direct in the form of the playlet, that will finally allow him the respite of revenge. That the song shall be one of discord, again, is a hint to the Babylonian allusion in regard to the playlet. Just as the murders of their sons has left them with no semblance of meaning, so the confusion in the language, that the murderers use in their politics, will deprive them of their very existence.

The scene with the painter is part of the fourth passage of additions, marked as Scene XII A. The painter too is shown to have lost his son to murder, and like Bazulto, the painter too remains silent, but for a single sentenced reply to Hieronimo's requests. "Bid

him come in, and paint some comfort, For surely there's none lives but painted comfort. Let him come in. One knows not what may chance: Gods will that I should set this tree—but even so Masters ungrateful Servants rear from nought, And then they hate them that did bring them up”, Hieronimo says, as the painter is announced into his court. He is cursing the tree, which he had planted, according to the will of the Gods, as he says, but, which had become the bower of death for his son. We see the scornful, frenzied Hieronimo throw his anger at the painter who has come seeking justice, for he himself has failed to find it. It is only the justice in the hands of god, that Hieronimo still has some hope from. But, the moment the painter reveals that, his son has been murdered, Hieronimo eventually calms down and, ironically, invites the painter to “talk wisely” with him. For the two fathers who have lost their sons, their frantic lamentations, that would sound mad to others, will be a more meaningful expression of their anguish.

When Hieronimo asks the painter if he could, “[P]aint me (for) my Gallery in your oil colours matted, and draw me five years Younger than I am—do ye see, sir, let five years go, let them go like the Marshall of Spain—my wife Isabella standing by me, with a speaking look to my son Horatio, which should intend to this, or some such like purpose: God bless thee, my sweet son,' and my hand leaning upon his head...”, he is trying to superimpose a reflection of the past onto the present, through art instead of language. Art is the only resort through which Hieronimo can imagine to find some expression of his chaotic world, as exemplified in the Bazulto scene, with the invitation to sing. But, as he goes on, Hieronimo asks the painter to paint not just people and objects, but his emotions, anger, and madness too. In giving a detailed account of Horatio’s death, and the revenge that Hieronimo envisions, the painting becomes a timeless representation of his mental landscape, where the past, present, and the future are all embroiled in a chaos. It is this madness that makes sense to Hieronimo — “Oh no, there is no end: the end is death and madness. As I am never better then when I am mad: then methinks I am a brave fellow; then I do wonders...”, as this madness is the only way he shall be able to exact his revenge, which is death.

Thus, the scenes with the painter and Don Bazulto, underline Hieronimo’s need for the externalisation of the madness within him. However, the movement from painting to song, only is a desperate attempt at expression, which shall not suffice for Hieronimo. It is only through the progression into dramatic art, represented by the playlet, which is indicative of action, of actively accomplishing his vow for revenge, that some sense of order can emerge out of the Babylonian confusion, even if it means the complete destruction of the older order.

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#### **4.2.6 Discuss Hieronimo’s soliloquies in *The Spanish Tragedy*.**

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Hieronimo's soliloquies direct the trajectory of the main action of the play, initiated by Horatio's murder. In his first soliloquy in Scene V of Act II, the language, although filled with the grief of a father holding the dead of his murdered son, does have an echo of a formal lament in it — "Ay me most wretched, that have lost my joy, In leasing my Horatio, my sweet boy." His grief quickly turns to fury and he feels that the only comfort that he can find from now on, is through avenging his son's death and bringing the culprits to justice — "To know the author were some ease of grief, For in revenge my heart would find relief." That revenge could mean lawful justice in terms of the king punishing the murderers with execution, is very much a possibility here, as is evident from Hieronimo's disillusionment with the justice system later on, which makes him resolute on having his revenge his own way. Moreover, in his lamentations in Latin — "Misceat, & nostro detur medicina dolori...Ne mortem vindicta tuam tam nulla sequatur", he decides against killing himself in grief, because he is afraid that justice may not prevail if he is not there to pursue it.

The soliloquy from Act III, Scene II, is one of the most often quoted, for it presents a very important picture in the development of Hieronimo's character. As Hieronimo begins the soliloquy, "Oh eyes, no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears; Oh life, no life, but lively forum of death; Oh world, no world, but masse of public wrongs, Confused and filed with murder and misdeeds", we find that he is slowly losing his sense of self in a world which seems deceitful and rampant with the corruption of justice. The world and its religion, around the premises and standards of which, he had ordered his own life, is in a chaos. So, he is slowly turning towards a more pagan and supernatural power, seeking justice — "Oh sacred heavens, if this unhallowed deed, If this inhumane and barbarous attempt, If this incomparable murder thus Of mine, but now no more my son, Shall unrevealed and unrevenged pass, How should we term your dealings to be just, If you unjustly deal with those, that in your justice trust?" It is as if by the benevolence of these un-Christian gods that, suddenly Bel-Imperia's letter, written in her blood, falls into his hands, — "Eyes, life, world, heavens, hell, night and day, See, search, show, send some man, some mean, that may—". But, the justice from these powers come at a price, and Hieronimo's gradual madness, that will ultimately lead to his violent revenge and his own brutal death, is the price that he must pay. In exchange for the letter from Bel-Imperia, naming the murderers of his son, Hieronimo is paying with his progression into insanity — "The ugly fiends do sally forth of hell, And frame my steps to unfrequented paths, And fear my heart with fierce inflamed thoughts. The cloudy day my discontents records, Early begins to register my dreams, And drive me forth to seek the murderer." It can be seen that, while the breaking down of this world is driving him mad, the constant meditation of revenge has Hieronimo turning shrewd, his first step in turning into a Machiavellian villain.

In Scene VII, when Hieronimo cries out in despair, for his desperate pleas for justice seem to be unheard in heaven and hell, the

failure of language to express and redress his anguish is indicated through the lines — “I find the place impregnable; and they Resist my woes, and give my words no way.” Hieronimo is realising the futility of language, and in the second part of the soliloquy, after the hangman leaves, giving him the letter, he, as such, says, “But wherefore waste I mine unfruitful words, When naught but blood will satisfy my woes?” Nevertheless, the breakdown of language is not complete yet, and Hieronimo decides to make his complaint to the king, denial of which shall result in his private revenge, hinting at the ominous end, starting with the complete breakdown of language and order.

The third passage of additions to the play is another soliloquy by Hieronimo, where he talks of his beloved Horatio, who has been cruelly snatched away from him by his murderers. The significance of this soliloquy lies in Hieronimo’s faith in the justice of the underworld that is sudden and chaotic. While the violent justice of the underworld shall avenge Horatio’s death, it will also engulf Hieronimo himself in its uninterrupted wave of destruction.

In scene XIII of Act III, Hieronimo is shown to walk in with a book in his hand. The phrase, “*Vindicta mihi*”, has captured the attention of many critics discussing its origin and its biblical allusion. The fact that he is carrying a book in his hand, has led some critics to suggest that, it is a volume of Seneca’s plays, for this phrase seems to be borrowed from the play *Octavia* by Seneca. On the other hand, the lines — “I. heaven will be revenged of every ill; Nor will they suffer murder unrepaid”, bears resemblance to Romans 12.19 from the Bible. There is a stark contrast in Hieronimo’s turn to the pagan beliefs and his referring to the Bible in this soliloquy. But now, as the rest of the soliloquy implies, Hieronimo has turned into the Machiavellian character who exploits every resource at his disposal for the accomplishment of his schemes, and hence, he is heralding every justification and any language that gives expression to his thirst for bloody revenge. Language becomes his weapon of choice for the moment, to set his plan in motion, and a re-appropriation of the Biblical reference to his own situation is symbolic of his Machiavellian politics of language — “No, no, Hieronimo, thou must enjoin Thine eyes to observation, and thy tongue To milder speeches than thy spirit affords; Thy heart to patience, and thy hands to rest, Thy Cap to curtsy, and thy knee to bow, Till to revenge thou know when, where, and how.” Hieronimo’s transformation into the Machiavellian villain is complete, as seen in this soliloquy.

Hieronimo had vowed never to part with the bloodied handkerchief of Horatio till his death is avenged. In the scene with Bazulto, when Hieronimo mistakenly takes out the handkerchief for the old man to wipe his tears, it reminds Hieronimo of his delay in his revenge. He curses himself for failing to exact revenge, even when his heart is in a constant turmoil of anguish and fury. So, once again, Hieronimo appeals for the intervention of the supernatural powers for assistance in his frenzied desire for revenge — “Then sound the burden of thy sore hearts grief, Till we do gain that Proserpine may grant

Revenge on them that murdered my Son. Then will I rent and tear them, thus, and thus, Shivering their limbs in pieces with my teeth.”

In Scene IV of Act IV, we have the last soliloquy of Hieronimo, after the conclusion of the play, with the death of Lorenzo and Balthazar. He begins on the pretext of explaining the action of play, that has been performed in multiple languages, but to everyone's shock, reveals Horatio's dead body. Here, as Hieronimo delivers his long speech, narrating the events of Horatio's murder, to this moment of his revenge, the visuals of Horatio's body and his bloodied handkerchief come together to give coherence to Hieronimo's language. It is observed that, the language that had gradually become a futile jumble of words, has regained its meaning for one last time, before Hieronimo completely destroys it by biting off his tongue. It is a spectacle not only of death, but a metonymic progression of the action and the culminating tragedy.

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### 4.3 Other Study Suggestions

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Given that a literary text has unlimited possibilities for raising questions and interpretations, it would be a good exercise for the critical thinker in the student to explore some issues on their own. For example:

- (i) What are the Senecan elements in *The Spanish Tragedy* and how does the play differ from it?
- (ii) What do you have to say about the women characters in the play from a feminist point of view? Can you highlight their significance in exploration of issues of justice and revenge?
- (iii) Can you explain the incestuous characterisation of Lorenzo as Erastus and Bel-Imperia as Perseda, the lovers, in the playlet “Soliman and Perseda”?

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### 4.4 Summing Up

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This unit intends to acquaint the students with some of the important questions relating to *The Spanish Tragedy*. Although, the answers may not always be exhaustive, for there is always room for different perspectives, the questions and answers in this unit are designed to equip the students with a fair amount of critical analysis of different important topics. The title of a literary text is layered with multiple agendas and connotations, that only arouses the interest of the reader, but also hints at the multiple possibilities inherent within the text. As such, an understanding of the title is very crucial to the understanding of the text itself.

The Portuguese subplot has been considered superfluous by many critics. Yet, with the understanding that a text is the sum total of every word in it, the critical relevance of the subplot cannot be brushed aside. The Portuguese subplot, in fact, plays an important role in substantiating the ideas addressed and explored in the play through the devices of juxtaposition, mirroring, and antithesis. Similarly, the scene with Don Bazulto, and the addition of the scene

with the painter, may seem stray incidents, but they are vital to the understanding of development of the character of Hieronimo. They are pivotal in corroborating the progression of Hieronimo into madness, the figure of language, and Hieronimo's search for some semblance of order and expression through art, that culminates in the tragic playlet of "Soliman and Perseda".

The constant shift of meaning of the handkerchief, as portrayed by its metonymic displacement as a token of love, revenge, and the dead body of Horatio, renders it as an important motif of the play. It also works to replace language, where language becomes futile. Thus, the handkerchief itself becomes a marginal yet important character in the play, whose absence in the scenes, is as much significant as its presence.

Finally, with Hieronimo becoming the central character of the play, it is vow for revenge that dominates and guides the action of the play. An analysis of the soliloquies, not only gives an insight into Hieronimo's character, but it also brings up the compelling issues of justice, revenge, madness, language etc. into the ambit of critical exploration.

All these issues have been discussed in the unit with an aim to provide a better and critical understanding of the play to the students. The students are expected to build up on these discussions, to polish their critical thinking as students of literature.

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## Unit 5

### Christopher Marlowe: Edward II

#### Introduction and Stage History

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- 5.1 Objective
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Date
- 5.4 Sources
- 5.5 Contexts
- 5.6 The play on the stage
- 5.7 Critical reception/ adaptations
- 5.8 Summing up
- 5.9 References and Suggested readings

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#### 5.1 Objectives

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- . After going through this unit, you will be able to-
- Understand Marlowe's life, his personal and political affiliations
  - Discuss his language, verse form
  - Explain the subjects, themes and protagonists of his plays
  - Discuss the relevance of his plays and their unconventionality
  - Explain the source, stage history of the play

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#### 5.2 Introduction:

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The eldest son of a Canterbury shoemaker John Marlowe, and his wife Katherine, Marlowe secured a scholarship and went to Corpus Christi

College, Cambridge, where he was destined for a career in the Anglican Church. He successfully completed his BA examinations, and continued his studies for the MA. However, the period was marked by his frequent absences from Cambridge though the Privy Council persuaded the University authorities to grant Marlowe his MA because he had been engaged in matters pertaining to the benefit of his country.

Just like his characters, Marlowe lived an eventful, somewhat unruly life because he and the poet Thomas Watson were briefly imprisoned for their involvement in the death of William Bradley. He was deported from Flushing, Holland, having been implicated in a counterfeiting scheme in 1592 and the following year he was summoned to appear before the Privy Council on charges of blasphemy, arising from evidence provided by Thomas Kyd, the author of the play, *The Spanish Tragedy*. Several days later, on 30 May 1593, Marlowe was fatally stabbed in Deptford when he was engaged in a drunken brawl with three men, including an Ingram Frizer, who stabbed him above the right eye and thereby killed him instantly.

Marlowe's heroes are highly ambitious, exaggerated both in their faults and their qualities. They want to conquer the whole world (*Tamburlaine*), to attain limitless wealth (*Barbaras, The Jew of Malta*), to possess all knowledge (*Doctor Faustus*). Their unbridled ambitions are matched by a grandiloquent language, rich in metaphor and effect. Marlowe brought the blank verse to good use in the soliloquies, asides, choruses and dialogues.

Just like Marlowe introduced heroes full of passion, he can also be credited as one of the first major writers to affirm what can be identified as a clearly homosexual sensibility. It was quite a daring act to do so in the Elizabethan theatre for a similar kind of homosexual relationship between King Richard and his lover is tactfully not

mentioned in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Edward II examines sexual choice and preference in relation to the questioning of authority, power, and love in a way which few other writers dared to do until the twentieth century. Therefore, Marlowe came to be described as a 'sexual political thinker' whose writings successfully question and reveal the terms of the contemporary debate. Marlowe's protagonists are Renaissance men in true sense of the term and the plays explore the boundaries of the new world and the risks that mankind will run in the quest for power as in *Tamburlaine*, for knowledge as in *Doctor Faustus*, for love as in *Edward II*.

Stephen Guy-Bray in the Bloomsbury edition to the play writes that while *Doctor Faustus* is probably still his most famous play, *Edward II* has become increasingly popular and increasingly widely studied in the last few decades. He cites the different reasons. For one, as a history play *Edward II* provides a useful different approach to the question of the representation of English history from that of Shakespeare's plays. While Shakespeare's history plays rely on an attitude toward kingship that is never really interrogated, Marlowe's play – his sole history play – calls into question the nature of English kingship itself. In this respect, *Edward II* makes an interesting pair with Shakespeare's *Richard II*, which also tells the story of a 'weak' king, although this comparison will show the extent to which Marlowe's critique of Monarchy is more thorough than Shakespeare's.

He also argues that *Edward II* has also been of tremendous importance in the field of sexuality studies, an area that has become one of the most important fields within Renaissance literary studies over the course of the last thirty years or so. It has long been recognized that much Renaissance literature interrogates traditional ideas about gender roles and about the forms of sexual expression deemed permissible or impermissible in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but in many of the texts studied from this point of view – the

comedies of Shakespeare and Lyly are an obvious example – the theme of sexual transgression is treated with some caution and the texts in question usually end with the re-emergence of the traditional sexual order.

*Edward II* stands apart not only from the other tragedies that were written during that period but also from Marlowe's other tragedies. Looking back at the Elizabethan England, the play can be said to be far ahead of its time. Andrew Sanders, writing about the play, comments that *Edward II* differs from Marlowe's other tragedies in that it exploits a far greater equilibrium between its central character and those surrounding him. Where the other plays insistently celebrate the dangerous detachment of the hero from the limiting restraints of society, *Edward II* explores the problem of moral conflict within an established society. Unlike the megalomaniac seekers after military, political, or intellectual power, Edward is born into an inheritance of royal government but effectively throws it away in favour of another mastery, that of a homosexual love unacceptable to the weighty historical world in which he is obliged to move. Edward is a king without command, a lover denied fulfilment, a lion transformed into 'a lamb encompassed by wolves' and a man finally reduced by his enemies (including his wife and son) to the depths of human misery. He is Marlowe's most conventionally 'tragic' character in what is perhaps also his most deeply unconventional tragedy. (Sanders, 152-153)

Marlowe's greatness lies in his unconventionality, be it his unconventional subjects, unconventional protagonists and even the treatment of those subjects. William J. Long, writing about the play, calls it a tragic study of a king's weakness and misery. In point of style and dramatic construction, it is by far the best of Marlowe's plays, and is a worthy predecessor of Shakespeare's historical drama.

It can only be said in Long's words that Marlowe is the only dramatist of the time who is ever compared with Shakespeare. When we remember that he died at twenty-nine, probably before Shakespeare had produced a single great play, we must wonder what he might have done had he outlived his wretched youth and become a man. Here and there his work is remarkable for its splendid imagination, for the stateliness of its verse, and for its rare bits of poetic beauty; but in dramatic instinct, in wide knowledge of human life, in humour, in delineation of woman's character, in the delicate fancy which presents an Ariel as perfectly as a Macbeth, - in a word, in all that makes a dramatic genius, Shakespeare stands alone. Marlowe simply prepared the way for the master who was to follow.

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### 5.3 Date

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While *Edward II* is usually dated to nearly the end of Marlowe's life, there is no firm evidence for this.

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### 5.4 Sources

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Marlowe's primary source was the second edition of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which appeared in 1587. Marlowe also made use, to a much lesser extent, of chronicles by Robert Fabyan (1559), Richard Grafton (1569), and John Stow (1580). Thus, the play could arguably have been written as early as 1587, and as Henry III of France, a king popularly imagined to have been destroyed by his male favourites, was assassinated in that year an earlier date seems reasonable.

On the other hand we do know that *Edward II* was first performed by the Earl of Pembroke's Men, a company that was not recorded before 1592 (of course, that is not conclusive proof that it did

not exist before that date). That the early 1590s saw a number of plays dealing with wars between English kings and their nobles, the most famous of which now is Shakespeare's *Henry VI* from 1591, could also be taken to suggest a date in the early 1590s. Both these facts make the later date plausible. The matter, like so much else about Marlowe's life and career, must be regarded as unsettled. No contemporary accounts of performances of the play survive; for this reason, not only the date but also the audience's reactions to the play and the manner in which it was performed are all unknown to us.

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## 5.5 Contexts

### 5.5.1 Chronicle play:

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J.A. Cuddon defines chronicle play as: Also known as a History Play, and therefore based on recorded history rather than on myth or legend. Early chronicle plays in England were like pageants interspersed with battle scenes. However, some dramatists saw the possibility of the history play. Bale wrote what is generally regarded as the first: *King John* (c.1534) Two other important works in the transition from Interlude and Morality play to historical drama were Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561) and Preston's *Cambises* (1569). Later, Marlowe also saw the possibilities of such presentation and, using Holinshed, dramatized the life of Edward II (1593). Shakespeare followed with a succession of chronicle plays which covered the English monarchy from Richard II to Henry VIII. Shakespeare also wrote *King John* (probably adapted before 1598 from an earlier work and not printed until the Folio of 1623). After him Fletcher, with *Bonduca* (1619), and Ford, with *Perkin Warbeck* (1634), continued the tradition successfully.

Marlowe's *Edward II* falls into this category of chronicle plays and Marlowe's *Edward II* is an honest portrayal about Edward's



failings whereas Shakespeare's *Richard III* dramatizes the overthrow of a tyrannical king. Both *Edward II* and *Richard III* show a flawed monarch who fights his barons for leadership, ultimately losing the conflict and the crown. David Daiches, writing about the play, writes that "though the main interest still concentrates on a central character—this time a study of weakness rather than of strength: Edward II is the sentimental weakling betrayed and done to death by the forces of ambition and cruelty—spreads the emphasis over a number of personalities and moves less in purple passages than the other plays.

Chronicle plays also demonstrated the political crisis in the Elizabethan age. By examining the choices of past monarchs, these dramas explored questions of moral leadership, political power dynamics, royal succession, and kingly responsibility. The personal lives of monarchs and the conflicts were also featured on the stage.

The plots and characters followed actual events as closely and chronologically as possible. Playwrights found source material in texts such as the 1597 volume, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* by English author and historian Raphael Holinshed (d.c. 1580).

Many playwrights took creative liberties, like altering the time line of historical events to move the plot forward. *Edward II* spans 23 years of history, highlighting the pivotal events to move forward. *Edward II* spans 23 years of history, highlighting the pivotal events of the king's reign. It can be said that Marlowe took the genre beyond political events to emotional tragedy. Edward, Queen Isabella, Mortimer Junior, Gaveston, and other characters that people the play are not just historical figures but they are complex and conflicted human beings. Edward defies the social and sexual norms of his time and suffers the consequences of his choices. Though Shakespeare popularised the genre with history plays like *Richard III* and *Henry VI* (Part I and Part II) but Marlowe's play stands apart in dramatizing his

protagonist's choice of defying the accepted norms of the society and portraying the court politics for power.

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### **5.5.2 Historical Context of Edward's Reign**

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The Historical Edward II of England was a controversial monarch. In the Introduction to the book, *The tyranny and fall of Edward II 1321-1326*, Natalie Fryde writes that the opposition to Edward II displayed the typical medieval baronial attitude to royal government. He writes that it was an ambivalent one because on the one hand the magnates proclaimed that the rights of the crown must be integrally maintained and they protested against alienations of royal property. On the other hand they were ready to resort to violence and rebellion against these same kings whose authority was the linch-pin of the whole order of society which the magnates professed to uphold. They mostly justified their opposition to royal government by claiming that they were attacking not the king's proper authority but one perverted by the counsel of evil favourites. Favourites were, in any case, a considerable threat to magnates's possibilities of bettering themselves, or even of surviving. Those magnates rich and important enough to frequent the court were always haunted by the fear that their power, based on a quasi-monopoly of royal favour and patronage, might be eroded by the arrival of newcomers or monopolised by one or two individuals. This meant not only the loss of land grants but of possibilities of finding the best marriages for themselves and their children. For such favours they were dependent on the king as their feudal overload.

In the early part of the reign opposition was quickly formed to Gaveston. The magnates reacted particularly swiftly and sharply to him because of his heavy hand on patronage came from a source completely outside the old channels of influence. He was a Gascon and, although a man of noble rank, came from no great family and had

no strong connections in England. Yet he obtained the title of earl of Cornwall, that had hitherto been reserved for members of the royal family, as well as one of the best marriages of the day, to the king's own niece. One has to bear in mind, too, that there had been virtually no promotions to earldoms of men outside the Anglo-Norman aristocracy since Stephen's time. Their chagrin was the more understandable since Gaveston maintained an attitude of total hostility towards them. He bestowed upon the best-known figures at court a series of insulting nicknames and, what was probably even more serious to their self-esteem trounced them in a tournament.

The conflict in Edward II's reign was marked by both policy disagreements and personal rivalries. Many barons found Edward II to be an incompetent king from the beginning. They added a clause to his coronation oath insisting he honour and enforce the rulings of Parliament. The nobles were troubled by Edward's prominent appointment of "favorites" or "minions" like Frenchman Piers Gaveston and English noblemen Hugh Despenser- Hugh the Elder and his son, Hugh the Younger. By the second year of Edward II's reign, an organized opposition began to form.

In 1311 noblemen close to the king created a set of rules, known as the Ordinances, intended to keep Edward II from mismanaging national funds and making promotions based on personal preference. One of the conditions of the Ordinances was Gaveston's departure from England. Although Gaveston was exiled twice, each time Edward II arranged for his return. In 1312, the barons captured and executed Gaveston.

Thomas, Earl of Lancaster who had always opposed Edward II seized political leadership in 1315. But Lancaster was an even worse ruler than Edward II. He did little to reform England. Faced with chaos in the country, a group of barons took over in 1318 and mediated between Edward II and Lancaster. Slowly Edward II regained

influence and he defeated Lancaster in battle and had him executed in 1322. With the Despensers at his side, Edward II led a newly effective but highly corrupt government.

Queen Isabella, meanwhile, resented being neglected in favour of the Despensers. In 1325 she travelled to France and began an affair with Mortimer Junior (1287-1330)- an earl Edward II had sent into exile. By the next year Isabella and Mortimer planned to overthrow Edward II and they returned to England in 1326 with a large army. Isabella and Mortimer easily overcame the English forces and had the Despensers executed. Edward II was imprisoned and forced to resign. His son was crowned the following year as Edward III. Later in 1327 Edward II was violently executed at Berkeley Castle in Gloucestershire, England.

Marlowe's play dramatizes most of these events in chronological order but Marlowe compresses their 23- year time line for dramatic effect.

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### **5.5.3 Edward and Gaveston's Relationship**

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Marlowe's characters Edward II and Gaveston are in a romantic relationship as the dialogues suggest and it is likely they were lovers in real life, although the nature of their relationship is unconfirmed. Piers Gaveston was the son of a knight from Gascony, France and became Edward's foster brother when Edward was 16. The two men soon developed an intimate relationship and Gaveston soon had a strong influence on Edward II, an influence that began to disturb Edward I, who banished Gaveston from England.

When Edward I died in 1307, Edward II became king and called Gaveston back. Soon he began awarding Gaveston unprecedented quantities of titles, land, and honors usually reserved for royal descendants. These honours included marriage to Edward II's

niece Margaret de Clare, daughter of the Earl of Gloucester, and the coveted earldom of Cornwall.

The barons thought Edward II was unfairly playing favourites. They despised Gaveston, and Gaveston too maintained hostility towards them. Despite two banishments in 1309 and 1311, Gaveston remained a powerful favourite of the king. In 1312 Gaveston was seized by the jealous barons and executed by the Earl of Warwick. The grieving king bought Gaveston an expensive tomb.

Years later Edward II developed a similarly intimate relationship with Hugh Despenser the Younger- Spencer in the play. Despenser was also awarded many promotions. Fryde writes in the Introduction to the aforementioned book that the personal nightmare of any medieval landowner was that one of his neighbours should become so powerful that he would be able to ride with armed men into his ancestral lands and dispossess him of them. This could happen in one of two circumstances. The first was that the neighbour became a royal favourite so that nobody dared to challenge him. The second was that the character of the king had so diminished the royal authority that the neighbour no longer feared the king's wrath or that of his ministers. Both nightmares became a reality under Edward II and were particularly experienced by the neighbours of the younger Despenser.

Marlowe depicted the conflict of interest in the play which was the result of the political promotions of Edward's favourites. Because his lovers are men, they can play important roles in the government, whereas a female lover, even a queen cannot. The play illustrates this conflict through the character of Isabella. Although she also has an affair, hoping to gain political power, her lover, Mortimer Junior, controls and limits her instead.

Edward II was not the only English monarch who had a homosexual relationship. However, unlike the other monarchs, in the play Edward is open and public, not discreet, about his love for

Gaveston. It is reflected in dialogues like “What, Gaveston! Welcome! Kiss not my hand:/ Embrace me, Gaveston, as I do thee: ...” (Scene I, lines 139-140). This is a daring act on the part of him as homosexual conduct was a criminal act in 14<sup>th</sup>-century England. The Catholic Church was a highly influential body and it was the only institution with enough power to contradict the king. The Church believed sex was intended for procreation, not pleasure, and homosexuality was considered a sin against God. Since same-sex relationships couldn’t lead to procreation, they were viewed as sinful.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Marlowe wrote *Edward II*, homosexuality was still widely condemned. The depiction of same-sex lovers made the play ground-breaking for its time. Actors and audiences in later centuries often focused on this aspect of the play as central to its tragedy. A 1991 film version of *Edward II* from English director Derek Jarman- himself a gay man- reflected on homophobia and the ‘90s AIDS crisis.

Marlowe depicts prejudice and violence against Edward and Gaveston but he makes neither character a blameless martyr. They are flawed just like Marlowe’s other protagonists but at its core the play is sympathetic to the two lovers and the challenges they face in a world that refuses to accept unconventionality.

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## 5.6 The Play on the stage

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There is no firm evidence regarding the exact date when Marlowe composed the play but there are records about the performance of the play on the stage. Stephen Guy-Bray in the Introduction to the play, writes that *Edward II* was first performed by the Earl of Pembroke’s Men, a company that was not recorded before 1592 (of course, that is not conclusive proof that it did not exist before that date). That the early 1590s saw a number of plays dealing with wars between English

kings and their nobles, the most famous of which now is Shakespeare's *Henry VI* from 1591, could also be taken to suggest a date in the early 1590s. Both these facts make the later date plausible. The matter, like so much else about Marlowe's life and career, must be regarded as unsettled. No contemporary accounts of performances of the play survive; for this reason, not only the date but also the audience's reactions to the play and the manner in which it was performed are all unknown to us.

*Edward II* appears to have been performed as late as the 1620s, but then not again until 1903. Over the course of the last century, the play has been increasingly frequently performed, at first in England and then throughout the English-speaking world. And beyond: Bertolt Brecht wrote a German version, *Leben Eduard Zweiten des Englands*, that has achieved some popularity both in German and in English translation, although it is not one of Brecht's best works.

Many celebrated actors have taken the title role. Particularly well-known among these are Ian McKellen in a 1969 production, which was broadcast the next year and which marked the first passionate male-male kiss on British television, and Simon Russell Beale in a controversial Royal Shakespeare Company production from 1991. These and other productions in the last half-century could certainly not be accused of downplaying the homoeroticism of *Edward II*. Indeed, the theatrical productions of the play tend to be more radical than the critical analyses, at least in their presentation of the physical nature of male-male love.

The most famous and controversial version to date is undeniably Derek Jarman's film version from 1991: *Queer Edward II*. Jarman radically revised, shuffled, and reshaped Marlowe's play, setting it in a version of the conservative and homophobic United Kingdom in which he himself lived and died (in 1994). Jarman's greatest achievement was to emphasize the homoeroticism and the

politics of the play, to demonstrate their crucial interconnection, and to insist on their relevance to his and our contemporary world. It is no exaggeration to say that *Queer Edward II* achieved a similar, and similarly scandalous, success to Tamburlaine, usefully reminding audiences just how transgressive Marlowe can still be. While Jarman exaggerates the subversive potential of male homosexuality in order to make a point about twentieth-century homophobia, his film valuably brings together several of the play's themes and aspects that are usually considered in isolation. In effect, Jarman demonstrates that it is misleading to speak of a private life, and this connection of public (politics) and private (sexuality) is indeed one of the distinguishing features of Marlowe's *Edward II*.

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## 5.7 Critical reception/adaptations

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By the time Marlowe was writing, a new type of audience had been created for a different kind of theatrical performance. It was an audience mixed across the classes, professions and trades. Again, in the humanist world following Erasmus, man is at the centre of the universe. Man becomes largely responsible for his own destiny, behaviour and future. This is the new current of thought which finds its manifestation in the writing of the 1590s and the decades which follow.

The issue of where the audience's sympathies lie- and how they change over the course of the play is an important aspect of the criticism of any play, and perhaps especially of any play that can be considered to be a tragedy, despite the fact that it is never really possible to speak of the audience as a homogeneous group. When critics speak of the audience's sympathy they are often really speaking about their own sympathies and biases, which may or may not be the



same as any given audience's. Furthermore, sympathies are often influenced by the way in which the play is presented.

Critic Stephen Guy-Bray also points out that the question of audience sympathies has been especially vexed in the case of *Edward II*, as discussions of the audience's reaction to the play have intersected with highly emotive views on sexuality. The consensus among critics writing on *Edward II* has been that the audience sides with Isabella and to a lesser extent, with the nobles for the first half of the play, and then with Edward for the second half. The consensus has also been that no character in the play reaches the status of a true tragic hero: Edward is too weak, and both Gaveston and Mortimer are too self-serving. For these reasons, it has often been useful for critics to consider Edward II primarily as a history play in which, for the most part, no characters are expected to be truly tragic.

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## 5.8 Summing up

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This unit is an attempt to introduce Christopher Marlowe and the Elizabethan England in which he lived and wrote his plays and even collaborated with other playwrights. We have discussed Marlowe's life, his personal and political affiliations, his language as well as the verse form. We have also introduced the themes and major characters of the play and discussed the source as well as stage history of the play. We hope that this unit gives you a necessary scaffolding for reading the text under discussion which is covered in the subsequent units.

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## 5.9 References and Suggested Readings

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## Unit 6

### Christopher Marlowe: Edward II

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#### *Reading the Play*

6.1 Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 Act-wise Summary

6.4 Characters in the play

6.5 Summing Up

6.6 References and Suggested Readings

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#### **6.1 Objectives**

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- i) The basic objective of this section is to acquaint the learners thoroughly with the play.
- ii) By engaging in a critical analysis of certain portions of the play, it also aims to familiarize the learners with the different themes and inherent politics in the play.

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#### **6.2 Introduction:**

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Before going to the summary, let us understand that in early copies of Marlowe's Edward II, there are no acts or scenes, though later editors often divide the play into five acts. Still, it varies from edition to edition. Whereas some editors divide the play into five acts, some others into twenty-five scenes with no Acts. Read the play in the light of the act-wise summary and enhance your own understanding.

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## 6.3 Act-wise summary

### 6.3.1 Act I

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#### scene i

The first scene opens with Gaveston reading a letter from Edward II, newly crowned sovereign of England after the death of Edward I. Gaveston had been banished from court and exiled by order of Edward I to his home in Gascony because of his corrupting influence on the young prince Edward. But now with the death of his father, Edward II is again inviting Gaveston to return to England and share the kingdom with him. The audience is made aware of the homosexual nature of their relationship from the soliloquy of Gaveston. Lines like “Might have enforced me to have swum from France, /And, like Leander, gasped upon the sand, /So thou wouldst smile and take me in thy arms.” are quite suggestive of the homosexual relationship between the young prince and Gaveston. The soliloquy also points to the theme of power that runs throughout the play. Gaveston muses about surrounding himself and the king with all manner of pleasure-seekers: “Wanton poets, pleasant wits,” and “men like satyrs” who for sport might hunt down a “lovely boy” as they would a deer. When the king and his entourage enter, Gaveston steps aside to overhear their conversation.

Gaveston makes his hatred for the nobles explicit from the very beginning when Gaveston expresses in an aside, “That Earl of Lancaster do I abhor.” and later, “That villain Mortimer, I’ll be his death.” On the other hand, the two nobles, Lancaster and Mortimer, too counsels the king to break off his relations with Gaveston and attend to affairs of state. Edward bristles at their boldness, and his brother Kent warns them for their impertinence. During this heated exchange between the king and his noble, Gaveston remains present through his asides. The nobles exit with a final threat to take up arms

against Edward's "base minion." Gaveston steps forth and Edward professes that he would rather "the sea o'erwhelm my land" than suffer another separation from Gaveston. And immediately the king makes Gaveston "Lord High Chamberlaine", "Chief Secretary to the State and him" and "Earl of Cornwall". All these positions and titles are in excess of Gaveston's station.

Then enters the Bishop of Coventry to celebrate Edward II's father's funeral rites and also to enquire whether "wicked Gaveston" has returned. Infact, the Bishop is the one who is directly responsible for Gaveston's banishment. As the Bishop threatens to send Gaveston back to France, Edward punishes the Bishop with exile, first performing a perverse baptism on him by stripping of his holy vestments and having him dumped into the channel. Gaveston leaves to take over the ruined man's worldly goodssaying, "What should a priest do with so fair a house?" as the Bishop is transported to the tower.

### **scenes ii & iii**

The scene ii begins as both the Mortimers enter on one side, and Warwick, and Lancaster on the other. Warwick confides that the Bishop of Coventry is in the Tower and his goods and body given to Gaveston. Lancaster is incensed that Edward is acting tyrannically as by imprisoning the Bishop, he is usurping the spiritual power of the Church. Mortimer Junior already makes his intention clear of executing the "Frenchman" Gaveston. They all bemoan the "reign" of Gaveston and they are joined by the Bishop of Canterbury, who regard Edward's treatment of the Bishop of Coventry as an offence for which God himself is up in arms as it amounts to violence against the Church itself. Gaveston learns of their plan to take up arms, which he announces to Kent, the King's brother.

#### **scene iv**

This is one of the longest scenes of the play and the scene begins with the entry of the nobles and the Bishop of Canterbury, with attendants. Lancaster brings the form of Gaveston's exile where the Bishop of Canterbury, Warwick, Mortimer Junior everyone puts their name. Edward commits further consecrations against the kingship when he makes Gaveston sit beside himself where the queen would normally sit. The step is both emblematic and shocking as it signifies that Edward has made his lover politically equal with himself. This incites the nobles to exile Gaveston once again, and he is taken away, along with the Earl of Kent. Kent was the one who questioned the nobles when they draw swords, "Is this the duty that you owe your King?" What we observe in this scene and the previous scenes is that Kent just behaves as an obedient and sincere follower of his brother. Thus, the inclusion of the former clouds the issue somewhat. When the King is incensed at this treatment and takes it as a violence on him, the angry lords admonish the king "Learn then to rule us better and the realm." The Bishop of Canterbury, who maintains a softer stand on the whole issue, presents the document of Gaveston's exile to Edward whereas Mortimer Junior declares, "either have our wills or lose our lives." However, the king is obsessed with his lover, and he once again claims that he would let "This isle shall fleet upon the ocean/ And wander to the unfrequented Inde" before he would willingly part with his "sweet Gaveston". In an attempt to sway them, the king offers each of the nobles a new title. Not only that, the king goes to the extent of declaring to make several kingdoms of the monarchy and share it equally amongst them all so that he may be left "to frolic" with his "dearest Gaveston". It shows how desperate and possessive the king is, for his lover. The King wildly imagines slaughtering priests in revenge, then revises Gaveston's banishment by assigning him the governorship of Ireland. The queen witnessing the condition of her

husband, realizes that her husband will not be restored to her unless Gaveston is called back. So, she attempts to persuade the lords to return Gaveston. The nobles decide that only Gaveston's death can break the spell he holds over their king. The underlying power politics of removing Gaveston, who is an outsider to the country as well the nobility cannot be missed. They even enlist Isabella to pretend that Gaveston is being returned, which will facilitate his murder. It is in fact Isabella who announces that Gaveston "shall be repealed." The King who is overjoyed at the news, however suspects the Queen a moment before to have "parlied with (her) Mortimer". The elated and unsuspecting king forgives all and heaps honours upon them as a reward. A renewed calm, as well as a reminder that other great leaders were not impaired by their male lovers persuades the nobles to leave this pair alone. Mortimer Senior observes that the King is changed and Mortimer Junior feels so has he and gives word to do service to the King. But at the same time, he proclaims to take up sword for he would not yield to any 'upstart' like Gaveston.

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### **6.3.2 Act II**

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#### **scene i**

The scene begins with the entry of Spencer (Junior) and Baldock. Baldock asks Spencer that in the face of Earl of Gloucester's death, which noble does he mean to serve. Spencer Junior replies that he would not serve Mortimer, nor anyone of his side because of their enmity with the King but the Earl of Cornwall, Gaveston for he hopes to profit by this association. He reveals that he would be his "companion" rather than his "follower" and Gaveston would have favoured him more than the King. The sexual undertone cannot be missed. When Baldock reminds him that Gaveston is banished and there is little hope of him, he replies that he has learnt from a friend

that he is repealed and called back to court. Spencer even saw Lady Margaret de Clare smiling as she read a letter that he suspects about her lover, Gaveston. Baldock hopes that the marriage between Margaret and Gaveston will go forward as he will profit off from the fact of being her former tutor. Spencer advises Baldock to “cast the scholar off” and adopt the ways of a nobleman: “You must be proud, bold, pleasant, resolute,/ And now and then, stab, as the occasion serves.” Spencer’s remark about “stabbing” is a sexual innuendo that captures the way characters like Gaveston and perhaps even Spencer use sex in order to climb the social ladder. By equating this “stabbing” with nobility, Spencer suggests that nothing fundamental separates the kind of power he and Gaveston hold from the kind of power the nobility holds. Even the literal sense of “stab” contains a challenge to social hierarchy as it implies that the nobility maintains its status through the use of violence.

Lady Margaret’s arrival interrupts the banter of the two men as they listen to the letters read aloud by Lady Margaret. In the letters, Gaveston declares his intention to remain true to her at any cost and the King has called her back to court to be married. Slowly, Baldock and Spencer comes out and the Lady orders Baldock to prepare her coach for departure. She urges Spencer to stay behind because she wanted to disclose the news of Gaveston’s return which she hints will prove beneficial to Spencer. Margaret apparently accepts Spencer’s connection to Gaveston.

### **Scene ii**

The scene begins with Edward, Isabella, Lancaster, Mortimer Junior, Warwick, Pembroke, Kent and attendants. They are all waiting for the arrival of Gaveston. Observing how impatient Edward already is, the Queen tells Lancaster that the former is grief-stricken but still he is preoccupied with “his minion” This irritates Isabella and the nobles- most notably Mortimer, who reminds the King that he ought to



be thinking of “matters of more weight,” like France’s attempts to recapture Normandy. Edward, however, dismisses this as a “trifle” and enquires what kind of heraldic device Mortimer has designed for the welcoming ceremony. Mortimer Junior describes it as “A lofty cedar tree fair flourishing...And by the bark a canker creeps me up/ And gets unto the highest bough of all.” When Lancaster is enquired, he describes a flying fish being captured by a bird. The King, realizing that these are symbols for Gaveston, questions whether the nobles have really made peace with him and his favourite. When Isabella attempts to reassure her husband that the nobles “love” him, but Edward argues that no one can love him and hate Gaveston. Edward draws upon the images of the flying fish and the fowl (from Lancaster’s description of his device) and exaggerates them in order to undermine the verbal assaults of the two nobles. Mortimer Junior fears that Gaveston’s presence will just deepen Edward’s fervor.

As soon as Gaveston arrives, the King behaves just as the nobles feared, with Edward comparing himself to the lovers of Danae, who “desired her more and waxed outrageous” when her father locked her in a tower. The nobles greet Gaveston but they do so mockingly and Edward, appealing to Kent for support, complains of the nobles’ behaviour. Encouraged by Edward, Gaveston mocks the nobles, asking them to return home and cease to bother him, since his “mounting thoughts did never creep so low/ As to bestow a look on such as you.” In response, Lancaster draws his sword and as Edward calls it a treason and attempts to remove Gaveston to safety, Mortimer Junior succeeds in wounding Gaveston first. As Gaveston leaves the scene, Isabella laments Mortimer Junior’s rash actions. Mortimer Junior however expresses that his only regret remains that he did not kill Gaveston. Edward responds by sending both Mortimer Junior and Lancaster away from court. Edward implies that they are in danger of being executed to which Warwick responds by saying that the King is

in danger of losing his crown. Edward then summons his brother to come with him to raise an army, and the two men exit, accompanied by Isabella.

Warwick, Mortimer Junior, Lancaster and Pembroke are now more convinced than ever of the need for Gaveston's death. They also feel that there is no point talking with Edward further and they prepare to send heralds to Edward- a symbolically significant act. Just then, a messenger arrives with a letter from Scotland, informing Mortimer Junior that his uncle, Mortimer Senior, is being held for ransom. Mortimer feels that the King should pay the ransom money, since Mortimer Senior was fighting on his behalf when he was captured. Mortimer Junior believes that the services the nobles provide should inspire some reciprocal loyalty on Edward's part. Edward, however, does not share this view and the nobles take his ultimate refusal to pay the ransom as yet another way in which he has breached an implicit contract with them. Meanwhile, Warwick and Pembroke depart to go to Newcastle to begin to raise an army.

A guard arrives just as Mortimer Junior is hinting darkly at what he will do if Edward does not agree to his demands that his uncle be ransomed. The guard attempts to prevent Mortimer Junior and Lancaster from seeing the King, but the commotion attracts the attention of both Edward and Kent, who emerge from the King's chambers. Edward refuses to pay the ransom and offers to give Mortimer authorization to raise money. In response, Mortimer grasps his sword and thus threatens violence.

The nobles then level a number of accusations at Edward: that the nation's wealth is being wasted on pageantry and gifts, that the King's treatment of Isabella jeopardizes international relations, that England is rapidly losing territory to the French, Scottish, and Irish, and that the common people are turning against Edward as a result of over taxation and lack of military protection.

Mortimer Junior and Lancaster leave, resolving to sell the Mortimer castle for ransom money and then “purchase more” by force. An enraged Edward says that he will no longer be held back by fear of the nobles. Kent on the other hand, is alarmed by the threat of war and urges his brother to banish Gaveston once and for all, for the good of the country. The two brothers argue briefly before Edward dismisses Kent in anger. Alone on stage, Edward says that he does not care if his castle is besieged as long as he has Gaveston with him.

Isabella reports her husband about the nobles going to war, and Edward again taunts her about her supposed affair with Mortimer Junior. Edward and Gaveston discuss what to do about Mortimer Junior now that he is openly threatening “civil wars”. Gaveston favours imprisoning or murdering him, but Edward fears upsetting the common people. Edward’s attention then turns to Baldock and Spencer Junior and he promises to let both men “wait on” him and to provide Spencer Junior with a title at some point in the future. He then tells Lady Margaret that she and Gaveston will be married that day, in part as a demonstration of his love for Gaveston. Edward then reiterates that they will begin preparing for war as soon as the wedding is over.

### **Scene iii**

Kent appears before Lancaster, Mortimer Junior, Warwick and Pembroke, saying that love to his native land has compelled him to join forces with them. Lancaster and Warwick suspect that Edward has sent Kent as a spy, but Mortimer Junior trusts in Kent’s honour, and the nobles accept him. Lancaster reveals that Gaveston and Edward are “frolicking” in Tynemouth, and the nobles resolve to attack the castle where Edward currently resides. Lancaster warns the group against laying hands on the King, he urges them to kill Gaveston and his friends. It can be noted that the nobles are still paying their allegiance to the King and not considering deposing or harming Edward.

#### **Scene iv**

The scene begins with Edward enquiring Spencer where Gaveston is. Spencer replies that he fears Gaveston is slain. Just then, however, he catches sight of Gaveston, and urges him to flee to Scarborough. Though Edward himself wants to flee away but Gaveston remarks, "...they will not harm you." Edward says goodbye to both Gaveston and Lady Margaret and when Isabella complains that "no farewell to poor Isabel", he bids farewell to her for Mortimer's sake. Everyone then leaves and Isabella reiterates that she loves no one but Edward and wishes he would take pity on her.

Then Lancaster, Warwick, Mortimer Junior enter and when Isabella starts to lament about her efforts to win her husband's affections, Mortimer cuts her short and asks her where the King is. When Isabella appears suspicious, Lancaster clarifies that they have no intention of harming Edward, but simply want to "rid the realm of Gaveston." Isabella reveals before them that Gaveston has gone to Scarborough, unaccompanied by the King. Mortimer questions her on this point and Isabella reveals that Edward hoped to force the nobles' army to split into smaller groups that could be more easily defeated. The nobles decide to pursue Gaveston as a group but before they leave, Mortimer asks her either to stay within the castle there or sail with them to Scarborough but Isabella declines, saying that Edward already suspects her of adultery. However, once the nobles have left, Isabella's loyalty to her husband begins to waver, and she says she could "live with thee (Mortimer) forever." She decides to plead with her husband one last time and if that fails, to go to France and appeal to her brother, the King of France, for help though she hopes that Gaveston's death will nullify the necessity of the trip.

#### **Scene V**

The scene opens with Gaveston being pursued. He calls the nobles "lusty lords" and taunts them that he has escaped their hands

and threats. As the nobles enter, Warwick orders the soldiers to take away his weapons. Mortimer and Lancaster threaten him with death and accuse Gaveston of causing civil unrest by “corrupting” Edward. Lancaster compares Gaveston to “the Greekish strumpet” implying Helen of Troy whose love affair started the Trojan War. Warwick, however, urges the other nobles not to speak to Gaveston and instead orders the soldiers to seize Gaveston.

Warwick at first intends to hang Gaveston for the country’s cause but then decides to give him the relative honour of a beheading. The debate over how and when to execute Gaveston encapsulates some of the pertinent questions about social status in medieval and Renaissance England. Although members of the nobility were not exempt from execution, they were entitled to the theoretically more dignified method of beheading. At that moment, however, Lord Maltravers arrives, explaining that he has been sent to request that Edward be allowed to see Gaveston one last time. The nobles refuse and even when Maltravers assures that Edward has promised to surrender Gaveston when the meeting is over, Warwick says they cannot trust the word of the King. Pembroke agrees to escort Gaveston to the King and back. The other nobles agree to the proposal, but Warwick who does so reluctantly, says in an aside that he will attempt to thwart the plan. Ultimately, Mortimer Junior hands over Gaveston to Pembroke under his responsibility. The trumpets sound and all exit except Pembroke, Maltravers, Gaveston and Pembroke’s men. Pembroke explains that his house is nearby and invites Maltravers to stay there. Maltravers accepts, so Pembroke places Gaveston in the keeping of James, one of his men, for the night. The group therefore splits up.

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### 6.3.3 Act III

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#### Scene i

The scene begins as Gaveston enter mourning, with James and the Earl of Pembroke's men. James and Gaveston realize that Warwick has betrayed Pembroke and is pursuing them. Gaveston desperately urges Pembroke's men to hurry so that he can meet Edward, but it is already late as Warwick arrives and demands that they hand over Gaveston claiming that his duty to his country takes precedent over his loyalty to Pembroke. As the nobles have done throughout the play, Warwick once again justifies his actions with an appeal to patriotic duty. He then leaves with Gaveston, and James and Pembroke's men go to report what has happened to their master.

#### Scene ii

The scene begins as King Edward, Spencer Junior and Baldock enter with drums and fifes. Edward waits anxiously with Spencer Junior and Baldock to hear news from the barons about Gaveston. He knows that he cannot save Gaveston's life, and fears that the nobles will not even let him see Gaveston again. Spencer Junior goes on to say that if he were king, he would not allow the nobles to insult him and his lineage in this way. He even says, "Strike off their heads, and let them preach on poles" Ironically, this defense of royal birth is similar to the nobility's protectiveness of their own status and corresponding dislike of Gaveston and Spencer. Anyway, Edward agrees that he has so far been "too mild" and resolves to be harsher in the future.

Spencer Senior, Spencer Junior's father, enter with his truncheon and soldiers and announces that he has brought a company of soldiers to defend Edward's "royal right." Edward responds by making him Earl of Wiltshire, promising him money to "outbid" the nobles, and vowing to "enrich [Spencer] with [the King's] favour."

After that, Queen Isabella enters with Prince Edward, her son and Levune, a Frenchman. She divulges before the King that her brother, the King of France, has seized Normandy because Edward has “been slack in homage.” Edward, preoccupied with Gaveston’s fate dismisses this as easily solved and decides over the young prince’s reservations to send his son and wife to France to negotiate. The King decides that he will stay back to deal with the domestic turmoil. Isabella remarks about the disruption of the social order which according to her is not just treasonous but “unnatural” to challenge the rule of a King.

As Isabella, Prince Edward, and Levune leave, Maltravers arrives to report that Gaveston is dead. When Edward presses him for details, Maltravers narrates in details the events leading up to Warwick’s ambush and the capture and beheading of Gaveston. Edward’s response to Gaveston’s death is typically passive. Instead, Edward turns whatever violent impulses he has inwards and wishes for death. It is Spencer Junior who remarks that Warwick’s actions are “flatly against law of arms” and urges the King to “refer [his] vengeance to the sword.”

Edward kneels, swearing by heaven, his lineage, and his status as king to be revenged on anyone involved in Gaveston’s death: “If I be England’s king, in lakes of gore/ Your headless trunks, your bodies will I trail,” He then makes Spencer Junior Earl of Gloucester and Lord Chamberlain- two of Gaveston’s former positions.

Thereafter Spencer Junior announces that a herald has arrived from the nobles. The herald reports that the nobles want the King to dismiss Spencer whom they consider as a corrupting influence on both Edward and the country. They hope that the King will “cherish virtue and nobility, /And have old servitors in high esteem.” In this case, the nobles are unwilling to even pretend to compromise with Edward over his favouritism, instead jumping straight to threats of civil war.

Edward angrily sends the herald away, saying the nobles have no right to dictate the King's "sports, his pleasures, and his company." He further orders the herald to tell the nobles that he is on his way to seek revenge for Gaveston's death. Then, turning on to those present, he urges them to notice "how these rebels swell" and to join him in "mak[ing] them stoop."

### **Scene iii**

A battle is underway between Edward's forces and the rebelling nobles as the scene opens but it also announces the retreat of Edward's forces. Edward questions this move as he intends to "pour vengeance" on everyone who is up in arms against "their King." Spencer Junior shares this belief. However, Spencer Senior comments that their forces are exhausted and need a break from the fight.

Mortimer Junior, Kent, Lancaster, Warwick, Pembroke appear and there is an exchange of words between them. Lancaster says that Edward's followers will betray him, "traitors as they are." Spencer Junior throws the charge of treason back at the nobles. As this game of allegations and counter allegations continue, Edward threatens that the nobles will die for rebelling against their King. Mortimer questions Edward whether he would rather "bathe [his] sword in subjects' blood/Than banish that pernicious company." Edward replies that he is willing to destroy the entire country in order to have his way. The nobles rally to cries of "the barons' right" as Edward's followers do the same in the name of the King.

### **Scene iv**

As trumpets sound, Edward, Spencer Senior, Spencer Junior, Baldock, and Levune appear, and they have a number of nobles [Kent, Warwick, Lancaster, and Mortimer Junior] under guard. Edward boasts about his victory, which he attributes to "justice" rather than the "chance of war." Edward looks forward to executing nobles for the murder of his "dearest friend." Kent tries to defend the nobles arguing



that the flatterer Gaveston was killed for the good of both the country and Edward himself but Edward sends him away. Edward contradicts the idea that the nobles acted in “regard” of him because they ignored his request to see Gaveston once more, and killing him in an ambush. Warwick and Lancaster dismiss Edward’s threats saying they would rather die than “live in infamy under such a king.” In response, Edward sends them off for execution under the guard of Spencer Senior.

Mortimer Junior laments the state of affairs in the country, “England, unkind to thy nobility, / Groan for this grief; behold how thou art maimed.” Edward gives orders for Mortimer’s imprisonment, and the latter is taken away under guard. Edward then symbolically “crowned him King anew.”

Spencer Junior instructs Levune to go to France and bribe the king and nobility there to withhold their support from Isabella for he suspects that she and the English nobility have been plotting to make Prince Edward king. Levune agrees, and Spencer urges him to leave as soon as possible.

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### **6.3.4 Act 4**

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#### **Scene i**

The scene begins with Kent who is preparing to join Isabella in France where he will back the “wronged Queen’s” claims about Edward’s weakness who slaughter noblemen and cherish flatterers. He waits for the arrival of Mortimer Junior who has devised a plan to escape his captors and Mortimer accordingly appears in disguise. When he is confirmed that it is Kent he is speaking to, he reveals that he drugged his guards and is now ready to accompany Kent to France. In this scene, Kent’s decision to place duty to country over duty to

family indicates that by the time Marlowe was writing, a concept of loyalty to an abstract nation-state was beginning to develop.

### **Scene ii**

The scene begins with Isabella and her son, Prince Edward. She laments that the French king and nobles have failed to support her. The Prince advises her to return to England and win his father's favour again. Isabella, however, says that it is not possible for them to be reunited again for they "jar too far" and wonders what will become of her. Just then, a nobleman by the name of Sir John of Hainault enters and greets Isabella. He invites her and Prince Edward to come with him to his home in Hainault. Prince Edward agrees, provided Isabella does as well, for he is determined not to leave his mother's side until he is old enough to challenge Spencer Junior. Isabella comments on how hopeful her son makes her and agrees to go to Hainault but at that moment, she notices Kent and Mortimer Junior entering. She had taken Mortimer Junior to be dead. Mortimer reveals that he has escaped in order to help crown Prince Edward the king of England. It pleases Isabella but she quickly adds that their attempts to find allies in France have been unsuccessful. Mortimer reassures her that though Warwick and Lancaster are dead, they still have friends in England. Kent intervenes to say that he wishes peace were restored and Edward II "reclaimed" but Mortimer Junior contradicts and argues that Edward can only ever be made to accept their terms "by the sword."

Sir John suggests Kent and Mortimer Junior should accompany Isabella to Hainault, where they will be able to raise both money and an army. Prince Edward predicts that Edward II will defeat them which probably stems from familial loyalty. Kent and Mortimer accept Sir John's proposal and praise him for helping the English Queen and nobles.

### **Scene iii**

Edward celebrates his victory and also the fact that he has got his way with regards to Spencer Junior. He asks Maltravers to read the list of executed rebels, and then gloats that Isabella's efforts to find French allies have failed. He enquires whether Spencer has issued a reward for Mortimer Junior's capture and dismisses the idea that Mortimer could have slipped out of the country.

A messenger arrives with a letter from Levune that reveals that Levune succeeded in buying off the French nobility and Isabella, disappointed, went to Hainault with Kent and Mortimer Junior to raise an army. He is angered by the news of Mortimer's escape and Kent's betrayal but saddened by Prince Edward's involvement. However, he prepares to go to Bristol to fight the rebels.

### **Scene iv**

The scene begins with Isabella, Mortimer Junior, Kent, Prince Edward and Sir John's arrival in England. Isabella describes civil wars as self-destructive in the sense that killing one's kin and countrymen is same as killing oneself. She laments that Edward's irresponsibility as a king has brought them to this impasse. As Isabella speaks about Edward's failures as a king, she grows more passionate and as she prepares to launch into a detailed explanation of a king's responsibilities to his people, Mortimer cuts her short. He briefly states their loyalty to Prince Edward and reiterates that their purpose in fighting is to restore order to the country. Sir John orders the trumpets to blow and the group leaves for the battle.

### **Scene v**

The scene opens with Edward the King, Baldock, and Spencer Junior, flying about the stage. Spencer Junior urges the King to flee to Ireland, but Edward refuses because he "was not born to fly and run

away.” Baldock responds by seconding Spencer’s warning, saying that Edward’s “princely resolution/ Fits not the time.”

Kent appears in search of Edward, whom he now regrets turning against. Kent believes that the revolt is unnatural because just as revolting against lawful king plunges a supposedly natural social hierarchy into chaos, so does betraying one’s brother. He then realises that Mortimer Junior will kill him if he discovers his loyalties have shifted. Finally, Kent confirms for the first time in the play that Isabella and Mortimer are having an affair.

Isabella, Mortimer Junior, Prince Edward, and Sir John appear and Isabella appoints Prince Edward Viceroy and rejoices in their victory. She tells her companions to deal with Edward II as their wisdom see fit and attributes his overthrow to his “infortunate” destiny.

When Kent asks Isabella what she intends to do with Edward II, Mortimer Junior responds by saying that that is a matter for Parliament to decide. Mortimer warns Isabella that Kent may be having second thoughts.

The group discusses the whereabouts of Spencer Junior and Baldock and just then Rhys ap Howell (a Welsh lord) presents Spencer Senior, who has been taken prisoner, to Isabella and Prince Edward. He also informs that Spencer Junior and Baldock have fled with Edward II to Ireland- news which distresses Prince Edward and Kent. Though Isabella professes to be upset, she also admits that she had no choice but to go to war. Mortimer Junior, however, retorts that Edward “wronged [the] country and himself.” It is quite evident here that Mortimer is now acting more out of personal ambition rather than any sense of patriotism.

Mortimer Junior’s personal ambition is quite evident in his subsequent actions. He orders for Spencer Senior’s execution, then orders Rhys ap Howell to deal with the remaining rebels in Bristol,

while he and Isabella figure out what to do about Spencer Junior and Baldock.

### **Scene vi**

Edward II, Baldock, and Spencer Junior have disguised themselves and taken refuge in a monastery where the Abbot assures Edward that he will be safe in his protection. Edward bemoans the miseries of life as a king and wishes he could lead the “life contemplative” the monks enjoy.

Though the monk assured them, Spencer Junior fears that their location will be revealed. Baldock speaks on how the bad weather thwarted their voyage to Ireland, leaving them vulnerable to Mortimer Junior. The mention of Mortimer’s name infuriates Edward who kneels before the Abbot, begging to be allowed to rest there until his death.

And soon, Rhys ap Howell and the Earl of Leicester discover them with the help of one Mower who had seen them and revealed their location. As the play is replete with plant imagery, the fact that it is a mower who betrays Edward has symbolic significance. If the tree or garden of the kingdom has grown out of control, it is the Mower who “trims” it back into order.

Leicester, in an aside, speaks pityingly of Edward and quotes a Latin proverb about the precariousness of power. He then arrests Spencer Junior and Baldock for treason. Edward laments his fate and blames the stars before inviting Leicester to kill him rather than imprison Spencer Junior and Baldock. Edward then bids goodbye to his companions. The Abbot looks on, distressed to see a king “bear these words and proud commands.”

Rhys ap Howell informs Edward that he “must go to Kenilworth,” which makes Edward take issue with the word “must.” He even suggests that he might well be carried away in a “hearse,” now that his friends are being taken away for execution. He bids

farewell to Spencer Junior and Baldock before Leicester escorts him from the room.

Spencer Junior and Baldock mourn their parting with Edward, likening him both to the sun and to their own “souls” but Rhys ap Howell cuts off their “preachments,” and takes them away. He promises to pay the Mower for his services.

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### **6.3.5 Act 5**

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#### **Scene i**

The scene begins with Edward being consoled by Leicester and to imagine Kenilworth Castle as his court. Edward, however, says that he cannot be consoled by “gentle words” because as a king, he says, he says he cannot help but chafe against his imprisonment at the hands of Mortimer Junior and his “unnatural queen” Isabella. He contemplates whether kings are actually anything more than “perfect shadows in a sunshine day.” He questions whether he will be forced to give up the trappings of his position-i.e. his crown- to Mortimer. The Bishop of Winchester, who has arrived at Kenilworth, responds to Edward’s question by arguing that they “crave the crown” for the sake of England and Prince Edward and not Mortimer Junior. Edward, however, suspects that Mortimer plans to take power himself but believes that if proud Mortimer wear the crown, the Heavens will bring a curse upon him.

As Leicester presses for a response, Edward takes off his crown and wishes for death but he again reconsiders and begs to be allowed to retain his crown until nightfall, which he prays will never come. He places the crown back on his head and asks to be allowed to wear it for a while longer.

Trussel, a member of Parliament who has come to Kenilworth with Winchester, demands a definite answer from Edward about

whether he will give up the crown. Edward responds by saying that he will not comply and Mortimer and other traitors can do whatever they wish to do at which Trussel and the Bishop of Winchester leave. At the warning of Leicester, Edward again changes his mind and asks Leicester to call Trussel and the Bishop. Ultimately, he hands the crown to the Bishop, praying as he does so to either die or “forget [him]self.”

Edward orders the Bishop and Trussel to leave but hands them a handkerchief, soaked in his tears, to take to Isabella. He fears for Prince Edward’s safety while his son is under Mortimer Junior’s care, but hopes that the Prince will prove a better ruler than he himself did. Then another messenger by the name of Berkeley arrives whom Edward takes to have come to kill him. Berkeley protests and shows a letter that dismisses Leicester and appoints Berkeley as Edward’s guard. Edward tears up the letter but resigns himself to go with Berkeley. Edward “rending” Mortimer’s name

### **Scene ii**

The scene begins with Mortimer Junior telling Queen Isabella, “Fair Isabel, now have we our desire.” He rejoices in the execution of Edward’s supporters as well as at the imprisonment of the “light-brained King.” He urges Isabella to arrange for Prince Edward’s coronation and he himself will then act as Protector. A messenger arrives from Kenilworth, followed shortly afterward by the Bishop of Winchester. The Queen feigns distress at the news of Edward’s unhappiness, but sends for Prince Edward when she sees the king’s crown. The Bishop reveals two important things- that Kent is plotting to help his brother escape and that Edward has been put in Berkeley’s custody. He fears that Berkeley may take pity on the King. Mortimer Junior, consequently plans to move Edward, but Isabella hints that it might be safer to simply kill him.

Mortimer summons Gourney and Maltravers, entrusting the latter with a message dismissing Berkeley. He gives Gourney instructions not only to move Edward from place to place but also to “amplify [Edward’s] grief with bitter words.” Mortimer promises Gourney that he too will rise in power alongside Mortimer himself if he carries out these orders. In keeping with her earlier attempts to feign affection towards Edward, Isabella gives Gourney a jewel to give to Edward as evidence of her love.

Mortimer Junior tells Isabella to keep up her pretence as Prince Edward and Kent walks into the room. They speculate that Kent is attempting to gain control of the Prince. Although Mortimer and Isabella exchange greetings and commiserations with Kent, Kent realizes their affectations.

The conversation turns to Prince Edward and the Protectorship. Kent denies aspiring to that position while the Prince begs not to be crowned king on the grounds that he is too young. He then relents on the condition that he be allowed to see his father and learn what his father wants to have happen. Isabella says that this is impossible and she Mortimer Junior and Kent begin to argue. While Kent doubts the couple’s sincerity, Mortimer claims to fear to allow Kent near the Prince. Prince Edward joins the argument on the side of Kent and Mortimer responds by dragging the prince out of the room by force. Kent demands the return of the Prince to which Isabella refuses and that makes Kent depart to Kenilworth to rescue his brother.

### **Scene iii**

The scene begins with the entry of Maltravers and Gourney, carrying torches, with Edward the King, and soldiers where Maltravers assures the King that they are his friends. They hurry Edward toward Kenilworth as he asks them where he is being taken to. Edward wonders whether he will ever be allowed to rest and offers up his heart to satisfy Mortimer Junior’s desire for revenge. He says that he is



likely to die soon and beg for water to drink and clean himself of “foul excrements.” In response, Maltravers and Gourney mockingly douse him in sewer water and shave off his beard as Edward laments the futility of “seek[ing] for mercy at a tyrant’s hand.” Edward calls on God to bear witness to Maltravers and Gourney’s treatment of “their liege and sovereign” He also calls on Gaveston, saying that he is now suffering for his sake.

In the meantime, Kent appears and a fight breaks out in which Gourney and Maltravers’ soldiers eventually succeed in seizing Kent to take him away to court. Gourney and Maltravers leave with Edward. Kent then resigns himself to execution, as he fails to secure his brother’s escape.

#### **Scene iv**

The scene opens with Mortimer Junior talking to himself that Edward must die, otherwise “Mortimer goes down”. He fears reprisal from Prince Edward and so the message he writes ordering Edward’s murder is deliberately ambiguous. It could also be interpreted as concerning Edward’s safety. Besides, Mortimer has ensured that the assassin, Lightborne, will be murdered once Edward himself is dead.

Mortimer Junior discuss with Lightborne the plans for Edward’s murder. Lightborne assures Mortimer that he knows many ways to kill without leaving marks on the victim’s body. Mortimer also gives Lightborne a letter to take to Gourney and Maltravers with a token that marks him for death. Thereafter, Mortimer Junior takes stock of his position as someone who cannot be challenged and can do whatever he wishes. Noting that that day is Prince Edward’s coronation day that will conceal Mortimer’s own position as Protector.

Trumpets sound, and Prince Edward enters, accompanied by Isabella, the Bishop of Canterbury, and a group of nobles. The Bishop proclaims the Prince to be king, and a champion swears to defend his right to rule by force of arms.

As soon as Edward III is crowned, a group of soldiers bring Kent forward for judgement. Mortimer Junior orders Kent's execution over the pleas of Edward III on the charge of trying to free Edward II. Kent himself also challenges Mortimer's right to condemn him, but is eventually escorted away under guard. Edward III expresses concern to his mother over his own safety at Mortimer Junior's hands. The Queen, however, reassures her son and urges him not to think anymore about the "traitor" Kent.

#### **Scene v**

At Berkeley, Gourney and Maltravers marvel at the fact that despite being kept in a wet and dirty cell, Edward II has not yet died. Just then Lightborne enters and hands Mortimer Junior's letter to Gourney and Maltravers. He also shows them the token Mortimer gave him and in asides, Gourney and Maltravers discuss the fact that Lightborne is there to murder Edward and then be killed himself. Maltravers then gives Lightborne the keys to Edward's cell, and Lightborne asks Maltravers and Gourney to fetch a table, a feather bed, and a hot spit.

Lightborne finds Edward, who suspects that Lightborne has come to kill him, a fact that Lightborne continuously denies. Edward describes the conditions in which he is held prisoner: his cell is a cess-pool, he is given little to eat, and the jailers continuously make noise to prevent him from sleeping. Claiming to be moved, Lightborne urges Edward to lie down on the feather bed. Edward is still suspicious, even though Lightborne once more protests his innocence. Edward tries vainly to win Lightborne's favour by giving him a jewel. Edward tells Lightborne to "know that [he is] a king." When Lightborne again urges Edward to sleep, Edward does obey but as soon as he has begun to drift off, he starts awake, saying that something tells him he will die if he falls asleep. When Edward again seeks to know the purpose of his

coming, Lightborne finally admits the truth, calling Maltravers and Gourney into the room.

Maltravers and Gourney hold Edward down while Lightborne kills him with the spit. Gourney then quickly stabs Lightborne and the two men then leave, intending to take Edward's body to Mortimer Junior after throwing Lightborne's in the moat.

### **Scene vi**

The scene opens with Mortimer Junior enquiring Maltravers whether the murder of Edward II is done and his murderer Lightborne dead. Maltravers replies in affirmative and also says that he wished "it were undone." Mortimer threatens to kill Maltravers if he is so full of remorse but eventually dismisses him instead. Mortimer then boasts that he "stand as Jove's huge tree, / And others are but shrubs compared to [him]. And therefore, he doesn't fear anyone.

Isabella arrives and informs Mortimer that Edward III knows about Edward II's death and suspects her and Mortimer Junior of ordering it. Mortimer brushes aside any fear but Isabella cautions that her son has already gone to seek the advice of his council. After that, the new King Edward III enters, accompanied by several lords and attendants. Renouncing Mortimer Junior as a "villain," Edward III says he knows that Mortimer murdered Edward II and intends to have him executed. He further says that Mortimer's "hateful and accursed head" can stand "witness" to his crime. He also accuses his mother that he fears she is guilty as well. When Mortimer questions who dares to accuse him, Edward III responds that his father speaks through him, "And plainly saith, 'twas [Mortimer] that murd'rdst him." When Mortimer Junior challenges Edward III to provide evidence, Edward III produces the letter ordering Edward II's murder. Mortimer at first attempts to protest his innocence, but quickly realizing the futility, says he would rather die than "sue for life unto a paltry boy." He speaks of "Base Fortune," noting that "There is a point to which, when

men aspire,/ They tumble headlong down.” Resigned to his death, he is escorted away by guards.

Mortimer’s stoic acceptance of his fate and his refusal to beg for his life restore some of the dignity he lost earlier. However, Isabella continues to plead with Edward III, begging him to spare Mortimer Junior’s life. Edward III takes it as evidence of Isabella’s guilt and he brings up the topic of her “unnaturalness.” She is seen as a threat for the fact that she has committed adultery because her affair could have placed an illegitimate child in the line of succession to the throne. In a society where social positions are based on blood lineage; this would have been hugely disruptive. Edward III orders his mother to be imprisoned even though she herself begs for death.

As Isabella is escorted to prison, a lord returns with Mortimer Junior’s head. Edward III then asks his attendants to prepare Edward II’s hearse. He laments that he could not “rule” Mortimer’s “accursed head” well enough to prevent his father’s murder. Eventually, the hearse is brought in, and Edward III offers Mortimer’s head on it as he proclaims his own “grief and innocence.”

Mortimer’s death was important because with his death, order is finally restored to England and the monarchy that was threatened by the unnatural relationships between Edward and Gaveston, Isabella and Mortimer. These destabilizing elements to the social hierarchy violently ended and Edward III’s actions so far indicated that he would rule with a firm hand and show proper deference to his counsellors.

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## **6.4 List of Characters**

### **Archbishop of Canterbury**

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The Archbishop of Canterbury is compelled to act against Edward II when the latter deposes the Bishop of Coventry, sends him to the Tower, and then turns over his lands to Gaveston. He considers

Edward's acts to be a form of violence against the Church itself and therefore take sides with Mortimer Junior and the other rebelling nobles.

### **Robert Baldock**

Baldock is scholar who read to the king's niece when she was young and serves her.

### **Beaumont**

A servant to King Edward.

### **Sir Thomas Berkeley**

Berkeley is made to take the King from the Abbey to his own castle. He does not keep the King long, for Mortimer has the King moved to prison cell, where Maltravers and Gourney are his guards.

### **Bishop of Coventry**

Bishop of Coventry is the person who was against Gaveston being called back from exile and he pens the order banishing Gaveston the second time. For this opposition to Gaveston, he is stripped of his symbolic gown, his possessions given over to Gaveston and sent to die in the Tower by Edward II.

### **Bishop of Winchester**

The Bishop of Winchester comes to Neath Abbey in Northern England where Edward has sought refuge. The task assigned to him is to carry back the crown to Mortimer. He demands a definite answer from the King when the latter shows his reluctance. He tells the King that "it is for England's good."

### **Piers de Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall**

Gaveston is Edward's lover and therefore when Edward I learns of Gaveston's corrupting influence on his son, the king banishes Gaveston. However, after the king's death, Edward II recalls him back to court which infuriates the nobles as well as the Bishop of Coventry. As the King begins to bestow different titles on Gaveston, he accepts the titles which are far beyond his lowborn social status and

also influences the King's haphazard administration of the kingdom. Gaveston dreams of turning the court into a sybaritic playland filled with "men like satyrs grazing on the lawns." He nearly succeeds in making his dream a reality, a state of affairs that infuriates the nobility. Gaveston in a way wants to rise in the social ladder by dint of his sexuality. The nobles along with the Bishop of Coventry force Edward II to banish him once again; but he is recalled once again. Gaveston attains a status equal to the Queen as he was made to sit beside the King. He relishes the idea of destroying those of whom he was envious, urging the king to banish Mortimer to the tower for daring to question the king's refusal to ransom Mortimer Senior, taken hostage by the Scots. He becomes arrogant and spiteful while in command of his king. His death seems a necessary action to restore the social order of the kingdom.

### **King Edward II**

The historical Edward sat on the throne at the age of twenty-three and managed to rule for twenty years. It is said that he was the pawn of his advisors, Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser. He was reputed to be Gaveston's lover. His French queen, Isabella, with the aid of her lover, Mortimer, deposed him in 1327 and he was left to die in a cold cell in Gloucester Castle. Some evidence also points to the possibility that he was murdered there in 1328. In Marlowe's play, which condenses the action into a matter of days, Edward is self-indulgent, a playboy with little interest in the governance of his country. His priorities get revealed when he says he'd "sooner the sea o'erwhelm my land / Than bear the ship that shall transport [Gaveston] hence." He never seems to comprehend the nobles' accusation that he has abandoned the country for the sake of his lover. The nobles are not so much bothered with the king's homosexuality as they are with his neglect of the kingdom and his heaping of honours and titles on the lowborn man. When the nobles murder Gaveston, Edward merely

transfers his interests to a new minion, Spenser. Marlowe's Edward earns no measure of respect and sympathy until his imprisonment, when he recognizes what he has lost in losing the kingship. Although he doesn't acknowledge his own follies and shortcomings and constantly holds Gaveston responsible, he does become more human, vulnerable, and therefore a more sympathetic character. One such instance in the play is when standing in the filth and mire of a cold dungeon, he asks a messenger to "Tell Isabella the queen, I looked not thus / When for her sake I ran at tilt in France." His condition towards the end is one of a broken and destroyed man who followed his impetuous heart instead of his sovereign duty.

### **Prince Edward III**

The young prince does not appear in the play until his father is imprisoned. At that point he shows his filial loyalty and bribes the French king not to take up his mother's cause. At that time Isabella has sought the aid of the French King. However, he could not prevent his father's ultimate overthrow. He accepts his father's overthrow because he recognizes his father's faults but when his father is treacherously murdered and his innocent uncle Kent is also executed by Mortimer, he asserts his power. By the end of the play, he shows himself poised to recover his kingship. The way he took charge and handled the situation, he proves that his reign will differ from his father in the sense that he will not neglect his kingly obligations. He doesn't allow his heart to come in the way of his duties and sends his mother to the Tower to await a proper trial, telling her that "If you be guilty, though I be your son, / Think not to find me slack or pitiful." Unlike his father, he has the right balance of heart and leadership and he maintains it through his course of actions depicted so far.

### **Edmund Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel**

Fitzalan, the Earl of Arundel remains loyal to the king. He comes as a messenger who asks if Edward may see Gaveston before he

is executed. When that request is denied, he offers to take Gaveston in his own trust, a guarantee to offer up himself if Gaveston escapes. Although Arundel is a trusted and honourable man, the nobles decide to put Pembroke, one of their own, in charge instead.

### **Guards**

The guards at Killingworth Castle, Sir John Maltravers and Thomas Gourney, wash the king with puddle water and shave off his beard. As narrated by Edward II, he was kept in a cell which is cess pool, given little to eat and prevented from sleeping by continuously making noise. They aid Lightborn in the murder of Edward II by holding him down. Then they murder Lightborn and throw him into the moat.

### **Henry, Earl of Leicester**

Leicester attends the king in his exile, where he attempts to assuage Edward's grief and fear by telling him to imagine that he is in his own court. He evolves as a more compassionate character. When the Bishop of Winchester arrives, Leicester advises the King to go ahead and give up the crown, so that young Edward III will not be hurt. He is trusted by the King and by Mortimer.

### **Isabella**

Isabella is the queen and wife of Edward II. She plays a significant role in the overthrow and murder of her husband. At first, she attracts audience's sympathy because Edward abandons her for Gaveston and she seems genuinely to mourn the loss of his attentions, saying "Witness this heart that sighing for thee breaks." She is accused by Edward II of being in love with Mortimer, a fact that even Kent, her brother-in-law admits. She is the daughter of the French King and she goes to France to seek their aid in their attempt to overthrow Edward. Her adulterous relationship with Mortimer soon comes out as they "kiss as they conspire." Towards the end of the play, she begs her son



to spare Mortimer's life when her son condemns him to death. She is ordered to be imprisoned by her son though she herself begs for death.

### **Sir John, of Hainault**

He is a French noble who hosts the queen when she goes to France to garner support for Mortimer against King Edward.

### **Kent**

Kent is the brother of Edward II and he offers good advice to his errant sibling. Initially, he appears to be one who is committed to the throne and therefore, he is offended by the noble's questioning of his brother's command. But he soon realises that Edward's actions are against the interests of the country and therefore he takes sides with the rebel nobles. Though Kent takes sides with Mortimer but he doesn't belong to his closest circle and when he sees how his brother is treated by the vengeful Mortimer, he attempts to rescue Edward. Kent recognizes that Mortimer's personal ambition has taken precedence over the interests of the state. Mortimer, in his attempt of having Kent out of the way, orders his execution, an act that has repercussions on the young King Edward III who then takes the advice of his Lords and have Mortimer executed.

### **Spenser Junior**

Spenser is a lesser lord who serves Gaveston until Gaveston is banished. Edward transfers his attention to Spenser after Gaveston's death. Spenser replaces Gaveston as Edward II's homosexual lover and like Gaveston, is bestowed with different titles. Spenser Junior encourages the King to stand up to the rebelling nobles.

### **Spenser Senior**

Spenser Senior is a character who supported Edward II at a crucial time of the political resistance. Spenser arrives with four hundred bowmen to defend Edward against Mortimer. He remained loyal to Edward throughout that struggle for power and was finally executed by Mortimer.

## **Lightborn**

Lightborn is the paid assassin who murders Edward II. When Lightborn goes to the cell where Edward II was held, the King immediately suspects his purpose to have come to murder him. It is before Lightborn that the King narrates his woes and sufferings. Lightborn is immediately murdered by Gouney and thrown into the moat. His name is a pun on Lucifer ("Luc" being a Latin word for "light"). His name can also be literally interpreted as someone of low birth, perhaps someone who simply does not comprehend the intricacies of court, but can be employed to carry out its evil acts because he does not have the sense nor the courage to question them. He executes the task given by Mortimer and is rewarded with death.

## **Roger Mortimer**

The elder Mortimer is the uncle of Mortimer junior and he does not have a long stage presence except in the opening scenes. He becomes crucial to the plot when he is held hostage by the Scots. Edward, ignoring duty and honour refuses to rescue him, thus angering Mortimer and other nobles. It sets off a series of events that ultimately lead to Edward's deposition.

## **Roger Mortimer, the younger**

Mortimer is a character who presents himself as one who is genuinely concerned with the affairs of his country but as the play progresses, he appears to be one whose personal ambition takes precedence. The historical Edward II was disturbed by the manipulation of Edward II by Gaveston and the Despencers and thus joined with the other barons to oust them. He was also in a relationship with the Queen Isabella, who shared her disgust with her dissolute husband. Together they succeeded in deposing the king in 1327. However, the young Edward III decided to eliminate Mortimer's controlling influence by having Mortimer and then hanged in 1330. Marlowe in his play, retains all of this material, with a twist of

Machiavellian excess. In the play, he becomes a self-conceited man who thinks he has to fear none. At that precise moment, Edward III takes matters under his control and orders for Mortimer's execution. At that moment, Mortimer realises that the wheel of fortune, which he had ridden to its highest point, was now taking him back down.

### **Nobles**

The nobles in the play are offended by Edward's favouring of Gaveston over them because Gaveston doesn't belong to the nobility. They pose as a constant opposition to Edward II. These noblemen, Guy Earl of Warwick, Thomas Earl of Lancaster, and Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, join with Mortimer to remove Gaveston from court, by force. Of them, Pembroke is seen as most trustworthy and honourable.

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## **6.5 Summing Up:**

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Marlowe's heroes are highly ambitious, exaggerated both in their faults and their qualities. They want to conquer the whole world (*Tamburlaine*), to attain limitless wealth (*Barbaras, The Jew of Malta*), to possess all knowledge (*Doctor Faustus*). Their unbridled ambitions are matched by a grandiloquent language, rich in metaphor and effect. Marlowe brought the blank verse to good use in the soliloquies, asides, choruses and dialogues.

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## Unit 7

### Edward II

#### *Supplementary Unit*

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7.1 Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

7.4 A note on Language

7.5 Summing Up

7.6 References and Suggested Readings

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### 7.1 Objectives

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- i) The main objective of this unit is familiarizing the learners with some important issues related to the play.
- ii) The unit will give an idea to the learners about the different probable questions and their suggested answers.
- iii) The diverse topics of the play cannot be covered within the scope of these units. Therefore, the unit shall show the way for the learners to get acquainted with other books and articles related to the play.

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### 7.2 Introduction

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Stephen Guy-Bray in the Bloomsbury edition to the play writes that while Doctor Faustus is probably still his most famous play, *Edward II* has become increasingly popular and increasingly widely studied in the last few decades. He cites the different reasons. For one, as a

history play *Edward II* provides a useful different approach to the question of the representation of English history from that of Shakespeare's plays. While Shakespeare's history plays rely on an attitude toward kingship that is never really interrogated, Marlowe's play – his sole history play – calls into question the nature of English kingship itself. In this respect, *Edward II* makes an interesting pair with Shakespeare's *Richard II*, which also tells the story of a 'weak' king, although this comparison will show the extent to which Marlowe's critique of Monarchy is more thorough than Shakespeare's. In this unit, we will discuss issues of monarchy, civic loyalty and social mobility, Mortimer's relations with Isabella as well as historical significance of the play.

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### **7.3 Probable questions and suggested answers**

#### **7.3.1 . Discuss the relationship between Edward and Gaveston.**

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**Or**

***Edward II* has typically been discussed as a play that is about homosexuality as much as it is about anything else. Discuss the statement with your views.**

Ans: *Edward II* is a play which is quite unlike the other plays by Marlowe and the homosexual love between Edward and Gaveston has often been discussed. Andrew Sanders while writing about the play, writes that Edward is born into an inheritance of royal government but effectively throws it away in favour of another mastery, that of a homosexual love unacceptable to the weighty historical world in which he is obliged to move. Sanders looks at Edward as a king without command, a lover denied fulfilment, a lion transformed into 'a

lamb encompassed by wolves' and a man finally reduced by his enemies (including his wife and son) to the depths of human misery. He is Marlowe's most conventionally 'tragic' character in what is perhaps also his most deeply unconventional tragedy.

It was quite daring on the part of Marlowe to dramatize a homosexual relationship before an Elizabethan audience. Stephen Guy-Bray opines that while critics writing in the first three-quarters or so of the twentieth century were content to use the words 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality', more recent critics have preferred to use a range of synonyms on the grounds that, following Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, homosexuality cannot be said to have existed before the second half of the nineteenth-century. Bray feels the word 'sodomy' is perhaps the most useful of these synonyms, as it has the merit of including Edward's love for Gaveston while not excluding many of the other relationships in the play.

Guy-Bray then cites Alan Bray's work on sodomy, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982) where he makes an important point in the context of *Edward II* that although sodomy was a capital offence for much of the period he discusses, prosecutions were very rare indeed. It appears that sodomy was only prosecuted when it was connected to a larger disturbance in the social order; much male-male sexuality was included under the heading of male friendship, which was considered the highest form of human relationship in Renaissance England. Guy-Bray also cites Stephen Orgel's essay, 'Nobody's Perfect: Or Why did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?' where Orgel pointed out, 'the only dramatic instance of a homosexual relationship presented in the terms in which the culture formally conceived it – as antisocial, seditious, ultimately disastrous – is in Marlowe's *Edward II*'.

As we read the play, in the beginning itself, Marlowe gives us an idea of how passionate and impatient Edward is with regard to

Gaveston. This relationship becomes more serious when Edward not only neglects his wife Isabella but also urgent matters of the state, like the France occupation of Normandy. Edward neglects the duties of a King like anything when he prefers to have fun with Gaveston at the cost of internal security. Edward's inability to repress in the sight of the peers his 'passionate' regard for his minion can be seen in these lines when he waits for Gaveston's return from exile:

*Edward:* The wind is good; I wonder why he stays.

I fear me he is wracked upon the sea.

*Isabella:* Look, Lancaster, how passionate he is,  
And still his mind runs on his minion.

*Lancaster:* My lord-

*Edward:* How now, what news? Is Gaveston arrived?

*Mortimer Junior:* Nothing but Gaveston! What means your grace?

You have matters of more weight to think upon;  
The King of France sets foot in Normandy.

*Edward:* A trifle! We'll expel him when we please.

But tell me, Mortimer, what's thy device  
Against the stately triumph we decreed?

(EII 2.2 1-12)

*The Routledge History of Literature in English* looks at Marlowe as one of the first major writers to affirm what can be identified as a clearly homosexual sensibility, and the historical tragedy *Edward II* examines sexual choice and preference in relation to the questioning of authority, power, and love in a way which few other writers were able to do until the twentieth century. Marlowe has been described as a 'sexual political thinker' whose writings successfully question and reveal, through a process of estrangement, the terms of the contemporary debate. Here King Edward asserts his role as king, against the threats of his nobles, in honouring his beloved Gaveston:



*King Edward:*I cannot brook these haughty menaces:

Am I a king, and must be over-rul'd?  
Brother, display my ensigns in the field;  
I'll bandy with the barons and the earls,  
And either die or live with Gaveston.

*Gaveston:*I can no longer keep me from my lord.

*King Edward:*What, Gaveston! welcome! Kiss not my hand:

Embrace me, Gaveston, as I do thee:...

(EII 1.1 133-140)

The book points out that it is King Edward's love for Gaveston which brings about his downfall. A similar homosexual relationship between King Richard and his lover is significantly not mentioned in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. In the play, we see that the nobles do not have a problem as such with King's love for Gaveston unless Gaveston is bestowed with the titles and elevated in social position at a time when social hierarchy was determined by birth just because he happens to be the King's minion. The nobles are offended because Gaveston is lowborn and doesn't belong to the nobility.

Guy-Bray writes that the play's most explicit discussion of what we would now call homosexuality comes in the fourth scene. The elder Mortimer advises his nephew to make peace with Edward: 'Let him without controlment have his will. / The mightiest kings have had their minions' (4.391-2). Mortimer senior goes on to provide classical examples – Alexander, Hercules, Achilles, Cicero, and Socrates. In this speech, homoeroticism is clearly presented as no obstacle to the highest conceivable achievement in military or intellectual life: unlike sodomy, which interferes with the functioning of the social order, this homoeroticism can coexist with the status quo.

However, Mortimer's defence cannot be taken to indicate that the nobles tolerate other sexual practices instead, it means that they are willing to ignore their homophobia as long as the status quo is maintained. This is the point that the younger Mortimer goes on to make in his reply. Beginning by saying that 'Uncle, his wanton humour grieves not me', he goes on to complain that Gaveston is low born, that he spends money on pleasure that could be used to pay soldiers, that he wears very fancy clothes and jewels, and that he and Edward 'laugh at such as we, / And flout our train and jest at our attire' (4.4 18-19). Mortimer's stress on Gaveston's humble origins and the specific accusation that he is permitted to 'riot it with the treasure of the realm' point to the connection with social disorder that turns the love between men from something that can be tolerated because it can be ignored to something that becomes a sodomitical disorder.

Bray points out that Mortimer's statement that 'this I scorn, that one so basely born,' is largely Marlowe's invention: the historical Gaveston was not of humble origins. While he was not an English nobleman, he had in fact been chosen by Edward I to be the companion of the younger prince Edward. Marlowe makes the same changes in the status to an even more pronounced degree in the case of Spencer, who becomes Edward's favourite after Gaveston's death. Marlowe makes these deviations because he wanted to situate Edward's lovers in the English class system where they didn't really belong to. Because of these changes, the Gaveston and Spencer of *Edward II* come to resemble Marlowe himself, the shoemaker's son who used scholarship to rise above his original status.

Another point, where Marlowe tries to deviate from the original accounts is about Gaveston's foreignness. At various points in the play, the fact that he is French is mentioned disapprovingly, and he is associated with other foreign countries as well. Though Gaveston's

family was from Gascony in southern France, but he had spent most of his life in England and this was in any case a period in which the distinction between England and France (and especially those parts of France under English control, as Gascony was for most part of Edward's life) was not so clear cut as it was in Marlowe's time. Isabella is the other important character of French origin in the play and the contrast between her and Gaveston in this regard points out at certain important issues. When the Earl of Lancaster sees Isabella bewailing her unhappy state early on in the play, he comments, 'Look where the sister of the King of France / Sits wringing of her hands and beats her breast' (4. 187-8). Isabella's foreignness is an asset. Her marriage to Edward cemented an alliance between the countries and, as Lancaster's statement could be taken to imply, her mistreatment could lead to war between the countries.

There is an interesting exchange that happen between Isabella and Gaveston:

*Isabella:* Villian, 'tisthou that robb'st me of my lord.

*Gaveston:* Madam, 'tis you that rob me of my lord. (4.160-1)

Now, Isabella and Edward are legally wedded husband wife but Gaveston has a prior claim because he had been Edward's companion before the marriage and he is clearly the one Edward prefers. Therefore, what is most transgressive about Marlowe's play is not that the king has a favourite with whom he commits sodomy, but rather that he seeks to give this favourite the status of a consort. Edward's attempts to make Gaveston into his consort represent the ultimate point in collision between his private and public lives. The nobles move against the king because he seeks to make his 'wanton humour' into a political fact or, in other words, a same-sex marriage.

In the play's opening lines, Gaveston reads a letter from Edward:

'My father is deceased; come Gaveston,

And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.'

(1. 1-2)

It makes one to consider the fact that if Gaveston feels that he has the right to the same status as the king, a point that is borne by his frequent assumption of command. Perhaps Gaveston seeks not only to be the king's consort, but also to replace him altogether.

Bray also points out that Gaveston certainly seeks to control the king. In the second of his two great soliloquies at the beginning of the play, he rejects the service of men who have approached him and declares his need for wanton poets, pleasant wits:

Musicians, that with touching of a string  
May draw the pliant King which way I please. (1. 50-

52)

He even goes on to say, 'Music and poetry' (1.53) are what Edward likes and he can use these aesthetic pleasures to control Edward for his own advantage. And when Gaveston uses the indefinite article to refer to Edward- as he does in the passage quoted above when he says 'to be the favourite of a king'- he reveals that whatever his feelings may be for Edward as a man, his primary interest is in self-advancement.

The aesthetic pleasures Gaveston plans are also sexual and theatrical, as he makes clear when he says that 'Like sylvan nymphs my pages shall be clad' (1.57) and, especially, when he envisages

a lovely boy in Dian's shape,  
With hair that gilds the water as it glides,  
Crowns of pearl about his naked arms,  
And in his sportful hands an olive tree  
To hide those parts which men delight to see (1.60-4)

What is sodomitical in Gaveston's speech is that homoeroticism is not presented as marginal or alternative, but rather as the truth of sexual behaviour.

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### **7.3.2 Discuss the themes of Monarchy, Legitimacy and Loyalty in Edward II.**

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Ans: -Like many works of English Renaissance drama, Edward II deals extensively with the nature and limits of monarchical rule. Although the English kings and queens of the time certainly wielded more power than they would in later years, they were not absolute monarchs in the way that many rulers in continental Europe were. Instead, England had a tradition of semi-constitutional monarchy dating back to the rule of King John and the signing of the Magna Carta—a document that gave the nobility some checks on the king’s power. This tug-of-war between the monarchy and the nobility continued for the next several centuries, and forms the backdrop for Edward II, in which the nobility eventually overthrows Edward in favor of his son, whom Mortimer intends to use as a puppet ruler. However, Marlowe’s take on history also incorporates questions of personal loyalty and patriotism which—although anachronistic to the era in which the play is set—add further nuance to the conflict between Edward and the nobility.

Perhaps more than anything else, Edward’s repeated complaints about being “overruled” by the nobility reveal his shortcomings as a king. For one, the remarks betray his lack of awareness, since Gaveston is in fact “overruling” Edward’s decisions on a continual basis through his influence. Even more to the point, however, Edward’s preoccupation with the indignity of his treatment by the nobles suggests that he has difficulty viewing the broader political implications of events beyond whatever personal meaning they hold for him. This is to some extent understandable, particularly given that Edward at times expresses a desire to be free of the burdens of kingship. For as long as he is king, however, Edward has a responsibility to abide by the norms and

responsibilities of the position, which includes paying attention to the concerns of the nobility. Ultimately, the nobles decide the king has failed to live up to his duties, and they rise up in revolt to depose him.

Whether Edward's flouting of his kingly responsibilities does justify deposing him is a complicated question. Early in the play, even those characters who are most frustrated with the king are wary of actually taking action against him because they believe the role of the king demands loyalty, regardless of the fitness of the individual who has the role. The Bishop of Canterbury, for instance, cautions Mortimer Junior to "lift not his swords against the King." The exception, as this exchange demonstrates, is Mortimer, who repeatedly argues that the king's actions have broken the implicit contract that makes him king in the first place, and that it is therefore "lawful" to rise up against him.

His argument is based not only on the idea that Edward's actions have wronged his nobles, but also that they have "wronged the country." Warwick and even Kent—Edward's own brother—eventually come to share in this view, citing their duty to England as a reason to support the coup that deposes the king. This line of reasoning, if accepted, transforms the nobles' rebellion into an act of patriotism. In addition, this logic also redefines treason as a matter of undermining the country's welfare, rather than rebelling against any particular leader. The nobles, for instance, repeatedly describe Galveston as a "traitor" despite his loyalty to the king.

This idea of civic or patriotic loyalty—loyalty not to a person but to a country—however, is tarnished by Mortimer's own ambition, and his behavior after his own ascent to power. His pleasure at seeing the "proudest lords salute him" does not make him seem like someone who places the interests of his country before his own. Perhaps, then, the best way to understand Marlowe's treatment of loyalty and royal

legitimacy is to view it in the context of the time in which the play was written and not the time in which it was set. Renaissance England was moving away from the medieval feudal system, where individuals owed allegiance to a particular lord or monarch, and was beginning to embrace something like modern nationalism, where individuals owe allegiance to a nation-state that exists independently of any particular ruler. The transition was incomplete at the time Marlowe was writing, however, and in fact England at the time was strongly united under Elizabeth I, though tensions over succession marked both the times before and after her reign (and in fact, about 40 years after the publication of the play England would erupt in a civil war that would end with the execution of its king). This may explain why Edward II views Mortimer's patriotism with some suspicion, while painting Gaveston and Edward's personal devotion to one another in a relatively sympathetic light.

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### **7.3.3 Discuss the theme of social mobility in the play.**

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Ans: - Social status dictates every aspect of life for members of Edward's court. It defines privileges, responsibilities and loyalties. For most characters their social class is crucial to their sense of self. The play confronts several social conventions of both early modern society as well as its drama during the period, especially class, sumptuary laws and traditional gender and sexual relationship goals. Throughout Edward II, the courtiers, especially Mortimer Jr., consistently point out that they are not enraged with King Edward and Piers Gaveston, his lowly born lover, because of the homoerotic nature of their relationship, but rather because Edward is giving Gaveston titles of nobility that he is not of the proper social class to have bestowed on him, therefore violating typical conventions regarding social class. Marlowe bitterly reveals through Edward's

tragedy the way in which Renaissance society categorizes people, particularly in reference to their social standing from birth and the way in which anything outside of traditional social is termed “unnatural”. Both Gaveston’s and eventually Spencer’s social mobility and striving for more power and influence is referred to this way throughout the play. While Edward has not himself attempted social mobility – he is king, he cannot rise any higher to power than he already is – he has aided in it and neglected his nobles who has “earned” their titles by being born into them. Mortimer Jr. who was born into nobility – into the right to wear luxurious clothes, and into the right social class to receive the sorts of title that Gaveston has thus far received from Edward – is highly offended that his king would dote on someone who was low born, when he clearly has several loyal subjects who are of a class deemed “socially appropriate” for him to dote upon and give titles to.

Throughout Edward II, Mortimer tries to seduce Isabella, but she is loyal to her husband despite is abuse and neglect of her. However, she eventually gives into Mortimer’s seduction, allowing him to achieve social mobility just as Gaveston has. Ironically, Mortimer who claims to be angry at Gaveston for trying to raise his social status through association with the king, commits the same act with the queen. Marlowe uses the manipulative and equally wrong decisions of Mortimer as well as his ultimate demise as a way to defy the social conventions and theatrical expectations that were placed upon playwrights of this period. Attempts at social mobility were frowned upon by upper class who were born into their station at this period of time, so everyone that attempts or aids in social mobility throughout the work is punished: Edward, Gaveston and Spencer. However, Mortimer is executed as well by Edward III. He is guilty of attempting social mobility but moreover, he is guilty of hypocrisy.



Social Mobility is a major theme within many renaissance plays, but it is nearly hyper emphasized throughout Edward II, as every character other than Edward III is somehow either engaged in, supporting or fighting against social mobility. Marlowe uses Mortimer's character to show the hypocrisy of citizens during his lifetime who opposed social mobility as well as unnatural relationships, and somehow uses him as a scapegoat to reveal his dissatisfaction with the social conventions of Elizabethan society.

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### **7.3.4 What is the historical significance of Marlowe's Edward II?**

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Ans: - Edward II ascended to the throne of England in 1307 following the death of his father, King Edward I. Known as Edward of Carnarvon, the second King Edward proved to be a weak ruler who suffered military and political defeats as well as attacks on his personal character.

Marlowe's Edward II is the finest flowering of a historical play. The historical fervor and the spirited zeal are well conceived here. Marlowe doesn't follow the chronological order of the historical event. He adopts, abridges, transposes and juxtaposes them to create new situations. He has abridged the time span and omitted certain events to compress the plot. Clumsy plot construction characterizes all historical plays but Edward II has a plot, well unit and it is the direct outcome of Marlowe's realism that a plot has to be coherent. He creates a tragedy but the tragedy is not his, it is the part of history. His characters are vividly decorated rather than the historical figures. In reality, Edward was not so great a voluntary figure as he is presented in the play nor did he ill-treat the queen as he is presented in the play. It is true that Edward II dramatizes the weaknesses and failure of a

king. The playwright has shortened the time duration of 23 years of reign of Edward II in something like 12 months. Thus, in the play banishment and return of Gaveston from the exile occur in one and the same scene. As a matter of historical fact, there was a gap of almost one year between the two events. But these changes and digressions are there to make history well dramatized. In *Edward II*, Marlowe finds in the historical character of Edward II, a true symbol of a tragic protagonist as per prevailing spirit of the Renaissance age. He finds the character of the king quite suitable for delineation as a tragic figure. The king, on account of his weakness and lust, is ultimately deposed and murdered. But at the same time, he also gains in dignity as the catastrophe comes nearer.

The play is a tragedy built on history. Marlowe's chief source is Holinshed's *Chronicles*. It is a memorable work of history in English in the Elizabethan age. In the play, Marlowe has covered quite a long period of history. It is definitely no easy task to build up an effective tragic play out of so many divergent and incoherent facts of a particular period. Marlowe has set aside different foreign affairs during the rule of Edward II. The battle of England of Scotland is almost dropped and only scantily referred to in the report of elder Mortimer's arrest. The battle of France is also treated summarily. Marlowe has condensed historical facts to make his dramatic action composite. The long Civil War is condensed into a single battle of Bannockburn. Gaveston's recall, banishment and recall again are also condensed into a single incident. Marlowe's dramatic craft has turned some bare historical facts into moving tragic scenes in his play.

*Edward II* of Marlowe shows several other historical digressions and inaccuracies. But in spite of all the drawbacks, *Edward II* stands supreme as a historical play. The characters are essentially historical. They speak for themselves. The audience may also mark Edward's weaknesses, his lowness to his wife, his dotage to Gaveston,

his haughtiness to his barons and carelessness about the interests of England and English people. They may also mark the insolence and haughtiness of barons, the selfish and unpatriotic spirit of Mortimer and faithlessness and hypocrisy of the Queen. History is a platform to Marlowe, to test the limit of human indulgence. Marlowe's Edward II owes to history and is historical. His credit lies in his superb treatment of history as the basic of his tragedy. He remains loyal to the basic events or facts of history. At the same time, he has made certain omissions, condensations, deviations and innovations to meet his dramatic requirements. He has brilliantly exhibited a rare dramatic skill to synthesize historical reality with tragic intensity, the irony of kingship with the sin of arrogant ambition.

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### **7.3.5 Discuss the role of Mortimer Jr. and his relation with Isabella in the play.**

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Ans: - Mortimer jr. is a powerful member of the English nobility and eventually the lead challenger to Edward II's rule. As Marlowe states outright in the play's full title, Mortimer is extremely proud and he views the influence and presence of Gaveston -a commoner- as an affront to his own rightful position and dignity. He is somewhat imbued with dual personality. His character undergoes a change in the play. At the beginning of the play Mortimer's actions symbolize his patriotism. He is overwhelmed with the love for his country and he would do anything for the sake of his country's dignity and solidarity. When the clutch of Gaveston makes the king to forget all his noble duties, Mortimer prepared to rebel against the king. Mortimer's hate for Gaveston is beyond question. He is bent upon removing him staking all his interest and energy. He instigates all the barons to rise in revolt against the king to banish Gaveston. Mortimer is the angry young man, impudent to the king, fiercely impetuous, the outspoken

spokesman for his elders. He is the most scornful of them. Mortimer's resentment is the fact that Gaveston encourages the king to spend money on pageants and plays rather than military matters. Besides being rather militant and hot-tempered himself, Mortimer feels a sense of obligation to the former soldiers now in need of pensions. Although Mortimer never makes any secret of his discontent, it is likely Edward's unwillingness to pay ransom for the return of his uncle, Mortimer senior, that pushes him into open rebellion. While Mortimer's initial resistance to Edward II seems to be based on a degree of principle, he grows increasingly less sympathetic as he rises to a position of power. He has Edward murdered, despite Edward's willingness to abdicate the throne. The courage and resignation with which he faces his own execution at the end of the play, however, do restore a sense of dignity to him in the play's final moments.

The few months during which he stays in France with Queen Isabella make him a different man altogether. His illicit intimacy with the queen raises the question of his patriotism. He is moved by the queen's miserable plight -- result of the king's attachment with Gaveston. With winning smiles and the practice of feminine art she easily prevails on him to agree to recall of his bitterest foe, Gaveston from exile. When she complains that the king doesn't love her, he advises her to cease to love him in return. After becoming the lover of Isabella, he uses his relationship with her to manipulate both her and her young son Edward III -- the new king.

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## **7.4 A Note on Language**

### **7.4.1 Blank Verse**

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Though blank verse was not invented by Christopher Marlowe, he is credited with having instituted its use in English drama. Blank verse is a verse form of unrhymed lines with a measured rhythm; the rhythm

usually takes the form of iambic pentameter, ten syllables with the accent falling on every alternate syllable. Marlowe has used slight variations in accenting or in the placement of pauses (*caesura*) to retain the freshness of normal speech, while maintaining the formality of poetry. It affords great flexibility for it is a medium that blends itself perfectly to the expression of natural sentences: “Here, take my crown, the life of Edward too, / Two kings in England cannot reign at once.” Marlowe freed dramatic lyrics from the constraints of rhyming lines, thus paving the way for further lyric innovations. Marlowe showed the way for Shakespeare who took more liberties with the stresses and let his characters utter even more realistic utterances than Marlowe was able to achieve.

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#### 7.4.2 Imagery

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The images conveyed in the language of a play suggest the themes and issues addressed in the play. Images suggesting the external marks of status appear over and over again throughout *Edward II*, such as the crown, battle ensigns, ceremonial robes, jewellery, hats and so on. Though these images reflect the King’s status, the function of these items is perverted by the king, in his mania for entertainment and self-indulgence. For example, when the Bishop of Coventry angers him for having signed the order banishing Gaveston from court, Edward punishes the holy man by stripping away his vestments. A priest’s vestment holds symbolic importance, and to lay hands upon them amount to sacrilege to the Bishop of Canterbury as well as an act of violence against the Church itself. This scene is repeated with Edward as the victim at the end of the play when he is stripped of his crown. His pitiable condition can be imagined from the fact that he tells Lightborn to convey a message to Isabella saying that he “looked not thus” when he “ran at tilt in France.” Edward’s appearance is an

important part of his position. During Renaissance England, there used to be tournament where the players dressed in their finest clothes performed mocked battles with each other. Therefore, whether it was a real war or play war, it required the players to dress up. The fact that Edward was willing to “undress” a priest makes him irreverent. He is depicted as overtly concerned with pageants and show but he went to battle only once, at the Battle of Bannockburn, and there he was so garishly dressed that he made himself a laughingstock. He lost the battle that proves he is a man more of show than of substance. On another occasion, he asks the nobles to tell him what “device” or design they have put on their ensigns, or battle flags. Each of the nobles describe a scene that can be read as a symbolic threat to the king and one of their devices contains the Latin phrase which means “surrounded by death.” Edward is thus surrounded by subtle visual images that symbolize the dangers lurking around him.

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## 7.5 Summing up

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In this unit, we have dwelt in some detail on issues of monarchy, legitimacy, social mobility besides others in the ‘question-answer’ form. Though we design the analyses keeping in mind the practical issue of preparing for the examinations, it is hoped that you will go through them and formulate our own answer for yourself in the light of the analyses offered in ‘question-answer’ section.

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## 7.6 References and Suggested Readings

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## Unit 1

### A General Introduction to Shakespeare

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- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Shakespeare's Life
- 1.4 Overview of the plays
- 1.5 Intellectual Conventions
- 1.6 Theatrical Conventions
- 1.7 Character
- 1.8 Critical Reception
- 1.9 References and Suggested Readings

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#### 1.1 OBJECTIVES

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

With the help of this unit you should be able to

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



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## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

As examples of such constructions of Shakespeare you might consider 'Shakespeare our Contemporary', 'political Shakespeare' or 'postcolonial Shakespeares'. (Constructs that represent the governing ideas of a time, these are also the titles of important path-breaking books on Shakespeare.)

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

- a) a political climate where an authoritarian regime intrudes into the private lives of its citizens (as shown in Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*) or
- b) our post- 9/11 recognition of listening to the 'other' as a moral imperative.

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### **1.3 SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE**

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The first extant reference to Shakespeare is as the member of a theatrical troupe (The Lord Chamberlain's Men). Shakespeare, along with William Kempe and Richard Burbage, signed a receipt for the company's honorarium of 20 pounds. There is very little definite information but the traces that are available make extremely intriguing

reading. Shakespeare acted in 1598 in Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* and in 1603 in *Sejanus*. We also learn from what the *Cambridge Companion* calls "traditions of uncertain reliability" that Shakespeare played "kingly parts" and that he also played the faithful old servant Adam in *As You Like It* and the Ghost in *Hamlet*. We do know for sure that Shakespeare served his troupe in a triple capacity: as playwright, actor and business director.

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

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

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

At the centre of the curriculum was the study of Latin and Shakespeare's texts often carry echoes of many of the great Latin texts taught there - Plautus and Seneca in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare also seems to have been particularly fond of Aesop's *Fables*, Apuleius's *Golden Ass* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Ben Jonson's comment that Shakespeare had 'small Latin and less Greek' appears in a new light in the face of such evidence.

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

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

In February 1616, on the occasion of the wedding of his daughter Judith, Shakespeare appears to have fallen ill. A Stratford physician and vicar noted fifty years later in his diary that Shakespeare and his fellow poets Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson "had a merry meeting, and it seems drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted".(Shakespeare's daughter Judith was still alive when Ward made his diary entry).(Source: *The Norton Shakespeare*)

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## 1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE PLAYS

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

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

*Richard III* (the final play of the first tetralogy or group of four history plays that covers the reigns of Henry VI and Richard III) showcases his unusual and powerful talent in the depiction of a brilliantly

conceived central character, a command of histrionic rhetoric and a moral vision of English history - elements that he will go on to elaborate and explore memorably in the later histories.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **List of plays**

#### **Comedies:**

The Two Gentlemen of Verona  
The Taming of the Shrew  
The Comedy of Errors  
Love's Labour's Lost  
A Midsummer Night's Dream  
The Merchant of Venice  
The Merry Wives of Windsor  
Much Ado About Nothing  
As You Like It  
Twelfth Night or What You Will  
Troilus and Cressida  
Measure for Measure  
All's Well That Ends Well  
The Two Noble Kinsmen

#### **Histories:**

Henry VI (The First part of the Contention of the Two Houses of York and Lancaster).

3 Henry VI ( The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good King Henry the Sixth).

1 Henry VI

Richard III  
Richard II  
King John  
1 Henry IV  
2 Henry IV  
Henry V  
Henry VIII

**Tragedies:**

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

**Romances: (also known as the last plays)**

Pericles  
The Winter's Tale  
Cymbeline  
The Tempest

**Poetry:**

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

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## 1.5 INTELLECTUAL CONVENTIONS

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

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

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

**SAQ**

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

.....  
.....

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

.....  
.....

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



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

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

**SAQ**

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

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.....

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

.....  
.....  
.....

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

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

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

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

**SAQ**

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

.....  
.....

Elizabethan political views were also in a process of change. The monarchic analogy with God was weakened and human weakness

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

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

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

Other disturbing developments included the recognition that corruption and mutability affected not only the sublunar but also the supralunar universe. In 1572, a bright new star or nova appeared (followed by others in 1600 and 1604) and then slowly disappeared, an event interpreted as showing the impermanence even of the cosmos.

As these doubts crept into Renaissance thought, dread of the hereafter, the impossibility of meaningful action, and uncertainty about life on earth and human relationships seem to have become the areas of concern for Renaissance dramatists who repeatedly figured the world

as stage and man as actor in temporary, borrowed and often ill-fitting costume, strutting and fretting his meaningless hour.

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

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

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

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

Note how the analogical habit of mind seems to be a common feature in the sense that you get of the Shakespearean drama, but is frequently subverted by the relativist bent of mind, by the disjuncture between language and reality, by the dissolution of absolutes and the breakdown of earlier conceptions of politics based on the maintenance of the analogy between king and God.

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

### **Check Your Progress**

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

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## **1.6 THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS**

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

The stage conventions taken for granted by Shakespeare and his audience were linked to the physical characteristics of the Elizabethan stage. Whether at the Theatre or the Globe or the Blackfriars,

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

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

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

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

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

Before the battle of Agincourt, the Chorus to Act IV apologizes in advance for disgracing the great event 'with four or five most vile and ragged foils,/ Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous', but asks the

audience: 'Yet sit and see,/ Minding true things by what their mock'ries be.'

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

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

### **Understanding Convention**

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

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

Theatrical conventions like intellectual conventions are shared elements of a particular period. We frequently speak about Shakespeare's "originality". But to get a sense of the truly "original" in

his plays it is important to understand that a great deal of the structure and mode of dramatic communication comes from these shared practices. Just as Shakespeare transformed commonly known narrative sources to write his great dramas, he relied on commonly used and recognized cues and signs to develop his own sophisticated presentations.

**SAQ**

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

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

.....  
.....

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

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.....

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## **1.7 CHARACTER**

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

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



have in mind at this point because this is the way the audience is expected to see her as she appears in the context of the play.

An example from *Hamlet* should make this clear. Take the scene where Gertrude recounts the moment of Ophelia's drowning. One could read this scene by imagining Gertrude standing by on the bank watching the dying struggles of Ophelia, noting details of flowers and so on and doing nothing to help her and interpret her character from this apparently callous behavior. The point of this scene however is not to give an insight into an aspect of Gertrude's character which is insignificant for the role that she is given in the play. In keeping with Elizabethan stage conventions the audience is expected to accept the information of Ophelia's death as a step in the progression of the play.

**SAQ**

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

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

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## **1.8 CRITICAL RECEPTION**

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

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

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

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

As a result of these re-readings, scholars began to examine emergent colonial discourses and relations during the early modern period and their impact on various aspects of English history, culture and

representations. They looked at representations of Islam in Elizabethan and Jacobean England (Samuel Chew's *The Crescent and the Rose*); images of Black Africans in the period and the literature (Eldred Jones' *Othello's Countrymen* and *The Elizabethan Image of Africa*); racial discourses and the status of foreigners during the period and in Shakespeare's plays (G.K. Hunter's *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition*).

Studies of this kind provided a preparatory ground for subsequent scholarship that looked at the relations between state power, the emergence of new classes and ideologies, the reshaping of patriarchal authority, the development of the idea of an English nation, sexual practices and the real and imaginary experiences of English people in the Americas, Africa and Asia. These experiences built upon and transformed ideologies about 'others' that had come from the experiences of the Crusades; had emerged in the interactions with other Europeans such as the Spanish, the Italians and the Dutch; and those that developed in relation to 'others' living on the margins of English society - the Jews, the gypsies, the Irish, the Welsh and the Scots.

### **The 'other'**

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

#### **Stop to Consider**

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

by the male characters in the play. A postcolonial approach to *The Tempest* might find in the Prospero and Caliban relationship a metaphor for the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized.

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

**SAQ**

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

.....  
.....

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

.....  
.....

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

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## Unit 2

### *Richard III:*

## INTRODUCTION AND STAGE HISTORY

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2.1 Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Date

2.4 Sources

2.5 Contexts of the Play

2.6 The play on the Stage

2.7 Critical Reception/Adaptations

2.8 A Note on Language and Style

2.9 Summing Up

3.0 References and Suggested Readings

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### 2.1 Objective

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The objectives of this unit is to

- *Introduce* the play *Richard III*
- *Familiarise* you with Elizabethan theatre
- *Help* you assess the importance of the play among the other works by Shakespeare

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## 2.2 Introduction

### 2.2 Date

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The exact year of the performance or the writing of the play has not been confirmed yet. It was probably written between 1591 to 1592. There are two primary texts, the First Quarto (1597) and the Folio (1623). However, looking at the inclusion of the play in a list by Meres in *Palladis*

*Tamia* (1598) as one of the six plays proving Shakespeare to be 'most excellent' in tragedy 'among the English', it can be assumed that the play was well received since its first appearance.

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## 2.3 Sources

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You must remember while undertaking a reading of the play that the character of Richard III is not an imaginary character. Rather, as belonging to the genre of history plays, it records the life of the last Lancastrian king Richard III and his reign from 1483-85. The first known source for recording the eventual life of the monarch in a dramatic representation is the *Anglica Historia* of

Polydore Vergil, an Italian humanist who, came to England in 1502 as a collector of Peter's Pence and was later appointed by Henry VII to write the first Tudor history of England. Vergil reportedly completed the history in about 1516 and began to publish in 1534. The second source is *The History of King Richard the Third*, by Sir Thomas More, which, was left unfinished about 1513, was not published until after his death. Both the writers have been known for their loyalty to the Tudor dynasty and hence despite being different in scope and recording of details of the same period, they project similar attitude



and political biases. This makes it clear as to why similar presentation of the character glorifying the Tudor dynasty and maligning the Plantagenet dynasty represented by Richard III can also be seen in Shakespeare's text. However, both these sources were received by Shakespeare through the medium of Hall and Holinshed. The play is immediately based upon the chronicles of these two famous chroniclers.

It is usually argued that the First Quarto of the play is the closest to the actual performing text of Shakespeare's play. However, some scholars have rejected this argument for the surprising number and range of typographical errors in the First Quarto. Moreover, a certain date for the play's first performance is also not known. The first of a string of Quarto publications appeared in 1597, which makes it a good assumption that the play was well received. But it was only in 1602 that the first good reference to the play appears and hence there are many possibilities regarding the time of the play. However, Richard III as a character first appeared in *2 Henry VI* as Richard, the Duke of York and develops as a significant character with all his ambitions and cruelty by the end of *3 Henry VI*. Edward IV becomes the king after the death of his father Henry VI and Richard faces a lot of obstacles in his way of becoming the king. It is for this desire for political power and personal pleasure that he resolves to be involved in war against all the possible rivals and enemies in the road to the crown. Shakespeare's *Richard III* begins at this juncture which makes it possible to portray the villainy of the character in an unprecedented fashion. His love for the crown was made very clear towards the end of *3 Henry VI*.

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## 2.4 Contexts of the play

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The historical setting of the play is the aftermath of the Wars of the Roses. The play *Richard III* is a history play that deals with the central

character Richard's sudden rise to the throne and his short tenure(1483-85) as the last Lancastrian king. Given the known conflict between the Plantagenet dynasty and the Tudor dynasty for the sake power, the plotting and subsequent reign of Richard as presented in the play can be studied having the historical conflict as the backdrop. When we try to uncover how Shakespeare has presented the entire episode projecting the villainy of Richard we must keep in mind his own position in this narrative.

It is well known by now that Shakespeare wrote for a Tudor monarch and used Tudor historians such as Holinshed as sources for his chronicle plays. Holinshed's version adopted by him for the play, on the other hand, is derived from the *History of Richard III* written by Sir Thomas More. Holinshed in his *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, volume 6 quotes More's version of Richard III as "little of stature, ill featured of limes, crooke backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard favored of visage ...he was malicious, wrathful, envious and from afore his birth ever forward". This very version of Richard III has been presented by Shakespeare in the play as he draws the last Lancastrian king. As all of you know that the Tudor dynasty succeeded Richard's Plantagenet dynasty.

The play Richard III presents king Richard as a joyful, cruel caricature who derives pleasure in explaining his villainies to the audience. His character may remind you of famous villains like Iago from *Othello*. The villainy of Richard and his ambition projects the conspiracy, political intrigues and manipulation very much common within the system of monarchy. The conflict between the dynasties and the subsequent turns of power cover a major part of England's monarchical history and the play must be read against that backdrop. In the course of only a few weeks, Richard effects the deaths of Henry VI and his son, his own brother the Duke of Clarence, his wife Anne, his friend Buckingham, his enemies Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey,

and most importantly, his two innocent nephews, the Princes in the Tower, one of whom should have reigned in his stead. Thus, the greed for power and the combined issues of hatred, enmity, betrayal and war vis a vis the complex nature of human relationships at a crucial juncture of shift in power form the backdrop of the play.

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## 2.5 The play on the stage

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As it has been stated above that no certain date is known regarding the first performance of the play, yet the stage history of the play since the first decade of the seventeenth century presents it as a very popular and well received historical drama. You have also been acquainted with the fact that Richard III as a character had been there in both the 2 and 3 *Henry VI* plays occupying a dominant position as his future course of action with the intent of being the king were significantly unveiled before the audience through the use of asides. Moreover, in other genres such as ballads and songs of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries he appears as an important character. Besides the plays by Shakespeare, he also features in three other plays *Richardus Tertius* (1579) by Thomas Legge, *The Second Part of Henry Richmond* (1599) by Robert Wilson and *Richard Crookback* (1602) by Ben Jonson. Given the uncertain date of the writing of the play, the first performance of the play before 1593 also do not seem plausible as from the month of June of 1592 the public theatres of London were closed owing to the outbreak of Plague.

According to John Dover Wilson, the phrase 'lately Acted by the Right Honourable the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants' that appear on the title-page of the first Quarto were kept intact till 1605. It was replaced in 1612 and 1622 to 'lately Acted by the King Maiesties Seruants'. These words provide an impression of the play being staged during the period till 1622 but no record of the performances are available till

date. The allusions and mentions related to the character of Richard III even after the Shakespearean play can be found in several seventeenth century plays such as *Returne from Parnassus Part II* (1601), *Scourge of Villainie* (1598), *The Iron Age* (1613) and *Little French Lawyer* (1619). In these plays either the character was presented even if for a brief period of time or important information related to him such as the news of his death are shared in the course of the plays.

It is known from various sources that the play was performed on 16 November 1633, 'by the K.players' at the Court before King Charles and the Queen which seems to be the only notice of the play before the closing of the theatres in 1642.

The later staging of the play especially after the rewriting by Colley Cibber, an important poet and playwright in the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century has gained huge popularity. In July 1700 Cibber's play was acted at Drury Lane in which Cibber himself played the titular role which he continued for a long time until the advent of Garrick in 1741. *Richard III* by Cibber was performed eighty seven times during this period. Out of these, Drury Lane was the venue for fifty two performances but from 1721, the newly emerging Lincoln's Inn Fields occurred to be the other significant venue where fifteen performances were held. The role of Richard in the Lincoln's Inn Fields performances was played by Ryan, who played the role of Richmond in a Drury Lane performance in 1715. Another venue named Goodman's Fields showed the play nine times and in seven out of these nine times, the role of Richard was played by Delane. The venue Covent Garden hosted the play seven times during this period where the central role was played by Quin.

These important and interesting staging and cast of the play *Richard III*, both the ones by Shakespeare and the later play by Cibber talk

about the popularity of the play which inspires many of the later adaptations of the same.

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## 2.6 Critical reception/adaptations

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You have seen till now that the play was immensely popular in the seventeenth century and multiple allusions to the play have been recorded by Shakespeare scholars. A glimpse at the contemporary reception and adaptation of the play will help you contextualize it as one of the important historical plays by the playwright. Besides the staging of the play, the cinematic adaptations would help you situate the play in your local contexts. As it has been mentioned, Colley Cibber, playwright and poet laureate in the late 17th and early 18th century, was the first author to substantially rewrite *Richard III* and his version has been considered as an important text till the recent times. In terms of editing the original play, Cibber has omitted many lines and it is around half the length of Shakespeare's. He omits out some characters such as of Queen Margaret, Edward IV, the Duke of Clarence and Hastings and many important scenes were seriously edited which according to John Dover Wilson leaves the central character Richard III in the centre of action but without the subtlety and wit of the Shakespearean villain.

The first act of the play by Shakespeare was completely excised in Cibber's version regarding which he later clarifies that apprehending a political turn of events it was removed. During the first performance of the play James II was in exile in France and it was feared that the tragic end of Henry VI presented in the first act might eventually arouse sympathy for James II. Thus, the popular and influential version by Cibber severely edits the Shakespearean play keeping in mind the tempo and political environment of the time.

In the previous section it is mentioned that the performance of Cibber's play in the seventeenth century which gained a huge popularity and continued to be in circulation till recently. In 1845 a serious adaptation of Shakespearean version was undertaken by Samuel Phelps where many alterations made by Cibber were rejected including the inclusion of the character of Margaret. The play reportedly went on for twenty-four nights which however could not stop the circulation of Cibber's version. Subsequently in 1877 and 1896-97 Henry Irving reproduced the Shakespeare play with some editing under the Lyceum production. Similar reproductions of the play can be witnessed in the twentieth century by several other production companies. However, since 1914 the Old Vic company have been the most frequent production at London which includes total ten performances. The first was in 1915 and continuing the production till the later decades of the twentieth century it has hosted numerous performances of the play. Nevertheless, out of all these later revivals of the play the role of Richard played by Laurence Olivier in the 1948-49 reproductions of the play at the Old Vic Company has remained one of the most memorable renditions of the role under the direction of John Burrell. During the period from 1886 to 1939, the play was also reproduced eighteen times at Stratford, out of which for fourteen times it was directed by Benson.

Similar to that of such popularity of the play in England, the play was highly appreciated in the United States. The first reported performance of the play in New York was in 1750 and thereafter it was shown almost every year there till 1889. This tradition, however, declined in the subsequent times. In all of these productions the version by Colley Cibber was adopted except the direction by Edwin Booth in 1878 where he for the first time performed the text by Shakespeare.

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## 2.7 A note on Language and Style

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As a student of literature you should keep in mind that in any great drama the reading of any scene needs a comprehensive understanding of style, character-construction and subject matter as they are interdependent. It is not possible to talk about independent language without characterisation or construction without reference to the theme of the play. However, a special attention towards language needs a close scrutiny of versification, imagery and frequent use of key words. The rich variety of Elizabethan drama till the late 1590s in terms of dramatic types, styles and modes of presentation helped Shakespeare design *Richard III* where a mixture of all these available tropes and an eye for innovation can be noticed. In fact, many scholars consider *Richard III* as a focal point where various elements of pre-Shakespearian drama appear in conjunction with innovations introduced by Shakespeare. While reading the play, you can examine the ways in which Shakespeare used prevalent norms and stylistic patterns. The play provides an excellent example of his ability to mix and merge the dramatic traditions of his times, to bring into new use the old devices and combine heterogeneous forms in a coherent dramatic structure. The play is rich in showcasing this interplay between tradition and originality and the making of a new style out of inherited forms.

The play begins with a long soliloquy by Richard, still the Duke of Gloucester and we see Shakespeare alluding to the seasonal metaphor and the changing nature of politics and dynastic fortune. We come across the first few lines in Act I, scene I :

Now is the winter of our discontent  
Made glorious summer by this son of York,

And all the clouds that loured upon our house  
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.  
Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths  
Our bruised arms hung up for monuments,  
Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,  
Our dreadful marches to delightful measures. (1-8)

This tradition of introducing the central figure through a glimpse into his inner thought, seems to be an important trope used by Shakespeare. Such prologues, prepare the audience for the opening situation that is very much simplified and provides almost all the necessary information regarding the play. His announcement in the same prologue prepares the audience to witness the turn of events in his life when he says:

And, therefore, since I cannot prove a lover,  
To entertain these fair well spoken days,  
I am determined to prove a villain (28-30)

Even in pre-Shakespearian drama villains always reveal themselves in a planning monologue at the outset of the play or at the end of the first scene in which they appear. Richard speaks five soliloquies in the play, four of them significantly placed in the first three scenes, so as to prepare the audience for the turn of events and also to confide on them. In fact, the scene also ends with another long soliloquy by Richard. The language used throughout the play is full of situational irony as Shakespeare has connected the occurrence of the verbal words containing irony with what happens before them. Let's look at an example from the first scene of the play where the role of Richard as an enthusiastic advocate and loving brother is contrasted ironically



with the previous announcements of his plotting against his brother George, the Duke of Clarence.

A close study of the range of Richard's tone, his use of subtle irony, suggestiveness and false brotherly love indicates at Shakespeare's adoption of a style newly developed for the historical plays.

The absence of a formal tone and the subtle hints at the playfulness of the events are duly complimented by the language of the play. What is more interesting is the presence of conversational tone in the dialogue between the different characters of the play. The colloquial everyday phrases can be seen replacing the conventional declaration. Shakespeare's use of frequent parenthetical and confirmatory notes throughout the dialogues between characters, the insertion of questions in such dialogues and words of address make the language lively and vivid. The ability of Richard to modulate the language, to play with the key and mode of expression, is presented as an important element of his enigmatic nature. It is as if his success in commanding others is dependent upon such craft of language and gesture, which for him is a secretive practice full of excitement and which he is seen enjoying thoroughly.

You can notice an excellent use of soliloquies in almost all of Shakespeare's plays and *Richard III* is no exception. In fact in Elizabethan drama, soliloquies form a major device for revealing the plans and proceedings of the play, highlighting the significant events of the plot and shedding light on the nature of the speakers. The soliloquies in this play also not only unfold Richard's plans, but make the audience well aware of his nature. A closer look at the skillful use of language in these soliloquies will help you situate the character within the manifold plans and intrigues. We witness the amused scorn in his exclamations such as "*Simple, plain Clarence*",

the sarcasm in announcing the intentions of murdering his enemies as Shakespeare frequently adds the phrase “sending them to heaven” and such brilliant use of language asserts the immoral nature of Richard and reestablishes his villainy. You will notice Richard’s mocking references to heaven and God that reaffirms his immoral plans and throughout the play, and his use of the verb *to bustle* (152) to describe his own projected activities on earth is another characteristic feature of the style adopted by Shakespeare. The rhetorical device of repeating a particular phrase “her husband and her father” by Richard in the final soliloquy presents Shakespeare’s attention towards expressing the character’s love for paradox and a cruelty that remain mostly unbelievable.

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## **2.8 Summing up**

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In this unit, we discussed the significance of the play *Richard II* as an important work by Shakespeare that familiarizes us with the dynastic politics of the fifteenth century England. The monarchy and its history had always been filled with revenge, hatred, usurpation, betrayal and frequent change of power. Through the ambitious design and plotting of Richard II to be the monarch and later to remain unchallenged in power reasserts this shifting nature of politics. You have also been introduced with the political prejudices reflected in the historical sources of the play and in Shakespeare’s portrayal of the central character. Nevertheless, the popularity of the play and its subsequent reception owing to the marvel of Shakespeare in terms of style, language and treatment of the notion of evil establishes the importance of the play and its inclusion in the course.

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## 2.9 References and Suggested Readings

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## Unit 3

### *Richard III:*

## Reading the Play

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3.1 Objectives

3.2 Act-wise Summary

3.3 Major Themes

3.4 Summing Up

3.5 References and Suggested Readings

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### 3.1 The objective of this unit is-

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- To provide you with a concise act-wise summary of the play *Richard III*.
- To help you with grasping the story without missing any vital information about it.
- To help you recognise the themes of the play.

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## 3.2 Act-Wise Summary

### 3.2.1 Act I

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#### Scene I

The scene opens with Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later King Richard III) addressing the audience in an extensive dramatic monologue introducing us to the context of the play. Richard refers to the end of the extensive war between the house of Lancaster and the house of York popularly known as the ‘war of the roses’ which is a

cause of celebration among all. His brother Edward has been crowned as the king Edward IV of England. However, Richard is jealous of his brother who now enjoys the privileges of a king. While bitterly lamenting his own bad luck in having been born with physical deformities, he secretly vows to compensate his shortcomings by making others' lives miserable and draw satisfaction from it. He implies that he wants to become the king in the end. Accordingly he lets the audience learn that he has already set into motion plots against his own brothers, Clarence and a sickly king Edward IV, and against other nobles.

Richard has incensed the king against the younger brother Clarence by planting rumours against him which worked to his favour. Now Clarence has been led to the Tower of London, a political prison. Richard pretends to sympathise with Clarence's misfortune and blames Edward's wife Queen Elizabeth or Lady Shore to have influenced the king into ordering Clarence's imprisonment. In the presence of the prison keeper, Brakenbury, Richard cunningly speaks of how Elizabeth influenced the king to appoint her relatives to courtly positions. Richard tells Clarence that he would try all means to free him from imprisonment the soonest possible. Meanwhile Brackenbury takes Clarence away to the tower leaving a happy Richard behind.

As Clarence is led away by the prison keeper lord Hastings enters the scene. Hastings was imprisoned under suspicions of treason fueled by Richard himself. Richard pretends to have had a hand in freeing him since it was apparently king Edward whose wrong rule has had good courtiers imprisoned while the evil ones were free enjoying the courtly privileges. He fakes concern for Hastings' wellbeing and pretends unawareness about the current political affairs of the king's court. Hastings informs him that king Edward is dying. Richard gloats over his future prospects of becoming the king himself once the legal heir, Clarence, too would die. He contemplates marrying Lady Anne Neville, the widowed daughter-in-law of Henry VI of the house of Lancaster, who was deposed and murdered by the Yorks. Richard shows his diabolic nature by getting amused at the idea of persuading Lady Anne to marry him.

## **Scene II**

This scene opens with a widowed Lady Anne Neville entering the royal castle with a procession bearing her husband Edward and her father-in-law, Henry VI's coffins. She asks the pall bearers to lay down the coffin for a moment and bitterly mourns the tragedy that has befallen her family and curses the murderers, the family members of the house of York. She curses Richard that any child that he might bear be born deformed like him and that his future wife be as miserable in widowhood as she herself is.

Richard's entry into the room presently enrages Lady Anne and she is filled with spite. As the funeral procession was about to resume, Richard threatens the pall bearers and they obey his order to wait further. Richard who has devised a plan to persuade her to marry him fakes humility and submission in front of Lady Anne's spiteful curses. He courts Lady Anne, repeatedly ignoring her rebukes against his wrong doings. Lady Anne continues to curse him calling him a villain and a devil. Meanwhile, Richard's eloquent persuasions gradually mitigate Lady Anne's fierceness so that he even totally denies killing her husband. He even goes to the extent of offering Lady Anne his sword telling her that if she does not forgive him then he would rather die at her hands. At the climax of the moment Richard confesses that he killed her husband only because he himself was deeply in love with her. Finally, as Richard sees the opportunity, he slips a ring into Anne's finger although the latter does not guarantee acceptance of his proposal of marriage instantly. As Lady Anne leave the scene Richard declares his victory in his ploy to win her over. He is also cynical about Lady Anne's irresolute and yielding nature even though her husband has recently been killed by the same man that now courts her.

## **Scene III**

Queen Elizabeth, the wife of the sickly King Edward IV, enters with members of her family: her brother, Lord Rivers, and her two sons

from a prior marriage, Lord Gray and the Marquis of Dorset. She is worried over her husband, the king's illness and expresses her concern that if the king were to die then the legal heir to the throne would be Richard until the king's own elder son grows up. This too poses a risk for their children's lives because the queen knows that Richard cannot be trusted. At this point the noblemen Buckingham and Stanley enter to report some improvement in the king's health and that the king wants to reconcile Richard and Elizabeth's kinsmen because of their hostile relationship.

Richard enters the scene and creates a ruckus complaining against the noblemen that are Queen Elizabeth's relatives. He declares himself to be a simple person with good intentions and that his image has been deliberately tarnished by people behind his back. He accuses them of wishing the king's death and blames Elizabeth for plotting the sentencing of Clarence. As they quarrel, the former queen, Margaret, widow of Henry VI appears in the scene and scorns Richard for murdering her husband and son. She also blames Elizabeth of sitting in a throne that belonged to her and blames her for aiding the Yorks in causing her family's downfall. She tells them that they have not yet learn what sorrow is and curses everyone present there for the murder of her family. Margaret leaves and a nobleman named Catesby arrives to report that the king wishes to see them. As Elizabeth and the others present exit the scene, Richard rejoices his increasing success in manipulating the events. Two murderers arrive to take instructions from him to kill Clarence in prison.

#### **Scene IV**

This scene opens in the Tower of London where Clarence is imprisoned. He tells the lieutenant of the prison, Brackenbury about the nightmare he had seen the previous night. Clarence tells that in the dream he saw his brother, Richard and himself leaving for France in a ship. Both were walking on the deck of the ship, Richard trips and is about to fall overboard. As Clarence tries to help, he is accidentally pushed by Richard and he falls into the ocean. The drowning is

prolonged and hence he sees the treasures hidden underwater. Clarence tries to free his soul but dreams of repeatedly drowning. Finally, he sees himself visiting the underworld where he met the ghosts of the members of the Lancasterian family that he helped kill. He particularly sees Edward, the son of Henry VI cursing him, following which he is dragged down into hell by the Furies. Clarence wakes up terrified and since then he gets afraid of being alone. Brackenbury, who sympathises with him, agrees to wait upon him while he falls asleep.

After Clarence falls asleep, the two hired assassins of Richard enters the prison, hands Brackenbury the warrant and sends him away. They discuss how to execute the murder and decide to beat Clarence up and drown him in a keg of wine present in the room. However, they are not being able execute the plan as their conscience slightly disturbs them. While one of them is uncertain about the ethics of the matter, the other reminds him that their reward should be their only motive. Clarence is woken up by the sound of the conversation and takes stock of the situation. He then tries to dissuade them from killing him. While the murderer wavering from his mission seems to relent, the other suddenly stabs Clarence dead from behind. They stow his body away in the wine keg and leave the scene.

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### **3.2.2 ACT 2**

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#### **Scene I**

The scene opens in the chamber of King Edward IV. With the sounding of the trumpet King Edward, Queen Elizabeth and her relatives (Rivers, Dorset and Gray), and Buckingham and Hastings followed by Richard enters. The king urges both parties to forget their past enmity for the sake of the wellbeing of England's future and reconcile. Everyone agrees to this proposal of peace and they shake hands to the king's satisfaction. Richard too pretends to forget and relinquish any past hostility that he had in mind towards them and declares himself a friend to all hereafter.



Encouraged by this atmosphere of apparent peace, Queen Elizabeth asks the King to forgive Clarence and fetch him to their presence. At this point Richard informs the gathering that Clarence has already been executed according to the King's order as soon as the warrant was given. He manipulates the facts for everyone to believe that although the King had issued a pardon to his brother Clarence, the latter was already been executed before the arrival of the messenger carrying the order of pardon. The King is filled with sorrow and laments the unfortunate incident. He declares himself guilty of forgetting the various times that Clarence had saved his life or helped him defeat the house of Lancaster. The King's illness aggravates and he is taken to his bed.

## **Scene II**

The mother of Edward, Richard and Clarence, the old Duchess of York enters with her two orphaned grandchildren left behind by Clarence. They ask her about their father's death and in order to spare them the pain, the Duchess tells them that Clarence is alive. However, she knows about Richard's diabolical nature and wishes he were never born. Meanwhile, Queen Elizabeth also enters in a highly agitated state and announces the death of King Edward. The children of Clarence tell her that they will not grieve the King's death since the Queen didn't grieve their father's death too. The Duchess tells them that because both of them were her own sons, she would lament for all of them. Thereafter, each of them expresses their portion of the sorrows in a ritualistic manner.

Rivers and Dorset remind Queen Elizabeth at this point that she should consider bringing his sons back to London to crown the elder son, Prince Edward. At this point Richard enters along with Buckingham, Stanley, Hastings and Ratcliff. They too agree with bringing the Prince from Ludlow to London. The Queen and her kinsmen decide that it will be safer for themselves to accompany the entourage. After the Queen and her followers leave, Buckingham

advises Richard to accompany the entourage to avoid suspicion. They also devise a plan to separate the Prince from the Queen on their return. By this time, Buckingham has turned totally loyal to Richard.

### **Scene III**

Three laymen discuss the state of affairs of the kingdom's politics. They understand that it is a delicate situation and the future of the country is uncertain because of the power-struggle between the two factions: Richard vs. Queen Elizabeth and her kinsmen. While one of them is optimistic about the crowning of the young Prince Edward, the second citizen feels that a young Prince would not be able to rule effectively. They also understand that Richard himself is dangerous and power-hungry, hence would be unreliable as a ruler. They are terrified at what the future might bring.

### **Scene IV**

In the royal palace the cardinal informs the Queen, the Duchess of York and the Queen's youngest son that Prince Edward is on his way to London and will arrive in two days. They express their wish to receive him as soon as possible. All of a sudden the marquis of Dorset arrives to report the Queen that Rivers, Grey and Sir Thomas Vaughn, an ally, has been arrested and sent to the castle of Pomfret. It was common knowledge that prisoners in Pomfret were often executed secretly. All three commiserate their loss knowing that it is the doing of Richard, and expect the worse to happen to their family in the near future. With the help of the Cardinal the Queen decides to take sanctuary in a church with her youngest son, the Duke of York for an initial protection period of forty days.

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## **3.2.3 ACT III**

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### **Scene I**

The young Prince Edward enters London with his entourage and is welcomed with pomp. The Prince's uncle, Richard is there to welcome

him accompanied by his allies: Buckingham, Catesby, and other nobles. During the interaction between Richard and the Prince, the latter took stock of his uncle's words and manners and replied accordingly with equal tact. He asks Richard the whereabouts of his mother and younger brother, and the reason for their absence. He also asks about Rivers, Gray and Dorset but Richard did not tell him about their imprisonment in Pomfret. Hastings arrives in the scene and informs the Prince and the others present that his mother and younger brother the Duke of York took sanctuary in a church. This frustrates Buckingham and he orders the reluctant Cardinal to go with Hastings and if necessary forcibly extract the young Duke from his mother. Richard, meanwhile, asks the Prince to accompany him to the Tower of London where he should take rest for the night with his younger brother on the eve of his coronation. The young Prince is, however, already suspicious of Richard.

After the Prince is sent to the tower, Richard discusses the status of his plans with Buckingham and Catesby. He measures the situation and wants to know whether Hastings and Stanley could be trusted to aid him in seizing the throne for himself. Buckingham gives an assessment of the loyalties of Hastings and informs him that Hastings will remain loyal to the family of the dead king Edward IV. Stanley similarly would follow the steps of Hastings.

This is a crucial part in Richard's mission as his plans are gaining momentum faster than before towards his goal. According to Buckingham, they should hold two separate meetings. The first one will consist of Richard's allies in his conspiracy and they would plan the moves to be played in the presence of everyone in the public meeting. The public meeting is supposed to be a discussion on the occasion of the new Prince's coronation. In that way, they would come to know where the loyalties of different nobles lie.

Richard then sends Catesby to measure which side Hastings' has his loyalties placed. Catesby is also instructed to tell Hastings that Queen Elizabeth's kinsmen will be executed the following day. Since, Hastings has a history of enmity with the Queen's relatives, he might

be happy to take Richard's side after knowing about the execution. When Buckingham wants to know what if Hastings stays loyal to the dead King Edward IV, Richard casually replies that in that case they would behead him too. In a moment of exultation, Richard promises to Buckingham that he will make him the Earl of Hereford once he takes control of the throne.

### **Scene II**

Early in the following morning, a messenger sent by Stanley knocks on Hastings' door. The messenger informs Hastings of the planned separate meetings of Richard which does not bode well. In addition Hastings is told about Stanley's dream of getting killed by a boar. Since the boar is the heraldic symbol of Richard, the dream is a premonition for Stanley of the looming dangers. Stanley has therefore advised Hastings to flee the country with him until the situation changes. Hastings, however, dismisses the matter as of no serious concern and returns a message that there is nothing to be feared at the moment. After the messenger left, Catesby arrives to discover Hastings' opinion on Richard's scheme to seize power. When Hastings expresses his disbelief and horror at the idea of Richard becoming the king, Catesby casually drops the topic. Unaware of Richard's plans to simply sweep off any opposition that might rise against him, Hastings attends the meeting with Buckingham. He rejoices the idea of execution of Queen Elizabeth's relatives while ironically his own death is approaching.

### **Scene III**

Queen Elizabeth's kinsmen Rivers and Gray and Sir Thomas Vaughn are being escorted into the prison of castle Pomfret by Sir Richard Ratcliff. All three commiserate their misfortune as their execution is due in the following morning. Rivers laments that they are going to be executed for no fault at all and condemns the wrong doers. They finally confront their destiny and realize that perhaps the former Queen Margaret's curse on them for partaking in the double murders of her

son and husband, Henry VI has fallen upon them. While accepting their fate they also rationalize that by that logic Richard will also face death as a materialization of the curse. In that way their murderer will also get punishment.

#### **Scene IV**

Richard's council has started in the Tower of London. A suspicious Hastings asks the purpose of the meeting. He is told that the purpose of the meeting is to decide upon a date for the coronation of the young Prince Edward and Earl of Derby reaffirms it. Richard arrives late for the council apparently in a good mood. He draws Buckingham aside and is reported that Hastings will not support him in his schemes. Richard leaves the room momentarily and on his return assumes an angry demeanour. He puts a question to everyone asking what should be done if a traitor was found among them. Hastings replied that the punishment should be death. Richard starts talking about his deformed arm and that it was caused by some wicked spell cast by Queen Elizabeth and Hastings' mistress Lady Shore. Knowing that it is actually a birth defect and not the result of a spell, Hastings tries to counter Richard's explanation. Richard promptly accuses Hastings of protecting Shore and committing treason. He orders Hastings' execution as a punishment.

#### **Scene V**

The Lord Mayor of London arrives at the Tower of London, by which time Hastings has already been beheaded. Richard and Buckingham discuss the next course of action, now that Lord Hastings and Queen Elizabeth's family has been removed from their way. At Richard's seeking reassurance of Buckingham's loyalty, the latter tells his master that he can lie, cheat and kill if necessary. They realize that they will have to gain the support of the common people of London. For this purpose, they need to convince the Lord Mayor of the earnestness of their actions. When Catesby entered the castle with Hastings' head, Buckingham reported to the Mayor that Hastings was a traitor

planning Richard and his murder. Richard adds to the lie that Hastings had confessed his crime before his death. The Mayor believes them and goes ahead to inform the masses about the happenings in keeping with Richard's suggestion. Richard also sends Buckingham after the Mayor to make a public speech to make a false revelation about Elizabeth's children. He has been instructed to tell the people that Edward IV's two children were illegitimate and thus ruin the dead King's image in the public's mind. As such, the people would hate the idea of the young Prince Edward crowned as the King of England and he himself would rise to power. Richard then assigns another ally to go to the Tower of London and get rid of the two princes.

### **Scene VI**

In this scene a scrivener says that he wrote the document for Richard that will be a public speech later that day. The document that took eleven hours to write is meant to support Richard and Buckingham's claims of Hastings' treason and the justifiable punishment. He condemns the world's hypocrisy and says that Hastings was alive when he was writing the document. Whatever be the claim in the paper, the citizens of London can see that it is all Richard's conspiracy.

### **Scene VII**

Buckingham returns to Richard after he appeared in front of the public to make the speech to slander the children of Edward VI. He also mentioned to the public that Richard should be the next King instead of a young and undeserving child. To Richard's great frustration this was met with cold silence from the common people except for a few of Richard's own allies sitting at the back of the hall. Nevertheless, an infuriated Richard decides to move on with his plans. To have the support of the Lord Mayor to get his suggestion of Richard as the King in front of the public, Richard and Buckingham decides to orchestrate a play. Accordingly, Richard stands on a balcony holding a Bible in his hands and stands between two priests as if in a prayer. Buckingham

leads the Lord Mayor and some of his nobles so that they would come upon this show of devoutness in Richard's character and thereby consider him deserving of the throne. You should note that the Lord Mayor represents the will of the masses and therefore, his opinion on the matter counts significantly. He has to wait a while before he is let into the chamber as Richard pretends to spend a lot of time praying. When they are let in, Buckingham carries out an extensive drama pretending to persuade Richard to take the throne himself. Richard plays along showing a lack of willingness to assume the throne and recommends the young Prince Edward. Finally, when a citizen also joins in the pleadings he agrees and Buckingham suggests that the coronation ceremony be held the very next day.

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### **3.2.4 ACT IV**

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#### **Scene I**

Outside the Tower of London, Elizabeth, her son Dorset, and the duchess of York meet Lady Anne and Clarence's young daughter. All of them have come to visit the two imprisoned princes. However, the guardian of the Tower, Brackenbury prevents them from entering as he says it was ordered by the 'King' instead of saying 'Lord Protector'. Stanley also arrives with the news of the coronation of Richard and that his present wife Lady Anne has been summoned for the same. Horrified at the news Lady Anne realizes that the worst has finally happened and England will be doomed under Richard's rule. Both Elizabeth and Stanley is in agreement to send her son Dorset to Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond in France in order to take sanctuary and join forces.

#### **Scene II**

In the palace, Richard enters triumphant after the coronation. However, he expresses his concern that he does not feel totally secure yet. He orders Buckingham to go to the Tower and execute the

imprisoned Princes, the rightful heirs to the throne. When Buckingham expresses reluctance towards this assignment, Richard speaks out an aside that allows us know that Buckingham is not worthy to be his highest associate. Instead he summons a criminal named Tyrrell and dispatches him for the mission. Immediately after this he also orders Catesby to spread a rumour that Queen Anne is ill and dying, intending to confine her and later have her murdered. Richard plans to marry the daughter of the late King Edward VI's daughter, his own niece. Meanwhile, Buckingham senses uncertainty about his future and repeatedly tries to bring up the matter of Richard's promise to make him the Earl of Hereford. A gloating Richard, however, first ignores and then rejects his demands. Realizing that he has been betrayed, Buckingham senses risk to his life and flees to Wales, his original home.

### **Scene III**

Tyrrell, the assassin returns to Richard after killing the two young princes. He tells Richard that he is deeply disturbed by the act as were his two accomplices. However, Richard is jubilant to hear the news of their death and rewards the assassins handsomely. He speaks of the development of his various schemes at the moment. The two young princes are dead, he's going to woo over the daughter of late Edward VI, he's married off Clarence's daughter to some unimportant man and had Clarence's son imprisoned, and implies that he might also have had Anne killed secretly. Meanwhile, Ratcliff arrives to announce bad news for Richard. He reports that Buckingham has fled to Wales and gathering forces to retaliate and that the Earl of Richmond has joined forces with his enemies at home to attack and seize power in England. Richard too orders that preparations be done for battle.

### **Scene IV**

The former queen Elizabeth and her mother-in-law, the Duchess of York are concerned over the state of affairs in the kingdom. They are lamenting the deaths of the sons and husbands in the family. The



former queen Margaret joins them and bitterly reminds them of how their fates have come full circle. She reminds them that her curses on the Yorks and Woodvilles for the murders of her husband and son have after all taken effect. Elizabeth, who is grief-wearied, asks Margaret to teach her how to curse. Margaret tells her that it is possible only if she can feel the same agony as herself. Margaret then leaves for France.

When Richard enters with his associates in the presence of Elizabeth and the Duchess, his mother curses him for causing tragedy in the family. She tells him that she regrets giving birth to him. Richard is infuriated and tries to drown the curses with the sound of loud music which he orders his men to play. The Duchess keeps cursing nevertheless, telling him that he would die a bloody death. Despite being shaken by his mother's curses, he collects himself and starts a private conversation with Elizabeth revealing his intention to marry her daughter. Disgusted and horrified Elizabeth sarcastically tells him to gift the bloodied hearts of the two murdered princes to their sister if he wants to impress her. Richard cunningly uses his power of persuasion telling Elizabeth that he seeks to marry her daughter only to avoid any civil war and to make amends with her family. Elizabeth foolishly relents and accepts to pass the message to her daughter.

Richard receives multiple bad news the worst of which was Richmond's invading England with a large naval force. Besides, his own commanders are lacking the morale to fight the war. Amidst all this he hears that his men have defeated Buckingham's army and captured him. However, the news of Richmond landing on the soil of England with a large force has finally arrived. Richard sets out to confront Richmond in the battlefield.

### **Scene V**

Stanley, the Earl of Derby secretly meets with a lord from Richmond's side. Despite Stanley willing to join Richmond's forces, he cannot desert Richard because his son is being held hostage by the

latter in order to force him into fighting on his side. However, Stanley wishes Richmond well. In addition to this message, Stanley tells the priest to tell Richmond that Queen Elizabeth has agreed to marry her daughter the young Elizabeth to him. Stanley learns that Richmond has camped in Wales and that he has a large force ready to attack London.

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### **3.2.5 ACT V**

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#### **Scene I**

Returning to the captured Buckingham, we see an armed officer leading him for execution. Buckingham requests the sheriff to let him meet Richard, but is denied. In his helplessness, Buckingham contemplates his past decisions that led him to this situation. He repents the bad decisions and the wrong path he has taken in his greed for power positions. Buckingham recalls the vows he made to the late Edward IV of always protecting his children and wife. He also bitterly regrets having trusted Richard and remembers the old queen Margaret telling him that Richard would give him nothing but sorrows eventually. He also accepts that he deserves this fate because of his share in the sins that Richard committed against others. Heartbroken, he finally asks the officers to take him for execution.

#### **Scene II**

Henry of Richmond has been marching through England. He informs his men that information has arrived from Stanley that Richard's camp is just a day's journey ahead. He makes a speech in front of his men to boost their morale. He encourages them to fight the war for a better future of the country and reminds them that they are fighting for a just cause. One of the nobles adds a further reminder of Richard's diabolical inclinations by mentioning that his own allies stay on his side only out of fear. There is a chance that they might flee if there are hints of Richard losing.

### **Scene III**

This scene opens in King Richard's camping site on Bosworth Field where he is having his men put up tents for the night. Richard tells his men that they will engage in a battle the next morning. He tries to infuse some enthusiasm in his men but their morale is already low. He tells them that his army is three times bigger than that of Richmond's and therefore they can be sure of an easy win.

### **Scene IV**

In a speech, Richmond implies that the sun is weary and is about to set implying Richard's impending death. Back at Richmond's camp he sends a messenger to deliver a secret letter to his step-father, Lord Stanley. Although unwillingly, Stanley is fighting on Richard's side but Richmond hopes that he would get some help from him.

### **Scene V**

Back in Richard's camp he orders his lieutenants to set guards outside his tent because he is suspicious of Stanley who he knows is related to Henry of Richmond. He threatens Stanley to bring his force next morning or lose his young son George who's been held hostage. Finally he declares that he would abstain from supper that night and falls asleep after writing for a while.

Having received the secret letter, Stanley secretly visits Richmond at his camp. He tells Richmond that he is bound to fight for Richard but would help him by making delays in the morning. Richmond then tries to fall asleep to get himself rested for the next day's battle.

When both Richmond and Richard falls asleep, they start dreaming. In their dreams the ghosts of Prince Edward, King Henry, Clarence, Rivers, Gray, Vaughan, the two young Princes, Hastings, Lady Anne, and lastly Buckingham appear in both the tents of Richmond and Richard. They take turns to appear beside each leader to tell them of their fate as per their natures and intentions. While on the one hand the ghosts praise and encourage Richmond

towards victory and prosperity, on the other hand they announce their grim predictions about Richard's immediate future. Richard wakes up petrified and delivers a soliloquy in which for the first time he confronts his true nature. He is confused whether to love or hate himself. When Ratcliff wakes Richard up at the first crow of the rooster the latter tells him his horrific dream only to be dismissed as superstition. In the other camp Richmond also tells his advisors his inspiring dream. Before setting out he delivers a last speech to remind his men that it is a fight of good versus evil.

### **Scene VI**

At his camp Richard is ready to set out and he too delivers a pre-battle speech to his army. He tells them that the rebels are nothing but a shabby lot compared to him, a King and his army. A messenger arrives at that moment and reports that Stanley has turned a renegade. The enemy has arrived at the battle field and there is not enough time to retaliate Stanley's betrayal by punishing his son.

### **Scene VII**

The battle starts and both the armies fight viciously. Catesby appears on the stage seeking help for Richard from their ally Norfolk. He tells Norfolk that Richard has fallen off his horse and is fighting like an insane person. He engages in duel with anyone he sees in front of him. Richard tries to find and fight Richmond himself, but is deceived by identical appearances. He says that he thought he killed five Richmonds meaning decoys have been deployed in the battlefield as a strategy. We now see Richard himself on the battlefield shouting out for anyone to lend him a horse. In his desperation he offers even his entire kingdom as a reward. However, when Catesby offers him help he refuses in his wild frenzy.

### **Scene VIII**

Eventually Richard confronts Richmond and engages in a duel. Richmond overpowers him and kills him. Naturally the battle has been

won by Richmond and he returns to his camp with his nobles. Stanley meets up with Richmond and swears his allegiance to him. He picks up the throne from the fallen Richard and presents it to Richmond making him King Henry VII. The new king immediately grants pardon to the enemy soldiers and frees Stanley's son who was held hostage. He promises to marry the young Elizabeth in order restore peace in the country and end the prolonged hostility between the Yorks and the Lancasters, thus ending the War of the Roses.

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## MAJOR THEMES

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The major themes that will draw your attention throughout the play are power, the temptation of evil, the relation between ruler and the state, the power of language, and women's status. Let us discuss these key themes of the play summarily.

### 3.3.1 Power

As one of Shakespeare's most representative historical plays, you need to mark that the entire action in *Richard III* is driven by political power-struggles among the members of the royal family and their allies. The play opens amidst the 'War of the Roses', an extensive conflict for power between the house of York and the house of Lancaster. The play is set during a historical phase when after a coup the Yorks have taken over the rule of England, the eldest son of the Duke of York, Edward has been crowned as Edward IV. However, Edward's brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester displays great ambition and hatches multiple plots to finally usurp the throne for himself. By his very nature, Richard has an extraordinary capacity for evil, scorn for everyone, callousness, manipulation and great cunning. He vocally expresses even in the first scene of the first Act of the play that because he has not been endowed with a normal physique and handsome appearances, he would compensate that by drawing sadistic pleasure from making other lives miserable. As such Richard's

diabolical hunt for power is the dominant drive of almost all the plots of the play.

You must also note that since Richard is an excellent orator, he has great power of persuasion. His associates are lured by him with hopes of power positions and rewards. As such characters like Buckingham who helps Richard with every possible means in ascending the throne are baited with the hopes of important political positions. We can also see other associates of Richard following his commands diligently. You may attribute this to a vicarious sense of power that characters might feel from being Richard's confidants. Moreover, Richard's political position even as the Duke of Gloucester is powerful enough to put fear in his allies too. This is more so because of the diabolical nature of Richard in addition to his royal position. Greed for power among the royal families and subsequent history of violence and bloodshed has been one of the significant themes of all the historical plays by Shakespeare.

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### **3.3.2 The Temptation of Evil**

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Richard himself is an embodiment of evil in the play. In his bid to manipulate the audience's sympathy he declares in Act I, Scene I that he wants to make up for his physical deformity by causing others injury. Richard wants this to be a justification of his evil schemes against characters who are nobody but his family members and allies. He draws a sadistic sense of pleasure from seeing others helpless and injured. He is excited by the idea of wooing Lady Anne although he knows that she despises him and is scornful of her gullibility after he manages to mitigate her anger. Richard gets his brother Clarence, his nephews, his wife Anne and his loyal associates assassinated secretly when he feels they are no longer valuable for him and might hinder his plans. When his mother and Elizabeth curse him he orders his men to play music on their instruments to drown the sounds. There is also the implicit idea that Richard's victims have invited their own doom by

aiding him at some point by giving in to his skillful persuasions. They have always had proofs that Richard is dangerous and manipulative but still got themselves enmeshed in his wrong-doings. Thus, the allure of evil is a significant theme that drives the characters into actions determinant of the outcomes of the play.

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### 3.3.3 The Power of Language

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Although not a primary, the theme of language is a crucial one in the play. A political play, *Richard III* mostly revolves around the manipulations and treacheries committed by Richard. Richard relies on his eloquence and power of persuasion to compensate his other shortcomings. His political ambitions too require him to be a good orator. He discards morality altogether and can lie, twist and manipulate facts and reason with his gullible victims at ease according to the need of the situation. As such, he deceives his brother Clarence into believing him until his murder; he can persuade the widowed Lady Anne to marry him even after she knows Richard's part in killing him; Hastings also remains loyal to him not realizing that Richard has found him a risk and has plotted to have him executed. Later in the play when Richard has succeeded in securing the crown for himself to the bewilderment of everyone, he manages to again go for the unthinkable: persuade the former Queen Elizabeth to talk her young daughter (Richard's own niece) into marrying him.

The play is also interspersed with elaborate curses delivered by the women characters as a response to Richard's manipulative speeches. In Richard's world of deceit and violence where his victims are helpless, the curses channel the power of destiny through words. Margaret's curse on everyone guilty of murdering her husband Henry VI and her son materializes. In turn Margaret's misfortune is also the result of a curse placed upon her by Richard, Duke of York for killing his son, Rutland.

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### 3.3.4 The Role of Women

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Women in *Richard III* do not play any role as far as the action is concerned. In keeping with the times, the women characters like Margaret, Queen Elizabeth, Duchess of York, Lady Anne, etc. do not get to participate in any political role. These women are mere victims of Richard's violent plots to usurp power. As wives and mothers they are deprived of their most important supports systems of life: their husbands and children. Margaret's husband and son was killed by the Yorkists; Queen Elizabeth loses her husband, King Edward IV and their two sons to Richard's ambition; Richard's own mother, the Duchess of York loses her son Rutland at the hands of the Lancastrians; and Lady Anne is widowed when the Yorkists killed her husband. You must note that the context of the play is fifteenth century England which was a time when women were not politically empowered.

Richard's vicious conspiracies against his own family members leave the women folk helpless and bereaved. He spread rumours, and slandered his own brothers and other nobles against each other in order to pave his way to the throne. The victimized wives and mothers were left with nothing to retaliate but curses and castigations to hurl on Richard. However, the play has a powerful emotional aspect which is channelized through the women characters' inability to otherwise add to any significant action. The mourning and grieving of the women character has the capacity for intense dramatic display of emotions and can leave the audience moved.

The fates of the women characters' in the play are also mostly arbitrated by the men in the story. The male-dominated political courtly intrigues deprives the women of their husbands and sons; Richard manipulates a grieving Lady Anne to marry him despite her knowledge of his involvement in her husband's death; he falsely implicates Queen Elizabeth in influencing Edward IV to have Clarence imprisoned; he marries off Clarence's daughter to a nobody according



to his will; Richmond asks the hand of the young Elizabeth and thus cement the ties with the house of Yorks after the end of the war. Thus, you may observe that even women are used in marriages to gain strategic political advantage and not solely for the human value.

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### 3.4 Summing Up

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After having a detailed discussion on the act wise development of the plot of *Richard III* you are expected to understand the historical importance of the play. The discussion on the major themes of the play would help you contextualise the play and understand how Shakespeare has devised his dramatic techniques as the constant conflict between good and evil are depicted in the play. The questions of political power, hatred, violence and injustice are substantiated by the mean deeds of the central character and towards the end of the play these are retaliated by the arrival of Richmond in the course of action.

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### 3.5 References and suggested Readings

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## Unit 4

### *Richard III:*

## Supplementary Unit

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4.1 Objectives

4.2 Major Characters

4.3 Probable Questions and suggested answers

4.4 Summing up

4.5 Suggested readings and references

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### 4.1 Objectives

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The objective of this unit is

- To introduce the learners to the major and minor characters from the play *Richard III*
- Critically assess the historical characters from Shakespeare's world
- Help the learners form an idea about the probable questions from the text

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### 4.2 Major Characters in *Richard III*

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#### **Richard**

Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later crowned King Richard III is the central character in the play. He dominates most of the play's action by deploying various plots against his rivals and allies that he is suspicious of. By nature Richard is evil, corrupt, manipulative and sadistic. He discards of morality altogether and stops at nothing to fulfill his selfish ambitions. Richard is an eloquent and cunning orator

who manipulates his listeners. With the development in the play, you can notice him becoming more secretive, suspicious and unwilling to divulge his plans before the audience. It can also be mentioned that he remains on stage more than any of Shakespeare's other characters. Towards the end of the play he grows desperately violent and realizes that his plans do not take effect as thought out. This realisation of the extent of his crime makes him one of the memorably complex character in the Shakespearean world.

### **Buckingham**

He is Richard's right-hand man in his schemes to gain power. The duke of Buckingham is almost as amoral and ambitious as Richard himself. Buckingham become the most trusted associate of Richard in whatever he plans to do and does not show any resistance except towards the end of the play, when he hesitates to carry out the order of execution of Edward IV's sons. In response Richard reject's Buckingham his promised reward, the Earldom of Hereford. This leads to mutual suspicion and Buckingham flees to Wales to rebel against Richard. However, Buckingham meets his fate and dies repenting that he violated his vows towards Edward IV only to be betrayed his master Richard.

### **King Edward IV**

Edward IV was the elder brother of Richard and Clarence, and the king of England at the start of the play. Edward led the Yorkist coup against the house of Lancaster that resulted in the death of Henry VI and his son. As a king, he wanted the newly appointed nobles on his wife Elizabeth's side and his own brothers' faction to forget their enmity and reconcile. However, Edward remains totally unaware of his brother, Richard's ambitious plots to overthrow him.

### **Clarence**

Clarence is the gentle and trusting second son of the Duke of York, and is the legal heir to the throne after Edward IV. In his attempt to take control of the crown, Richard slanders Clarence and has his imprisonment ordered by the King. Taking advantage of a confused

state of affairs that he himself staged, Richard secretly hires assassins and has Clarence secretly killed in the Tower of London. Clarence has a daughter and a son.

### **Queen Elizabeth**

She is the wife of King Edward IV and the mother of the two young princes (the heirs to the throne) and their older sister, young Elizabeth. After Edward's death, Queen Elizabeth (also called Lady Gray) is at Richard's mercy. Richard rightly views her as an enemy because she opposes his rise to power, and because she is intelligent and fairly strong-willed. Queen Elizabeth is the wife of Edward IV and the mother of a daughter, young Elizabeth and two princes. After the death of Edward IV's, Richard strategically suppresses her because of her opposition to his rise to power. Throughout the play Richard slanders Elizabeth blaming her of conspiracy and unfairly influencing the King. Elizabeth is part of the Woodeville family. She has her kinsmen—Dorset, Rivers, and Gray—appointed to important positions in the court.

### **Dorset, Rivers, and Gray**

Rivers is Elizabeth's brother, while Gray and Dorset are her sons from her first marriage. Richard eventually executes Rivers and Gray, but Dorset flees and survives. They are part of the Woodeville and Gray families, and naturally are Elizabeth's allies in the court.

### **Anne**

Lady Anne is the wife of the slain Prince Edward and the daughter-in-law of the late king Henry VI. She and Queen Elizabeth are the first major characters from the play who protest against Richard's deeds. They were courageous enough to confront Richard, accuse him of shattering the royal family and curse him for vengeance. Richard courts Anne for marriage in order to keep her from rising against him. Lady Anne hates Richard bitterly, yet yields to his advances, finally getting married to him. Richard scorns her lack of will power and probably has her killed when he senses that she is no longer a threat.

### **Duchess of York**

The Duchess of York is the mother of Edward IV, Clarence and Richard. As a mother figure she is very protective of Edward's children and the rest of her family. Embittered by Richard's evil deeds, she curses him for causing the downfall of the house of Yorks. She wishes Richard was never born.

### **Margaret**

Margaret is the widow of the former king late Henry VI and the mother of a murdered son, Prince Edward, the legal heir to the throne. In a power-struggle the members of the York family staged a coup and killed the king and his son, leaving a bereaved Margaret alone. In her helplessness Margaret has no other recourse than curses and bitter prophecies, each of which comes true by and by. Margaret represents the sting of karma in the play. Finally she departs for France, leaving the Yorkist women miserable facing their destiny.

### **The princes**

The two young sons of King Edward IV and his wife, Elizabeth, their names are actually Prince Edward and the young duke of York, but they are often referred to collectively. Agents of Richard murder these boys—Richard's nephews—in the Tower of London. Young Prince Edward, the rightful heir to the throne, should not be confused with the elder Edward, prince of Wales (the first husband of Lady Anne, and the son of the former king, Henry VI.), who was killed before the play begins.

### **Young Elizabeth**

She is the daughter of the former Queen Elizabeth. Young Elizabeth enjoys the fate of many Renaissance noblewomen. She becomes a pawn in political power-brokering, and is promised in marriage at the end of the play to Richmond, the Lancastrian rebel leader, in order to unite the warring houses of York and Lancaster..

### **Richmond**

He is a member of a branch of the Lancaster royal family. Richmond gathers a force of rebels to challenge Richard for the throne. He is meant to represent goodness, justice, and fairness—all the things Richard does not. Richmond is portrayed in such a glowing light in part because he founded the Tudor dynasty, which still ruled England in Shakespeare's day.

## **Hastings**

He is a lord who maintains his integrity, remaining loyal to the family of King Edward IV. Hastings winds up dead for making the mistake of trusting Richard.

## **Stanley**

Lord Stanley is the Earl of Derby. He is Loyal to Hastings and informs rebels of the location of Richard's army. His son was held hostage by Richard. Although he secretly helps Richmond, he cannot escape Richard's watchful gaze.

## **Lord Mayor of London**

He is a gullible and suggestible fellow whom Richard and Buckingham use as a pawn in their ploy to make Richard king.

## **Rivers, Grey, and Dorset**

They are the sons of Queen Elizabeth. All three are adversaries of Richard, and Rivers and Grey are beheaded for it, while Dorset flees to join Richmond's army.

## **Vaughan**

He is a friend of Elizabeth, Dorset, Rivers, and Gray who is executed by Richard along with Rivers and Grey.

## **Ratcliffe, Catesby**

They are Richard's flunkies among the nobility.

## **Tyrrel**

He is a murderer whom Richard hires to kill his young cousins, the princes in the Tower of London.

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### **4.3 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers**

#### **4.3.1 Make a critical assessment of the theme of conflict between good and evil in *Richard III***

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Ans: The conflict between good and evil as a common theme in Elizabethan play... the world of monarchy and inevitable conflict for power... the characters representing two sides of the conflict... Richard , the protagonist representing evil, injustice, violence and crime and Richmond representing the good, fairness and forgiveness... the conflict shattering the world of order and justice as evil seems to overpower the good, however, by the end of the play the element of goodness wins and restores peace and harmony.

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#### **4.3.2. Critically examine *Richard III* as a historical play.**

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Ans: The historical play by Shakespeare reveals the nuances and shades of England's political history. The conflict between the dynasties and consequent violence and bloodshed are well represented in his plays... *Richard III* captures the complex evolution of the Lancaster king and his intrigues to stay in power...the War of the Roses and its complex course...the beginning of the Tudor dynasty.

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#### **4.3.3 Critically comment on the treatment of the women characters in *Richard III*.**

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Ans: The role of women in royal history of England... the characters of lady Anne, Queen Elizabeth, Duchess of York and Queen Margaret are seen by Richard as objects to advance his own ambition. Shakespeare presents them as critiques of the evil nature of Richard. They are courageous to curse and accuse him ... however, they are also equal participants in the political intrigues of the monarchy...the effect of the curse by Queen Margaret as a significant trope in the play.

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#### **4.3.4 Critically comment on the use of language in *Richard III*.**

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Ans: The rich variety of Elizabethan drama till the late 1590s in terms of dramatic types, styles and modes of presentation helped Shakespeare design *Richard III* where a mixture of all these available

tropes and an eye for innovation can be noticed... Shakespeare's use of seasonal metaphors and changing nature of politics and dynastic fortune...use of prologues and monologues to make the audience aware of the intrigues and plans...soliloquies by Richard... use of irony and suggestive language.

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#### 4.4 Summing up

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The play *Richard III* thus introduces you to the complex and layered world of power politics and helps you develop an understanding of the course of Elizabethan England. This unit acquaints you with the major characters that contribute to the play and represent the diverse nature of people involved in politics. The study of the play as a historical play helps you realize that Shakespeare's intention behind the writing of this play is not limited to record the course of events in the fifteenth century; rather, through a close observation of the central character of Richard III, he unfolds the complex psyche of human regulated by ambition and greed. Subsequently the reading of the play is expected to help you understand how political history has been presented through dramatic tropes and structures, especially by Shakespeare.

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## **Unit 5**

### ***Hamlet***

#### **Introduction and Stage History**

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- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Sources
- 5.4 Shakespeare's Techniques
- 5.5 Shakespeare's Language
- 5.6 Themes of the Play
- 5.7 The Theatre in Shakespeare's Time
- 5.8 Summing Up
- 5.9 References and Suggested History

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#### **5.1 Objectives:**

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In this unit you will be able to

- Learn about the sources from which Shakespeare borrowed for Hamlet
- Identify the techniques used by the bard for the play
- discern Shakespeare's use of language
- learn about the themes of the play
- learn about the theatrical conditions of his time

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#### **5.2 Introduction**

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*Hamlet* presents a skilful manipulation of the audience's knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the death of the king and Hamlet's doubts about it. The audience knows for certain, from Claudius's attempts to pray in Act III, that there has been a 'foul murder', a fratricide that has been covered up with the story that the king died from snake bite. Hamlet however does not hear Claudius's confession. He must bank on the testimony of the Ghost which seems to require corroboration.

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#### **5.3 Shakespeare's Sources**

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The primary source of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the Norse legend of Amleth, which was first written in the twelfth century by the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus. He collected several Danish legends, folk

tales, and stories and transcribed them in Latin in a work titled *Historica Danicae*, or *History of the Danes*. More than three hundred years after his compilation, *Historica Danicae* was published for the first time in Paris in 1514. Book three and book four of this publication contain the story of Amleth with all the bare bones of the play you are studying. In this story, King Horwendil of Denmark is murdered by his brother Feng. King Horwendil has a son called Amleth, whose name translates to “simpleton”. Feng then decides to marry the queen, Gerutha, Amleth’s mother. Amleth vows to take revenge on Feng and while he is plotting his revenge, he pretends to be mad. As the story progresses, we find that Feng sends a young woman to unravel the secrets of Amleth. Amleth also has a conversation with his mother Gerutha, which a courtier of the King tries to eavesdrop by hiding under the bed. This courtier is discovered and killed by Amleth, who eventually gets sent to England accompanied by two members of the court. These two courtiers have a letter with them that demands the death of Amleth at the hands of the English. As you may have guessed, Amleth changes the contents of the letter and the two courtiers get murdered instead. Amleth comes back to Denmark, exacts his revenge and kills the king and gets on the throne himself.

There are some interesting things to note in this version of the old Amleth legend. They pertain both to the evolution of the story and Shakespeare’s creativity in finally presenting *Hamlet* on the Elizabethan stage. In the old story there is no ghost who tells Amleth of the murder. The identity of the person responsible for the murder is known to everyone, including Amleth and there is no reason for him to pretend to be mad. In essence, he has a valid reason for seeking revenge. In England, after the two courtiers have been murdered, Amleth marries the princess of England. He returns to Denmark in disguise and while the whole court is celebrating his supposed death in England, he gets everyone drunk and kills the king. He then proclaims himself king. Compared with later versions of the story and Shakespeare’s own version, you can see how character and plot development takes a new turn.

In 1570, the French writer and translator François de Belleforest published *Histoires Tragique* based on Saxo Grammaticus’s *Historica Danicae*. Here he included the story of Amleth with some variations. (Note that in 1570, Shakespeare was six years old). Belleforest gave the characters of the story more depth and added backgrounds and character insights thereby laying the ground for further character development. The original story, with the battle with the Norwegian king is expanded by Belleforest, which enables him to introduce the character of young Fortinbras. He provides additional intrigue by introducing an adulterous relationship between Gerutha, Amleth’s mother and his uncle. He also includes in the story Amleth’s relationship with a young girl, who have known each other since they were children and are now lovers. This lays the ground for the character of Ophelia. Ophelia’s madness and the revenge of Laertes,

are however, additions by Shakespeare. Belleforest also does not include the play within the play, *The Murder of Gonzago*, that Shakespeare uses to optimum effect. Belleforest's version was itself translated to an English version in 1608, called *The Historie of Hamleth* which also contained phrases from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

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## 5.4 Shakespeare's Techniques

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Shakespeare had intricate knowledge of the classics, the Greek and the Roman authors of antiquity that we study as a part of classical literature today. He must also have been aware of the conventions and criticism of ancient drama, most notably the works of Aristotle. As far as his tragedies are concerned, Shakespeare modelled his works on those of the Roman author Seneca. But he also significantly experimented with the conventions of classical tragedies and expanded on the technical patterns to create more elaborate works that delved deep into the human psyche and made his stories richer and more insightful. The characters and situations that Shakespeare created explored the boundaries of human behavior and human relationships. This is one of the major reasons why the plays of Shakespeare continue to inspire scholarship, performance and adaptations- with each subsequent indulgence more fruitful than the previous ones. This is also why his plays continue to appeal to the modern reader- because of the affinity it has to the human condition, modern or otherwise.

The character of Hamlet offers us the perfect example of this **blend of the classical and Shakespeare's experiments**. Hamlet is the high-born tragic hero, a young man with lofty ideals and the expectations of the state upon him. The events of the play that have happened before Hamlet takes the stage work to mold the tragic hero image which is reinforced by the burden of seeking revenge and justice. Yet at the same time, we find that this young person is a product of his age, with a propensity for philosophy and poetry, speech that betrays humanist ideals of the high Renaissance and flaws in character that are closer to the *everyperson* than to the classic tragic hero. The classical convention of catharsis is obeyed here, since in the tragedy of Hamlet, the audience is able to experience heightened sense of pity and sympathy. Yet, for the audience, the tragedy of this hero is closer to their own lives and times than to the classical tragic hero. To further strengthen this connection, Shakespeare does not depend on anachronism. Anachronism happens when we find a character or a story that is identifiably old-fashioned- it is out of sync with the present. Shakespeare's Hamlet is a student of the University of Wittenberg, which was founded in 1527 AD. The original Hamlet of Saxo lived sometime in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. This would make Shakespeare's Hamlet immediately identifiable to the audience- they would assume Hamlet to be a probable Protestant and a skeptic- which is evident from the many references in the play where he doubts the ghost.

Shakespeare's innovations are also obvious in the **play within the play** (*The Murder of Gonzago*) that forms such an important part of *Hamlet*. The play within the play might give Hamlet a way of determining his uncle's guilt, for Shakespeare, several things are achieved by this technique. First, it offers Shakespeare a stage to discuss the rivalries between the child and adult acting companies in the London theatres during 1600 and 1601. In Act 2 Scene 2 (lines 320- 325) Hamlet asks several questions about these child acting companies which Rosencrantz tries his best to sum up. Contemporary editor Philip Edwards is of the opinion that "Perhaps he [Shakespeare] inserted it in the heat of the moment to replace a much briefer remark about fashion in the theatre, which would carry us from Rosencrantz at 312 to Hamlet at 334." Second, it gives Shakespeare a lot of space to comment on drama as an art itself. Hamlet's sympathies with the players and his belief in their talents is not an off-hand remark. Towards the end of this scene, Hamlet launches into a speech that is apparently about his own grief. But, if you read more closely, this speech (Act 2 Scene 2, lines 501 -558) is also about the power of theatre and the power of actors to tap into the deepest recesses of human emotion. Third, this also offers Shakespeare to indulge in some act of literary criticism of his own within the play itself. If you carefully read the first 36 lines of Act 2 Scene 2, you will find that Hamlet is giving clear instructions about how his speech needs to be performed, with minute details that include body movements and the tone of voice. There are several other such details mentioned in these lines. This criticism and evaluation of the stage and drama continue even when the play is being performed in front of the King and Hamlet continues his commentary. Fourth, this technique also enables Shakespeare to present Hamlet's humanist education that would make him immediately identifiable by the audience. That he is a poet is beyond doubt, but here the hero displays intricate knowledge of drama, with special references to the classics. He also turns the author of the edited version of the play that is to be performed. The fact that he knows some of the players personally and that he even remembers snippets from their previous performances only serve to make Hamlet one of the audience's own.

**Shakespeare's imagery** is also a part of his unique technique. He makes sure that the state of tragedy is compounded by audio and visual cues that remains in the minds of the audience as the tragedy unfolds. It is not only through words that Shakespeare maintains that something is rotten in the state of Denmark. At the very start of the play, the new king's revelry is the subject of discussion, and the important thing to note here is that only sounds of the revelry reach the stage, which sets off the criticism of the king's conduct. That same impression is maintained by letters written to England in the middle of the play. Hamlet's grief, melancholy and confusion is reflected in the "inky cloak" that he wears. Curtains and screens throughout the play serve to elevate the state of mistrust, mystery and impending doom in the play. The placement of the Ghost under the stage in several scenes where

only the voice of the ghost can be heard serve to tighten tensions during the play. Ophelia's white dress, her floral decoration at the time of her death and several similar techniques not only add on to the innocence of the character, it provides a direct visual contrast to the "inky cloak" of Hamlet and a metaphorical contrast to the darkness that pervades the play. Her words and her songs in her madness add on to the eeriness that the play has maintained since the start. Just before the final scene of the play, the scene at the graveyard, with skulls, shovels, dirt, open graves, dramatic confrontations and the physical act of jumping into graves compound the effects already discussed. Apart from the "rotten state" that Fortinbras is invited to take charge of, his first job is actually to clean up four dead bodies that lie on the stage (and the reference to two more bodies lying somewhere in a distant land). You should note here the connections between *Hamlet* and what later came to be known as Jacobean Theatre. What have you learnt about the conventions of Jacobean theatre, and can you call *Hamlet* a Jacobean play?

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## 5.5 Shakespeare's Language

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Shakespeare wrote in a combination of verse and prose. Verses are rhythmic patterned lines; they can be both rhymes and unrhymed. Shakespeare mostly used *blankverse* or unrhymed patterned lines in his plays. Blank verse is sometimes referred to as "Marlowe's mighty line" after Christopher Marlowe who adapted it for the English stage. Shakespeare's use of the *blank verse*, however, is more unique and spread out and he helped to carry it forward as the dominant technique. Blank verse may not have rhyme, but they are carefully rhythmic lines created by the structuring of iambic feet. In some cases, he also used rhymed couplets, which are two consecutive lines of rhyming verse, meaning, patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. One poetic foot is a single unit that is repeated to give a steady rhythm to a line of verse, and it doesn't matter if the verse is rhymed or unrhymed. The iambic foot consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, like "inSIST" or "reSIST". The iambic pentameter was quite popular in English drama and English poetry in Shakespeare's time and the Earl of Surrey was the first person to use it in his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

It is also important to note here that in Shakespeare's time, authors were expected to follow the **Doctrine of Decorum**. This doctrine was based on the class structure of the society and helped to maintain this structure. Quite simply, it meant that characters who held high ranks in the society, such as kings, priests and courtiers, were expected to speak in verse. On the contrary people ranked lower on the hierarchy, like guards, laborers, clowns, and mad people were expected to speak in prose. For the most part, Shakespeare adheres to this decorum in *Hamlet*. The grave diggers speak in prose, as does Hamlet when he is acting mad. Do you think Shakespeare obeyed this doctrine to the fullest in *Hamlet*? Study the language of the characters of the play

carefully and find out if he did. Hint: Ophelia's madness and her verses. Hint 2: Hamlet's language as he is talking to high born male characters, for example Claudius or Laertes as compared to Hamlet's language as he is speaking to high born female characters, for example his mother or Ophelia. Find out similar examples and construct your argument. Hint 3: The soldiers speak in beautiful blank verse.

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## **5.6 Themes of the Play**

### **5.6.1 The extremes of the Human Condition**

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In the play we find that Shakespeare has contrasted extreme ways of understanding the human condition. Remember that this play was written when Humanism was a very popular philosophical thought, in theory and in practice. Yet, in this play we find that Shakespeare presents situations that oscillate between extremes, forcing us to think that the exalted nature of the human condition and the emphasis on humanist thought may not be exactly what we think about. Consider the following examples to understand the prime theme of the play. For the audience of Shakespeare's time, Hamlet would have been the paragon of the Renaissance man, complete with his doubts and confusions. Yet, there are several times in the play when Hamlet refers to himself in terms we equate with vermin and insects, crawling the nether world of the earth. There are several times when Hamlet exalts death as compared to the troubled existence he is forced to live through. Go to Act 4, Scene 3 (lines 16- 35) and observe the conversation between Claudius and Hamlet. Observe what Hamlet has to say about Polonius's body. Apart from this, also observe what Hamlet has to say about his father, the most exalted of men, in contrast to what he has to say about his uncle. Observe Ophelia's apparent purity in contrast with Gertrude's apparent promiscuity. Furthermore, observe what Hamlet has to say about Yorick in Act 5 Scene 1.

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### **5.6.2 Revenge**

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This is a widely discussed theme of the play. Hamlet's cause and grievance remains one of the most discussed revenge plots of our time. However, as with most things Shakespeare, the theme of revenge is not as straightforward as it may seem. For starters, the information leading to the cause of revenge is provided by a spirit, who, for the longest time is not entirely trusted by the protagonist. Second, the execution of the revenge is delayed for a considerable time. There, at least two other prime characters of the play also have their own revenge plots, and they seem to be executed quickly, except for Hamlet's. Third, Ophelia is just as much cause for revenge and justice, yet, her revenge is not seriously pursued. Fourth, Shakespeare makes sure that by the end of the play, everyone gets one form of revenge or the other, even Ophelia, without seeking it.

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The supplementary unit contains a detailed exploration of the theme of revenge in *Hamlet*. Go through that to add on to what you have learnt here.

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### **5.6.3 Desire and love.**

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At the root of the tragedy lies common human feelings like desire and love. Just as the previous themes, Shakespeare makes sure that we are exposed to various versions of desire and love. On the obvious front, we have Claudius's incestuous desire for his brother's wife and the desire for the throne of course. With both subjects, Claudius shows that his desires are well placed. We do not have any evidence in the play that would suggest that he did not, in fact, love Gertrude. He also proves to be an efficient administrator too. At the other end of this spectrum is Hamlet's love for his father, and his apparent disdain for the throne. We also have a see saw of his love for Ophelia. Whereas his letters (produced as proof of madness by Polonius) do point towards the lovelorn Elizabethan prince, his treatment of Ophelia would suggest otherwise. He does confess about having loved her before, and to stamp on this fact, behaves the way he does in Act 5 Scene 1. New also have the love of Fortinbras for his father, and that of Laertes for his father, both work as foil for Hamlet's love for his father. Far less discussed is the compassion and love in friendship that we see between Horatio, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Hamlet-which seems to be genuine in the first case, and not so genuine in the second. Hamlet is quite dismissive of sending his two 'friends' to death. In all this discussion, take careful note about the loves and desires of Ophelia and Gertrude. Both of these characters have not been given genuine space to express their loves and desires as they would have liked, yet critics point towards Ophelia's purity in contrast to Gertrude's promiscuity. Hamlet himself seems quite harsh in his opinion about the emotions of both women, and in both cases, he is either mistaken, or the text does not have enough words for these two women to express themselves.

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### **5.6.4 Parenting and growth.**

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In a play rife with fathers being murdered, remarrying mothers, vengeful sons and self-harming characters, it is not odd that we may be talking about the theme of parenting (or bad parenting for that matter) and the growth of children. And just as we have seen with the other themes as discussed above, we find in *Hamlet* several different cases of parenting and growth in contrast with each other. Let us discuss a few of these. In the first case we have Claudius, trying to replace Hamlet's father and is seen to be welcoming him as his son. Halfway through the play, Claudius seems genuine in respecting this new bond and is concerned for Hamlet's situation. It is only later that this relationship turns sour. Contrast this with the genuine father-son relationship between Hamlet and his late father, that is at least apparent

by Hamlet's words. However, the best example of parenting and growth is given by Polonius and his children. He gives very different advice to his two children. His lesson in parenting reeks of gender bias when he is talking to Ophelia. While talking to Laertes, it is clear he wants the son to be a worldly-wise man. He even sends Reynaldo to spy on his son's activities in Act 2 scene 1. Laertes, the brother, is also trying to be a parent. Observe his conversation with Ophelia in Act 1 Scene 3. He might come across as a concerned brother, but if you look closely, he is, like a patriarch, telling Ophelia how to be good woman and not give in to temptations. Later in the play, Laertes is caught in a proxy fatherly relationship with Claudius, that has a violent end. Fortinbras seems to have enough control over his nephew in the other side of the story.

Note that all the people we are talking about here are quite young- Hamlet and Laertes are students and Fortinbras is referred to as young prince, Ophelia is yet younger. So, what about their mothers? So far, we have only seen the fathers or the absent fathers. Hamlet's treatment of his mother offers us some clue as to their relationship. But the truth remains that *Hamlet* offers us a case of absent mothers, or silent ones. This play does not explore the relationship of the characters with their mothers.

Explore the question of the absent mothers in *Hamlet*.

And answer the final question. How do these young people grow (up) in the play?

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## 5.7 The theatre in Shakespeare's time

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In spite of the rich tradition of plays that we have inherited from the late Elizabethan period, the theatre of those time was mired by contentious politics and policies. Technological advancements since the Middle Ages and the curiosity and innovation of the renaissance came as a boon to theatre, no doubt. But, to be able to stage a play on the Elizabethan stage as perfectly as the playwright wanted was still a tough thing to achieve. There are several reasons for this. For starters, strict regulations were applicable on theatres if they were to be built within the walls of the city. Since most of the plays were staged during the day time, it was believed that having the theatres within the city was likely to affect the performance of the working people. Such places of public performances were also thought of as a space where people would indulge in riotous behavior. London, by that time had also dealt with severe plagues and outbreak of other contagious diseases. The theatre was seen as a space for congregation, and hence as a catalyst for the spread of such diseases and behavior. The puritans, on the other hand, believed that the theatre was responsible for promoting immorality. Such attitudes towards the theatre forced the owners of the theatres to build their play houses outside the city, on the



south bank of the river Thames, nearby places which hosted other kinds of restricted activities, like dog fighting and bull baiting.

The location of the theatre was not the only problem that had to be dealt with. Consider the following facts. Five years before Shakespeare was born, in 1559, the court of Queen Elizabeth proclaimed a censorship law that stated that no play should be performed that depicted “either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the common weal.” This essentially meant that the theatre had to be careful about depicting heresy, profanity and seditious acts on the stage. Consider what happened with Shakespeare’s *Richard II*. It was thought that the deposition of Richard II made rebellion very respectable and the complete scene was forcefully edited out of the first edition of the play. Consider the year 1606, the year *Macbeth* was first performed, when an act of parliament was passed which stated that,

“That if any time. . . any person or persons do or shall in any stage play, interlude, show, maygame, orpageant jestingly or profanely speak or use the holy name of God or of Christ Jesus, or of the HolyGhost or of the Trinity, which are not to be spoken but with fear and reverence, shall forfeit for every offence by him or them committed, ten pounds.”

As a fallout of this edict, several old plays had to be revised. Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*, which, as you are aware, touches on some of these sensitive topics, had to be edited and there are several differences between the editions of 1603 and 1608. Similarly, Shakespeare’s works published before 1606 had to undergo changes and they differ from the *Folio* text printed in 1623.

### Stop to Consider

What do these examples tell you? Was it easy being Shakespeare, doing what he did, talking of contentious issues through his plays and being popular at the same time? Did these factors affect the creativity and innovation of Shakespeare? Could these factors be the reasons why Shakespeare indulges in extensive word play in his plays? Can you identify such instances of word play and camouflaged meaning in *Hamlet*?

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## 5.8 Summing Up

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The history of Hamlet criticism is an interesting point to begin to understand the play. The familiar procrastinating Hamlet, who is plagued by doubt about the ghost and about himself, is a late entrant into the scene of Hamlet reception. (You will read more about critical reception of Hamlet in Unit 6 of this Block). Twentieth century

criticism of the play sensitizes us , apart from the character analysis, towards various aspects of the play such as language and imagery, mood of anxiety and uncertainty and contradictions. In fact, Hamlet is a rich repository of divergent meanings and presents itself as always a fascinating text for any reader to make forays into.

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## Unit 6

### *Hamlet*

#### Reading the Play

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- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Date and Text
- 6.4 Critical Reception
- 6.4 Act-wise Reading of the Play
- 6.5 References and Suggested Readings

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## 6.1 OBJECTIVES

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

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

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## 6.2 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

It is important to note that even before the Ghost exposed his uncle's villainy, Hamlet was a troubled young man - suffering from the

traumas associated with his father's death, his mother's sexuality and a sickening awareness of the vulnerability and corruptibility of the flesh. From the exaltation of 'What a piece of work is a man!' to the anguished 'And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?' (2.2 293-298), Hamlet's melancholy is apparent.

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

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

### **Stop to Consider**

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

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

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### 6.3 DATE AND TEXT

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Shakespeare probably wrote *Hamlet* in 1600, but the exact date of composition is uncertain. The text of the play is problematic because of the number of variants of the text that have come down to us. The First Folio of 1623 contains the text called *The Tragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, but most editions of the play since the 18th century, have included passages from the text of the play as it appears in the Second Quarto (1604) with the title *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*.

**SAQ**

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

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.....

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

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### 6.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION

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

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

prayer reasoning that he would in fact like to destroy his soul. Dr. Johnson echoed this distaste in 1765.

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

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

The most well known and important landmark in the trend of character analysis is A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904). Bradley denies Hamlet the stature that he gives to the other tragic heroes. He has been accused of treating the play as a study of Hamlet's character, almost like a nineteenth-century novel, of neglecting the poetry, and of not taking enough note of Elizabethan stage conditions or of Elizabethan thought. But his important contributions include his noting of, a) Hamlet's puzzlement at his own procrastination; b) his doubting of the Ghost's word to still his conscience; and c) his genuine and active interest in the perfect performance of the play at the same time that he is also interested in Claudius's reaction and urges Horatio to

take note of it. The contrary and ambivalent aspects that Bradley pointed to are still with us in contemporary approaches to the play which regard plurality as a significant Shakespearean trait.

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

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



shall be the formula of that particular emotion". Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear."

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

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

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

confronting male hegemony (or rule) which reproduces Ophelia in the image of its own ideas and values.

**Stop to Consider**

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

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

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

**SAQ**

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

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

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**6.5 ACT-WISE READING OF THE PLAY**

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**Act I**

The first act begins with the change of guard on a dark winter night outside Elsinore Castle in Denmark,. In the heavy darkness, the men talk about a ghost they think they have seen on the castle ramparts in the late hours of the night looking exactly like the dead King of Denmark. The appearance of the ghost is central to the development of

the entire play primarily because a restless spirit indicates foul play and forebodes some great misfortune perhaps in the form of a military attack.

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

The situation Shakespeare presents at the beginning of *Hamlet* is that a strong and beloved king has died, and the throne has been inherited not by his son, as we might expect, but by his brother Claudius. We meet prince Hamlet grieving over the death of his father and brooding over his mother's actions. His mother is no longer the widow of his dead father but the newly wedded Queen of King Claudius. Hamlet would rather have died and met his worst enemy in heaven than seen his

mother's second marriage. When Horatio informs him about the appearance of the ghost, he is left perturbed and decides to look into the matter himself. As he waits with Horatio and Marcellus, the ghost appears. Hamlet not only talks to it but also follows it to a remote spot to discover its real purpose. The ghost starts telling its own story to the prince that it is indeed the spirit of his dead father. His own brother, who not only usurped the throne but also married his wife, that is Hamlet's mother, killed him. Hamlet is urged to take revenge without harming his mother. When his friends find him Hamlet is a changed man. He hints at the terrible discovery and makes them promise not to reveal anything of what they have seen. Hamlet now knows the truth behind his father's death and is determined to act alone. The act ends in Hamlet deciding to "put on an antic disposition", that is, he will pretend to be mad in the company of others. Everyone will then keep away from him and he will be able to plan his own strategy without anyone knowing about it. Hamlet seems to be aware that the present king keeps him under surveillance.

### **Theme and Dramatic Effect**

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

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

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

**SAQ**

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

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

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**Act II**

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

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

This is followed by Polonius's conversation with Claudius and Gertrude, which includes the discussion with the ambassadors; Hamlet's conversation with Polonius, in which we see Hamlet

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

Polonius enters, announcing the return of the ambassadors whom Claudius had sent to Norway. They enter with the good news that Fortinbras swore he would never again attack the Danes. The Norwegian king, overjoyed, bequeathed upon Fortinbras a large annuity, and urged him to use the army he had assembled to attack the Poles instead of the Danes. He has therefore sent a request back to Claudius that Prince Fortinbras's armies be allowed safe passage through Denmark on their way to attack the Poles. Relieved to have averted a war with Fortinbras's army, Claudius declares that he will see to this business later. It is notable that Claudius appears indifferent to the fact that a powerful enemy will be riding through his country with a large army. Claudius seems much more worried about Hamlet's madness, indicating that where King Hamlet was a powerful warrior who sought to expand Denmark's power abroad, Claudius is a politician who is more concerned about threats from within his state.

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

to understand Hamlet's behavior entirely thwarted by his uncooperative replies.

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

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

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

### **Stop to Consider**

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

### **Act III**

Claudius and Gertrude discuss Hamlet's behavior with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who say they have been unable to learn the cause of his melancholy. Claudius and Polonius intend to spy on Hamlet's confrontation with Ophelia arranged by her father. Gertrude exits, and Polonius directs Ophelia to walk around the lobby. Polonius hears Hamlet coming, and he and the king hide behind the tapestry.

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

In mid-thought, Hamlet sees Ophelia approaching. Having received her orders from Polonius, she tells him that she wishes to return the tokens of love he has given her. Angrily, Hamlet denies having given her anything; he laments the dishonesty of beauty, and claims both to



have loved Ophelia once and never to have loved her at all. Bitterly commenting on the wretchedness of humankind, he urges Ophelia to enter a nunnery. Claudius is convinced that Hamlet's strange behavior has clearly not been caused by love for Ophelia and that his speech does not seem like the speech of insanity. In the king's opinion the best way to relieve his trouble is to send him away to England

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

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

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

**Stop to Consider**

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

**SAQ**

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

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

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

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### Act IV

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

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

### SAQ

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

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

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

The scheming Claudius encounters Laertes at approximately the same moment as he learns that Hamlet has survived and returned to Denmark. He decides to appease Laertes' wrath and dispense with Hamlet in a single stroke: he hits upon the idea of the duel in order to

use Laertes' rage to ensure Hamlet's death. The devious king thus thinks of a way for Laertes to ensure his revenge without creating any appearance of foul play. Laertes agrees, and they settle on a plan. Laertes will use a sharpened sword rather than the customary dull fencing blade. Laertes also proposes to poison his sword, so that even a scratch from it will kill Hamlet. The king concocts a backup plan as well, proposing that if Hamlet succeeds in the duel, Claudius will offer him a poisoned cup of wine to drink from in celebration.

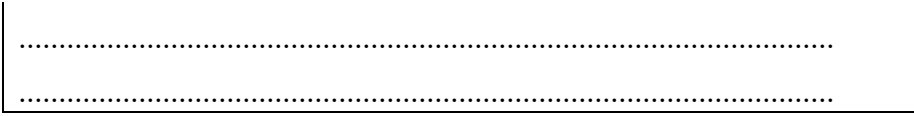
Gertrude enters with tragic news. Ophelia, mad with grief, has drowned in the river. Anguished by the loss of his sister so soon after his father's death, Laertes flees the room. Claudius summons Gertrude to follow. He tells her it was nearly impossible to quiet Laertes' rage, and worries that the news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

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

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

### SAQ

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



**Act V**

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

Hamlet and Horatio enter at a distance and watch the gravediggers work. Hamlet's confrontation with death, manifested primarily in his discovery of Yorick's skull, is, like Ophelia's drowning, an enduring image from the play. Hamlet tells Horatio that as a child he knew Yorick and is appalled at the sight of the skull. He realizes forcefully that all men will eventually become dust, even great men like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar.

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

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

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

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

They select their foils (blunted swords used in fencing), and the king too is ready with a cup of poisoned wine for Hamlet. The duel begins with Hamlet striking Laertes but declining to drink from the cup,

saying that he will make another hit first. He hits Laertes again, and Gertrude unknowingly drinks from the poisoned cup. In the meantime, Laertes scores a hit against Hamlet with his poisoned sword, drawing blood. Scuffling, they manage to exchange swords, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with Laertes' own blade.

**SAQ**

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

.....  
.....

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

.....  
.....

In the final scene, thus, the violence, so long delayed, erupts with dizzying speed. Characters drop one after the other, poisoned, stabbed, and, in the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, executed. The queen falls. Laertes, poisoned by his own sword, declares, "I am justly kill'd with my own treachery" (V.ii). The queen moans that the cup must have been poisoned, calls out to Hamlet, and dies. Laertes tells Hamlet that he, too, has been slain, by his own poisoned sword, and that the king is to blame both for the poison on the sword and for the poison in the cup. Hamlet, in a fury, runs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. With this the theme of revenge and justice reaches its conclusion. Hamlet tells Horatio that he is dying and exchanges a last forgiveness with Laertes, who dies after absolving Hamlet. Hamlet achieves his father's vengeance, but only after being spurred to it by the most extreme circumstances one might consider possible: watching his mother die and knowing that he, too, will die in moments.

The sound of marching echoes through the hall, and a shot rings out nearby. Osric declares that Fortinbras has come in conquest from Poland and now fires a volley to the English ambassadors. Hamlet tells



Horatio again that he is dying, and urges his friend not to commit suicide in light of all the tragedies, but instead to stay alive and tell his story. He says that he wishes Fortinbras to be made King of Denmark; then he dies. The arrival of Fortinbras effectively poses the question of political legitimacy once again. In marked contrast to the corrupted and weakened royal family lying dead on the floor, Fortinbras clearly represents a strong-willed, capable leader, though the play does not address the question of whether his rule will restore the moral authority of the state.

### **Hamlet's Psyche and His Situation**

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

### **The Use of 'Scenes'**

The comic scene with its 'grave' undertones may compare well with other scenes in many Shakespearean plays where serious action is apparently relieved by a comic scene. One famous example that may be set beside the gravedigger scene is the porter scene from Macbeth. The porter in his speech on equivocation adds resonance to the dominant atmosphere of ambivalence of that play. Here the gravedigger's talk of suicide adds another dimension to Hamlet's great problem: "To be or not to be".

### Stop to Consider

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

### SAQ

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

.....  
.....

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

.....  
.....

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## 6.5 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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## **Unit 7**

### ***Hamlet***

#### ***Supplementary Unit***

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7.1 Objectives

7.2 How to write an answer

7.3 Model questions and suggested answers

7.4 Other Study Suggestions

7.5 References and Suggested Readings

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### **7.1 Objectives:**

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In this unit, you will be able to

Have an idea of how to write an answer to questions from the text

Learn the basic points for answering these questions

Familiarise yourself with the resources that enable you to understand the text better

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### **7.2 How to write effective answers**

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Let us discuss how to write effective answers. The first requisite for writing a good answer is to read the text well. It is always better to read the text at least twice. As literary critics in training, one of our major tasks is to provide an accurate analysis of a text with valid arguments. This will happen only if you have read the text. More often than not, a good answer can be written just by reading a text well. Over and above the study material that you study or how many commentaries you go through, the basic duty has to be kept in mind. The second requirement of writing a good answer is to have valid arguments that are tied to each other to make a composite answer. These arguments then need to be organised and arranged in a proper manner. Often the evidence that you cite from the text in support of your arguments and answer overall are scattered all over the text. Hence, the importance of multiple reading. The third important

requirement for writing a good answer is to take the help of experts and critics who have already contributed to the study of a text or a subject. Whenever valid, you have to cite the works of such critics to support your answer and provide more justification. For a text like *Hamlet*, this is a major advantage since Shakespeare and his works have a rich critical heritage. The fourth important requirement for writing a good answer is to have some amount of research skill, which involves visiting libraries and finding out journals and books where past masters have left their mark. Towards the end of this unit, you shall find that one such rich source is available to you right next door. The fifth important thing to consider present trends of research for a text or a subject. This means keeping in mind recent publications which add not only to the understanding of a text, but also enriches the critical heritage. With a text like *Hamlet*, this is another advantageous case, since its contemporary scholarship is also rich, as you shall find out at the end of this unit.

In 1927, while addressing the Shakespeare Society, TS Eliot made the following observation about our understanding of Shakespeare:

“About anyone so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong.”  
(Eliot 126)

The enormity of this statement lies not in the uncertainty of our being right or wrong about Shakespeare, but in the exercise of generating meaning from subsequent readings of his plays; building upon or challenging previous readings of the plays. The sustained scholarship on *Hamlet* and the consequent generation of readings and perspectives that have continued in the twenty first century is one testament to this exercise. Hence, the stress on re reading the play multiple times, considering the critical heritage of the play and keeping abreast of contemporary scholarship. The attempt of this unit is to guide you towards a holistic understanding of the play and demonstrate in practice how to write an effective answer. We will do this by considering three questions from *Hamlet* and demonstrating how to structure your answer, how to use the close reading of a text to formulate an argument, how to support that argument from evidence from the text, how to reinforce your argument further, how to cite from the critical heritage and how to refer to contemporary research in some cases.

(Please note that all quotations have been taken from the following edition of *Hamlet*

William Shakespeare, Burton Raffel. *Hamlet*. Yale University Press, 2003.)

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### 7.3 Model Questions and Suggested AnswersSample

#### 7.3 1 Write a critical note on Hamlet's delay.

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Critics have often pointed out Hamlet's inability or reluctance to execute his revenge as one of the major unresolved questions raised by the play that determines how we understand the mind of Hamlet. In what has come to be known as Hamlet's delay; here the reference is to the many doubts and questions Hamlet has regarding what the ghost has told him, his many schemes to arrive at the truth, his inability to confront his uncle directly, and his inability to raise the sword when the opportunity presents itself towards the end of Act 3 scene 3. The reference here is also to his many soliloquies expressing self-doubt, creating excuses for his delay, and finally frustration at his inaction.

To understand and answer a classic question like Hamlet's delay, you have to keep four things in mind. First; what evidence can you glean from the text, second; how Shakespeare reinforces the reading of delay in the play, third; what do critics have to say about the delay, and, fourth and most importantly, what your own close reading of the play tells you about Hamlet's delay.

First, attempt a close reading of the play. It is the ghost who informs Hamlet of a murder 'most foul'. ***Yet Hamlet continues to have doubts about what the ghost says.*** The only time Hamlet is absolutely convinced of his duty is in Act 1 Scene 5, lines 92- 109, and says of the Ghost's commands "And thy commandments all alone shall live Within the book and volume of my brain," (102- 103), which he continues by calling the ghost 'honest' in line 137. Soon after, in Act 2, scene 2, he makes a decision to observe his uncle to determine his guilt and says, "The spirit that I have seen May be a devil, and the devil hath power T' assume a pleasing shape – yea, and perhaps Out of my weakness and my melancholy As he is very potent with such spirits, Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds More relative than this." (Lines 585- 590). To confirm his suspicions, he primes Horatio to observe his uncle during the play in Act 3, scene 2, and one of his motives is to prove if a 'damned ghost' has made 'foul' his imagination (lines 78-79). Later in the scene, as Horatio perceives he

saw guilt in the expression of Claudius, Hamlet assures himself that he will take the ghost's word for a 'thousand pound' (line 275). Yet again, Hamlet shows his ambiguity towards the ghost in Act 3, Scene 4, (he is confronting Gertrude, and the ghost enters) when he refers to the ghost as 'it' as the ghost steals away (line 134). (William Shakespeare)

Second, continue with a close reading of the play, only this time, ***concentrate on the speeches and soliloquies of Hamlet. What does Hamlet make of his own delay?*** The first instance is Hamlet's soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 2, (lines 532- 590) where he begins by acknowledging that he has not been quite up to his task and questions himself 'Am I a coward?' (Line 555) and uses expressions like 'pigeon livered' and 'lack gall' (562) to reinforce his feelings. His tone gets severe between lines 568- 574. Yet the action that he plans after line 576 does not match his words. His famous soliloquy, 'To be or not be' in Act 3 Scene 1 can also be seen as an outcome of his inability to take action. Here, you can observe how existential torment in his speech relates the personal to the universal. A few lines later, while talking to Ophelia, he refers to himself as being 'proud, revengeful, ambitious' (Line 124) with enough things to give him offence. Immediately after, he questions his actions, 'crawling between earth and heaven', equates himself to 'arrant knaves', and asks Ophelia not to trust fellows like him (Lines 127- 129). The only time he seems to be taking action is when he confronts his mother in Act 3 Scene 4 and he foreshadows his meeting and confrontation with his mother by his words towards the end of Act 3 Scene 2 "Let me be cruel, not unnatural. I will speak daggers to her, but use none." (Lines 378- 379). For once, he does what he says. The closest he comes to yield his sword is towards the end of Act 3 Scene 3, when Claudius is praying alone. This is a much-debated scene, and you must mention carefully Hamlet's reasons, religious or otherwise. In any case, notice the strong "No" in line 86.

There are other speeches and soliloquies of Hamlet that you can use to support your argument. But we must leave them for the third argument of your answer.

Third, write about how ***Shakespeare reinforces Hamlet's delay by contrasting it with two other characters in the play who are quite prompt in taking action where they feel wronged or denied justice.*** At the very start of the play, we have young Fortinbras who has already made considerable progress in his mission of avenging his father, so much so that the new king Claudius has to send envoys to the king of Norway to rein in his nephew. In Act 4 Scene 5 of the play, we have

Laertes seeking revenge for his father, who manages to gather a band of supporters who demand “Laertes shall be king” (line 108), whose rebellion seems “giant- like” to Claudius (line 121) and who minces no words while confronting the king directly (lines 130- 136). Hamlet is aware of the two young men and their grievances, and their eerie similarities to his own situation. Later in the play (Act 4 Scene 4) as Hamlet comes to know of young Fortinbras’ new quest in Poland; he wonders, “How stand I then” (line 56), compared to this “delicate and tender prince” (line 48) who seems prompt in leading twenty thousand men to battle. This stirs up his urge for revenge and decides in the end that from this time on his thoughts shall be “bloody, or be nothing worth!” (Line 66). Of Laertes’ situation, Hamlet says in Act 5 Scene 2 “For by the image of my cause I see the portraiture of his.” and, “But sure the bravery of his grief did put me Into a tow’ring passion” (lines 77- 79).

Shakespeare reinforcements can be very subtle. Here are two more examples from the text that you can cite to make your argument better. As Claudius goads Laertes towards extracting revenge from Hamlet for his father’s murder, he is very careful with his choice of words. He asks if Laertes will be able to “show yourself your father’s son in deed More than in words?” (Act 4 Scene 7 lines 122- 124). In effect, Claudius’ entire speech between lines 108- 124 is a general lesson on why deeds must be done on time and should not be delayed, with clever wordplay involving the words ‘should’ and ‘would’. In any case, this indecision is carried till the very end, with Hamlet stabbing Claudius only after he knows that he is about to die, and when he does stab Claudius, he makes no mention of his father’s murder, his mother’s poisoning, or revenge (Act 5 Scene 2). Note that he displays a similar kind of instantaneous action when he stabs Polonius, and he also sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death without much contemplation.

Fourth, write about *what critics have to say about Hamlet’s delay*. The critic A.C. Bradley is of the opinion that, “...no theory will hold water which finds the cause of Hamlet’s delay merely, or mainly, or even to any considerable extent, in external difficulties.”(((())). He proceeds to explain how Hamlet makes no mention of any external difficulty at all, regarding his access to the person of Claudius and he does mention that he has everything he needs; cause, will, strength and means, to execute his revenge (Act 4, Scene 4, Line 45). In any case, we do not find, anywhere in the play, a scheme of Hamlet’s to bring Claudius to public justice- we only find an experiment in the approximation of locating guilt by reading facial expression. He goes



on to support his argument by alluding to Laertes's ability to raise a rebellion at such a short notice, whereas, Hamlet. Claimed to be the beloved of the people is not able to do that. In any case, he never even once mentions any thought of raising public opinion against for their murdered king and his personal motive of revenge. Gabriel Josipovici is of the view that "He cannot take part in the Revenge Tragedy his father wants him to act in because, first of all, he is not sure if the Ghost really is the spirit of his dead father and not a spirit out of Hell sent to lead him to destruction, and secondly because the whole notion of Revenge Tragedy strikes him as out of date and no longer relevant, what the French call pompiers. Because he loved, or imagines he loved, his father, and loathes his uncle, he would dearly like reassurance on the authenticity of the Ghost, and because he deeply admires the old revenge ethos he is deeply troubled by his inability to embrace it wholeheartedly." (Josipovici 254)

Many other critics have commented on Hamlet's delay. You may quote them to further strengthen your answer.

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### **7.3.2 Comment on Shakespeare's use of madness in the play *Hamlet*.**

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As you may have noticed, both sample question 1 and sample question 2 are open ended general questions. These questions have been put in here so as to guide you to answer any question on Hamlet's delay and madness.

In answering Shakespeare's use of madness in *Hamlet*, we will follow the same strategy employed in Sample question 1. There will be four arguments in the answer.

In the first argument, ***write about how madness is used as a plot device in the play***. The first instance is contrived use of madness by Hamlet to find out the truth about his father's death. He makes his compatriots swear not to reveal to anyone the instances of the night (Act 1 Scene 5) and also tells them that from now on, he might "put on an antic disposition" (line 172) and might bear himself "odd" (line 170) and enhance this behavior by "pronouncing of some doubtful phrase". Madness as a plot device is already underway and in subsequent scenes, each character in the play takes notice of Hamlet's behavior- there are plans to understand his behavior (as is shown in the concern of Gertrude and Claudius), plans to cure his madness by issue

of companionship (as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are employed) and an erroneous estimate of his madness. Polonius is convinced love is “The very cause of Hamlet’s lunacy” (Act 2 Scene 2, Line 49). Hamlet’s letters to Ophelia serve as proof later. Immediately after, Gertrude gets extremely close to understanding Hamlet’s behavior, the only character in the play to do so, and says “I doubt it is no other but the main, His father’s death, and our o’erhasty marriage” (lines 56-57). But of course, before any discussion on this statement can take place, news from Norway arrives in the form of Voltimand and Cornelius. Madness takes backstage, politics takes front stage. As Polonius encounters Hamlet in the same scene, their conversation and Hamlet’s words convince Polonius that there is a “method” in his madness (line 202). From here on, as a plot device, madness is attached with Hamlet’s philosophical musing, each reinforcing the other to make the effect stronger. It is as if Hamlet’s feigned behavior gave him the license to be bitterly sarcastic and philosophical. (At this stage, compare the Elizabethan convention of using the fool or the clown to present controversial or caustic statements in the garb of laughter or madness. What other plays written by Shakespeare or Webster have a similar device?)

In the second argument, *write about how madness is used as an excuse to explain Hamlet’s behavior, even by Hamlet himself*. This may also be taken as a continuation of the plot device argument. Here, cite three examples. First, in Act 3 Scene 1, concentrate on the meeting between Ophelia and Hamlet. Hamlet is fresh off his philosophical musing alone, deciding to be or not to be, when Ophelia confronts him. In his flow of emotion, Hamlet talks of his predicaments (which Ophelia does not completely understand), he says he does not love Ophelia anymore and he advises Ophelia to go to a “nunnery” (line 121). Ophelia’s conclusion, after Hamlet leaves, is that “a noble mind is here o’erthrown” (line 149) and that Hamlet’s “noble and sovereign reason, Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh,” (lines 157-157). The second example is from Ophelia’s burial in Act 5 scene 1, where Hamlet jumps inside the open grave of Ophelia and makes a passionate scene of his affections for the drowned girl. In this dramatic scene, consistent with the unpredictable behavior of Hamlet, he even manages to get into a scuffle with Laertes, who is anyway in the lookout for revenge for his own two personal tragedies. Once the men are forcibly separated, Gertrude concludes this of Hamlet’s behavior “This is mere madness” (line 269) and that “the fit will work on him” awhile (line 270). The third and most compelling example comes from Act 5 Scene 2, where Hamlet himself takes the help of his feigned madness to explain his rash actions that lead to Polonius’ death.

Seeking forgiveness from Laertes before their duel, this is his complete excuse:

“Give me your pardon, sir: I have done you wrong,  
But pardon't, as you are a gentleman.  
This presence knows, and you must needs have heard,  
How I am punished with a sore distraction.  
What I have done  
That might your nature, honor and exception  
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.  
Was't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.  
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,  
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,  
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.  
Who does it, then? His madness. If 't be so,  
Hamlet is of the faction that is wronged:  
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.” (lines 211- 224)

In all the three examples cited above, we find that in each time madness is used as an explanation or excuse to understand Hamlet's behavior. Hence this also serves as a plot device.

In the third argument ***write about the one case of real madness in the play that is seldom talked about: Ophelia's madness.*** The circumstances of Hamlet and Ophelia are fairly similar. Both their fathers have been murdered. The circumstances leading up to and immediately following their death are conveniently suspicious. In both cases, there is an attempt at brushing up the truth about the murders and the truth is only known to the people directly involved in the murder. In both cases there are fair grounds of seeking revenge. Whereas Hamlet feigns madness to find the truth and seek his revenge, Ophelia is not even shown to come near the idea of revenge. Here, contrast and compare the violent reaction of her brother in seeking revenge, in the name of honor and pride and justice. The female character is not even considered to express similar feelings. She is given a different outlet altogether, one devoid of any purpose; madness. Only in her case, the madness is real. Her singing, mystical

melancholy and eventual death is all explained by madness. In her first appearance on the stage in Act 4 scene 5, after her father's death, her behavior is first termed "conceit" (line 45) by Claudius and soon after, he describes her situation as "Divided from herself and her fair judgement" which he generalizes as "Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts." (Lines 85- 86). In the same scene, she appears again and Laertes seems to think that if she had her 'wits' about and pursued revenge, her situation might have been avoided. Her behavior, he terms "A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance fitted" (lines 177- 178)

In the fourth argument, *write about what critics have to say about Shakespeare's use of madness*. Here, the issue is that there are other plays by Shakespeare where madness is a theme, so you will either need to take the help of criticism that focuses on Shakespeare's use of madness in Hamlet in the context of his other plays or take the help of comments that directly deal with *Hamlet*. Your choice of criticism to cite should make your answer better, that should be the focus of your citation.

A.C Bradley has this to say about Hamlet's madness, "His adoption of the pretence of madness may well have been due in part to fear of the reality; to an instinct of self-preservation, a fore-feeling that the pretence would enable him to give some utterance to the load that pressed on his heart and brain, and a fear that he would be unable altogether to repress such utterance." (Bradley 101). Of Ophelia's madness, Bradley is of the view that Shakespeare's introduction of madness in Ophelia is, "...though intensely pathetic, is beautiful and moving rather than harrowing; and this effect is repeated in a softer tone in the description of Ophelia's death" (Bradley 48). Feminist critic and theorist Elaine Showalter has a different opinion of Ophelia however. She says, "Ophelia's symbolic meanings, moreover, are specifically feminine. Whereas for Hamlet madness is metaphysical, linked with culture, for Ophelia it is a product of the female body and female nature, perhaps that nature's purest form. On the Elizabethan stage, the conventions of female insanity were sharply defined. Ophelia dresses in white, decks herself with "fantastical garlands" of wild flowers, and enters, according to the stage directions of the "Bad" Quarto, "distracted" playing on a lute with her "hair down singing." Her speeches are marked by extravagant metaphors, lyrical free associations, and "explosive sexual imagery." She sings wistful and bawdy ballads, and ends her life by drowning." (Showalter 80)

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**7.3.3 There are two sides to Claudius - treacherous villain; and the tormented sinner who longs for redemption. Discuss these two aspects of Claudius's character, showing which, in your opinion, is more dominant.**

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As you can see, this question is more direct than the other two and is clearly asking you for your opinion. This means that whatever argumentative skill that you have derived from the exercise of the previous two questions; you have to use those skills in a more pointed way. Here, the question is already telling you that there are two sides to Claudius. And then, the question is asking you to argue which one is dominant. There will be four arguments in this answer. You have to *first demonstrate, from the text, argument and evidence where Claudius displays his treacherous side*. Second, you have to demonstrate from the text, argument and evidence where *Claudius demonstrates his cowardly side*. Third, you have to give evidence as to which side is more dominant. Fourth, you have to *support your answer by citing and referring to critics whose opinion of Claudius support your arguments*.

For better or for worse, the original crime that Claudius is allegedly accused of, that of the murder of Hamlet's father lies outside the action of the play. As the play commences, you get a good insight into what kind of a person Claudius is. At the very start, you find him doing three things at once; grieving for his dead brother, celebrating his wedding and dispatching envoys to quell young Fortinbras's rebellion (Act 1 Scene 2 Lines 1-39). In the same scene you find him giving fatherly advice to Hamlet at once personal and philosophical. So far so good. Things only unravel in Act 1 Scene 4, as Claudius's noisy celebrations off stage threaten the eerie calm of the stage. Claudius's treacherous side begins to emerge as he effectively convinces Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet (Act 2 Scene 2), the result of this initiation does take a sinister turn as we come to know in Act 5 Scene 1. At this point, take care not to include his political decisions outside of Denmark, those concerning Norway and England, to cloud your judgement of Claudius. There is evidence in the text where Claudius can be seen plotting political gambit. That may be a reflection on his character, but that is also something that a king is supposed to do (Think in terms of a Machiavellian character, political cunningness was a required skill and personal treachery is a character flaw). He is supposed to be cunning and treacherous when it comes to

protecting his kingdom or demanding taxes. At best, you may mention that in the process of collecting taxes, he combines treachery by plotting Hamlet's murder in England as a favor.

Thereafter, come to the point where Laertes accuses Claudius of his father's murder, or at best, concealing details of the murder. From this point on, Claudius makes no pretense of his villainous side. He manages to convince Laertes that he is innocent, he grieves as much at Polonius's death (Act 4 scene 4 lines 149- 152) and promises him the truth. His treachery here lies in telling exactly what Laertes wants to hear, promising him the kingdom if he be found guilty, giving him the permission to do something he wishes to do (raise a group of friends to judge Claudius, which Laertes has actually already one, but now it has the king's sanction) and knowing full well that he himself is innocent of Polonius's death, he extracts from Laertes the promise that if he be found innocent, Laertes will do as Claudius says (Act 4 Scene 5 Lines 200- 209). From this point on, Claudius's treacherous side takes over completely. He manages to explain his inaction (Act 4 Scene 7 Lines 9- 24) by citing two reasons, both reasons being valid. Immediately after, he makes Laertes his confidante by reading Hamlet's letter aloud and in front of him, saying "Laertes, you shall hear them" (line 42). For a king to read out personal correspondence from a common enemy, in front of a young man crying for revenge, this must be a morale booster. The second plot to murder Hamlet springs up immediately, since now he has his instrument, Laertes, primed and fueled. The treachery lies in the idea of making it seem like an "accident" (line 66). He now has two cards to play, Hamlet's supposed jealousy of Laertes (Lines 125- 137), and Laertes's skills with the sword and wish for revenge. This side of the character is only reinforced after Claudius makes the following statement- "Therefore this project should have a back or second, that might hold if this should blast in proof." (Act 4 Scene 7 lines 151-153). He is calling for a backup plan in case the duel does not work.

All the lines and incidents quoted above clearly confirm Claudius as being treacherous

In contrast, there are very few instances that prove that Claudius was a tormented sinner who longed for redemption.

This is the second argument of your answer. Here, refer to two instances. The first instance occurs in Act 3 scene 3, after the play within the play has successfully managed to tingle the guilt of Claudius. Between lines 35 and 72, Claudius makes some interesting comments on his position. He begins by calling his offence 'rank'

which 'smells to heaven' (line 36) and then he says he cannot pray and ask for redemption (38), though his inclination and will to pray are 'sharp' (39) yet he says 'My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent' (40). His attempt to seek forgiveness and redemption are both beyond his reach, for, he says,

"That cannot be, since I am still possessed  
Of those effects for which I did the murder,  
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.

May one be pardoned and retain th' offence?" (53- 56)

In the subsequent lines, he follows up with more tormented words, admits to his guilt, yet does not directly ask for forgiveness. It would appear from his words that he has already accepted that there can be no redemption for his action. There is an element of fatality in his speech. The second instance comes in Act 4 scene 5, where Claudius, as opposed to the scheming and cunning king that we can observe in the first argument, suddenly appears vulnerable and fearful of what is to come. Between lines 75 and 96, he is referring to the secret arrival of Laertes in Denmark, having heard of his father's death and steaming for revenge. His speech to Gertrude is hysterical and fearful, and at the same time involves some retrospection at his actions following the death of Polonius. Besides these two events, there is seldom any part in the play where Claudius appears vulnerable or weak or like a sinner who is seeking redemption.

Your third argument must be a clear statement stating that based on the arguments and evidence cited above, it is clear that in your opinion Claudius is a treacherous villain and not a tormented sinner seeking redemption.

Your answer, in this case, seems to conform to critical opinion about the character of Claudius. A.C Bradley has this to say about Claudius

King Claudius rarely gets from the reader the attention he deserves. But he is very interesting, both psychologically and dramatically. On the one hand, he is not without respectable qualities. As a king he is courteous and never undignified; he performs his ceremonial duties efficiently; and he takes good care of the national interests. He nowhere shows cowardice, and when Laertes and the mob force their way into the palace, he confronts a dangerous situation with coolness and address. His love for his ill-gotten wife seems to be quite genuine, and there is no ground for suspecting him of

having used her as a mere means to the crown. His conscience, though ineffective, is far from being dead. In spite of its reproaches he plots new crimes to ensure the prize of the old one; but still it makes him unhappy (III. i. 49 f., III. iii. 35 f.). Nor is he cruel or malevolent. (Bradley 143)

Find out what other critics have said of Claudius and refer and cite their comments to make your answer better.

As you have seen from the three sample questions and the exercise in writing answers for them, careful study of a text, organizing your arguments and reading critical essays and texts can greatly enhance your answer writing skills. Here, we may be talking of Hamlet only, but if you follow a similar model of writing answers for other texts and papers, you stand to benefit greatly. Also remember that this is not only an exercise in writing answer, it is also an exercise in clear analytical thinking and arrangement of your analytical arguments.

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#### **7.4 Other Study Suggestions**

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*Hamlet* happens to be the only play by Shakespeare that has a journal dedicated exclusively to an individual play. *Hamlet Studies: An International Journal of Research* was first published in 1979 by its founder editor Professor Rupin Desai. Writing a review of the inaugural edition of *Hamlet Studies* in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* in 1980, Jay L. Halio had the following words to say about this unique journal:

It was, of course, bound to happen. Given the plethora of criticism and scholarship on *Hamlet*, including film and television analyses and related studies, a journal devoted exclusively to this most famous of all of Shakespeare's plays was inevitable. And now we have it: *Hamlet Studies*, Volume I, Number 1, April 1979, published in India by Vikas Publishing House of New Delhi, and edited by A. N. Kaul and R. W. Desai. (Halio 1980)

Interestingly, the Krishna Kanta Handique Library of Gauhati University has in its collection copies of this rare journal. Even though we may now be in the grip of digital media and scholarship, it would be an interesting task for students to access the copies of this journal in the University Library. Make an annotated bibliography of papers published in the journal which are relevant to the themes and issues that have been discussed in this study material. This should not only



increase your knowledge of the play; it will also serve as a research exercise for the future.

Apart from this journal and many others which talk about *Hamlet* and other plays by Shakespeare, you should also pay attention to recent works that have enriched this field of study. Mentioned below are some such works that you should refer to:

1. Burnett, Mark Thornton. 'Hamlet' and World Cinema . Cambridge University Press, 2019.
2. Croall, Jonathan. Performing Hamlet: Actors in the Modern Stage. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.
3. Lewis, Rhodri. Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness. Princeton University Press, 2020.
4. Purakayastha, Anindya Sekhar. Literature, Cultural Politics and Counter-Readings: Hamlet as the Prince of Deconstruction. New York: Routledge, 2021.
5. Sonia Massai, Lucy Munro, ed. Hamlet: The State of Play. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021.
6. Sonya Freeman Loftis, Allison Kellar, and Lisa Ulevich, ed. Shakespeare's Hamlet in an Era of Textual Exhaustion. Routledge, 2018.
7. White, Paul Megna · Bríd Phillips R. S., ed. Hamlet and Emotions. Springer International Publishing; Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

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## **7.5References and Suggested Readings**

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Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth*. 3rd Edition. New York: Macmillan Education, 1992.

Eliot, T.S. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1932.

Halio, Jay L. "A New Hamlet Journal." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31.3 (1980): 462-464.

Josipovici, Gabriel. *Hamlet : Fold on Fold*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Showalter, Elaine. "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism." *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*. Ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman. London: Taylor & Francis, 2005. 77-94.

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## Unit 8

### *Measure for Measure*

#### *Introduction and Stage History*

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- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Objective
- 8.3 Date
- 8.4 Sources
- 8.5 Contexts of *Measure for Measure*
- 8.6 The Play on the Stage
- 8.7 Critical Reception
- 8.8 Summing up
- 8.9 Reference and Suggested Reading

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### **Objective:**

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In this unit, you will be able to

- Learn about the date and sources of the play
- Consider the various contexts of the play
- Understand how the play was staged variously at various times
- Evaluate the play in terms of its critical reception down the ages

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## 8.1 Introduction

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*Measure for Measure* is one of the most popular plays by Shakespeare. As mentioned by an author, the popularity of the play and its global appeal can be exemplified by the fact of its performance. In 1981, for example, it was staged in various theatre events in London and Edinburgh, in three theatre festivals in America, and in Switzerland, Hungary, Belgium and China (Wharton 9). Also, a formidable body of scholarly work on *Measure for Measure* has been published globally. Written more than four centuries ago in a culture and time entirely different from ours, the play is still as perplexing and intriguing as in the time of its production, capable to elicit differing responses from the audience / readers. The play raises issues of corruption, sexuality, law, authority and moral judgement while its mode of unfolding to a point of revelation and reconciliation through varying moods of anxiety, fear, subversive and casual talk, and philosophical speculation would keep you glued to itself. This unit, along with the other two that follow, will help you look at various dimensions and aspects of the play, to learn what is ‘inside’ the text and what lies ‘outside’ its—the various contexts. But the units should help you to encounter the text itself.

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## 8.3 . Date:

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Date of publication of the *sources of Measure for Measure* will help us to infer the dating of the play. (Sources are discussed in the next subsection of this unit.) Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi* was finally reprinted in 1593. Whetson’s *Promos and Cassandra* a text to which Shakespeare’s *Love’s labour Lost* alludes was published in 1578 (Gibbons 12). Moreover, accession of James I in 1603 was an important public event in which Shakespeare was directly involved. As

we shall see, there is a repercussion of this event in the text. Considering all this, the play is supposed to be composed in 1603-4. There is evidence that the play was performed at the Court of James I on 26 December of that year. It was conjectured that the text was based on a transcript of the bard's manuscript made by Ralph Crone who was the scrivener of *King's Players*. Please note that the king changed the name of Shakespeare's theatre company from the Chamberlaine's Men to King's Men. the play was first published in 1923 in the First Folio of Shakespeare's work. It was conjectured that the text was based on a transcript of the bard's manuscript made by Ralph Crone who was the scrivener of King's Players.

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## 8.4 Sources

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Basic sources of *Measure for Measure* are George Whetstone's play *Promos and Cassandra* (1578) and another text *Hetameron of Civil Discourses* (1582). Whetstone took his story from Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565) which Shakespeare also knew.

In Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* the emperor Maximilian appoints Juriste to rule over the city. A young man Vico is sentenced to death for violating a virgin and his sister Epitia pleads for him. Juriste promises to consider the case on condition that she should lie with him. Epitia demands from him a promise of marriage before she should comply, and he falters. Vico passionately requests his sister to save him by accepting Juriste's proposal. Epitia accepts the proposal. Next morning she finds that her brother is executed. Contemplating revenge upon Juriste, she appeals to the emperor, and the emperor, in turn, orders Juriste to marry her before accepting death sentence. Epitia, now Juriste's wife, pleads for mercy to her husband, and the emperor pardons him to allow them to live happily ever after.

In whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra* Promos, a newly appointed ruler of the city, resolves to render justice impartially and sentences one Andrugio to death for incontinence. Andrugio appeals to his sister Cassandra to plead to Promos for mercy. She meets Promos, appeals for mercy and has the execution postponed. Promos falls in love with her but resists the temptation. Encouraged by a servant Phallax, Promos in the second meeting offers Cassandra a proposal of physical relationship, which she refuses. He promises to marry her. As she comes back to her brother, he appeals to her to accept the proposal and she is won over. Promos satiates his desire but breaks his word. He orders that Andrugio be executed secretly and his severed head be sent to Cassandra. Cassandra decides to approach the king for justice. However, in reality, the jailor had actually brought her the head of an executed criminal and released Andrugio. King returns to the city and hears of Cassandra's story. Promos at once confesses his guilt. King orders him to marry Cassandra and then to be put to death. Promos pleads for mercy and so does Cassandra, now his wife, but to no avail. It becomes known that Andrugio is alive. King eventually pardons Andrugio and also acquits Promos for the sake of his wife. The play also has a comic underplot involving courtesan and bawds.

Now, look at what happens in *Measure for Measure*. Vincentio, Duke of Vienna, materializes his stated plan to depart from the city and to hand over power to Angelo, a man of reputation. The Duke, however, disguises himself as a Friar to observe his deputy's method of governance as well as his behavior from close quarters. Angelo enforces a hitherto neglected law against fornication, demolishing the brothels and imprisoning Claudio for breaching the law, as part of his plan to end corruption in public life. Claudio asks Lucio, a friend of his from the suburbs, to make his sister Isabella to plead for her brother's life. Isabella proceeds accordingly. In her bid to persuade Angelo for sparing her brother from capital punishment, she awakens

in him a sexual desire and elicits a condition of sexual encounter in return for Claudio's life. Isabella rejects the offer and asks her brother to prepare for death. Claudio, out of his instinct for survival and fear of death, urges her to acquiesce to Angelo's condition so that he is set free. Isabella reviles at what she deems to be a disgusting thought and only curses her brother to die. The disguised Duke learns this hideous secret overhearing the siblings' exchange. He suggests to Isabella to pretend to accept Angelo's proposal and shares with her to send in her place one Mariana, Angelo's long-neglected beloved who was betrothed to him. The plan is executed, but Angelo breaks his promise. He orders execution of Claudio. Meanwhile, pulling provost into the rescue plan, the Duke manages to send to Angelo the severed head of a deceased prisoner, fashioned as Claudio's. In the thick of events the Duke also receives slanderous remarks from Lucio. Now, the Duke returns to Vienna in his own person to receive Isabella's accusation, as planned, but dismisses her complaints. The ultimate proof of her charge presents itself when the Duke reveals the Friar as his disguise. Angelo is ordered to marry Mariana before he is decreed to be executed for his crime. Mariana, now Angelo's legally married wife pleads for his life. Finally Angelo is pardoned. Claudio is to marry Juliet, while Lucio is to marry his mistress. At the end, Vincentio himself proposes marriage to Isabella.

From these brief outlines of the stories you will learn the similarities and differences. You will notice that *Measure for Measure* is closer to Whetstone's version while there are noticeable similarities between Shakespeare's text and Cinthio's. Both the secretary in Cinthio's text and Escalus in Shakespeare's speak of the hardness of law. Both Epitia, and Isabella of this play make a distinction between act and intention. For a detailed analysis of Shakespeare's adaptation of these

texts, you may refer to the ‘Supplementary Unit’ of the under discussion.

**Check your progress:**

Write a note on how Shakespeare incorporated thematic elements for the play from Cinthio’s and Whetstone’s texts. (in 100 words)

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**8.5 Social Background of *Measure for Measure*:**

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James I’s accession in 1603 provides an immediate political background. James I Wrote *Basilicon Dorn*(literally meaning ‘royal gift’) in 1599 which sold thousands of copies. Bacon, Gibbons mentions, said that the book was in every man’s hand(15). *Basilicon Doron* is about the essential traits of a good monarch, his duty to God, his responsibilities and office, as well as his behavior in daily life. Governance was an urgent issue of the time, and discourses on dealing with corruption were not sparse. Whetstone in *A Mirrour for Magistrates and Cyties* (1584) deals with the issue of reforming the city and eradicating vices. Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Image of Governance* (1541) mentions the Empire Steverns who visited his city in disguises to observe people and operations of law, an ideal model for reforming ruler. Ruler in disguise also figures in a number of Elizabethan comedies; for instance Marstone’s *The Malcontent* has a Duke-in-disguise. Coming back to discourse on governance, various



sermons and treatises defined the privileges and responsibilities of a Christian governor. These include Antony Guevara's *Dial of Priss* (translated in 1557), Geoffrey Fenton's *Forms of Christian Policie* (1574), Henry Bullinger's *Fiftia Godlie and Learned Sermons* (1587). There were a number of works that dealt with the office and duties of a christian ruler such as six sermons preached before King James at various times by Thomas Bilson, Richard Eedes, Henry Hooke, Thomas Blague, Richard Field, Henry Smith's *Magistrates Scripture, emento for Magistrates*, Andrew Willet's *Ecclesia Triumphous*, William Willymat's *A Loyd Subject's Looking glasse*, Ben Jonson's *Panegyre* on King's first entrance into Parliament, William Perkin's *Treatise of Christian Equity and moderation*. ( )

Some understanding of the social customs and moral values of the Elizabethan times should enable you to assess the social world in which action of Measure for Measure takes place and its characters are situated. Questions of law, authority, morality, sexual practice and marriage must be addressed from the perspective of that time. As you will see from your reading of the play, the main characters—Angelo, Claudio, Isabella—either perceives evil or are driven by a sense of guilt at a certain point in the play. Primarily, this 'guilt' is associated with sexual indulgence within a heterosexual frame. Epistle to the Romans, the sixth book of the New Testament, illustrates a certain propensity of human nature to indulge in evil even as man can be aware about what is good. This inherent sinfulness of human being prompts one to resort to action which contradicts the law of goodness. According to Elizabethan custom a de future betrothal (that is, engagement for future marriage) does not legalize sexual union. The law enforced in Vienna by Angelo does not intend to remedy the problem of sexual corruption through the institution of marriage but to curb the liberty which inspires 'prompture of the blood' ( Nagarajan 116)

Institution of marriage, betrothal customs and issues of sexual union are crucial to the social world depicted in the play. In the Elizabethan society, family functioned as a site for generating gender hierarchy, reproduction and inheritance of property, patriarchal authority, a ground for imparting religious orientation to children. Good marital relationship within the family was seen as a key to good citizenship in the public world. (Ingram 114) (You may notice in Shakespeare's plays an analogy between public issue of governance and domestic issue of settlement of marital relationship and how they go to establish some order eventually.)

Central to the existence of the family is the marriage. A couple could ideally consummate their relationship by means of a promise made to each other where presence of parents, relatives or church officials was not mandatory. However, this over time created confusion and problems. Church began to insist on the requirements of marriage such as the parents' consent and so on. However, license could be issued to obviate such societal requirements, and Martin Luther complained against such practice. Church increasingly arbitrated in marriage affairs, disapproving of unsolemnized marriage. From the turn of the century, number of legal battles relating to marriage decreased significantly. Still, irregular marriages never stopped in the seventeenth century, and questions of sexual morality assumed greater importance. Sexual transgression was subjected to legal penalty. Regulations of sexual practice and suppression of sexual expression inversely gave rise to bowdy jokes, and sexual humour. As for the betrothal contract, a scholar illustrates the distinction between two types of contracts, *de futuro* and *de praesenti* spousals both of which prevailed in the contemporary Elizabethan society. De future spousal is an union which is to be solemnized in the future, and can be broken for a variety of reasons. De *praesenti* contract is the couple's pledge to each other in private. Legally, this kind of marriage cannot be

dismissed. In *Measure for Measure* you will see how question of sexual practice is intrinsically linked to issues of betrothal. (Nagarajan 116-117)

In the matter of sexual transgression, both secular and ecclesiastical authorities arbitrate. Both the church courts and secular agents such as constables and justices of peace dealt with sexual offenders with culprits whipped or incarcerated for some time. “By ancient customs Lord Mayor and Aldernon could order ‘strumpets’, ‘whores’ and ‘bawds’ to be carted through the city of London”( Ingram 115). Sex in anticipation of marriage and act of fornication were not much differentiated. Sexual corruption was a moral issue, but it was also linked to question of illegitimate birth. Illegitimate birth increased around 1600 increasing the burden of the local communities because of the increased rates to be levied for the relief of the poor. Meanwhile, for a woman her marital status primarily defined her identity. Eternal celibacy was no option, and the churches did not much promote eternal celibacy (Oxford Companion 280). In *Measure for Measure* Isabella’s celibacy as a votary of Saint Clare proves to be only for the time being.

Check Your Progress: Write a note on the question of governance and morality during the time of the production of *Measure for Measure*.

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## 8.6 The Play on the Stage:

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### A Few remarkable Productions of *Measure for Measure*

- Davenant's adaptation, *The Law against Lovers* first produced at Lincoln's Inn Field in 1662
- Gildon's adaptation, *Measure for Measure, or Beauty the Best Advocate* produced in 1700
- After the restoration, the original play, in shortened form, was performed in 1720.
- Tonson's acting edition in 1722 was heavily cut
- J.P.Kemble's acting edition in 1794 made some changes to the original play
- There was a performance in 1824 in which Macready, , successfully played the role of the Duke
- There was another remarkable production by Phelps in 1846 at Sadler's Wells.
- William Poel's production in the Royalty Theatre in 1893
- Nugent Monk produced *Measure for Measure* in 1925 at the Madder market Theatre.
- Tyrone Guthrie produced the play in 1930 and 1933.
- At Stratford in 1950 Peter brooks offered a breakthrough production of the play.
- The 1970 Royal Shakespeare company production in 1970 directed by John Barton
- Keith Hack produced the play at Stratford in 1974.
- Jonathan Miller produced the play in 1974
- A 1975production at the Open Space Theatre directed and adapted by Charles Marowitz
- The Royal Shakespeare Company production in 1978

directed by Barry Kyle.

- Michael Bogdanov's production in 1985 at Stratford Ontario.
- Nicholas Hytner produced the play in 1987-88.
- In Canada Robin Philip presented the play in 1975.
- The production for the BBC Television Shakespeare directed by Desmond Davies, broadcast in 1979.
- The Actors' Touring company production in 1980 directed by John Retallack.
- 1981 Caribbean production by Richard Rudman.

To discuss the stage history of *Measure for Measure* we can loosely divide the time-frame into separate divisions so that changing nature of the play's performance can be traced and located against a specific historical time.

**Restoration period:** Sir William Davenant ( ) and Charles Gildon ( ) were key adapters whose versions of the play had a lasting influence in subsequent productions till the nineteenth century. They excluded low life characters and glorified the major characters. In Davenant's version Angelo only tests Isabella's moral integrity with the proposal of sexual encounter, and eventually marries her because she has stood the test. In *The Law Against Lovers* Davenant made crucial changes in the plot and only damaged the play's serious character. To Shakespeare's play he added restoration values of clarity and decorum. Charles Gibbon's adaptation *Measure for Measure, or Beauty the Best Advocate* we have opera called *Dido and Aeneas* which was introduced as interlude. While Shakespeare's original text has the Duke expressing his marital choice of Isabella which comes as a surprise, Gibbon gives a love speech in his mouth. Both Davenant and Gildon excluded low life characters and glorified the major characters. In Davenant's version Angelo only tests Isabella's moral integrity with

the proposal of sexual encounter, and eventually marries her because she has stood the test.

**The Eighteenth Century:** Shakespeare's text was retained as it is , though heavily cut, throughout the eighteenth century. It was one of the popular plays by Shakespeare staged during this period, securing 19<sup>th</sup> ranks in popularity, with more than 130 performances in British cities. (Gibbons 54). In 1795 acting edition by J.P. Kemble some alterations were made involving slight re-configuration and removal of scenes. In this re-configured text a simplistic narrative emerges, displacing Shakespeare's method of contrast between values and societies. Ironic juxtaposition of the social worlds and counterarguments by marginal characters which was a trait in Shakespeare had not place in Kemble's version which also toned down anxiety associated with corruption and sexuality.

The Duke and Isabella emerged as leading characters in the eighteenth century. Some of the remarkable actors known for their role as Isabella from this period are Mrs. Cibber, Mrs Yeats, Mrs Siddon, James Quin, J.P.Kemble etc.

#### **Let us Know**

Mrs. Cibber: Sussanah Maria Cibber (1714-1766) was one of the greatest actors on the British stage in the eighteenth century, whose singing caliber was also highly commended by people like Charles Browney. She had the remarkable ability to emotionally move the audience with her performance for which she was highly admired. (<https://peoplepill.com/people/susannah-maria-cibber>)

Mary Anne Yeats(1728-1787) succeeded Mrs Cibber in the leading tragic roles on the English stage.

Sarah Siddons(1755-1831) is one of the greatest tragic actresses in the both the eighteenth e=and nineteenth centuries. Isabella is one of the memorable roles she played, though she is said to have excelled as Lady Macbeth. There were portraits of her by painters

of the time including Sir Joshua Reynolds.  
(<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sarah-Siddons> )

James Quin (1693-1766): An English actor of Irish origin known for his slow, but impressive declamatory style and for his role as Falstaff.

**The Nineteenth Century:** The play was less popular in the nineteenth century. If you look at the critical reception of the text in this period, there was a general air of disapproval. It was labeled a dark comedy and the characters were criticized as lacking in a strong personality and moral grandeur. S. T. Coleridge's criticism is symptomatic of the nineteenth century perspective on the play, when he calls it "the only painful part" of Shakespeare's work, "the single exception to the delightfulness" of the bard's plays, even "a hateful work"( Geckle 80). Coleridge's critical view also reflected the view of the stakeholders of theatrical production in the nineteenth century. Among few remarkable productions at this time is Samuel Phelps's 1846 production at Sadler's Well. Phelps was known for his exquisite stage design and faithful reproduction of the original version. Still the Duke was a key figure in nineteenth century productions while Angelo was marginalized. The new middle class values that were centred around notions of home and family at this time were incommensurate with sexuality, disease, lower class which are some of the foci of Shakespeare's text (Gibbons 56).

Influence of pre-Raphaelite art on set design was remarkable in the production of Shakespeare's play at this time. As the curtain rose, audience would applaud the stunning scenery painted on the backdrop, and the stage manager would even appear on stage to receive the applause before actors start the performance. However,

Measure for Measure offered little scope for such exquisite set design(Gibbons 58-59). William Poel, called the father of modern Shakespeare productions, influenced younger directors such as Nugent Monck, Bridges-Adams, Granville Barker, Robert Atkins, B. Iden Payne, Lewis Casson and Barry Jackson. He produced Measure for Measure at the Royalty Theatre in 1893 where he chose to remain faithful to the original and to simulate the Elizabethan performance conditions. On the whole, the nineteenth century and early twentieth century did not see much production of measure for Measure. A critic mentions that from 1879 up to the First World War, the play was staged at Stratford only three times, and between the wars, six (Nicholl 51-52).

### **The twentieth Century:**

Up to the Second World War the play was not popular on stage.

Peter Brook's breakthrough production in 1950 was remarkable on many counts. Rich and effective setting and costumes, swift swing of action from scene to scene, importance of the low life as a counterpoint to the main action of the play, as well as quite a number of cuts which were introduced to re-fashion the characters are some of its traits. The air of dark, manipulative figure built around the character of the Duke was largely shed. Similarly Isabella's guilt-ridden confession to her offence was also omitted. (Gibbons 62) resultant effect of the cuts introduced by Brook was that the main characters assumed more importance. As for the low underworld or low life characters, they were presented not as clowns but as real humans. By these cuts, Brooks also emphasisez the contrast between high and low, holy and rough world. Unchanging set, shift change of scenes, emphasis on actors –these set the standard to be followed by subsequent producers for quite some time. On the whole, Peter Brooks established Measure for Measure as a serious play. While Brooks



presented the Duke as a human figure, John Blatchley's 1962 production figures Brabantio in his darker aspects. Tyron Guthrie fashions the Duke as a father figure in various shades and disposition in relation to various characters.

Desmond Davies's 1979 BBC production adhered to the original text and used traditional costumes. It was a successful production. But as Graham Nicholl contends, the performance lacked a coherent interpretation, and kept beneath a haze of mystique questions of why the characters behave the way they do (55).

Barton's 1970 production was characterized by attention to details and the darker, realistic elements of the play. He negotiated between the conventions of the play embedded in the text (such as narrative flow to a point of resolution etc) and its realism. Of course realism and conventions bring forth some tension which reached an extreme in Markowitz's production at the Open Space Theatre in 1975.(56) Because of this insistence on realism, Barton's *Measure for Measure* is anti-symbolic.

Marowitz adaptation of Shakespeare's is significant for the way he sheds all the ambiguous layers off the play, making it a straightforward statement on the tyranny of law which tramples justice. He directs his criticism against those in authority—the Duke, Escalus, Angelo, s cry against corruption at the top.

**Check Your Progress:** Do you think that the text of *Measure for Measure* has changed in the course of its production down the ages?

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## 8.7 Critical Reception:

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John Dryden made the first significant critical comment on *Measure for Measure*. His “Defense of the Epilogue: or and Essay on the Dramatick Poetry of the Last Age” (1672) accuses the play of its lack of both seriousness or comic gaiety. Charles Gildon--also an adapter of the play—in his “remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare” (1710) appreciated the play for its appropriate delineation of low characters and for its observance of the unities of action and place. The play’s unity of action is also appreciated by John Upton in 1746. Charlotte Lennox, an eighteenth century critic is known for her dismissive comments on the play. She rules out Upton’s judgement and argues that the play lacked unity, and that the low characters here are extraneous to the main plot. Especially she hated the play’s comic resolution of problems through marriage, as she says: “ That Shakespeare made a wrong Choice of his Subject, since he was resolved to tortur it to a comedy, appears by the low Cotrivance, absurd Intrigue, and improbable incidents he was obliged to introduce, in order to bring about three or four Weddings, instead of onegood Beheading, which was the consequence naturally expected.” ( Geckle3)

In the nineteenth century the play received more negative critical response than appreciation. It was seen as a “dark comedy, full of bitter satire and cynicism.” (Nagarjuna lxiii) Major critics in this period underscored the moral theme of the play. George Daniel, for instance, stressed the theme of mercy and justice. Mrs Anne Brownwell Jameson ( ) showers eulogy on the playwright as well as on Isabella, positing her as an ideal of femininity. However, the play as a whole earned negative attributes such as ‘dark’, ‘painful’, ‘bitter’ (Geckle 9)

Edward Dowson emphasized this dark and somber atmosphere of the play which Isabella illuminated.

In books of English literary history the term 'problem play' has been associated with *Measure for Measure*. This goes back to Frederick S. Boas, who labels this play (along with *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Troilus and Cressida*) a 'problem play' and inaugurates a long debate (Geckle 9). In the late nineteenth century dwelt on how the ending of the play resolves its main problem. Arthur Synonds, on the other hand, argues that in the play mercy is granted in humiliation (Geckle 10), A. C. Bradley, a major exponent of biographical criticism mentions that a spirit of bitterness and contempt pervades the play. Another important critical voice in the nineteenth century is that of Coleridge. Coleridge almost denounced the work. He objected to Angelo's pardon, thus echoing Lennox, and criticized the play's tragic and comic elements.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century *Measure for Measure* was seen as a dramatic parable that exemplifies certain tenets of Christianity (Nagarjuna lxiv). G. Wilson Knight, who wrote an influential essay on the play in the 1930s, stresses that man's moral nature and justice is the thematic core of the text. He also offers an allegorical and symbolic interpretation of the play. Andrew J. George similarly argues that the play upheld Christian morality. Charlotte Porter, in a similar line of argument illustrates the New Testament background of the play (Geckle 11) another important strain of criticism had a historical approach which went beyond subjective criticism that largely prevailed in the nineteenth century. Scholars defending this historical approach included Walter Raleigh, E.E. Stoll, W.W. Lawrence, R.W. Chambers, E.P. Pope and so on. They focused on the play's historical background as well as the conventions of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre. R.W. Chambers's important essay *The Jacobean Shakespeare and Measure for Measure* explored contemporary attitude

and conventions such as betrothal contract, monarch in disguise, the deserted bride in disguise etc. (Geckle 13) issues like relationship between the text and King James in the context of theatrical production etc were also discussed within the ambit of historical criticism. There was , besides a continuation of biographical approach from the nineteenth century well into the twentieth with Sir Arthur Quillar Couch talking about Shakespeare’s preoccupation with sexual matters.J Dover Wilson argues that from 1601 to 1608 gloom and dejection dominated the mind of th bard. (Geckle 12)

Modern criticism of Measure for Measure focuses on issues like the play’s treatment of sexuality where Isabella’s concern over her chastity was seen as obsessive while Angelo’s sexual puritanism is analysed to be hypocritical. From 1970s psychological criticism of the play built up. Stephen A. Reid, MarilynWilliamson, Janet Alderman draw on Freudian concepts of sexuality to interpret the play.

Cultural Materialist Jonathan Dollimore writes that th play represents a society in which the prostitutes are historically the most exploited group, yet they are hardly represented.Leonard Tenneshouse offers a New Hitoricist approach and argues that the play is about the machinery of state control, and that political power includes the control of sexual desire. Hence the reconciliatory mechanism of the play is also the mechanism of control of sexual desire.

<p><b>Know your Progress</b></p> <p>Write a short note on the critical reception of the play in the nineteenth and twentieth century (100 words)</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>
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## 8.8 Summing Up:

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*Measure for Measure* is an important play of a kind known as ‘tragi-comedy’ by Shakespeare. In the chronology of the bard’s plays it falls within the period in which tragedies were written, and follows comedies and history plays. Till the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century since the theatre houses were closed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the play was not very popular with the readers as well as on stage. There may be many reasons for its relative unpopularity vis-à-vis some other plays by Shakespeare, but some critics have suggested one reason, which is, the play’s frank treatment of issues of sex, crime and social division.

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## Unit 9

### Measure for Measure

#### Reading the Play

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9.1 Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Act-wise Reading of the Play

9.4 Summing Up

9.5 References and Suggested Readings

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#### 9.1 Objectives:

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By the end of this unit you will be able to

- Know about the sources and changes made by Shakespeare in the play
- Understand the play in the light of the critical reception of it
- Look at the basic plot of the play
- Evaluate the action of the play
- Identify the basic issues and themes represented in the play

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#### 9.2 Introduction:

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*Measure for Measure* is an important play of a kind known as ‘tragi-comedy’ by William Shakespeare. In the chronology of the bard’s plays it falls within the period in which tragedies were written, and

follows comedies and history plays. Till the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century since the theatre houses were closed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the play was not very popular with the readers as well as on stage. There may be many reasons for its relative unpopularity vis-à-vis some other plays by Shakespeare, but some critics have suggested one reason, which is, the play's frank treatment of issues of sex, crime and social division (Gibbon ). Written in a mixed genre with assimilations of diverse materials and dramatic styles, *Measure for Measure* is interestingly challenging. As you go through the play, you will find it entertaining, intriguing as well as thought provoking, and you will be propelled to deeply speculate on themes and questions that the play treats or provokes. Though composed in a time and culture far distant from ours, you will nevertheless find the ideas embodied in the play relevant to our time. We live in an everyday world troubled by a variety of crimes and questions of justice, authority and power. The play also talks about issues of human instinct, sexual corruption, power and governance. Though these questions have never been resolved in today's culture and civilization, these public and private issues were quite sensitive during Elizabethan times. From the time of Restoration well into the 1980s the text has been variously adapted, and these adaptations suppressed the issues in the play, be it sexual, political or religious (Gibbons 49). Various performances of the play addressed specific cultural and political questions of the time in which it was performed. As you start reading the play, the question before you is: what are these issues and ideas embodied in the play, and how are they represented by Shakespeare?

**Points to Ponder:**

- As you have got some hints of the play's themes, think about them in general and see whether they are relevant to the world that you live in.

- What is your idea about tragedy and comedy? What constitutes tragi-comedy? Consolidate your idea by consulting a glossary.

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## 9.3 Act-Wise Reading of the Play

### 9.3 1 Act 1

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**(A) What happens in Act 1:** Duke of Vienna deposes one Lord Angelo as the governor of the city. Saying that he would be moving abroad, he entrusts upon Angelo all the power of a ruler, and departs from the scene. Meanwhile a young man, Claudio is arrested and walked down the street to Prison in a disgraceful manner. He has violated a state law that prohibits fornication as his clandestine love to Juliet has led to the birth of an illegitimate child. As the law is strictly enforced in the new regime of Angelo, it raises concern and speculations among the public. Mistress Overdone, a whore who runs an alehouse apprehends dire economic consequences of the legal undertaking. Lucio, an irreverent flamboyant young man, informs Claudio's sister Isabella about her brother. He further informs her of Claudio's request to her to go to Angelo and plead for mercy, and she concedes. Meanwhile, the Duke converses with Friar Thomas divulging his plan to disguise himself as the Friar and visit people to see things for himself with Angelo running the state. The Duke reveals that the point is to experiment with a mode of governance that will ascertain strict enforcement of law contrary to the laxity of his own rule.

#### **(B) Discussion:**

Why is this appointment of Angelo as the new ruler of Vienna, and how do you explain the Duke's plan for temporary resignation



deputation of someone else in his place? To answer the first question, you will see that social reputation and image of Angelo provides sufficient reason, which is why Escalus does not contradict Duke's choice of Angelo. But governance is a complex issue, and Angelo has not sttod necessary test for it, as he himself says:

Let there be some more test made of my mettle  
Before so noble and so great a figure  
Be stamped upon me. ( *Measure for Measure* 1.1. 47-49)

The suggested image of a counterfeit coin in the above speech is very significant. The Duke relies on externality and is blind to the inner character of Angelo. As you will see, the very action of the Duke (i.e. his conferring power and authority to Angelo) unleashes a set of unforeseen circumstances and the firm belief in the integrity of Angelo will be put to rigorous test. As for the second question raised, the motif of a disguised ruler is not Shakespeare's own invention; it was commonplace in medieval folktales and a familiar device on Elizabethan stage. In the context of the play under discussion, it has to do with the notion of governance. The Duke was a lax ruler while governance requires stringent implementation of law. Please read Act I Scene III. The reasons for temporary withdrawal from power is clearly stated in the Duke's coversation with Friar Thomas, as the Duke says:

We have strict statutes and most biting laws,  
The needful bits and curbs to heasstrong weeds  
Which for these fourteen years we have let slip  
Even like an overgrown lion in a cave,  
That grows not out to pray(...)Now as found fathers  
.....  
Having bound up the threatening twigs of birch  
Only to stick it in their children's sight  
For terror, not to use; in time the rod  
Becomes more mocked than feared;(...) (1.4. 19-27)

From the seriousness of matters of governance and power, there is a shift to the street life in Act 1 scene 2, and we hear cacophony of laconic verbal duel, indecent talk and bawdry. This scene cannot be simply labeled as comic relief. In fact the text is interspersed with images and languages of low life and achieves a complex pattern. It allows questions to be asked to those in power and institutions that govern people's life. The character of Lucio is important in this context. (we shall discuss it in relevant context). Mistress Overdone's trade is going to be ruined because of the law that aims to stop 'sexual corruption'. From the mouth of Pompey we learn that prostitution in the suburbs of Vienna would be banned while the trade will thrive in the city because of big investments of burghers there. (Read Act 1 Scene 2, especially the exchange between Pompey and Mistress Overdone.)

As for Claudio, he admits of his offence and betrays a tinge of self-reproach. He is now aware of human propensity for evil in an atmosphere of 'too much liberty'. However, mutuality of his supposed 'offense' and his repentance suggests that death penalty would be too harsh a punishment for him. He himself thinks that capital punishment would be too heavy for his guilt. It is only understandable that he asks Lucio to go to Isabella to make her plead for mercy. Will her appeal work, you may ask. As you may have been aware from 'critical reception' section of this unit, sexual crime is an important theme of the play. We now add: the play not only deal with sexual 'crime', as exemplified in the one committed by Claudio, but its linguistic texture often carries sexual overtones. Coming back to the targeted plea of Isabella, Claudio counts on her sexual appeal. Read last few lines of Act 1 scene 3, you will find that Claudio uses words such as 'assay', 'prone and speechless dialect'

‘such as move men’. In fact he envisages how Isabella can move Angelo with her seductive submissiveness.

Shakespeare has an extraordinary ability to bring together characters who share certain symmetrical pattern as well as significant difference in temperament and attitudes. While Claudio is aware of his guilt, to Lucio it is no guilt at all. He describes before Isabella Claudio’s guilt not in any legal terms but in terms of some vegetative, agricultural metaphor. On the other hand, Isabella, who jealously guards her chastity and chooses a vocation, accordingly, does not express disgust or contempt when she knows of her brother’s crime. She instantly suggests a marriage with Juliet a woman she is familiar with.

On the whole, act 1 sets the tone of the play, introduces major characters and the theme, but also suggests that there is a disproportion between the crime and the punishment. We are to see the repercussions of this discrepancy in the subsequent acts.

**Check your Progress:** 1.How does the first act presents an exposition of the problem? (write in 100 words)

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**Stop to Consider**

: How the case of Claudio has created a stirring I the society of Vienna? How does the public respond to his punishment? You can

think about it and enrich your response as you gradually read the play to the end.

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### 9.3.2 Act 2

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#### (A) What happens in act 2

Claudio's case occasioned discussions in the court. Escalus opines that Angelo himself could not have been absolutely infallible while the Deputy adheres to law and justice saying he will himself be subjected to punishment for guilt of that kind. Angelo orders Provost to prepare Claudio for execution with necessary formalities such as the confession. Elbow enters with pimp Pompey and a gentle man bawd Froth and accuses them of villainy. When asked to explain they resort to pointless, cacophonous talk which is comically digressive. Angelo withdraws in exasperation leaving Escalus to resolve their problem. Escalus pardons Pompey and Froth with a warning. Provost comes to Angelo for verification of the order of execution and the Deputy stands firm in his verdict. Isabella goes to Angelo's court with Lucio and asks for Claudio's life. Angelo refuses to withdraw order of execution. Lucio encourages Isabella for effective verbal performance with the Deputy. She upholds christian principle of condemning sin and sparing the sinner, discourses about compassion and the necessity to think from the position of the other. She asks him to introspect. Inwardly tempted by her eloquence, Angelo asks her to come again next day. He is indeed torn between desire and duty.

Meanwhile, the Duke, disguised as Friar, sets out to perform his allotted duty and talks to Juliet and makes her confess her guilt. Angelo suffers because of the new inner conflict developed after meeting Isabella. The lady meets him next day. After some verbal exchange Angelo states that Claudio will be saved if she surrenders her body to him. He airs his proposal in a blatantly plain language. She

refuses to comply and threatens to expose him to the public. Angelo says that nobody will listen to her, reiterating his proposal and that he expects an answer next day. Aghast and inwardly injured, she decides to go to her brother and to ask him to prepare for death.

**(B) Discussion:**

We have seen that Angelo's verdict on Claudio has created stirring in both the upper and lower strata of society. To Lucio, the guilt is nothing but a 'game of tick-tock.' We have the wise statesman Escalus almost arguing with Angelo on behalf of Claudio. He says that the Deputy himself might have found himself vulnerable to the propensity that pushed a young man to death. He says:

Let but your hour know

.....

Whether you have not sometime in your lifeferred in this peril which now you censure him

And pulled the law upon you (2.1.8-16)

You will notice that in the first meeting with Angelo Isabella drives home the same point when she says

Go fo' your bosom

Knock there and ask your heart what it doth know

That's like my brother's fault; (2.2.136-138)

A ruler is asked to introspect and see if he is himself really immune to such offence which he severely punishes people for. If impartiality is a basic condition of justice, then Isabella and Escalus ask a very crucial ethical question. Apparently Angelo himself promotes this impartial nature of justice, but the plea is also for developing an ethic of inwardness ("go to your bosom") as against the notion of external impression or social reputation. It is also a hint at Angelo's past affair with a woman, something we will know later in this play.

Isabella's encounter with Angelo acquires a dramatic momentum. Her plea for mercy, her increasingly powerful arguments in favour of her brother, Angelo's dismissive and curt reply, Lucio's intermittent intervention to encourage Isabella—all this makes a compelling dramatic scene. As she shifts from modest confession of her precarious state to high-pitched argument to make Angelo introspect, her verbal performance gathers momentum. One such high point in this scene is her plea to the Deputy to think from the condition of the other by thinking about an imagined exchange of life's conditions.

If he had been as you, and you as he  
You would have slipped like him but he like you  
Would not have been as stern (2.2.64-66)

Angelo does not concede yet, though he asks her to come next day. Yet the effect of her verbal performance on him is noticeable: he feels a curious desire for the lady. When he asks her to introspect and see if he has not ever committed any similar fault, it is an anticipated hint at his link with Mariana, but it also inwardly instigates him for an honest confession of a guilty desire that he may have for her. The effect on Angelo is registered in his immediate aside

She speaks and 'tis  
such sense that my sense breeds with it.(2.2. 142-143)

If temptation is the root of legally punishable sexual offense, Angelo's susceptibility to such offense cannot be ruled out. His confession in a soliloquy about how he is driven by sexual desire for Isabella—an indication of his internal nature—stands opposed to his social image and his devout profession of external legal principle. Do you think that confidence in the Deputy's moral integrity is undercut by such manifestation of internality? (Wait! There is much more to come. Follow the sequence of circumstances.)

The second meeting of Angelo and Isabella will make you listen to a language which is redolent of sexual passion. Clash of Arguments, mutual maneuvers and an increasingly sexualized language aggravates the situation.

Angelo's discursive maneuvers and Isabella's word play makes the scene interestingly intriguing: one is trying to outwit the other. He tries to demoralize Isabella in a number of ways and she, in turn, twists the logic to her advantage. For instance he universalizes human being's moral vulnerability and by extension argues she is fallible too. This time, Isabella admits of women's fallibility but she blames men's deceitfulness for it. Angelo quickly capitalizes on her concession and asks her to retain this essential femininity by surrendering herself to him:

Be that you are

That is, a woman; if you be more, you're mine. (2.4. 134-135)

It is perhaps at this point that Isabella seeks to break free from the torturous circuits of devious arguments and playfully suggestive language, and demands a plainer tongue. She has used up whatever little space she is offered for augmenting with the ruler. But obviously, she is caught up in a situation of power where an ordinary city woman encounters the ruler. Their starkly uneven positions in the power structure become evident after she threatens to expose him to the public. Angelo remains unaffected with such threats, as his powerful position as the ruler would protect him from any such accusations. (We are to see that as Angelo's infallibility is being questioned, his claim of assured fortification from moral trials would turn out to be baseless.)

**Stop to consider:** I have mentioned about 'sexualised language' in Angelo-Isabella scene. To know more, you can read the 'Introduction' of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* edited by

Brian Gibbons, especially pages 30-33 (for detailed bibliographic information, see 'Works Cited' section at the end of this unit.) As Angelo argues that justice is concerned with crimes which are committed not those which are concealed, but words he uses to express this also carries sexual connotations. Similarly she speaks of concealed crime in terms of conception and birth. Likewise, As I have already mentioned, when Isabella implores him to introspect sincerely, it indirectly invites confession of Angelo's guilty desire. Angelo's spontaneous response registers an appreciation of the lady using words like 'sense and 'breeding' that also has sexual connotation.

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### 9.3.3 Act 3

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#### **(A) What happens in Act 3:**

Duke/Friar meets Claudio and advises him to prepare for death. Claudio hopes for mercy, yet he states that he accepts the verdict. Isabella meets Claudio. Duke/Friar overhears their conversation. She reiterates the Duke's advice, as the remedy would be more abominable. She reveals that Claudio would be saved if she allows her honour to be ravished by Angelo. Claudio instantaneously rules out the grossly immoral condition, yet after some thought he begs her to comply with Angelo's proposal, because death is terrifying to him. Claudio's unexpected desperation makes Isabella angry and she curses him to perish for his moral cowardice. Duke intervenes, and proclaims the finality of Claudio's death. He meets Isabella separately saying Angelo only tests her virtue. He divulges a plan that would save Claudio's life without letting her lose her honour. He recounts the past of Angelo who broke off with a woman named Mariana because of loss of dowry. Mariana still pines for him. The plan is: Isabella will consent to the proposal but send Mariana to the Deputy's room in her



place. Angelo will be later forced to marry his betrothed while Claudio will be set free.

In a separate scene Elbow brings Pompey to the court with the accusation that the latter broke the law and is also a pickpocket. Duke/Friar orders the Pompey be sent to prison. Lucio arrives. When Pompey asked him for bail money, he ruses to pay. On the other hand, in an irreverent casual talk with the Duke/Friar, Lucio even tarnishes the image of the supposedly absent Duke, even hints at the latter's immoral sexual affair. Meanwhile Mistress Overdone is sent to Prison for running a brothel. Escalus, on the other hand, informs Provost that the Deputy has not changed his mind.

**(B) Discussion:**

The Duke's role under the cover of a friar is significant. The disguise allows him to play a centrally important role (as a mediator-coordinator, preacher, and planner) among people and push the action towards a certain culmination. His role as a Friar enables us to hold a more philosophical view of things. In fact the play successfully assimilates a set of extremities. For one thing, it encompasses the laconic air of the poverty-stricken street life and its crude cacophonies as well as sublime discourses on life and death. Of course the discursive performance of the Friar is official, and it an outcome of a political decision. As Claudio's death is certain, life for him needs to be evaluated in less desirable terms. Thus, it is no surprise that the Friar speculates on life's transience, its utter dependence on vagaries of mind and desire, even on offspring's neglect in the old age (Have you read King Lear? Predicament of old age constitutes a theme here.)

Look at Claudio. Though he is outwardly prepared for death, Isabella's mention of the Angelo's proposal offers him a ray of hope, and now we have Claudio offering a terrible vision of death conjuring up metaphors of clay, fire, ice, wind and darkness—an imagined view of a horrible afterlife:

...And blown with restless violence roundabout  
The pendant world (...)  
Imagine howling—its' too terrible (3.1.125-128)

**Stop to consider:** while reading the play, please do not restrict yourself to mere plot or incidents and characters. Have a look at the language, see the metaphors and images and try to gauge their implications and what kind of mood or sentiment they evoke.

Look at how the Duke begins to act to set things right. Does not he emerge as something of a stage director? As a Friar he has access to greater mobility and facilities. He disguises himself; he can eavesdrop; even order someone to be sent to prison, secure necessary consent for an undertaking, coordinate with people with a facility. As for his proposal of the 'bed trick', he prepares the ground using a folk-tale device: he narrates to Isabella the sad story of Mariana. (have you noticed that Mariana is introduced as a good woman? A character's social image or reputation is important for engaging sympathies of contemporary audience.)

From the moment Mariana is introduced with a story, Angelo's cruelty to Isabella becomes less important than his marital injustice to Mariana. A marital reconciliation is called for. There is a corresponding shift in Isabella's temperament from the earlier individualistic moralistic position to a more diplomatic-managerial one. Now, at least verbally, she will consent to the proposal without hesitation. On the other hand, the Duke's role as a stage director is manifested in the plan itself that involves calculated entry and exit of the woman, darkened condition of Angelo's room etc. Isabella and Mariana are his actors.

The second scene somewhat relieves the tension built up in the preceding one. People from the lower stratum are being sent to prison

on charges of theft and prostitution. Here, Lucio is different from the rest, as he is projected as one who can adopt various linguistic and social styles and propagates rumours about important figures. Look at the way Lucio airs slanderous remarks about the Duke in the presence of the Duke/Friar. Lucio's encounter with the Duke is suffused with comic irony while some of his remarks transgress limits. It is for this subversive behaviour of Lucio that he is threatened with torture and death by the Duke in the final act of the play.

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### **9.3.4 Act IV:**

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#### **(A) What Happens in Act 4:**

The Duke introduces Mariana to Isabella. The women go for a walk and Isabella shares the plan with Mariana. Mariana readily agrees. Mariana is also persuaded to remind Angel of her brother before she would depart from him. Meanwhile at the Prison Pompey is appointed as assistant to the executioner Mr. Abhorson for Claudio and another prisoner. Provost asks the Duke if there is any hope of saving Claudio's life, and the Duke replies affirmatively. When a messenger arrives, the Duke thinks it is Claudio's pardon as Angelo's condition is met, but the letter turned out to be an order for Claudio's execution and showing the severed head to the Deputy. According to the order, Bernardine is also to be executed in the afternoon. To postpone Claudio's death, the Duke tells Provost to send the head of Bernardine in place of Claudio's. accordingly, abhorson orders Pompey to bring Bernardine who, it is known, is drunken and is not prepared for death. The Duke/Friar arrives to talk to Bernardine, yet the prisoner reiterates his unwillingness to die. The Duke, then, in consultation with Provost decides to send the severed head of a notorious pirate who has already been executed.

Isabella enters and asks if the pardon arrived. Planning to keep her from knowing the truth about Claudio, the Duke informs her that her brother is executed and his head is sent to Angelo.

Meanwhile, letters from the 'absent Duke puts Angelo in a perplexed and precarious condition. In one of the letters, the Duke proclaims redressal of public grievances at the city gate when he returns.

Isabella and Mariana wait for the Duke at the gate, as advised by the Duke/Friar. Mariana advises Isabella to accuse Angelo of violating her, as it is part of the plan to trap the Deputy.

### **(B) Discussion:**

A key issue here is the 'bed trick' introduced by the Duke. The bed trick, however, is a somewhat improbable device. Nevertheless, subjective conditions necessary to make it work are fulfilled. Mariana readily agrees to be part of the 'deception' because she is deeply in love with Angelo, and the trick carries a promise of marital bliss. It is perhaps this expectation of Mariana's happiness that makes the audience gloss over the dubious way in which the distress lady would find her husband. Isabella's solidarity with Mariana is equally important for the plan to succeed. Mariana is asked to say 'remember my brother' as she would leave Angelo's room. This is an ambiguous sentence. It can be seen as a reminder for Angelo to save Claudio's life, the same line can as well be read as an exhortation to the Deputy to remember Mariana's long-lost brother.

Tricky, unforeseen situations arise in this act, and the Duke faces them with understanding and intelligence. He faces a number of hurdles on his way. Bernardine is unprepared for death. A prisoner for nine years, Bernardine is a drunken man who committed murder in the past and lives a disgustingly inert animal life. He is utterly unresponsive to emotions of fear, agony or penitence and remains

shrouded in darkness of sleep and drowsiness. It is decided to send the dead of Rangozine, another prisoner who is already executed and whose look is similar to Claudio. This second deception is theatrically important. It allows the playwright to avoid bloodshed and pull the action from slipping into hopelessly grim tragedy. The Duke's theatrical intelligence is manifested in his move to move to postpone knowledge until a most appropriate time. He decides to keep Isabella from knowing the truth about Claudio- a testimony of his strategy to manipulate emotions. This is also a ploy to push the action towards moments of some comic effervescence.

In fact, Shakespeare's artistic capacity in the manipulation and orchestration of varying theatrical moods and emotions is reflected in his plays. Here, false news of the execution of Claudio fills Isabella with pent up anger and frustration and the Duke's lessons in forbearance fails to work. On the other hand, Angelo's crisis starts after he received the Duke's letters. Promise of open redressal of public grievance naturally invites fear of complaint against him.

Please note that as we move towards the end of act 4, we are actually moving nearer the city gate. From 'a room in act 4 scene 4, the setting shifts to a place 'outside the town (scene 5), 'near the city gate' (scene 6). The entire act 5 is set in the city gate. The rising importance of the city gate speaks of the importance of the real Duke who arrives there. The city gate as a site of the departed Duke offer a reassurance of justice and a belief that things would be set to right.

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### **9.3.5 Act 5**

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#### **(A)What Happens in Act 5:**

Isabella arrives at the city gate, approaches the Duke, and begs for justice. The Duke is dismissive to her plea. Angelo interrupts and

discredits her words, and Isabella, in turn, in frustration and anger, denounces him with harsh words. Finally the Duke has to allow her to explain her case. In her explanation, Isabella mentions Angelo's sexual offence against her how he broke the promise by executing Claudio. The Duke is not convinced and senses potent subversiveness in her accusations. When asked she mentions Friar Lodowick as a testimony. As the Friar is sought, the 'Duke' makes his exit on some pretext only to return disguised as Friar. The Friar states that Isabella lies. Mariana enters, her face veiled. She is not disposed to show her face until her husband bids her so. She discredits Isabella's accusation against Angelo as she herself was sharing intimate moments with him on that very day. Angelo is compelled to ask her to unveil, which she does. Now, Angelo admits he knows her and they broke off. But he denies having physical relationship with her on that day. When Friar Lodowick is asked if he had sent Isabella and Mariana to slander Angelo, he denies, saying he has seen lot of corruption in Vienna. The Friar is threatened with torture by Escalus for subversive comments. When Angelo asks Lucio to testify against the Friar, Lucio says he had indeed slandered the Duke. There ensues a verbal scuffle between Lucio and the Duke/Friar, and Lucio in excitement pulls the Friar's hood off, and the Duke has been unveiled.

Things instantly turn crystal clear when the Friar's true identity is revealed. Angelo confesses to his offense and begs death penalty. The Duke makes him marry Mariana in the first place. He also asks Isabella to pardon Angelo for the sake of Mariana. Angelo is offered death sentence after the marriage for having executed Claudio. Upon Mariana's request, Isabella sues for Angelo's life. Bernardine is acquitted and is left to the advice of Friar Thomas. Lucio is brought to the scene, threatened with death sentence, but is finally shown mercy and made to marry Mistress Kate Keepdown. The Duke himself offers to marry Isabella.

**(B) Discussion:**

Act 5 is basically a scene of trial where the Duke turns out to be the sole arbiter of justice. Even as the Duke is subjected to humiliation and slander (remember Lucio's comments on him) it is all when he disguises himself as the Friar. The idea of the Duke is held in high esteem. The Duke is even synonymous with justice and common sense when Escalus says to the Duke/Friar: The Duke's in us and we will hear you speak. Look you speak justly (5.1.296-297). The trial requires testimony. Big accusations are levelled against a man of authority. But the testimony is not readily trusted either. Friar Lodowick is brought in to testify what might transpire among the triumvirate—he, Isabella and Mariana in order to distort Angelo's reputation. This allows Shakespeare to present before us an unquestionable testimony—which the Duke himself.

Also remember that the whole trial proceedings are pre-calculated. If we keep aside the schematic, pre-planned nature of the trial, we must say that it is a difficult one for Isabella. The Duke is as dismissive of her accusation as he is appreciative of Angelo's efficiency. Had Angelo violated Isabella, says the Duke, he would not have executed her brother. Angelo's moral integrity is projected as something unquestionable.

The justice delivered here is not singularly focused on just one person. In fact the trial brings to a comic resolution contradictions and issues facing people of different social groups: Angelo's break off with Mariana, Claudio's plea for life and the requirement of a marriage, Bernardine's need for rehabilitation in life, Claudio's need of a stable marital relationship with Kate Keepdown. Justice is re-defined in a way where mercy plays an important part. Main principle of Angelo's vision of justice and governance is to push the violators of law to

imprisonment and death. In the new dispensation after the restoration of the Duke, mercy is bestowed on all and marital relationship is sought. Can marital reconciliation can be thought as a kind of compensation for women who have been wronged: Mariana, Kate Keepdown? Think about it. The play obviously endorses the institution of marriage as much as it underscores the necessity of a good ruler who can reconcile issues and contradictions effectively. Further, when sexual offence is the key issue, a middle line between license and strict prohibition is the regulation of desire, that can be done through the institution of marriage. You can thus even look at how the play establishes analogy between governance and marriage.

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#### **9.4 Summing up:**

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*Measure for Measure* is a play with a complex pattern and saddled with issues that cannot be easily resolved. It has comic elements, yet it does not evoke hearty laughter. It is dark, intriguing and blends crucial issues of public and private life. The play has generated critical literature since the 17<sup>th</sup> century well into the twenty first where critical disagreements are widespread. Composed and staged in a time of a peculiar political atmosphere where subversion of authority in theatre would be strictly banned, the play nevertheless raises issues of power , governance, law and justice from a critical standpoint. in the act-wise reading of the play, we have discussed issues of power, authority, language, the Duke's role, as well as the matter of theatrical dynamics. A thorough reading of the play will help you understand these issues better.



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## 9.5 References and Suggested Readings

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## Unit 10

### Measure for Measure

### Supplementary Unit

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10.1 Objective

10.2 How Shakespeare Adapted the source materials into *Measure for Measure*

10.3 A Note on Language

10.4 Other Study Suggestions

10.5 Probable Questions and Suggested Answers

10.6 Summing Up

10.7 Reference and Suggested Reading

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### 10.1 Objective:

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In this unit, you will be able to

- Compare the play to its source texts and evaluate Shakespeare's peculiar mode of adaptation
- Appreciate the linguistic texture of the play and its significance for the themes and ideas informed in the play
- Learn about important critical viewpoints on the play
- Answer questions that may be asked based on the play
- Know about the themes of the play

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### 10.2 How Shakespeare Adapted the source materials into *Measure for Measure*

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We have already discussed the sources of the play. In Cinthio's Hecatommithi a young man is decreed to be beheaded for raping a young woman, while his sister pleads for mercy. Juriste agrees on the condition that she give herself to him. What is absent in Shakespeare's text is Juriste (=Angelo) tries to persuade Epitia (=Isabella) expressing the likelihood of his marrying her. Another mark of departure in Shakespeare is Epitia's eventual compliance which is not part of any trick. The brother and the sister in Cinthio's text embrace each other in

a moment of emotional reconciliation. In *Measure for Measure*, in contrast, Isabella not only vehemently rejects Angelo's offer in a rage of outburst against him but equally dismisses her brother's persuasion in utter revulsion. Another significant thematic element in *Hecatomithi* is the utter notoriety with which Juriste breached the contract with Epitia. He violates her on the promise that he will send her brother home to her. The young man is beheaded, instead, and the body is sent to Epitia. This element of shocking horror and atrocious cruelty is significantly toned down in Shakespeare's play. Analogous development in *Measure for Measure* would have further complicated question of mercy and redemption. Comic resolution of tensions mounting with the unfolding of action is skillfully worked out through multiple strategies. One of the object of these strategies to eventually show Angelo for all his cruelty and sexual tyranny as a repentant fellow worthy of redemption. Shakespeare makes much of an important distinction between intention and execution, abstract thought and concrete action. Angelo is not radically different from Juriste, as both order beheading of a young man convicted for sexual crime while perpetrating or being complicit in same crime themselves. Angelo is an offender by intention, while the Duke carefully substitute the victim/ persons who are at the receiving end of the crime.

In Cinthio's text Juriste pleads for mercy. Maximilian decrees that he marry Epitia. But because he commits a double crime of violating her and breaking his promise by killing her brother, the emperor announces an order for his execution. Epitia, now Juriste's lawful wife, pleads for her husband's life. Such unlikely manipulation of events hardly addresses question of justice nor does it satisfy the principle of realism or enhance our sense of human personality. For one thing, Epitia's abrupt shift from keen hatred to emotional love is not at all convincing. *Measure for Measure* also acquits Angelo and allow him prospects of a fulfilling domesticity, but not with Isabella. Mariana is a significant novelty in Shakespeare's play. Angelo is envisioned as having a past which the Duke is shown to have known. Mariana's bereavement and Isabella's emotional engagement in her predicament allows Shakespeare to uphold the case of this poor woman. She unfolds the past, and narrates how Angelo did wrong to her causing her agony and suffering. As a woman pining for her lover, she seeks a marital reconciliation rather than justice in the strict juridical sense. Justice, to her, means marital reconciliation for which she has agreed to replace Isabella in the 'bed trick', becomes more important than

mere exaction of revenge. In another text by Cinthio called *Epitia*, Juriste has a sister called Angela who pleads for Juriste's life. Here Juriste's order for beheading Epitia's brother is violated, and the head of a look-alike is substituted. These account for a change in Epitia's heart and we have in this text a closer resemblance to Shakespeare's.

However, Shakespeare is closer to Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*. Whetstone applies the convention of morality drama to present characters and situations so as to be amenable for Elizabethan stage. Whetstone dedicates the play to William Fleetwood, an eminent parliamentarian of Elizabethan times, who was engaged in purging the underworld of the city (Gibbons 10). Shakespeare differs from Whetstone in terms of his significant focus on the low life and his insightful observation of maladies in the city's underworld.

The nature of Claudio's offence, however, shows Shakespeare's affinity to Whetstone. Unlike in Cinthio's text, Claudio does not commit a rape but consummates a consensual relationship with Juliet. Secondly, execution of the offender in Whetstone, in turn, takes place through the 'twist' of substitution of heads. This is yet another thematic link of Shakespeare with Whetstone, apart from the elaborate representation of city life which is common to both texts. Use of soliloquy is yet another point of similarity, though Whetstone's soliloquy does not greatly explore the psychology of the character. Whetstone's play is important for another reason, too. It was staged as part of festivities and pageants held on the occasion of King James I's accession in 1603—an occasion in which Shakespeare was also involved. James I caused Shakespeare's company to change its name to King's Men. Gibbons writes, "King's Men would be invited to perform plays at court, and it was necessary for Shakespeare to take account of the new monarch's tastes and interests" (12).

#### **Points to Remember**

- While *Cassandra* submits to will of *Promos*, Shakespeare's heroine refuses to yield to *Angelo*. He created the character of *Mariana* to fulfill the condition that *Angelo's* demand should somehow be met which is crucial for the overall comic resolution of an otherwise terrible situation.
- He uses a folk-tale device of 'bed trick' to enable union of *Mariana* and *Angelo* and virtually to satisfy his demand. The bed trick does not so much offend the contemporary audience's moral sense because she loves *Angelo* dearly.
- In *Promos and Cassandra* the brother's offence is fornication whose enormity and consequences has not been dealt with.

Shakespeare does not merely see it as just a fault of one's youth. Contrasting attitude to the offence committed are illustrated in characters, and some of the grave consequences of irresponsible sexual indulgence are dwelt on.

- Shakespeare expanded the scope of the character of the overlord, making him a disguised spectator and a participant in the action. He is the most crucial manipulator of events in the play whose decisions might seem cruel sometimes but proved effective. He lies to Isabella that Claudio is dead, but it enables her to shower invectives against Angelo which he deserves given the enormity of his guilt.
- Isabella in Shakespeare is a novice of Saint Clare. A woman's defense of chastity does not require her to become a novice. It may allow us to have a glimpse into the psychology of the character, adding some depth to her personality. It also adds to the dramatic conflict of the play, as in her revulsion against her brother's suggestion to yield to Angelo for his acquittal. Of course, relationship to Mariana adds another dimension to her character. On the whole, Shakespeare reshapes Cassandra into the complex full-blooded personality of Isabella who has both verbal power, determination, strength as well as compassion.
- Mariana is a novelty in *Measure for Measure*. Mariana is structurally necessary in the play because of the envisioned 'bed trick' that will eventually resolve the mounting contradiction and anxiety in the play. Second, Mariana is not merely a ploy in the dramatic action but has her peculiar character. She exemplifies the worth of love and deploys it to reconcile the abiding tragic potential of the play. Isabella learns from Mariana the value of love which eventually takes her beyond the pettiness of eccentric defense of chastity.

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### 10.3 A Note on Language in *Measure for Measure*

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#### Other Study Suggestions for *Measure for Measure*

##### 10.3.1

G. Wilson Knight writes an essay on the play, titled "Measure for Measure and the Gospels" in his book *The Wheel of Fire*. His argument is that the play's central theme of morality and justice is dealt with in allegorical fashion where various characters including figures of low life explicate different aspects of the moral being of man. The characters-- Angelo, Isabella, the Duke, Mors Overdone,

Pompey—exemplify abstract qualities of man's moral ature, such as self-centred saintliness, self-protected righteousness, wayward wit, enlightened wisdom and mercy. Man's divine legacy and bestial instincts form the thematic core of the play. Knights argues that the Duke is posited at the centre of the action who distributes praise and blame, controls the course of action, and gives everyone his/her due by way of a divine poetic justice. The Duke, Knights argues, is the custodian of divine principles and spiritual knowledge. Although the entire action is steeped in a predominantly ethical atmosphere and the characters offer differing , even contrasting ethical views, it is the Duke who finally gears the action wtowards a certain direction and establishes his divine authority above all else. Knights explores analogies between the ethical discourses articulated through various characters' mouth, principally through the Duke's dialogues, and specific ethical doctrines from the scriptures. Claudio sues for life with a petrified vision of death, but the play basically endorses a Christian ethics of redemption, as also expounded by Isabella in her arguments with Angello. From this heightened moral doctrine of mercy and redemption, Angello's stringent and austere principle of cruel justice stands unfounded. The ethical agenda of the play has to do primarily with Angelo's self-protected righteousness which is satirized through an elaborate design of plot at the behest of the Duke. Angelo is endowed with a divine authority with the assumption of his moral character. Deputation of Angelo as the governor of Vienna is not a whimsical decision but is legitimized through an assessment of his moral worth. Knights dwell long on the significance of the character of the Duke from this ethical perspective , but exercises his authority even in disguise , and yet shows leniency towards the morally wayward Pompey and subversive Lucio. Up to the advent of Isabella, Angelo is depicted as a sincere ruler who adheres to the institution of justice. On the other hand, the Duke emerges as a father figure who cannot be too sever to his children, and assumes a spiritual dignity towards the end. Knights stresses upon the moral integrity of the Duke, while posits self-deception as the primary fault of Angelo.

Starting with the premiss that Isabella represents airy, idealistic ascetism devoid of a genuine sense of divine love. On the other hand, Angelo is equally idealistic in his pride of moral righteousness. These 'aberrations' the Duke resolves in the beautifully crafted final act , and we see Isabella breaking free from her rigid, cold ascetism through Mariana's ideal of warm, forgiving love, and Angelo realizing his

vulnerability and expressing remorse and streamlining himself to the this-worldly conjugal bliss of marriage with Mariana. The characters finally receive judgement in proportion to their deeds and moral satuture. For instance, Isabella is austere in her saintliness, but prods Mariana for illicit love. Still, she is not a hypocrite. Knights's assessment entails that her marriage with the Duke is a reward due to her.

Knight's reading of the play has not stood the test of criticism in subsequent times, especially in various political readings of *Measure for Measure* invariably go against the wind of Knight's judgment. But Knights will definitely enrich your understanding of the problems raised in the play, though they should not restrain you from a serious re-reading.

### 10.3.2

E. M. W. Tillyard wrote a chapter on the play, in his book *Shakespeare's Problem Plays*. Here, he points out some of the faults in earlier criticism of *Measure for Measure*. The Victorians had objections against the play which are basically concerning the characters. Steeped within a broad framework of character criticism, the Victorians found the characters deficient from a realistic perspective. The Duke is resented for his act of eavesdropping, and for his lack of sympathy, while Isabella, though realistic, received criticism because she does not fit into their cherished notion of idealistic woman. In contrast, R. W. Chambers defends Isabella and Angelo, showing how her ignorance of her brother still alive, in turn, and in the turn of events, upholds her forgiveness to Angelo. Tillyard also critically assesses allegorical and symbolic interpretation of the play, arguing that in the last act which is structurally crucial for the play's allegorical meaning, a vast amount of material has to be handled by the poet, resulting in labored complications that mar the symbolic potential. For instance, Angelo's repentance is brief and perfunctory. Reasons for Isabella's ignorance of her brother being alive are not elaborated.

Tillyard's contention is- allegorical or symbolic dimension of the play is not explored in the first half of the play where the tone is more human, while in the second half allegory fails to justify itself poetically.

Tillyard contends that the play is compositionally a bit faulty, and does not claim to have poetic, organic unity. The nature of the play changes

half-way through: while the first half have situations where characters with differing critical position are depicted allowing audience to empathize with each, the second half descends to comedy whose medium is prose. Mariana and Isabella's plea before the Duke acquires a poetic power, yet it has little effect on the overall tone. The comic verve of the exchange between Lucio and the Duke, for instance, is not in sync with the poetic atmosphere of the first part of the play. Tillyard also points out the inconsistencies of some of the characters. In the first half, the Duke's importance is minimal, and in the second half his significance assumes an enormous proportion. In the first half, focus is on the reality, on characters having their own crisis. In the second half the Duke controls the entire action with reflection and calculative moves. As for Isabella, going against the grain of critical resentment against her self-protected chastity and her lack of compassion for her brother, Tillyard argues that Isabella emerges as an independent figure battling Angelo with her own discretion but changes to be a rather acquiescent woman from the moment the Duke takes over and manipulates the course of action half-way through the play. The Duke's plan, as viewed in prevailing criticism, is appreciative because it leads to an ethical result. But Tillyard contends that dramatic validity of the Duke's move cannot replace 'practical common sense' (128).

Tillyard also brings to consideration the sources of the play to drive home the fact that Shakespeare owes to Whetstone (who wrote *Promos and Cassandra*, a play and the Rare History of *Promos and Cassandra*, a short narrative) certain elemental passions and conflicts and their dramatic possibilities. But Whetstone's *Cassandra*, as Tillyard argues, was a much more flexible dramatic character who goes through a series of inner struggles while in Shakespeare *Isabella* is denied similar dramatic possibilities because of her inflexible moral character. And this reduces the possibilities before her, and eventually the action is taken over by the Duke. Shakespeare, moreover, grafted the fairy tale element of the Duke mingling with his subjects on to the realistic milieu of the low-life which is also a feature of Whetstone's text. But the mix of realism and folklore in *Measure for Measure* is not thorough, and the result is an abruptness in the course of action. blending of realism and folklore is not thorough or harmonious. However, Tillyard demonstrates Shakespeare's poetic power as manifested in the early part of the play, and ends the essay with a detailed demonstration of the bard's power of characterization in the



analysis of the verbal exchange between Isabella and Angelo, a scene where subtle movement of her mind and temperament is captured.

### 10.3.3

F. R. Leavis's essay on *Measure for Measure* in *The Common Pursuit* ( ) is worth reading. Leavis in this essay offers a critical appreciation of the play refuting critical reservations of L. C. Knights about the text's artistic merit. Knight's judgement, Leavis says, is part of a long critical tradition that has been skeptical about the play's excellence. Claudio's self-disgust and self-condemnation, Leavis argues, is not disconcerting , as alleged by Knights, in the textualized context of conventional moral attitude towards pre-marital sex, nor is this at odd with 'his being in love'( ). The play does not simply articulate its moral doctrine singularly through a specific character as such but brings together a variety of moral attitudes where the Duke's attitude is more complex relative to others'. Leavis also defends the play against the charge about its pessimism, especially in its view of death. True that the disguised Duke at times unequivocally articulates a rather negative judgment about the worth of living, but such negative discourse must not be abstracted and separated from the specific context in which he is only playing a role (as the Friar) with a compulsion to win credibility. But the whole context of the play refutes his cold, austere judgement. Claudio's claims for live acquires a power that drowns the Duke's professed austerity. Isabella also condemns death by way of her professed faith as a novice of Saint Clare. Angelo, on the other hand, begs for death towards the end when "he has already lost in life"( )

By way of refuting claims of L. C. Knights, Leavis asserts the play's poetic unity and moral integrity, and supports G. Wilson Knight's position in *The Wheel of Fire* that the text demonstrates the New Testament's dictum of 'judge not but ye be judged'. Condition of capital punishment has, to Leavis, works as a ploy to demonstrate the human nature as well as the need of social discipline and order. The play should not make the reader simply support or criticize the law but invite him to use his power of discrimination. Leavis's position is not just that of simplistic praise or outright blame. He deals with the subtlety of the moral import of Isabella's action. she commands some respect initially, and articulates key themes of the play in her verbal exchange with Angelo. However, there is an implicit criticism of her , especially in her halted assertion of chastity. Her marriage with the

Duke towards the end establishes this critical view of her moral position.

On the other hand, Leavis refutes the argument that the comic ending of the play is not driven by the inner logic of the action of the play. The Duke is Shakespeare's invention, and through his multifarious roles he transforms the drift of the action from romantic comedy to an accomplished moral play which offers a 'criticism of life'. ( ) authority of the Duke has been strongly established. Similarly, Mariana plays a significant role not just as a means to protect Isabella's chastity but by placing, in turn, Claudio's offence into a proper moral perspective. Leavis also defends Angelo from demands of punitive justice because , as Leavis says, he is not a 'certified criminal type'.( ) Isabella's famous "go to your bosom" speech indicates the new governor's common humanity and appeals to his capacity for remorse and realization in a way where we can identify with him. On the other hand, until Isabella intervenes into the affairs of Law, he was sincere and honest in his office.

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## **10.4 Probable questions and Suggested Answer:**

### **10.4.1 How does Measure for Measure deal with the question of governance?**

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**Answer:** Historically, governance was a key issue of the time. Please go through the "backgrounds" section in the first unit of the play. There we have mentioned how governance was part of the public discourse with a variety of texts being produced since the later sixteenth century till James I's *Basilicon Doron*. I think the play is interestingly intriguing in that it asks you a set of questions. why, for instance, does the duke depute Angelo as the governor of Vienna? It is not just about the public reputation and supposed quality of the new ruler. It also suggests Brabantio's failure as the ruler of the state. Now look at Angelo's mode of governance and its consequences. Several questions arise: does Angelo as a ruler maintain his moral integrity? Is severity an antidote to the 'corruption' of Vienna arising out of the Duke's laxity? Is the new ruler perceptive enough to take cognizance of human being's instinctual life? How does the Duke restore eventually restore order in a society rife with chaos and confusion and petrified by the new puritan law? While framing your answer, you may

consider these points and illustrate them with appropriate textual evidence.

**10.4.2** Do you think that in *Measure for Measure* tragic possibilities are curbed/contained within a reconciliatory mechanism of comedy?/ Comment on the tragic-comic structure of the play.

**Answer:** Aristotle basically illustrates his notion of tragedy in *Poetics* and briefly mentions comedy as a category that deals with characters from lower strata of society. He does not illustrate or endorse a mixing of these genres, which is why tragicomedy was a forbidden genre in the neoclassical period. However, Renaissance writers practiced this genre combining in a comic play certain traits of tragedy such as elevated diction, important public events, evocation of empathy etc. (Tragicomedy 2014).

You are to illustrate how the play brings together various elements from tragedy and comedy. Take the case of Claudio, for instance. Claudio commits an offence. Remember that he is not a man from the street; like Angelo, he also has some reputation and dignity. Notice how the people in the suburbs of Vienna responds to his 'guilt'. Do you feel that the offence renders him a downright villain? Question of some degree of compassion for the protagonist who suffers because of a fault (which is not grave moral blunder) is intrinsically related to tragedy. Of course Claudio is not beheaded, as directed by Angelo who, half-way through the action of the play acquires some amount of villainy. No less serious is the predicament of Isabella who has to choose between her honour and her brother's life. Claudio's inner torture of the imminent death and Isabella's futile rage against the tyranny of the new ruler suggest the gravity of the situation. However, the Duke's role proves to be crucial for rescuing the action from veering towards tragic doom. Think yourself: is *Measure for Measure* basically a comedy, then, to which tragic elements are supper-added? Or is it the other way round? How important is the Duke's reconciliatory mechanism crucial for the happy ending of the play? How is the institution of marriage a decisive tool of this comic reconciliation? You may further see how this comic reconciliation creates certain gaps and silences which the text fails to address. (for instance, how do you evaluate Isabella's silence at the Duke's proposal of marriage?) Try and write your answer with these points/questions in mind.

**10.4.3** How are contrary demands of justice and mercy negotiated in the play?

Answer: the Duke's plan to deploy Angelo is grounded on the belief/assumption that he can effectively enforce the law against fornication. From the juridical point of view Claudio, and also Mistress Overdone and Pompey, commit offence, and their punishment is justified. But the notion of justice does not remain as simple; When Isabella intervenes in the legal affairs with her plea for mercy, the idea of justice gets overturned so that eventually she is compelled to demand justice. The claims of impartiality of the law is overpowered by sheer tyranny of the lawgiver who fails to resist the sexual temptation in his verbal encounter with the woman. If justice is to be served at all, Angelo should be subjected to the same impartial law that supposedly kills her brother. It is at this point that Mariana's intervention (or, rather deployment by the disguised Duke) is crucial. Just imagine: will there be any question of mercy for Angelo had the sub-plot of Mariana been absent? Another factor that makes Angelo more worthy of mercy is a crucial tactical move by the Duke: sparing Claudio from execution and substitution of heads, and telling lie to Isabella that her brother is no more. Further, the institution of marriage altered the equation between justice and mercy with Mariana seeking forgiveness on behalf of her newlywed husband Angelo. While answering the question, you will evaluate the action of the play, with special attention to constructive plotting by the Duke, in the light of the above remarks.

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## **10.5 Summing Up:**

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By the end of this unit, you must have gathered some idea of Shakespeare's genius. We have discussed how Shakespeare borrowed from pre-existing texts, yet transmuted them into something new and expressive of a complex kind of sensibility. The essence of this play is its inner complexity, its own conflicting versions of moral judgement and its vision of a social life which accommodates all strata of social life. We have discussed the key issues of the play, and now your encounter with the text should be more rewarding and interesting. On the whole, you may feel how beautifully the play even responds to the twenty first century mind. The issues raised so compellingly are also issues that often face us today.

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## Unit 11

### The Tempest

#### Introduction and Stage History

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- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Introduction
- 11.3 Date and Text
- 11.4 Sources
- 11.5 Stage History
- 11.6 Critical Reception
- 11.7 Language in *The Tempest*
- 11.8 Summing Up
- 11.9 References and Suggested Readings

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### 11.1 OBJECTIVES

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This unit aims at introducing you to William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* which he wrote almost four hundred years ago. The emergence of Shakespeare as a playwright can be looked at in the backdrop of Renaissance theatre. Regarded as his last play without a collaborator *The Tempest* is an exploration into mysterious lands, dark magic and family conflicts.

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

- *understand* Shakespeare as one of great writers of his age
- *read* *The Tempest* as a Renaissance play
- *assessthe* ways in which the play has been received

- see how Shakespeare dealt with the issues of his age- colonialism, exploitation of power

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## 11.2 INTRODUCTION

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William Shakespeare, son of a glove maker, whose birth and formal education are a source of mystery, has heralded a new world through his writings that even after 450 years of his death he is becoming more relevant than ever. Apart from hundreds and thousands catalogues of books and articles Shakespeare has influenced every aspect of human life. From food to music he has enriched various disciplines, such as Film Studies, Cultural Studies, and New Historicism, to name a few. Reading his *Hamlet*, the Romantic critic William Hazlitt opined that we were all Hamlet. Similarly Harold Bloom, a contemporary critic, subtitled his book *Shakespeare* as “The Invention of the Human”.

As a writer, Shakespeare wrote total 154 sonnets, 2 long narrative poems and 38 plays. The 154 sonnets collectively called as *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* published in 1609. Shakespeare was influenced by the Renaissance’s sonnet tradition which was introduced in England by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey. In the sonnets, Shakespeare explored the themes of time, friendship, lust, beauty, morality, infidelity, etc. through the poetic speaker’s narration of a young man and a woman, commonly known as the “fair youth” and the “dark lady”. The two long narrative poems – *Venus and Adonis* (1594) and *The Rape of the Lucrece* (1594) were both dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. Modelled after Ovid, the Roman poet, both the poems are retelling of the said characters’ stories and events.

The first collected edition of Shakespeare’s plays, known as “The First Folio” was published by his friends John Heminges and Henry Condell in 1623, after seven years of his death, where they included total 36 plays categorically divided as comedies, histories and tragedies. For his plays, Shakespeare borrowed materials from

historical accounts and classical texts. His main sources were Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and Plutarch. It was believed that Shakespeare was inspired by Saxo Grammaticus, the 12<sup>th</sup> century Danish historian, to write the story of Hamlet. Shakespeare also collaborated with John Fletcher, a Jacobean playwright, for his *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

During the reign of Elizabeth-I, Shakespeare formed The Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting troupe, with Richard Burbage in 1594 where he both acted and wrote plays for them. However, most of his plays were written in the Jacobean period. In 1599, Shakespeare along with his troupes began building the Globe Theatre. It was around this time where he started writing his great tragedies. King James adopted his theatre company and renamed it as King's Men in 1603. As a prolific and rich man, Shakespeare retired from writing in 1613 and died three years later.

### **Stop to Consider:**

#### **Shakespearean Criticism: A Brief History**

It is undeniable that the criticisms on Shakespeare have also helped in establishing Shakespeare's universalism. The canon of Shakespeare is occupied with some of the great critical writings of his life and works. Ranging from 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards to 21<sup>st</sup> century we have seen expansion of various critical and theoretical dimensions in both literature and language from the works of Shakespeare. Although the criticism of Shakespeare during his own time was thin on the ground, the only instance was Robert Greene's silly remark about him as an "upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers", but with John Dryden in 17<sup>th</sup> century whose remark on Shakespeare as "the man, who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul" in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* can be seen as the beginning of Shakespearean criticism.

In 18<sup>th</sup> century, Alexander Pope took the charge of editing the collected works of Shakespeare where he commented and corrected



the previous errors of Nicholas Rowe's edition. However, it was Samuel Johnson's famous Preface to the collected works (1765) that unfolds many aspects of Shakespeare's works. Harold Bloom has rightly opined "Of all critics, Dr. Johnson best conveys the singularity of Shakespeare. Dr. Johnson first saw and said where Shakespeare's eminence was located: in a diversity of persons. No one, before or since Shakespeare, made so many separate selves. (Bloom 1) In the hands of Romantic critics like Coleridge and Goethe, Shakespeare was considered for his creative genius. William Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare* was also an important addition to the 19<sup>th</sup> century criticism of Shakespeare.

With A.C Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), the 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw the increasing exploration of Shakespeare's life and works. T.S Eliot's close reading of Hamlet in his essay "Hamlet and His Problem" had also given new direction to look at the images, tone, and language of the play instead of approaching the play through a historical evaluation.

However, the Post-war witnesses new interpretative approaches to Shakespearean criticism. The emergence of theory in 1960s helped many critical schools, such as Post-colonialism, Feminism, New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Archetypal Criticism, etc. to evaluate Shakespeare's canon from their perspectives.

SAQ

Why is Shakespeare regarded as one of the great writers of his age? (50)

*The Tempest*, usually taken to be Shakespeare's last play written without a collaborator, was listed as a comedy in the First Folio. First performed in 1611 before King James at Whitehall and later included in the wedding celebration of king's daughter Princess

Elizabeth in 1613, yet it was not printed until the publication of First Folio in 1623 where it was appeared as the first play. At heart, *The Tempest* fixes on the relation of father and daughter. With the exploration of themes like sin and forgiveness, repentance and salvation, *The Tempest* has the right mixture of spectacle, humour, fantasy and philosophy. It was one of Shakespeare's shortest plays and also the only play where he adhered to the three unities – time, place and action of Greek dramatic tradition. Despite the various events, the entire action of *The Tempest* occurs during the course of a single afternoon and in a single locale.

Shakespeare employed conventional literary elements, such as fairy tales and romances for the plot of the play. He also drew upon the themes and situations from his own previous works. However, the immediate source of *The Tempest*, as scholars attributed, was the 1609 shipwreck of an English ship in Bermuda and travelers' reports about the island and the ordeal of the mariners.

Many commentators tried to link Shakespeare's autobiographical motifs, as he was retiring from the stage, in this play. Some of the key features of The Renaissance world – new learning, new discovery, humanism, etc. are found reflected throughout the story of *The Tempest*. In addition, the play provides a primary perspective on 17<sup>th</sup> century attitudes about imperialism. Emphasised on sin and forgiveness, together with the note of humility and the appeal for mercy, showed by Gonzalo's dialogue at the end, "when no man was his own", *The Tempest* is a play that also captured the idea of Christian salvation.

Over the course of time, *The Tempest* has influenced numerous other works of literature. During the Romantic period, P.B Shelley's poem "To a Lady, with a Guitar" has the surprising line "Ariel to Miranda", a clear reference to the characters of the play. Robert Browning's poem "Caliban upon Setebos" reimagines Caliban's belief and identity. In 20<sup>th</sup> century, W.H. Auden's long poem *The Sea and*

*the Mirror* presents a series of dramatic monologues by characters of the play. Margaret Atwood's Hogarth Shakespeare Series' *Hag-Seed* is a contemporary retelling of *The Tempest*.

### **Stop to Consider**

**Exploitation of Power in *The Tempest*:** From Shakespearean mirror, power was one of the distinctive features of his age. It took a large margin of argumentation in his plays and hence it became a pivotal subject in Shakespeare. Being one of the symbolically richest plays of Shakespeare, *The Tempest* examines a variety of questions about power: Who has it and when? Who is entitled to it? What does the responsible exercise of power look like? How should power be transferred? In this play the exploitation of power was displayed through various incidents. But, the majority of power was explored by the hands of Prospero. In his view there existed a world of difference between the governor and the governed.

*The Tempest* is full of various allusions to power taken by force, and each case these actions lead to political instability and violence. Antonio and Alonso's overthrow of Prospero leads to Antonio and Sebastian's plot to overthrow Alonso, just as Prospero's overthrow and enslavement of Caliban leads Caliban to take revenge. In case of Miranda, she has also become a mere object of exchange for Prospero to achieve his political power. Moreover, when Ferdinand described his love in a mode of serving Miranda, it becomes a weapon of patriarchal power. Miranda's femininity has been subdued under her father and later by Ferdinand. Thus, exploitation of power in its various forms remains one of the prime thematic concerns of the play.

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## **11.3 DATE and TEXT**

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Probably written in 1611 when it was first performed before the King at Whitehall *The Tempest* was not printed until in the First Folio in

1623. It was printed as the first comedy, and consequently the first play in the Folio. It had a second royal performance as part of the King's daughter Princess Elizabeth's wedding celebration. A recorded performance at Court on 1 November 1611 leads scholars to consider the composition of the date of the play in between 1610-11. Ralph Crane, the scribe, amplified the full, descriptive stage direction during the publication of First Folio.

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## 11.4 SOURCES

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Shakespeare is generally criticized by some critics for imitation of the concepts for his plays. But *The Tempest* is an exception in the canon. It is really difficult to point out a single main source of it. Research proves that there are many influences which led Shakespeare to write this play. One of the major sources is the letter by William Strachey written in 1610, where he described about the shipwreck in Bermuda. He was also accompanied by Sylvester Jourdain who also described about it in his *A Discovery of Bermuda*. This accounts exerted great influence upon Shakespeare. Influence of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is visible in portrayal of the character of Prospero. And Ariel's disguise is an influence of Virgil's *Aeneid*. John Florio's translation of Montaigne's *On Cannibals* in 1603 is another clear influence which is evident in the creation of Caliban. Besides these sources *Dr. Faustus* can also be seen as a remote influence upon constructing the character of Prospero.

### Stop to Consider

***The Tempest* as a Renaissance Play:** *The Tempest* was about an unprecedented havoc caused by a shipwreck in the life of Prospero and his daughter, Miranda. It showed Shakespeare's endeavour to explore new lands and the quest for discovery which was an undying characteristic of the Renaissance. The play also reflected the political and psychological turmoil in the life of the characters. Prospero's landing into an unknown territory and

gaining absolute power and trying to establish himself as a perfect ruler showed the colonising mission of the English. This finds further emphasis when Prospero imposes his culture and rules to Caliban in the name of civilizing him. Prospero's books and cloaks were the very manifestation of his power. This was clearly evident when Gonzalo arranged the books to be placed on the ship that removed Prospero and Miranda from Milan. He even restored the magic which features man's effort to overcome his worse self. His books provided him a platform to reason with his current situation i.e. after being usurped by his brother Antonio. The play is about an affirmation of the self and man's paths to explore newer horizons. Prospero's quest for knowledge and new learning through his books and magic; Caliban's succumbing to colonial dominance and Miranda's willful acceptance of patriarchal dominance are some of the aspects of the play where we can locate some of key features of the Renaissance- new learning, new world, status of women etc.

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## 11.5 STAGE HISTORY

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The first recorded performance of *The Tempest* was when this play was acted in front of King James on 1st November, 1611. After a gap of two years, once again the play was staged during the marriage of the Princess Elizabeth to Frederick, the Elector Palatine of Bohemia. It is also said that in 1614, Ben Jonson included a couple of references to *The Tempest* in his introduction to the famous play *Bartholomew Fair*. In the year 1667, it was adapted by Sir William Davenant in collaboration with John Dryden and named it *The Enchanted Island*. Thomas Shadwell, another significant poet and dramatist, staged a different version of *The Tempest* which gained massive appreciation from the audience as well as at the box office. It must also be mentioned that until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the character of Ariel was played by man. But since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the role was played by female characters. Moreover, in the recent film adaptations of *The Tempest*, we have seen that even the role of Prospero is played by female actors. In contrast to the other plays of Shakespeare, *The Tempest* was written

keeping in mind an indoor audience. This was mainly because, by the time the play was written, the King's men had started to use the indoor Blackfriars Hall for their performances. While talking about the stage history, we must also look at certain props, costumes, music and sound used while staging the play. For special sound effects, drum rolls, organ music, dog barking and the like were used. Extravagant costumes like Prospero wearing a magic robe, Ariel dressed as a spirit and Caliban clothed in animal skin were all remarkably shown. Although there were innumerable changes in the adaptations of *The Tempest*, yet in 1897 attempts were made to come back to the genuineness and realness of the Elizabethan stage under the supervision of Sir William Poel.

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## 11.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

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The history of criticism of *The Tempest* shows that the play has been interpreted in different ways in different centuries. Though the audience of the 18<sup>th</sup> century received the adaptation with great enthusiasm, it did not please the critics that way. As it was an age of reason as well as a satirical spirit influenced the literature, the text became a victim to the same. Where on one hand it got greatly appreciated by Charles Gildon for Shakespeare's use of the three unities, the criteria set by Aristotle as a mandatory requirement for a play, on the other hand it was heavily criticized by writers like Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope etc. Nicholas Rowe praised the work for its imaginative quality and the fanciful way in which things were presented in the text. He considered the magical elements of the text as poetic. Samuel Johnson had also presented his version of *The Tempest*. His criticism mainly centered on the character of Prospero whom he considered as a fallen spirit. He was critical of his power of enchantment through which he tried to dominate all which he regrets at last. He compared it to 'Black Art' or 'Knowledge of Enchantment'. He further commented on the Caliban's use of the language taught by

Prospero which is an expression of his brutality and malignity as well as Ariel's songs. Diversity of characters from various strata of the society as well as use of super natural elements is highly praised.

The fervor of the 19<sup>th</sup> century portrayed the text in a new light different from the earlier ages. They generally focused on depth of the texts rather than just the superficial level. Most of them including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt were critical about staging of *The Tempest*. They felt that it was more about reciting. Coleridge referring to his own concept of 'imagination' and 'fancy' comments that *The Tempest* appeals to the imagination of the readers. He further praised Shakespeare for his amalgamation of the highest and the lowest. He praised the characterization for showing "life and principle of each being with regularity". William Hazlitt, one of the greatest Shakespearean critics praised it for its gracefulness and opulence. The fine blending of real with imaginary and dramatic with grotesque is appreciated. Charles Lamb also questioned the efficiency of stage representation of the play. He believed that fairies and spirits cannot be represented on stage. Anna Brownell Jameson focusing her criticism on female characters of Shakespeare praised Miranda as "perfectly unsophisticated, so delicately refined, that she is all but ethereal".

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the influence of the 19<sup>th</sup> century criticism was not totally vanished. Where on one hand Wolfgang Clemen mainly focused his criticism on the imagery of the works, on the other hand Henry James' study mainly focused on the depth of the work. However in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the heart of discussion shifted from the forms to in depth criticism. As a result of this the colonial, post-colonial, feminist and other readings of *The Tempest* emerged. Harold Bloom is of the opinion that this age is neither an age of Ariel or Prospero but of Caliban. He vehemently criticized the play for its lack of proper content that if one is asked to give a summary of it they will end in grimace. Northrop Frye's criticism was focused on the social order of the play. He said that the shipwreck shown in the beginning was also a reflection of the dissolving society.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century reading of the play mostly portrayed the post-colonial mindset. The habits, relations and leftovers of colonials were reflected in this period. Some of the recent critics like Tom McAlindon have tried to dismantle the rigid concepts of the earlier critics. With the emergence of new theoretical schools- new historicism, cultural materialism, post-colonialism we have seen critics like Stephen Greenblatt, Alan Sinfield, Catherine Balsey, AniaLoomba and their analysis of some of the major aspects – culture, dress, ideology, institute from this play.

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## 11.7 LANGUAGE IN *THE TEMPEST*

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Language not only helps us have access to different branches of knowledge but also gives us a way to assert our identities and establish our opinions. Like knowledge, language is linked to power. In Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, language becomes a subject of inquiry. The nature of language in the plays of Shakespeare is indeed very remarkable. The plays of Shakespeare are written as a mixture of both prose and verse. In *The Tempest*, language is used as an element of power and control. We can witness the relationship of language and power from the angle of post-colonialism. Prospero is portrayed as the 16<sup>th</sup> century linguistic colonialist. After arriving at the island, Prospero seizes the native land of Caliban and imposes his language. Moreover, in the play, Prospero is seen speaking in elongated and complex sentences to show his linguistic superiority. Quite contrary to Prospero, we see Trinculo and Stephano exchanging funny stories and jokes. Thus, we can witness a divide between the high and the low born characters in terms of language. The reason behind teaching Caliban is not humanitarian or it is not even an act of kindness. Instead, Prospero made Caliban learn his language so that he could know more about his life and land. For Caliban, learning the language spoken by his master is a signifier that stands for the injustice done to him and his mother. If we draw on postcolonialism, then Prospero



becomes the coloniser, and Caliban the colonised. Prospero, like a coloniser, determines what language Caliban should speak. Caliban's act of unlearning is an act of resistance. It can be considered as an instance of subversive strategy. Prospero does not allow both Miranda and Caliban to go through his books. The audiences learned about her from Ariel and Prospero. And, the way Prospero described her gives us the impression that she was never a part of society. Caliban knows that the way to destroy Prospero is through his books and tell Stefano and Trinculo to burn them before they kill him. The books contain knowledge which have an authority over oral language. Caliban's past and any language which he may have spoken have vanished before Prospero's authority. It is Prospero who dominates the narrative. In fact, Caliban's mother does not appear in the play.

Being infuriated at Prospero's act, Caliban argued that Prospero has taken over his land and taught him his language only to gain advantage of identifying the unidentified spots of the island. On the other hand, Ariel is devoid of radical speech. Nor are there any soul bearing soliloquies by Ariel in the play. We are not sure how Prospero is able to control Ariel as he is a supernatural being who can get rid of Prospero with the help of magic. It can be assumed that it is connected to Prospero's mastery of language and of the books that he has at his disposal. Ariel carries out his tasks but despite his power, Prospero's authority via language binds him. Prospero teaches Caliban to speak, but Caliban resorts to curses.

. Since language is associated with civility, the denial of speech, in case of Sycorax and Caliban, reinforces their outsider status—that they represent nature and are uncivilized and barbaric.

### **Stop to consider**

**Colonialism in *The Tempest*:** Shakespeare addressed the unexplored and mysterious New world with the choice of a remote island as it was reflected through the setting of the story. This choice of setting allowed him to discuss broader themes about the new world. As the

16th century saw the proliferation of European overseas exploration, in *The Tempest* Caliban's enslavement by Prospero showed the dominance of the European explorers on Non-European population. Caliban's character, in this case, can be seen as a victim of European colonization.

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## 11.8 SUMMING UP

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After going through this unit the readers will get an overview of the play. *The Tempest* not only presents before us a family conflict but also a supernatural world with magical characters. Besides, it also presented a Renaissance man through the character of Prospero, whose misuse of power and greed to dominate led to his downfall. This play can be read as a commentary on European exploitation of the Non-European people. Language was used as a tool of colonization and manipulation here. It played a major role throughout the play. This section also help us to know about Shakespeare as a playwright and about his various sources which inspired him to write this work as well as how it has developed with time and received in various ages. The scholarly interpretations of theplay throughout the centuries have ameliorated it to achieve the critically acclaimed status that it has today.

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## 11.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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**Unit 12**  
***The Tempest***  
**Reading the Play**

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- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 Introduction
- 12.3 Date and Text
- 12.4 Sources
- 12.5 Critical Reception
- 12.6 Act-wise reading of the play
- 12.7 The Theatrical Aspects of *The Tempest*
  - 12.7.1 Prospero
  - 12.7.2 Caliban
  - 12.7.3 Miranda
  - 12.7.4 Ariel
  - 12.7.5 Prospero's Masque
- 12.8 Summing Up
- 12.9 References and Suggested Readings

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**12.1 OBJECTIVES**

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You should read the play carefully before and during the perusal of this unit. You will, by the end of this unit, be able to:

*analyse* the social and historical contexts of *The Tempest*

*read* *The Tempest* as a play that belongs to the genre of Romance

*appreciate* *The Tempest* in relation to the ethical, ideological and political systems of the time.

*see* how Shakespeare dealt with issues of colonization in *The Tempest*.

*comprehend* the complexities of Shakespearean stagecraft.

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## 12.2 INTRODUCTION

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The *Tempest* is generally regarded as Shakespeare's last play, first performed in 1611 for King James I and again for the marriage festivities of Elizabeth, the King's daughter, to Frederick, the Elector Palatine. Scholars attribute the immediate source of the play to the 1609 shipwreck of an English ship in Bermuda and travelers' reports about the island and the ordeal of the mariners. The period in which it was written - the seventeenth-century age of exploration, the circumstances of its performance at court, and the context of the playwright's writing career suggest immediately some of its rich themes and ambiguities.

The play can be read as Shakespeare's commentary on European exploration of new lands. Prospero is banished from Milan by his brother; he lands on an island with a native inhabitant, Caliban, a being he considers savage and uncivilized. He teaches this "native" his language and customs, but this nurturing does not affect the creature's nature, at least from Prospero's point of view. But Prospero does not drive Caliban away, rather he enslaves him, forcing him to do work he considers beneath himself and his noble daughter.

### **Stop to Consider**

As modern readers, sensitive to the legacy of colonialism, we need to ask if Shakespeare sees this as the right order; what are his views of imperialism and colonialism? What are our twentieth century reactions to the depiction of the relationship between the master and slave, shown in this play?

The theme of 'utopianism' is linked to the explorations of new lands. Europeans were intrigued with the possibilities presented for new beginnings in these "new" lands. Was it possible to create an ideal state when given a chance to begin anew? Could humans hope to recreate a "golden age," in places not yet subject to the ills of European social order? Could there be different forms of government? Would humans change if given a second chance in an earthly Paradise? These are some of the questions that Shakespeare's play

makes the contemporary audiences ask as they watch a performance of the play.

The play emphasizes dramatic effects. Music, dance and masque-like shows are used to great effect. One of the reasons for this was probably because it was performed at court. The role of the artist is explored through Prospero's use of his magic, and parallels can be drawn to Shakespeare's own sense of his artistry.

Finally, knowing that this is Shakespeare's last play, it is intriguing to explore autobiographical connections. Does he see himself in Prospero? Does he feel somehow isolated, in need of reconciliation? How is this play a culmination of other themes he has explored?

*The Tempest* shows Shakespeare's final treatment of themes that have run through the other plays, e.g. good and evil, justice and mercy. For students of world history this play provides a primary source perspective on 17th-century attitudes about imperialism. Also, the low humor and pageantry in the play heightens its appeal to a wider audience.

Interpretations of the *Tempest* tend to be shaped quite strongly by the particular background, which the interpreter brings to it. This play, more so than many others, tends to bring out in interpreters what their particular interests are in a way that other plays often do not (at least not to the same degree). In part, this happens because this play can be treated allegorically. The answers to questions like, what is Prospero's magic? What does Caliban represent? Is the island a depiction of the new world or a world of the imagination or something else, tend often to depend upon the major interests of the person seeking to understand the play?

Readers with a lively interest in theatrical productions of Shakespeare tend to emphasize the extent to which the main focus in the *Tempest* is on the nature of art and illusion, especially theatrical art. This tendency is powerfully reinforced by the fact that this play is almost certainly Shakespeare's last full work, so that the *Tempest* is, in effect, his farewell to the stage.

People with a strong interest in politics, however, often take a different slant, and see the play as having less to do with an exploration of theatre than with a probing artistic analysis of important political

issues, especially those relevant to the oppression of the inhabitants of the new world (that is, the issue of colonialism) or to the relationship between the intellectual and the political world. So, for example, the play has been presented as a statement about colonial attitudes in North or South America or as an exploration of the role of the intellectual in post-glasnost Eastern Europe.

Other interpreters see in the play a vital exploration of education (the nature-versus-nurture dispute) or theories of politics or knowledge.

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### 12.3 DATE AND TEXT

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The only authoritative printed text of *The Tempest* is in the First Folio of 1623, where it appears as the first play, at the head of the comedies. The text seems to have been prepared carefully. It includes a list of characters (Names of the Actors) printed at the end of the play and provides act and scene divisions. There are also unusually full stage directions; this has led scholars to wonder whether they were written entirely by Shakespeare.

The play was probably written in 1611 and it was first performed on 1 November 1611 at Whitehall. According to a rare surviving record of performances, Shakespeare's acting company 'presented at Whitehall before the kinges Majestie a play called 'The Tempest'. *The Tempest* had a second royal performance as part of the celebrating Princess Elizabeth's betrothal to the Elector Palatine. *The Tempest*, like the other plays chosen for the celebrations, was probably written originally for performance at one of the King's Company's playhouses - probably the indoor Blackfriars Theatre. *The Tempest* was played by the King's Company at the Globe Theatre during the summer months and at The Blackfriars from October to May.

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### 12.4 SOURCES

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As long ago as in the New Variorum edition of 1892, Horace Howard Furness saw any search for a source for *The Tempest* as inevitably ending in 'a blind' (Furness 1964, 307), and the latest Arden editors

claim that twentieth century editors have not claimed any direct sources for the play (Vaughan 1999, 54).

The Vaughans agree with the conclusion reached by their Arden predecessor, Frank Kermode: 'Ultimately the source of *The Tempest* is an ancient *motif*, of almost universal occurrence, in saga, ballad, fairy tale and folk tale' (Kermode 1954, lxiii). At the other extreme, Kermode also declared that 'The only undisputed source for any part of *The Tempest* is Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals"' (Kermode 1954, xxxiv). If one adds that the play's essential constituents of storm and shipwreck and miraculous rescue, and some of the deeper issues the play raises, have been found in contemporary accounts of a voyage undertaken in 1609 to the Virginia Colony, but temporarily halted off the Bermudas, one more or less exhausts the recognised discoveries. The significant bearing of the dispatches from the would-be colonists, in the Virginia Pamphlets - on various aspects of the play has been shown by Philip Brockbank (Brockbank 1966, 1989).

The *Mirror of Knighthood* by Diego Ortuñes de Calahorra (1562, translated 1578...1601), and the fourth chapter of the untranslated *Noches de Invierno* by Antonio de Eslava (1609) have been cited as providing some material for the play but the Vaughans admit it as 'no more than a tangential source' (Vaughan 1999, 55).

Shakespeare could have used the pastoral tale, *The Enamoured Diana* by Gaspar Gil Polo's. Although it does not have a Prospero or Ariel or Caliban to recommend it, does have an island, and enough other points of similarity to *The Tempest* for it to merit inclusion among Shakespeare's sources. Gil Polo's work was also very popular at that time and it was available in English translation.

### **Stop to Consider**

Shakespeare, in writing *The Tempest*, did not use any one source. This gave him the freedom to use material from essays, pamphlets and literary romances for his play. Since he was not bound by one source his imaginative re- creations of the island and its inhabitants could include a spirit along with a bestial Caliban.

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## **12.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION**

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An understanding of the history of criticism of *The Tempest* will help the reader to see how the text has been subjected to very different



interpretations. This will open up for the reader the complexities that are embedded in the text.

Eighteenth century productions of the play underlined a neoclassical emphasis on human rationality and morality. Most eighteenth century representations of Prospero portrayed him as a grey bearded magus who controlled the disorderly political forces in Antonio and Sebastian and the corrupt moral forces embodied in Caliban. The audience of the eighteenth century would probably have accepted Prospero's wisdom and authority and interpreted the play through his eyes.

The characteristic response to the play until well into the Victorian period was that it was a *Shakespearean flight of fancy, a holiday from more problematic reflections on human duty and social kinship*. Samuel Johnson regarded Prospero as an enchanter, and this meant that Ariel and his partner were: "evidently of the fairy kind, an order of beings to which tradition has always ascribed a sort of diminutive agency, powerful but ludicrous, a humourous and frolick controlment of nature..." This lack of seriousness might be partially explained by the operatic versions of the play that were firmly installed in the eighteenth century repertory.

The focus on *The Tempest's* changed significantly with the dawn of the nineteenth century. Romantic poets led by Wordsworth and Coleridge, emphasized creative imagination and rejected neoclassical rules. This change in perspective led them to praise Shakespeare's plays as the ultimate perfect example of the creative imagination, and the dramatist himself as the untutored genius who followed nature rather than the ancient rules of the classicists. Shakespeare's plays were no longer considered as acting scripts for a public theatre but as expressions of his personal feelings. *The emphasis on the text as poetry rather than as theatre led to a split between the literary analysis of Shakespeare's text and assessments of Shakespeare in performance*. Critics like Charles Lamb felt that Shakespeare's genius could only be appreciated in the reader's imagination, and that plays like *The Tempest* could not be come to life on the stage: "Spirits and fairies cannot be represented, they cannot even be painted". *Romantic poets like Shelley identified Ariel with the poet, and the spirit's songs with poetry, and this led to the identification of Prospero with Shakespeare himself*. This identification of the magus with the dramatist culminated in the claims

of Edward Dowden in 1875 that the romances reveal biographical information about Shakespeare's later life. The romantic age also marked a revival of interest in Caliban. Several nineteenth century critics found some merit in his claims to ownership of the island and others saw in him reflections of the Noble Savage.

In the late nineteenth century productions of *The Tempest* Prospero and Miranda were eclipsed by Caliban. This was a direct result of major interpretations of *The Tempest* that first appeared in the late nineteenth century and flourished in the twentieth. There was an emphasis on reading the play as essentially about the new world and for some critics the play symbolized European or United States imperialism. This radical shift emerged from different circumstances in Latin American and Anglo-American scholarship. For the Latin Americans the rise of an intellectual class whose ethnic and cultural ties were dominated by their Native American and African heritage made them see their situation in a different light. In England and Europe on the other hand there was an emerging skepticism about European imperialism and its impact on colonized people - dispossession and often death, and on the colonizers - insensitivity and brutality. After 1950 postcolonial interpretations of *The Tempest* dominated the stage and literary studies around the world.

#### **Postcolonial approaches**

Postcolonial critics as a whole can hardly be understood as being devoted to locating a binary opposition between oppressor and oppressed, and celebrating the latter. Yet this is the image of postcolonial criticism that is often evoked within Renaissance studies, which is ironic given that in the last two decades, some early modern scholars have made important contributions to postcolonial debates about power relations.

Late twentieth century criticism has, however, opened up different ways of assessing the play. Earlier approaches to a text had conceived of the text as autotelic - "an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next". In recent years, however, an alternative criticism often referred to as 'structuralist and 'poststructuralist', has displaced the primacy of the 'autotelic' text by arguing that a text

"cannot be limited by or to...the originating moment of its production, anchored in the intentionality of its author". This insistence has opened up the text to Marxist, new-historicist and feminist readings of the play. The interesting aspect of these 'alternative Shakespeares' is that no one reading cancels out another, they all can exist simultaneously enriching our reading of the plays. Students should try and acquaint themselves with the criticism of Stanley Fish, Stephen Greenblatt, Alan Sinfield, Juliet Dusinberre and Catherine Belsey to understand the invigorating way *The Tempest* can be read.

**SAQ**

1. How did Romantic criticism influence the reading of the play? (50 words)

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2. In which period were Shakespeare's plays no longer seen as acting scripts? Why did this happen? (20 + 50 words)

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3. What were the major shifts in 20th century criticism? (50 words)

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## **12.6 ACT-WISE READING OF THE PLAY**

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Students will note that *The Tempest* is a short play and that it roughly conforms to the unities of time place and action. As Prospero's instructions make clear, the plot consumes the hours between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. (the events that take place in the past and on other locales are narrated, not enacted). Except for the storm scene all the events take place on the island. *The Tempest* is extremely tightly structured, roles and events parallel and reflect each other - a good example is to see how the theme of usurpation that is first introduced by Prospero is echoed through the play.

## Act I

The scene opens with a ship at sea in a terrible storm. The King Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Ferdinand, Gonzalo, and other courtiers enter looking for the ship's Master but they simply impede the work of the crew. Traditional authority is challenged in the storm. The Boatswain is in charge; he orders the king and the other aristocrats off the deck. He gives his order to the sailors with confident authority and speaks to his social superiors with little or no respect. But symbolically, the storm and Boatswain's behavior represent the various challenges towards authority, which will recur again and again throughout the play.

The storm is representative of a disruption in the scheme of things and we are left clueless regarding the fate of the ship and its passengers and the crew. The abruptness and violence at the beginning and at the end of the opening scene create a theatrical shock of great power.

The staging of this particular scene is a matter of concern for the directors. In some productions, the scene is played in a bare stage, without props or scenery. Only lighting, sounds, and the actors' movements create the illusion of a ship caught in a tempest. Can you think of possible ways by which the naturalism that Shakespeare has employed can be retained?

Why is it significant that the play begins with a storm at sea?

In the next scene the location changes to an island where Miranda is seen pleading with her father Prospero to abate the storm. She feels for the suffering of the shipwrecked people and is full of pity for them. It is evident that it is none but Prospero who had caused the tempest but the reasons are yet to be clarified. However, he immediately assures her that no harm has been done and the people on board the ship are safe. In this long scene, Prospero explains to his daughter the reasons for their being on the island, their history, the origins of his magical powers, and the cause of the tempest. He questions her about what she remembers of the past. At the same time he reveals that he was the Duke of Milan before his brother, Antonio robbed him off his dukedom. He had entrusted the government of Milan to his brother as he himself wanted to pursue his studies. Enjoying the benefits of

playing the duke, Antonio aspired to become the duke, and plotted with Alonso, the King of Naples. He treacherously admitted Alonso's army into Milan, which led to the capture of Prospero and his infant daughter. The conspirators dared not kill Prospero because of his popularity. Instead, one good Neapolitan counselor Gonzalo abandoned him and Miranda in a tiny boat. Prospero thus continues to tell his story and Miranda questioned him repeatedly.

We also meet Ariel who reports how he has carried out his master's orders with regard to the storm and ensured the safety of the passengers who are now distributed around the island. He also adds that the sailors are asleep on board and the rest of the fleet is returning to Naples, mourning the death of Alonso their king. Having said this Ariel demands his freedom which Prospero had promised to give him. This enrages Prospero who reminds Ariel of the debt he owes him and threatens terrible punishment.

**Prospero's dictatorial image** needs to be explored from this point itself. Prospero claims to have saved Ariel from Sycorax the infamous witch who enraged by Ariel's refusal to obey her orders had imprisoned him inside a tree for twelve years. Now Prospero also threatens him with another twelve years of imprisonment, this time wedged into an oak tree. Can you really say that he is a better tormentor than Sycorax? His gentleness and love towards Miranda is contrasted to his harsh treatment of his slaves. Moreover, his attitude towards his spirit servant is ambiguous.

Ariel, frightened by thoughts of further imprisonment goes away to take the shape of an invisible sea-nymph. Then we happen to meet his other slave Caliban, the son of Sycorax. He curses Prospero and in response to the threats of punishment complains that Prospero and Miranda are the outsiders who have taken possession of his island.

### **Stop to Consider**

Can the conflicts between Prospero and Caliban be seen as that of a colonizer and native inhabitant respectively? Apart from general views of Caliban being the symbol of wickedness - the son of a witch and the devil - can he be viewed as a victim of an exploiter

who takes over his island, forcing him to slavery? It is interesting to note that 'Caliban' is almost an anagram of 'cannibal'.

Prospero too states his reason for making him a slave. Caliban had tried to violate Miranda's honour and Prospero punished him for daring to do such an act. Miranda reminds him how she had patiently taught him language and Caliban replies that the only benefit of that is that he can now curse.

Shakespeare's time was the high time of European expansion. They set out in their mission of the discovery of the New World carrying their torch of enlightenment to the 'dark' corners of the universe. Caliban's inability to express himself in the European language was a sign of his savagery and uncivilized behavior. Miranda's teaching him language is necessary for him to be able to know his own meaning and the meaning of the world he lives in.

Ariel enters singing followed by Ferdinand the King's son who is in a trance like state, affected by the music, which speaks of his father's possible death. Miranda sees him and thinks him to be another spirit while her father assures her that he is a human like them. She is at once attracted towards him and Ferdinand too thinks her to be some goddess. Watched by Prospero who reveals that he wants them to fall in love, Miranda and Ferdinand talk to one another. Prospero intervenes, decides to be rude to Ferdinand, fearful of too rapid a courtship. He makes Ferdinand a prisoner accusing him of a plot to usurp him and orders him to a cell.

### **Check Your Progress**

1. What is your reaction to Prospero's treatment of Caliban?
2. How significant is the fact that the play begins with a storm sea?
3. Why does Miranda have such immediate empathy for the men in the ship?
4. What crimes does Antonio, Prospero's brother, commit?
5. In Prospero's questioning of Ariel, we learn that the storm is part of Prospero's design. Does he want to punish the conspirators or lead them to repentance?

6. What connection does Shakespeare establish between outward appearance and inner spirit?

## Act II

The act opens in an isolated part of the island where the royal family is to be seen. They are surprised that their clothes smell and feel as fresh as if they had just been bought at a market. However, Ferdinand is missing, presumably drowned. Alonso, his father, is in a state of deep depression. Gonzalo, the faithful royal servant, comforts him by reminding him of their miraculous escape in which even their clothes are unharmed. From Gonzalo's speech, it is revealed that the voyagers were back from the wedding of the king's daughter Claribel and the King of Tunis when the tempest struck them. During the course of their petty talk, the courtiers' debate among themselves and Gonzalo's knowledge regarding Widow Dido of Carthage becomes the butt of everyone's joke. Antonio and Sebastian mock the manner in which Gonzalo brought about a comparison between Claribel as the new Queen of Tunis and Widow Dido.

Dido was the queen of Carthage and a famous figure of Roman mythology. In one version of the myth recounted in Virgil's *Aeneid*, she had a passionate affair with Aeneas, the Trojan Prince who founded Rome. When he later abandoned her, she killed herself.

Alonso, who was already in grief for having left his daughter in Tunis after her marriage, now feels that his son too is lost forever. Francisco, however, assures him that Ferdinand probably survived, as he was last seen swimming efficiently. Sebastian blames the King himself for the shipwreck and the loss of Ferdinand as the marriage that he had fixed required a sea voyage. Alonso was firm in his resolution of giving his daughter's hand in marriage to the King of Tunis. With barely concealed racism, Sebastian claims that all the courtiers begged Alonso not to permit the marriage of Claribel to the King of Tunis. He also asserts that Claribel herself did not want to marry the African King but, as a dutiful daughter, she obeyed her father's wishes. Gonzalo reprimands Sebastian for his lack of gentleness in such a delicate situation. He

attempts to cheer the king with an account of an ideal world that he would like to build in the very island, which saved their lives, where everything is owned in common.

Gonzalo's picture of a society in which ownership of everything is shared ('commonwealth') is influenced by an essay entitled 'On Cannibals' written by Michel de Montaigne (1533-92). The essay gave rise to the belief in the 'noble savage' for whom harmonious, peaceful and equal relationships were completely natural.

In the meantime, Ariel enters invisible to all of them playing on a solemn tune. With his magical powers, Ariel induces sleep in all but Antonio and Sebastian who offer to stand guard. While the king is asleep, Antonio encourages his brother Sebastian to usurp the throne and improve his fortune. Antonio provokes him to think of himself as the next heir to the throne of Naples as Ferdinand is without doubt dead and Claribel being the Queen of Tunis resides too far away. Gradually Sebastian induces him to think that destiny has provided him with the best opportunity to fulfill his greatest ambition by murdering the king in his sleep. He urges that it is the time for them to act quickly. He decides to kill Alonso so that Sebastian can become king and Sebastian will have to kill Gonzalo to silence further criticism on the matter. Sebastian at this point recalls the manner in which Antonio had supplanted his brother Prospero. The two are about to kill Alonso in his sleep but Ariel seeing that the king's life was in danger sings in Gonzalo's ear and awakens him and he in turn wakens the king. Antonio and Sebastian explain that their swords are drawn to protect the king from wild animals. All of them are confused with the peculiar happenings and Alonso urges them to search for Ferdinand.

In yet another part of the island, Caliban who has been ordered by Prospero to gather wood, is seen carrying his load and uttering curses for his master. He describes the ways in which Prospero and the spirits controlled by him torment him for every minor offence. Trinculo, the king's jester, enters the scene and Caliban thinking it to be another one of Prospero's spirits falls flat on the ground and covers himself with a cloak. Trinculo was in fact looking for shelter from yet another storm when he stumbles across Caliban. He wonders as to what kind of a creature Caliban is and wonders if he could carry it to England and



earn a fortune from him. Stephano, the king's butler also joins them in a drunken state and together they force Caliban to drink. Caliban too begins to worship them as gods who could rid him of Prospero's torments. He promises to work for them sincerely just as he had promised Prospero initially.

**SAQ**

1. What type of person is Gonzalo? What was his role in the plot against Prospero? (50 words)

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2. How can the characters of Sebastian and Antonio be visualized? (50 words)

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3. What is Gonzalo's idea of the type of government or life style that could be possible on this island? (60 words)

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4. See how the theme of usurpation is carried over from the first Act. (80 words)

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5. See how the playwright uses popular conceptions that Europeans had about people belonging to other races. (50 words)

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**Act III**

The action takes place outside Prospero's cell. Ferdinand enters carrying one of the many heavy logs, which Prospero has ordered him to pile up. Unlike Caliban, however, Ferdinand has no desire to curse. Instead, he enjoys his labors because they serve the woman he loves, Miranda. As Ferdinand works and thinks of Miranda, she enters, and after her enters Prospero unseen. Miranda tells Ferdinand to take a

break from his work, or to let her work for him, thinking that her father is bussy at studies. Ferdinand refuses to let her work for him but does rest from his work and asks Miranda her name. Miranda disobeying her father tells him her name. Ferdinand declares how he admires her more than any woman he has met and Miranda too declares her love for him. With promises of devotion they agree to become betrothed and then leave the stage in different directions. Prospero who is watching them reveals his pleasure in 'asides' to the audience. He then hastens to his book of magic in order to prepare for remaining business. This scene revolves around different images of servitude. Ferdinand is literally in service to Prospero, but in order to make his labor more pleasant he sees Miranda as his taskmaster. Prospero makes both Ferdinand and Caliban work for him but whereas Caliban is a slave both to Prospero and to his own anger, Ferdinand, is a willing slave to his love. This is the only scene of actual interaction we see between Ferdinand and Miranda.

Near Caliban's cave Stephano, Caliban and Trinculo again meet. The three of them are in a drunken state. Stephano promises to make Caliban his deputy. Caliban accuses Trinculo of cowardice and Stephano supports him. Caliban begins to tell Stephano more about his slavery to Prospero and urges him to kill his master. Stephano agrees to help Caliban kill Prospero, burn his books and take away his beautiful daughter. They provide a comic parody of one of the main themes of the play: usurpation. Caliban's plot to overthrow Prospero is a comic reflection of the way in which Antonio seized the throne from Prospero and of the conspiracy to kill Alonso.

Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and their companion lords become exhausted, and Alonso gives up all hope of finding his son. Antonio, still hoping to kill Alonso, whispers to Sebastian that Alonso's exhaustion and desperation will provide them with the perfect opportunity to kill the king later that evening. At this point strange music fills the stage and a procession of spirits enters, bringing a banquet of food. The men disagree at first about whether to eat, but Gonzalo persuades them it will be all right. Just as the men are about to eat, however, a noise of thunder erupts, and Ariel enters in the shape of a harpy. He claps his wings upon the table and the banquet vanishes. Calling himself an instrument of Fate and Destiny Ariel goes on to accuse Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio of overthrowing Prospero

and calls on them to repent. Saying this he vanishes, and the procession of spirits enters again and removes the banquet table. Ariel's appearance as an avenging harpy represents the climax of Prospero's revenge, as Antonio, Alonso, and the other lords are confronted with their crimes and threatened with punishment. Prospero, still invisible, applauds the work of his spirit and announces with satisfaction that his enemies are now in his control. He leaves them in their distracted state and goes to visit Ferdinand and his daughter.

Alonso, meanwhile, is quite desperate. He has heard the name of Prospero once more, and it has signaled the death of his own son. He runs to drown himself. Sebastian and Antonio, meanwhile, decide to pursue and fight with the spirits. Gonzalo, ever the voice of reason, tells the other, younger lords to run after the three of them.

**Stop to Consider**

Is the love between Ferdinand and Miranda diluted for the audience because everyone is aware that Prospero is manipulating the two young people? The confusion and sorrow of the survivors of the 'shipwreck' added to what Prospero had been subjected to in Milan bring elements into the play that are not in keeping with comedy.

**SAQ**

1. How has Ferdinand's and Miranda's love deepened from their first attraction? What is Shakespeare suggesting about the true nature of love? (100 words)

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2. What does Caliban hope to accomplish by his plot against Prospero? Why does Shakespeare include this subplot mirroring the conspiracy of the nobles? (80 words)

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3. What does Caliban hope to accomplish by his plot against Prospero? How does the apparition of the banquet affect Alonso and his retinue? How is the banquet used as a symbol? Why aren't the men allowed to eat the food? Is this an effective moment for Ariel to accuse them of their sins? (120 words)

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## Act IV

Prospero gives his blessing to Ferdinand and Miranda but warns Ferdinand not to break Miranda's "virgin-knot" before the wedding has been solemnized as it will only bring misery. Ferdinand promises to comply. Prospero then calls in Ariel and asks him to summon spirits to perform a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, masques were popular forms of entertainment in England. Masques featured masked actors performing allegorical, often highly ritualized stories drawn from mythology and folklore.

Soon, three spirits appear in the shapes of the mythological figures of Iris (Juno's messenger and the goddess of the rainbow), Juno (queen of the gods), and Ceres (goddess of agriculture). This trio performs a masque celebrating the lovers' engagement. Prospero's masque features Juno, the symbol of marriage and family life in Roman mythology, and Ceres, the symbol of agriculture, and thus of nature, growth, prosperity, and rebirth, all notions intimately connected to marriage. The united blessing of the union by Juno and Ceres is a blessing on the couple that wishes them prosperity and wealth while explicitly tying their marriage to notions of social propriety and harmony with the Earth. In this way, marriage is subtly glorified as both the foundation of society and as part of the natural order of things, given the accord between marriage and nature in Ceres' speech. One reason Shakespeare might shift the focus of the play to marriage at this point is to prepare the audience for the mending of the disrupted social order that takes place at the end of the story.

The spectacle awes Ferdinand and he says that he would like to live on the island forever, with Prospero as his father and Miranda as his wife. Juno and Ceres send Iris to fetch some nymphs and reapers to perform a country-dance. Just as this dance begins, however, Prospero is startled, and suddenly sends the spirits away.

Prospero, who had forgotten about Caliban's plot against him, suddenly remembers that the hour nearly has come for Caliban and the conspirators to make their attempt on his life. Prospero's apparent

anger alarms Ferdinand and Miranda, but Prospero assures the young couple that his forgetfulness is largely a result of his age; he says that a walk will soothe him.

When Ferdinand and Miranda leave him Prospero immediately summons Ariel, and asks Ariel to tell him again what the three conspirators are up to. Ariel tells him of the men's drunken scheme to steal Prospero's book and kill him. He reports that he used his music to lead these men through rough and prickly briars and then into a filthy pond. Delighted, Prospero now orders Ariel to hang gorgeous clothes on a line by his cell. Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano enter, wet from the filthy pond. The fine clothing immediately distracts Stefano and Trinculo to the fury of Caliban. Soon after they touch the clothing, Prospero's spirits in the shape of hounds chase them away.

**SAQ**

1. How does Shakespeare use the masque to emphasize the theatricality of the play? (80 words)

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2. How is Ferdinand different from Caliban in his relationship to Miranda? Why does he pledge to keep her honor safe? (60 words)

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3. Why is Miranda's virginity so important to Prospero? (50 words)

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4. What is the overall impact of the Masque? How is it supposed to affect the two young lovers? What is its message about the sanctity of the marriage bond? (70 words)

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**Act V**

Near Prospero's cave Ariel reminds him that the time has arrived when Ariel is allowed to stop working. Prospero acknowledges Ariel's request and asks how the king and his followers are faring. Ariel reports the troubled state of the king and courtiers, and expresses compassion for them. Moved by Ariel's feelings, Prospero tells Ariel

to release the men, his reason and not his passion takes control. He realizes that "the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance," and since they are sorry for their crimes, he has accomplished his purpose. Now alone on stage he delivers his famous soliloquy in which he gives up magic. He says he will perform his last task and then break his staff and drown his magic book.

Ariel now enters with Alonso and his companions, who have been charmed and obediently stand in a circle. Prospero praises and weeps with Gonzalo, criticizes Alonso and Sebastian, and though recognizing Antonio's evil nature, forgives him. He promises to grant freedom to his loyal helper-spirit and sends him to fetch the Boatswain and mariners from the wrecked ship. Prospero releases Alonso and his companions from their spell and speaks with them. Alonso now tells Prospero of the missing Ferdinand. Prospero tells Alonso that he, too, has lost a child in this last tempest-his daughter, then draws aside a curtain, revealing behind it Ferdinand and Miranda, who are playing a game of chess. Alonso is ecstatic at the discovery. Meanwhile, Miranda marvels at the sight of the king and courtiers. Alonso embraces both of them and begs Miranda's forgiveness for the treacheries of twelve years ago. Prospero silences Alonso's apologies, insisting that the reconciliation is complete. Accusing his enemies neither more nor less than they deserve, and forgiving them instantly once he has been restored to his dukedom, Prospero has at last come to seem judicious rather than arbitrary in his use of power.

After arriving with the Boatswain and mariners, Ariel is sent to fetch Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano, which he speedily does. The three drunken thieves are sent to Prospero's cell to return the clothing they stole and to clean it in preparation for the evening's reveling. But Caliban is sufficiently changed by the experiences of the play to recognize his gullibility and his need for freedom. Prospero then invites Alonso and his company to stay the night and hear his tale of the last twelve years. And in the morning, they can all set out for Naples, where Miranda and Ferdinand will be married. After the wedding, Prospero will return to Milan, where he plans to contemplate the end of his life. He promises a favorable voyage to Naples, and sets Ariel free. The play ends with a calm and quietness in direct contrast to its opening.

The other characters exit, and Prospero delivers the epilogue. He describes the loss of his magical powers and says that, as he imprisoned Ariel and Caliban, the audience has now imprisoned him on the stage. He says that the audience can only release him by applauding, and asks them to remember that his only desire was to please them. He says that, as his listeners would like to have their own crimes forgiven, they should forgive him, and set him free by clapping.

**SAQ**

1. Why does Prospero decide to show mercy to his enemies? Why is Ariel the first to speak of mercy? Do you think Prospero had planned to forgive them from the beginning? (50 words)

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2. Why does Prospero decide to give up magic? What does his choice show about what he thinks happened in the past? How does he plan to live in the future? What has Prospero learned? Has he changed in any fundamental way or had the change already occurred before the beginning of the action? (100 words)

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3. Are Caliban and Prospero reconciled? (40 words)

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4. Are Alonso, Antonio, and the other conspirators truly sorry for their plot against Prospero? Has their ordeal on the island changed them? (50 words)

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**12.7.1 THE THEATRICAL ASPECTS OF *THE TEMPEST***

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*The Tempest* is an intensely self-conscious play - it is, in many ways, theatre about the theatre. Many of the actions and events in it are explicitly and implicitly referred to as theatrical ones. Miranda's response to the shipwreck is a response to a tragedy, full of pity and fear:

O, I have suffered  
With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel-  
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her-  
Dashed all to pieces! O, the cry did knock  
Against my very heart-poor souls, they perished. (I, ii 5-9)

The shipwreck is described by Prospero as a theatrical show staged by himself. "The direful spectacle of the wreck" (1.2.26,) - where the predominant meaning of "spectacle", as defined by Orgel, is "theatrical display or pageant". Similarly, Ariel is commanded to assume the "shape", or role of a "nymph o'th sea". Prospero orchestrates the events in *The Tempest* and much of the play is a play-within-a-play, directed by Prospero, with Ariel as his assistant-director and stage manager. This aspect of the play has led critics to link the figure of Prospero with that of Shakespeare himself. This play, accordingly, can be read as Shakespeare's farewell to the stage.

*The Tempest* is also Prospero's attempt to undo the past by restaging it. In this respect, Prospero is comparable to Hamlet, Richard II and Lear who also employ a reenactment of the past as a means of exerting symbolic power over it. Hamlet restages his father's assassination, and 'The Mousetrap', in a sense, is the replacement of actual revenge. Richard II turns his dethronement into a theatrical spectacle, and Lear calls his daughters to a mock trial. All resort to drama because reality is out of their reach, beyond their control. Metadrama, in Shakespeare, seems to function as a symbolic weapon, a substitute for reality, a staged repetition of the past an assertion of control on the site of loss and defeat.

Prospero's theatrical art serves as his weapon of power, his instrument of control. *Theatricality and power converge most strongly, and reach their apotheosis, in the wedding masque in Act 4, scene 1.*

It is clear that *The Tempest* does depend for much of its effectiveness on a wide range of special effects - sound, lighting, fantastic visions, a whole realm of "magic" (it may well have been written in response to the changing theatrical tastes of an audience that was requiring more theatrical effects in the presentation of dramatic productions). But there's more to the theatricality of the play than just its style. A central issue of the *Tempest* is an exploration into the nature of theatre itself.



For those who have read a certain amount of Shakespeare, the theatrical theme gets considerable impetus from the fact that *The Tempest* seems, in some ways, to revisit many earlier Shakespearean themes and characters, so that at times it comes across almost as a final summary look at some very familiar material, something Stephen Greenblatt calls "a kind of echo chamber of Shakespearean motifs".

**Shakespearean motifs**

*The Tempest's* story of loss and recovery and its air of wonder link it closely to the group of late plays that modern editors generally call "romances" (*Pericles, The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline*), but it resonates as well with issues that haunted Shakespeare's imagination throughout his career: the painful necessity for a father to let his daughter go (*Othello, King Lear*); the treacherous betrayal of a legitimate ruler (*Richard II, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Macbeth*); the murderous hatred of one brother for another (*Richard III, As You Like It, Hamlet, King Lear*); the passage from court society to the wilderness and the promise of a return (*A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It*); the wooing of a young heiress in ignorance of her place in the social hierarchy (*Twelfth Night, Pericles, The Winter's Tale*); the dream of manipulating others by means of art, especially by staging miniature plays-within-plays (*1 Henry IV, Much Ado About Nothing, Hamlet*); the threat of a radical loss of identity (*The Comedy of Errors, Richard II, King Lear*); the relation between nature and nurture (*Pericles, The Winter's Tale*); the harnessing of magical powers (. . . [*2 Henry VI*], *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth*).

**SAQ**

1. How is *The Tempest* an exploration into the nature of theatre itself? (50 words)

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2. In which scenes can you identify the conscious use of theatrical elements? (40 words)

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3. Can you link Prospero's actions of donning and removing his costume at different points of the play to the conscious use of theatre? (50 words)

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### 12.7.2 PROSPERO

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*The Tempest*, it is clear, features an experiment by Prospero. He has not brought the Europeans to the vicinity of the island, but when they do come close to it, he has, through the power of illusion, lured them into his very special realm. The experiment first of all breaks up their social solidarity, for they land in different groups: Ferdinand by himself, the court group, Stephano and Trinculo by themselves, and the sailors remain asleep. The magic leads them by separate paths until they all meet in the circle drawn by Prospero in front of his cave. There he removes the spell of the illusions; the human family recognizes each other, and together they resolve to return to Italy, leaving behind the powers of the magic associated with the island.

#### **What is the purpose of Prospero's experiment?**

He never gives us a clear statement, but it seems clear that one important element in that purpose is Miranda. He wants to arrange things on her behalf, and of all the people in the play, her situation is the most transformed: she is going back to Europe a royal bride, filled with a sense of enthusiasm and joy at the prospect of living among so many fine people in a society that, quite literally, thrills her imagination. *It seems that Prospero's major intention includes a recommitment to civilized life in Milan*, so that his daughter can take up her rightful place in society. *As with As You Like It*, there is no sense here that any appropriate life could be based on remaining on the island when they no longer have to.

However, we must not forget that Prospero is also consolidating his own power by arranging the marriage of his daughter with Alonso's son. He is ensuring that there will be no repetition of earlier mistakes that led to his loss of power. Shakespeare by introducing the plot

hatched by Antonio and Sebastian keeps questions of power present in the minds of the audience.

The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda and Alonso's change of heart is a direct result of Prospero's experiment. *The most complex change in the play, however, takes place within Prospero himself.* In considering his motives for undertaking the experiment, we cannot escape the sense that Prospero harbors a great deal of resentment about his treatment Milan and is never very far from wanting to exact a harsh revenge. After all, he has it in his power significantly to injure the parties that treated him so badly. What's very interesting about this is that Prospero learns that that is not the appropriate response. And he learns this central insight from Ariel, the very spirit of imaginative illusion, who is not even human. Speaking of the fact that all of Prospero's enemies are now in his power and are painfully confused, Ariel says: "if you beheld them now, your affections/ Would become tender." Prospero replies: "Does thou think so spirit?" to which Ariel responds: "Mine would, sir, were I human." At this point Prospero delivers one of the most important speeches of the play:

And mine shall.  
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling  
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply  
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?  
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part. The rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance. (5.1. 18-28)

Here, the imaginative sympathy for the sufferings of others leads to an active intervention based upon "virtue" rather than "vengeance." *This is a key recognition in the play: virtue expressed in forgiveness is a higher human attribute than vengeance.* And in the conclusion of the play, Prospero does not even mention the list of crimes against him. He simply offers to forgive and accept what has happened to him, in a spirit of reconciliation. Unlike earlier plays which featured family

quarrels, the ending here requires neither the death nor the punishment of any of the parties.

**Stop to Consider**

How does one read Prospero's taking over the island? Can one see it as another usurpation or does Prospero have the right to rule over the island.

How powerful is Prospero? Remember that Caliban shows the island's secrets to Prospero and also reveals some of his mother's magic charms.

Prospero has arranged for his daughter and Ferdinand to fall in 'love', this marriage will help him to consolidate his power. Marriage was often used during this period as a political tool to ensure power.

These questions will help you to 'contextualize' the play because they bring out its connections to some ideas which were important to the Elizabethans --public issues relating to royal succession, usurpation, the nature of monarchical power, the institutional aspects of personal relations like friendship and marriage.

**SAQ**

1. How does Prospero direct the events of the play? (50 words)

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.....

2. What is the role of Ariel in the ordering of the events? (30 words)

.....  
.....

3. How do you read Prospero's "change of heart"? Is it believable? (40 words)

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**21.7.3 CALIBAN**

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The presence of Caliban presents two diametrically opposing ways of reading the play:

1. One reading would probably stress (as many productions have always done) Caliban's dangerous, anarchic violence which represents a clear and present danger, because he is not capable of being educated out of the state he was born into. Prospero's "civilizing" arts keep him in control, though with difficulty. Caliban might well be considered in some sense a natural slave (as D. H. Lawrence pointed out) because his idea of freedom from Prospero seems to involve becoming the slave of someone else, someone who will kill Prospero, i.e. Stephano and Trinculo. So Caliban throws in his lot with the two drunken Europeans, not having the wit to see them for what they are. Caliban is thus not so much interested in freedom as he is in rebellion; his violence is natural to him and is not an outgrowth of the way he is treated. Hence, Prospero's control of him through his magic is not only justified but also necessary. Does Caliban undergo any sort of significant change at the ending of the play? There's a suggestion that he has learned something from the mistakes he has made, and his final comment ("I'll be wise hereafter,/ And seek for grace") may be a cryptic acknowledgment of some restraint. But he doesn't go with the Europeans and remains on his island. Caliban's future life has always sparked interest among certain writers, for there is a tradition of sequels to the *Tempest* in which Caliban is the central character (notably Browning's long dramatic monologue "Caliban on Setebos").

2. However, the presence of Caliban also questions the legitimacy of Prospero's actions. Prospero as Caliban points out is not the natural ruler of the island, Caliban claims that the island belongs to him; Prospero's reasons for enslaving Caliban then become untenable. Even Prospero's claim of educating Caliban are questioned: "You taught me language, and my profit on't /Is I know how to curse...". Caliban's accusations in away undercuts the entire European enterprise of enlightened education of the natives. Caliban's is a very strong voice against colonization.

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#### **12.7.4 MIRANDA**

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Miranda is the only female character who appears in the play. Other women are only referred to - Sycorax, Claribel and Miranda's mother

are only referred to. Miranda too did not arouse much critical interest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.. Mary Cowden Clarke omitted Miranda from her description of *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1852) and Miranda's most outspoken lines (1.2.352-63) were attributed to Prospero. Miranda's diminished roles reflect the nineteenth century's patriarchal perspectives.

We first meet Miranda, overwhelmed with the wonder and delight on seeing so many finely dressed civilized Europeans she cries out, "O brave new world/ That has such people in't!" to which the more sober minded and mature Prospero comments only, "'Tis new to thee." Those four words of Prospero undercut Miranda's joyous affirmation. It is obvious that she is completely a product of Prospero's education. He has moulded her to echo his own ideas; she really has no voice of her own. Even her 'love' for Ferdinand is arranged by her father. Miranda's marriage like that of Claribel is actually a political expedient; Shakespeare makes no attempt to elide over this fact.

By creating Miranda Shakespeare might have been reflecting contemporary attitudes towards women. Since she confirmed to Prospero's ideas on the place of women she was raised to the position of someone to be worshipped, whereas Sycorax who was powerful was banished and always referred to in derogatory terms. Miranda's position is that of a figurehead, she has no real power although she is the future Queen.

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### **21.7.5 ARIEL**

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We should note how central Ariel is to Prospero's magic. And Ariel is not human but a magical spirit who has been released from natural bondage by Prospero. The earlier inhabitants of the island, Sycorax and Caliban, had no sense of how to use Ariel, and so they simply imprisoned him in the world, which governed them, raw nature. Prospero's power depends, in large part, on Ariel's release and willing service. In that sense, Ariel can be seen as some imaginative power, which makes the effects of the theatre (like lightning in the masts of the boat) possible. One of the great attractions of this view of the play

as a celebration of the powers of theatre is that it makes the best sense of Ariel's character, something which, as we shall see, is not quite so straightforward in other approaches.

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## 12.7.6 PROSPERO'S MASQUE

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A masque was a celebration of royal power and glory and, in staging one; Prospero becomes a type of king, a royal mage whose ideals become reality in a courtly entertainment. The wedding masque in *The Tempest* is an allusion to the court masques performed at the Whitehall Banqueting House and brings into the play a broad range of Renaissance thought about royalty, its manifestations and the nature of royal power. The wedding masque in *The Tempest* is a materialisation of Prospero's will and power. Like the court masque, it is a visual spectacle: "No tongue! All eyes! Be silent!" (4.1.59). Whereas in the second scene of *The Tempest*, Prospero wanted his daughter to listen, and drink in his tale, this time he wants visual attention. The masque celebrates Prospero's paternal magnanimity and his ability to defy the laws of time and nature - "Spring come to you at the farthest, / In the very end of harvest!" (4.1.114-15): winter has been excluded from Prospero's seasonal cycle. Abundance emanates spontaneously from Nature's inexhaustible resources; the masque is a departure from the real world of *The Tempest*, in which Ferdinand has to labour for his wedding, Ariel for his freedom, Caliban for the liberation from bodily pain. These harsh, rigid transactions are replaced by a vision of unconditional plenty. It is, however, worth noting that Venus and her "waspish-headed son" have been safely excluded from the party; unbridled erotic lust - so much feared by Prospero - has been warded off.

### **Stop to Consider**

This scene can be connected to the first scene of the play where Prospero is actually producing the storm. In both these scenes Shakespeare emphasizes the idea that Prospero is like a playwright moulding the reactions of the audience for a particular purpose.

In the court masque, when the masquers reveal their true identities (i.e. as persons of nobility, people of the court), the audience was meant to look through the image, at the ideals of kingship and courtly life it represented. "In such representations", Orgel and Strong write, "the court saw not an imitation of itself, but its true self." Likewise, the wedding masque in *The Tempest* offers Miranda and Ferdinand an image of their ideal, virtuous selves. It points to the ideals forged by Prospero's royal mind and stands for his project in general:

In one voyage  
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,  
And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wife  
Where he himself was lost, Prospero his dukedom  
In a poor isle, *and all of us ourselves*  
*When no man was his own.* (5.1.208-13)

Prospero's noble, rational magic is contrasted to the black sorcery practised by Sycorax, Caliban's mother, and this, again, links him to the images of royal power we encounter in the court masque. Frank Kermode, in his New Arden Edition of *The Tempest*, writes that Prospero's art is:

"...the disciplined exercise of virtuous knowledge ... it is a technique for liberating the soul from the passions, from nature; the practical application of a discipline of which the primary requirements are learning and temperance, and of which the mode is contemplation ... it is the ordination of civility, the control of appetite, the transformations of nature by breeding and learning."

### **The Court Masque**

The court masque played a crucial role in the way Renaissance monarchs chose to think about themselves. Masques served essentially as images of the order, peace and harmony brought about by the monarch's mere presence, and expressed didactic truths about the monarchy. Lavishly spectacular and visual, designed to enchant the eye, they formed a genre fundamentally different from the drama performed on the public stage. Much of the action was taken up by the settings themselves, which did not merely form a passive backdrop to the action, but were an integral part of it and symbolised the controlling power of the king. In this sense, the



masque is radically different from the plays that were performed in the popular playhouses, which lacked scenic machinery. Inigo Jones's ingenious settings, "his ability to do the impossible" were the prime manifestation of the royal will

Under James 1, the form of the masque developed into two contrasting parts. The first section, or antimasque, offered an image of vice and disorder, which, in the second section, the masque proper, was superseded by the workings of royal power, and an ordered, harmonious world, with the king at its centre, was established.

In a number of masques, the king was often represented as the controller and tamer of nature. The royal will created order and sophistication in "the wildness and untutored innocence of nature". At the climax of each masque, the masquers descended from the stage and chose a dancing partner from the audience, merging the worlds of the masque and the court into the ideal royal universe.

The court masque, then, manifested an important theatrical image of kingship; royalty's prime mode of expression was fundamentally histrionic, this is also confirmed by James I's personal treatise on royalty entitled *Basilikon Doron* (1599) and Elizabeth's assertion that "We princes, I tell you are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed". The theatre served as an extension of the royal mind. Even watching a masque was a histrionic activity: the king's box was placed at the centre of the hall, for all the other spectators to see. The king had to be seen seeing. Inigo Jones' stage-effects were also designed in such a way as to give the king the best view of the stage - only from his seat could the action be seen properly.

**SAQ**

1. What is a masque? What use does Shakespeare make of the masque in the play? (20 + 50 words)

.....  
.....

2. How is the idea of 'theatricality' built into the use of the wedding masque? (50 words)

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.....

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## 12.8 Summing Up

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For all the potentially warm reconciliations at the end of the play, however, it is not without its potentially sobering ironies. And there is a good deal of discussion of just how unequivocal the celebration is at the end. For Prospero is no sentimentalist. He recognizes the silence of Sebastian and Antonio at the end for what it is, an indication that they have not changed, that they are going to return to Naples and Milan the same people as left it, political double dealers, ambitious and potentially murderous power seekers, just as Stephano and Trinculo are going back as stupid as when they left. Prospero's theatrical magic has brought them together, has forced them to see themselves, but it has had no effect on some characters.

One might argue that if Prospero's experiment is designed to make everyone better, then it's a failure in large part. And it may be, as I mentioned above, that Prospero recognizes that fact. It is not unusual to stage this play in such a way that the conventional comic structure of the ending is seriously undercut by the sense of sadness in Prospero, who is returning to Milan to die. The ending of this play *may not be the unalloyed triumph of the comic spirit that we are tempted to see there*. Prospero's sober awareness of what the silence of Sebastian and Antonio means qualifies our sense of joy by indicating that the eternal problem of human evil has not been solved or dismissed. One major interpretative decision any director of the play has to make concerns this ending. Just how evident and serious should those ironies be: non-existent, a light shadow under the communal joy, or a heavy reminder of what is in store back in Italy?

### **Stop to Consider**

The ending of the play raises as many questions as it seems to solve. Audiences are not given any clues about what is going to happen to Caliban and Ariel. The silence of Sebastian and Antonio point to the fact that Prospero and Alonso will always have to face the danger of usurpation. Critics have also wondered about the future of Ferdinand and Miranda. Their love has been engineered in a vacuum and one wonders whether it will weather the storms of real life.

### **SAQ**

1. How does Shakespeare dispose of all the characters in the play?  
(50 words)

.....  
2. Does the ending of the play raise more questions than it resolves?  
(50 words)

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## 12.9 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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## Unit 13

### THE TEMPEST

#### SUPPLEMENTARY UNIT

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##### 13.1 Objectives

13.2 Shakespearean Comedy and *The Tempest*

13.3 Critical Approaches to *The Tempest*

13.4 Critical texts on *The Tempest*

13.5 Adaptations and Retellings of *The Tempest*

13.6 Key Dramatic Terms Associated with *The Tempest*

13.7 References and Suggested Readings

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### 13.1 OBJECTIVES

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The ever growing critical and theoretical receptions of Shakespeare's plays have invited the reader to interpret his plays from various perspectives. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which was written in the age of discovery, where new expeditions of explorers like Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake and others opened up the new boundaries of the world, attracts the modern scholar and contemporary theatre audience to revisit and reinterpret the play. Although it was listed as a "Comedy" in the First Folio, can it be considered as a comedy as it is often labelled today as a "Romance"? How did Shakespeare look at the issues of gender; the Renaissance status of women as there was only one active female character in the play. These are some of the crucial aspects which demanded critical discussions. However, with the current literary developments in theory and criticism, *The Tempest* has become the subject of many significant and enlightening interpretations.

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

- look at the play from various critical perspectives
- understand the gender roles, power-politics involved in the text
- familiar with some of the theoretical frameworks, such as Postcolonialism, Feminism, New Historicism
- familiar with some of critical texts associated with the play

- learn literary terms associated with the play

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## 13.2 SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY AND *THE*

### *TEMPEST:*

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In the First Folio published in 1623, Shakespeare's plays were divided into History, Tragedy and Comedy. The plays which were listed under "Comedies" are:

1. The Tempest
2. The Two Gentlemen of Verona
3. The Merry Wives of Windsor
4. Measure for Measure
5. The Comedy of Errors
6. Much Ado About Nothing
7. Love's Labour's Lost
8. A Midsummer Night's Dream
9. The Merchant of Venice
10. As You Like It
11. The Taming of the Shrew
12. All's Well that Ends Well
13. Twelfth Night
14. The Winter's Tale

Shakespeare's other two plays *Pericles* which was not included in the First Folio and *The Two Gentleman of Verona* which he wrote with John Fletcher can also be regarded as comedies. Shakespeare didn't write like the classical comedy. Shakespearean comedies were far more complicated than a straightforward story of a classical comedy. He introduced number of elements and characters to make plot complex. Whereas the classical comedies opened with mutually known lovers, Shakespeare placed his characters in various circumstances and played with their fate. He emphasized mostly on plots. He used disguise to twist gender roles, particularly the disguising of women as young men, to produce dramatic irony.

Shakespearean comedies are known for its portrayal of marriage. Unlike the conventions of marriage represented in classical comedies, Shakespeare used deceptions and misinformation as tricks to successfully invoke the laughter in his depiction of marriage. A

misconception of the lovers is one of the enjoyable moments in Shakespearean comedies.

The comedies have also shared some of the features of his tragedies. The heroes tend to be upper class or belong to the royal family like the protagonists of the tragedies. Like tragedies, the lovers of comedies have to defy authority to be together. The comedies depict the ways lovers are get caught in the struggle between Apollonian and Dionysian forces, the forces of reason and the forces of wilderness, and after a sequence of comic events, they end with a happy note. Miscommunication which is also a common element in tragedies can also be seen in his comedies as characters often suffer from mistaken identity. Characters doubt their spouses to be unfaithful, letters fall into the hands of wrong personas and spirits put love potion to the wrong person have provided the materials to invoke laughter in the comedies.

One of the significant elements in Shakespearean comedies is the separation and reconciliation of the lovers. Although love is the central theme in most of Shakespeare's plays, but it is more noticeable in his comedies. The lovers being separated is a frequently recurring feature in Shakespeare's comedies. The separation calls on the journey and it leads towards the reconciliation in the end. However, the most crucial element of a Shakespearean comedy is its happy ending. Unlike the tragedies which always end with death, the comedies end with a happy note. It ended in a celebratory manner with love and marriage as the most important points.

In the First Folio, *The Tempest* appeared as a comedy. The element of comedy in the play was shown by its major characters, Prospero, his daughter Miranda and Ferdinand. Out of all the characters in the play, Prospero was the one who exhibited the most comedic aptitude as he carried the common sight in Shakespearean comedies – self-deception. He often ordered his companions to do one thing as he himself did the opposite and then criticised them for not following his example when things inevitably turned into wrong. Elements of separation and reunification are also visible in the play. It is the element of deception that brought laughter in the play. For example Prospero was deceived by his brother and castrated into an unknown island. Miranda often deceived herself in believing her father's choices as right whereas they were often cruel.

Like his other comedies, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* revolves around a series of misunderstanding. The titular tempest which caused the shipwreck, believing many characters that their shipmates were

dead was actually a misunderstanding. None of the characters die in the storm, and everyone is happily reunited at the end of the play. The play ends with Alonso repenting of his scheme against Prospero, and Prospero reclaiming his title of Duke of Milan. The fact that no one dies in the play, discord is repaired, misunderstandings are resolved, and lovers are united in marriage – all contributed to the play’s classification as a comedy.

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### 13.3 CRITICAL APPROACHES TO *THE TEMPEST*:

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*The Tempest* offers myriad of interpretative possibilities. The emergence of cultural and literary theory have also inspired exciting new readings of the play. A brief survey of the critical approaches and its application to the play exhibits different interpretations and it leads us consider the shift and trends in the reading of a Shakespearean play.

**i) Cultural Materialist Reading of *The Tempest*:** Cultural Materialism as a movement came out of British Universities in the 1970s and 1980s which was partially prompted by the social and political upheavals of the 1960s. Along with European literary theory, cultural materialism shows interest in Marxist ideology that emphasized the way economic forces impacted cultural production. It posited that literature should not be considered as privileged or different from other social artefacts. It considers how the genres of literature, such as poetry, drama, novel etc. can be best understood in their historical context, and above all they were ideological. A cultural materialist reading involves a literary text, in most cases a Renaissance text, from where one can trace the history and the “context of exploitation from where it emerged” (Berry 128). With close textual analysis, especially employing structuralist and poststructuralist frameworks, cultural materialist critics tend to find previous socio-political and religious dominance during the production of the text. Cultural materialism is consciously political as it aims to transform the social order. By focusing on the marginalised and the exploited, cultural materialist reading aims for the possibilities of subversion and resistance in the text. In this process, it also interrogates the hidden political agenda and power struggles within a text.

Cultural materialist reading of *The Tempest* uncovers the dominant, repressive ideologies of the Elizabethan times. It traces the subversion of the hegemony and ideology of the coloniser through the character of Caliban. They also read the character of Ariel whose aim



was to create illusion among characters. Ariel's employment by Prospero to create the illusion of grandeur reflected the strategy of the state power in the early modern Europe. Cultural materialist also investigates the songs of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo. Although these are written to provide comic relief in the play, cultural materialist critics draw attention to the subversive nature, racial identity and marginalised aspects of these characters.

**ii) Postcolonial Approach to *The Tempest*:** Postcolonial reading developed as a literary approach after the decolonisation of Europe's colonial empires. It draws attention to the political and cultural tensions between colonisers and colonised. It also examines the projection of the colonial experience in the text by the Europeans. Highlighting the same colonial experience, postcolonial critics seek to deconstruct the Eurocentrism, its standard and values. It attempts to read the social, political and cultural power narratives that surround the coloniser and the colonised. Postcolonial approaches question the stereotypes created by the colonial power about the colonised and retell the narrative from postcolonial point of view. Analysing the European representations of culture, postcolonial methodology develops a perspective where "states of marginality, plurality and perceived 'Otherness' are seen as sources of energy and potential change" (Berry 130).

Shakespeare's works often interpreted through the lens of postcolonialism as most of his plays were written in the context of British Empire who at that time was busy establishing colonies and exploring geographical boundaries. His works reflected the colonial authority and cultural superiority over the colonised people. Postcolonial readings of Shakespeare's plays have started to emerge after the decolonisation movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. Reading *The Tempest* through postcolonial lens will show that the play is actually an allegory of European discovery and colonisation. Postcolonial approaches challenge the traditional interpretations of the play by questioning Prospero's ownership of the island and his controlling of Caliban. Although the earlier readings consider Prospero as a benevolent character, postcolonial critics find a coloniser in him because of his enslavement of Caliban. Interrogating the historical background of the play, such as the narratives of discovery and colonisation and Shakespeare's using of materials, such as Elizabethan travel writing for his depiction of the opening storm and shipwreck scene and European's confrontation with a 'savage' Caliban, postcolonial reading shades new light on the play's colonial agenda on the

colonised people. *The Tempest* reflects early European attempts to colonize the world.

Postcolonial critics show that the play functions as a colonial text as its plot and language enact a colonial discourse. Moreover, they would argue that because of its canonical position it has helped perpetuate colonial ideology. However, the main focus of a postcolonial reading is the character of Caliban and his relationship with Prospero as it is marked by the inequalities and struggles that informed the coloniser-colonised relationship in many parts of the world. The construction of Caliban as a monster, brute and savage, are all reminiscent of the ways in which many Europeans represented natives across the world. But the postcolonial critics do not see him as a mere slave but the native of an island over which Prospero has imposed a form of colonial rule. They place Caliban at the centre of the play who has come to signify the colonised native. The following speech of Caliban reflects Prospero's conquest and colonial agenda:

This island's mine, Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me.  
When thou cam'st first  
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me; would'st give me  
Water with berries in't; and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,  
That burn by day and night: (Shakespeare, I,ii)

The colonial strategy of civilising the brutish nature of the colonised is also reflected in the attitudes of both Miranda and Prospero. Prospero claims to treat Caliban with kindness as an attempt to civilise him. Miranda has also expressed the same attitude as she justifies their enslavement of Caliban with the assertion that they tried to civilise him but to no avail:

Abhorred slave,  
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,  
Being capable of all ill: I pitied thee  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour

Postcolonial readings view Prospero and Miranda's relation with Caliban as an allegory of British colonialism. They find Prospero as a representative of coloniser who takes control over the inhabitants of the island, Ariel and Caliban. They also highlight and condemn Prospero's suppression and exploitation of Caliban as it is parallel with actions of the British colonisers. Prior to the arrival of Prospero, Caliban was free and in fact ruled the island. From Prospero's friendly attitudes in the beginning after the arrival to the forced enslavement of Caliban, the postcolonial approaches examine the way *The Tempest* dramatized the process of colonisation.

**iii) New Historical Approach to *The Tempest*:** New historical reading involves a parallel reading of literary and non-literary text of the same historical period. It emerged in the United States almost in parallel with Cultural Materialism. Like its British counterpart, it also emphasises on the inevitable political and historical nature of literary texts. Giving equal importance to literary and non-literary text it insisted that literary texts are historical utterances and history is not simply a backdrop to a literary text. The main practitioner of new historicism Stephen Greenblatt demonstrates how a new historical reading takes place the literary text within the framework of a non-literary text. The new historicists look at the issue of state power, colonial discourses and patriarchal norms involved with the text. Picking up canonical Renaissance texts they look at how some of the state apparatuses, such as Church aroused anxiety and fear (of hunger, punishment, death) in order to control the public. The strategies of control, such as threat, pardon and punishment were designed to reinforce the idea of the monarch as an all-powerful figure who could dispense both justice and mercy at will.

The new historical reading of *The Tempest* highlights the historicity of the text, the relation between the aspects of the play and the historical context in which it is set. In the play, the New World of Renaissance is located where early settlers were engaged in establishing colonies. This aspect of the new world clearly displays the colonial history of Europe associated with the play. The new historical approach finds the play as a commentary on colonial expansion. Stephen Greenblatt has also offered a reading of *The Tempest*. As the examination of political power and its discursive strategies were central to the New Historicists' method, Greenblatt emphasized the

means used by Prospero to exercise and maintain power. Like the Renaissance documents that Greenblatt considers as source of power, Prospero arouses and manipulates his opponents to cause fears and anxieties. Gary Schmidgallin *Shakespeare and the Poet's Life* argues that *The Tempest* was written in accord with the 'courtly aesthetic' of the time which signifies the grand court rituals. Thus the play is structured around the eminence of royal power and social hierarchy, which are both challenged by Caliban, who symbolizes rebellion and disorder.

**iv) Feminist Approach to *The Tempest*:** Feminist reading emerged as a literary approach much later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the first wave of feminism. Prior to that, most of the texts either presented women characters conforming to the convention or even if they tried to rupture it, the attempt was made hiding behind the curtains. The aim of the feminist theory is to understand the nature of gender inequality that prevailed in the society as a result of different pre-determined expectations of the society which are imposed upon women in order to satisfy the patriarchal norms. Lois Tyson in his *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* comments it as "the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women" (83).

Shakespeare projected patriarchy to a large extent in his plays. The Elizabethan society had imposed restrictions upon women. They were considered as their father's or brother's possessions. They were not even allowed to own property. This is one of the grounds why Queen Elizabeth did not marry because she did not want to surrender her authority to a man. *The Tempest*, being an Elizabethan play, is not an exception. The narrative of the play vividly projects the stereotypical roles and norms imposed upon women in the society. In-depth reading reveals that women were considered as a mere object or opulence owned by man. The play consists one major female character i.e. Miranda, the daughter of Prospero. She was presented as a passive and vulnerable heroine of the play. She was seen surrendering to the whims and desires of the male characters of the play, particularly her father. It was even seen at times Miranda addressing her father as 'Sir'. She was not even allowed to choose her husband. It was Prospero, who was seen making all the arrangements by sending Ariel to get a hold of Ferdinand, while she was in her sleep. Even in the final scene of the play she was portrayed as a mere prop next to Ferdinand. But there were two scenes when Miranda, in an unexpected way, speaks for herself. Firstly in Act 1, scene-ii when Caliban was accused of

intending to violate Miranda, she scolded him for being ungrateful of her attempts to educate him.

The second moment is in Act. III, scene I, when Miranda proposed Ferdinand for marriage:

“I am your wife, if you will marry me

If not I’ll die your maid.” (Shakespeare, III, i).

This play has three other women characters. One is Sycorax, the mother of Caliban. Though she did not play a larger role as she was dead before the arrival of the other characters, her mention is equally relevant in this discussion. Though the narrative did not reveals much about her, the little that is mentioned is from Prospero’s perspective, who never met Sycorax but was only acquainted with her through Ariel’s erratic facts. In spite of that she was constantly demonized and dehumanized by Prospero. Some critics even consider her as a very strong character because she blurs the male-female boundary through her supernatural powers. At one point even Prospero considered her as equally powerful in terms of the use of magical powers. The other female character is Alonso’s daughter Claribel. Though these two characters have a name in the play, it is Prospero’s wife, the third female character who is not even mentioned. These three characters are considered as absent female characters of the play because even though they are mentioned, they have not acquired the required importance they deserve. By looking at these characters, feminist reading of the play attempts to recover the unheard female voices and the projection of extreme gender inequity that existed in the Renaissance society.

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### 13.4 CRITICAL TEXTS ASSOCIATED WITH *THE*

#### *TEMPEST*:

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i) **Caliban by Harold Bloom**: It is one of the critical texts that can be ruminated in order to get a proper hold upon *The Tempest*, especially on one of the central characters i.e. Caliban. Considered as most widely studied criticism on fictional characters, this book claims an important position in the scenario of World Literature. Together with Bloom’s essay on “The Analysis of Character” this book is a compilation of essays from scholars around the world that enlighten us with the myriad shades of the text and give us different perspectives to

interpret the same. Further it is loaded with some introductory essays by Bloom himself on the major characters which adds to entire stock of information. The book primarily focuses on Caliban, the half human half monster, which can be counted as the most grotesque of Shakespeare's characters.

ii) **The Tempest: Martial law in the land of Cockaigne by Stephen Greenblatt:** Stephen Greenblatt's essay "The Tempest: Martial law in the land of Cockaigne" offers a reassessment of the historical background with its author and the text. The essay analyzes the shifting relationship between art and society and the developments that occurs as a result of various external influences. The discussion of the play here is framed between the analysis of the tale told in a sermon by Hugh Latimer in 1552 and a story by Stanley, an African explorer. The essay projects *The Tempest* as an emblem of the disturbing power of magic. It shows how Prospero uses magic as a device to create fear as well as wonder in the hearts of the people. Even his daughter suffers as a result of this. However his techniques are a bit softer with his daughter and harsher with his enemies. Greenblatt here reveals Prospero's attempt to conquer everything using his magical powers. Apart from the other characters Prospero himself suffers the most in the process. The magic is both the creator as well as the defendant of the conspiracy in the play. He points out the genuine presence of anxiety in Prospero, which is deeply felt throughout the text. Engrossed in his own magical powers he forgets about the serious threat to his own life. The destruction of the villains at the end of the play and his inability to educate Caliban is an expression of the limitation of Prospero's magic. It proves that magic cannot change the inner self of a person. Greenblatt further discussing the staging of the play states that William Strachey's account of the tempest that stuck an England fleet at Jamestown have proved to be an impetus in shaping *The Tempest*. Though he referred to various historical facts in this essay while referring to the play but he concludes it with an appraisal of Shakespeare's role in the process. How without Shakespeare we would not have an access to Strachey's experience. However, he further adds that if we consider Shakespeare as a discourse of power there are other discourses as well which are equally important.

iii) **Dominique- Octave Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*:** The book gives a new standpoint to visualize the long-preserved dilemma of colonization from united viewpoints of imperial administration, ethnography and psychoanalysis. Though initially he approached it from more like an

official interest in the natives, it was in 1947 when he returned to Madagascar that the curtain was removed. The things which no one dared to bring into light was focused on and what he called his “own private devil” was wiped out. Stating the example of Malagasy and Europeans he puts forward the fact that we should know both the sides and what they are characterized by. Malagasy has a dependency complex whereas the Europeans has inferiority complex which they tend to hide. So when a child is brought up with such experiences one will feel secure under powerful authority while the other will like to dominate and feel superior. Mannoni states that Europeans always search for Calibans to colonize them. In 1947 when the French authorities granted some freedom to the Malagasy the political situation was disturbed because they felt a kind of insecurity. Mannoni questions this kind of situation and asks for some kind of equilibrium by rejuvenating a traditional Malagasy authority, which can be brought into the sphere. Mannoni points out that Shakespeare knew that Prospero was a part of human nature. Prospero created an illusionary world through his magic and suffered every moment of being threatened by some superior power. That is the reason he dominated and bullied everyone starting from Calibanto his own daughter Miranda. Mannoni’s book includes a chapter named “Prospero and Caliban” which draws a comparison to the situation in Madagascar by referring to the characters. Even though at times Prospero tries to treat other as equal he cannot do that. He cannot give up his authorial voice as well as nature like the Europeans in Madagascar whereas Caliban never complained of exploitation or being a slave like the Malagasy. Mannoni tries to state that Prospero lacks the understanding like other colonizers - the need to respect Others.

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## 13.5 ADAPTATIONS& RETELLINGS

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Over the years Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* has seen many critical and successful adaptations and retellings. Some of the examples are mentioned below:

1. ***Caliban’s Hour***: Written by American fantasy and Science Fiction writer Tad Williams, this fantasy novel reimagines the story of *The Tempest* from Caliban’s point of view. In this story, Caliban kills Prospero and tells Miranda his version of *The Tempest*.

2. ***Prospero's Books***: Directed by Peter Greenway, this film reimagines *The Tempest* by using innovative film techniques which was new at that time and opened up other cinematic possibilities in the field of Shakespearean film adaptations.
3. ***Hag – Seed***: Margaret Atwood's retelling of *The Tempest* centres on a failed director Felix whose life turns upside down after the cancellation of his production of *The Tempest*.
4. ***The Tempest (Opera)***: The English composer Thomas Ades turns *The Tempest* into an opera. It featured a libretto by Meredith Oakes and premiered in 2004.
5. ***Forbidden Planet***: This Science Fiction film is a loose adaptation of *The Tempest*. The setting and the characters are modelled on the play. This movie turns Prospero's island into a planet and Prospero into a mad scientist. Caliban also turns into a robot named Robby.
6. ***Miranda and Caliban***: Jacqueline Carey's novel retells the love story of Miranda and Caliban. This novel is set in a different location but with underlying shades of Shakespeare's work. It is basically the story of Miranda, who resides with her father in an abandoned Moorish palace with chickens, goats and a wailing spirit trapped in a pine tree. In this grotesque book a young boy Caliban, an orphan deprived of parents and language but not of love. Miranda's father is equally dominating and controlling like Prospero from *The Tempest*. Shakespeare in *The Tempest* tried to project Prospero's dreams and revenge but we were unknown of Miranda and Caliban's contemplations. However Carey in her book flips the coin and presents Miranda and Caliban's plight and their struggle to overcome it. Miranda in *The Tempest* was a one dimensional character, a victim or mere tool at the hands of her wicked father but here she is presented as a character with opinions and decisions. The efforts of the star-crossed lovers are the prime focus in this novel. The journey through the plot will endow the readers with a sublime feeling and transport them to a completely different world of fantasy, forbidden love and revenge.
7. ***Caliban: The Missing Link by Sir Daniel Wilson***: Published in 1873, this book is an analysis of the life of the antagonist of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The volume presents Caliban as an unhinged untamed man who inhabited the isle before the advent of Prospero and Miranda. Presenting him as a "monster", the text studies his character in relation to the supernatural environment, physical environment of the island,



evolution along with the other characters of the play. Wilson has placed science beside fancy in his work in order to represent his characters. Although the entire book is divided into fourteen chapters, eight of them are primarily focused on “the missing link”. An in-depth analysis of the work reflects the presence of Darwin’s theory of Evolution as the backdrop. Wilson is trying to state through this work that man’s savagery is not a result of racial degradation. He attempts to find out “the missing link” that bridges the gap between the man as we now see them and their relation with their nearest pithecoïd links. He believed that if there was any such creature on the planet it might look almost like Shakespeare’s Caliban, a non-human and savage but still intellectual and has the ability to learn.

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### 13.6 KEY DRAMATIC TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH *THE TEMPEST*

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**i) Denouement:** The denouement of a play comes after the climax in which the complexities of the plot are unravelled and the conflict is finally resolved. In some plays, denouement proves to be a catastrophe rather than a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction for the audience. The denouement of *The Tempest* shows a general sense of resolution and hope. It arrives when Ferdinand and Miranda are discovered playing chess and Alonso realises that his son is alive and betrothed to Prospero’s daughter. *The Tempest* ends with the resolution of all things as Prospero forgives Alonso and Antonio for the past betrayal.

**ii) Dramatic irony:** It occurs in a play when a situation is well perceived by the audience that are hidden to the characters. The playwright uses dramatic irony to control the fate of the characters who may think that they have free choice. In such cases, the spectators are more powerful position than those characters. It is often the foundation of comedy as the audience “witnesses characters blundering into amusing or compromising situations because they lack a vital piece of knowledge revealed only to the audience” (Pickering 21).

One can easily detect several instances of dramatic irony in *The Tempest*. The shipwreck scene is the first instance where the audience

aware of the fact that it was Ariel who on Prospero's command raised the sea storm and caused the shipwreck. The audience also knows that Prospero has already planned the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda whereas they pledged themselves to each other.

**iii) Soliloquy:** A soliloquy is an utterance where a character, onstage and alone, reveals his/her thoughts to the audience. *The Tempest* being a comedy does not have many soliloquies, as the dramatic scenes are quite enough to give accurate information about the characters' fate to the audience. However, Shakespeare does use a few soliloquies, most notably through Prospero, for example, in act I, scene iv to end the play by telling the audience that he is giving up his magic. In act II, scene ii, Caliban does utter a soliloquy which unravels his grotesque appearance.

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## 13.8 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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