

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

ENGLISH
COURSE : ENG - 103
(1st Semester)

DRAMA-I

BLOCK - I

RENAISSANCE DRAMA

BLOCK - II

SHAKESPEARE

BLOCK - III

RESTORATION AND MODERN DRAMA

DIRECTORATE OF OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING
DIBRUGARH UNIVERSITY
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ENGLISH
COURSE : ENG - 103
BLOCK - 1
RENAISSANCE DRAMA

Contributor:

Dr. Lulu Mariam Borgohain

Asstt. Professor, DHSK College, Dibrugarh

Mr. Lengdon Chetia

Asstt. Professor, Demow College

Editors:

Mr. Pratik Chaudhury

Associate Professor, Rtd. DHSK College, Dibrugarh

Mr. Siva Prasad Mili

Assistant Professor, Sivasagar Girls' College, Sivasagar

BLOCK - 2
SHAKESPEARE

Contributor:

Dr. Anita Konwar

Asstt. Professor, Sonari College

Suranjana Baruah

Research Scholar, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Nabanita Hazarika

Research Scholar, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Dr. Meena Sharma

Asstt. Professor, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Editors:

Mr. Pratik Chaudhury

Associate Professor, Rtd. DHSK College, Dibrugarh

Mr. Siva Prasad Mili

Assistant Professor, Sivasagar Girls' College, Sivasagar

BLOCK - 3

THE MODERN TO THE POSTMODERN

Contributor:

Dr. R.K. Jha

Associate Professor, S.M.D. College, Charing

Ritushmita Sharma

Research Scholar, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Ms. Jharna Dowerah & Ms. Momi Borgohain

Lecturer, Dibru College

Deemi Baruwati

Research Scholar, Department of English, Dibrugarh University

Editors:

Mr. Pratik Chaudhury

Associate Professor, Rtd. DHSK College, Dibrugarh

Mr. Siva Prasad Mili

Assistant Professor, Sivasagar Girls' College, Sivasagar

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ENGLISH
COURSE : ENG - 103
BLOCK - 1
RENAISSANCE DRAMA

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Block-I

Unit 1 : Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*

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- 1.4 The Context of Drama
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1.1 OBJECTIVES:

This unit tries to give a comprehensive picture of English Drama since its inception. This introduction will help you to contextualize the play through a proper understanding of the historical basis and the period of its production.

This unit will help you to:

- *Understand* the intellectual period in which the plays were written.
- *Apprehend* the role of the theatres and acting companies in the actual production of the play.

1.2 INTRODUCTION:

1.2.1 Origins

The origin of English drama can be traced to travelling players in the Middle Ages. The poetry of Chaucer mentions "Jonglers" and

“Joculators” and Langland condemns them as social pests. A mention of professional tale-tellers or “Scops” is made in *Beowulf* and that poem is told as a Scop’s tale. The Christian attitude to the Scop’s was, however, one of opposition for he was a part of a pagan civilisation.

A less dignified performer was the “Mime” and with him were tumblers, dancers, and jesters of varying degrees of disrepute. The Church passed a number of decrees restricting their activities in the thirteenth century. From the twelfth century to the fourteenth the “minstrels” occupied an important part in the social life. Some of them were resident at Court and in the great houses, and some were strollers. Even the Church, which formerly condemned such performers came to recognise them and sometimes made use of them. Besides, there were seasonal and communal celebrations in the country side to commemorate the spring or harvest time, or the spring. These were the rudimentary beginnings of drama in England.

1.2.2 The Mass

The Mass, which had early developed as the central element in the service of the Church, contained a certain dramatic element within it, particularly on certain days when special features were added which increased the dramatic significance. Out of such practices, there came the presentation by voices chanting in Latin certain crucial scenes in the Christian story, such as those of the Birth and Resurrection of Christ. Such presentations may have had a simple beginning, but they gradually became elaborate, and later words were attached to these ritualistic presentations. It is easy to imagine that these early liturgical plays were more realistic than they probably were but some step towards a dramatic presentation had obviously taken place particularly at the festivals of Christians, and of the celebration of Resurrection.

Once established, they had an important effect on the history of the drama. They were in all likelihood fully established by the middle of the fourteenth century and by the middle of the fifteenth they had become secularized. Again it is difficult not to make the process seem simpler than it probably was. The liturgical plays at Christmas and the Resurrection were extended to include other incidents, until a fairly complete cycle of the biblical story had been made. For instance, the story of the Creation was easily presented in this manner, and with each addition the liturgical play grew closer to legitimate drama. The element of devotion decreased

as the element of dramatic presentation increased. It was thus that out of the liturgical play there developed the miracle play.

1.2.3 Miracle and Morality Plays

With these extensions in the play, came changes in the place of presentation. In general, it would seem that the plays began in the choir, and from the choir went to the nave and from the nave to out of the church. When the crowds outside the church became too unseemly for the holy precincts, the play moved to the market place, or joined a succession of plays which were shifted from one position to another in procession around the city. When the Theatre was in the market place and in competition with other forms of entertainment, its character increased in secularity.

The civic corporations organised the plays, and exercised some censorship over the choice and the method of presentation. While the craft guilds produced them and bore the cost each member of a craft guild paid a contribution to the cost of production. In the fourteenth century the craft guilds wrote plays about God and the Christian story like the plays of Noah with his children, the First Shepherds' Play, the Second Shepherds' Play, the Play of King Herod and the Play of Christ before Cayphus. These were the Miracle Plays, in which there is a close and vivid description of a realistic nature. Such realism can be found in the description of the ship in the Noah play. Further, there is a kind of dialogue of a most natural, human and contemporary kind. It can be seen in the vivid characterisation of Noah's wife as a shrew. Besides the Miracle Plays, there were a series of Morality Plays in the early fifteenth century, like *The Castle of Perseverance*, in which the characters represented abstract qualities. The most well known play of this genre is *Everyman*. It has a protagonist represented as a man of his time, who is close to the audience, and in this strange way the morality play gains a realism of its own. The strength of *Everyman* lies also in the skill with which the scenes are developed. The story although an allegorical one, seems to be the story of an ordinary journey and there is a simple poignancy about it.

1.2.4 The "Interlude"

The "Interlude" was made and produced solely for its dramatic interest. The themes of such interludes were humanistic rather than

didactic. The house of Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) had a taste for such dramatic entertainments, and around More there were those who could make interludes and who had the means of circulating them. John Rastell, a printer and a writer of interludes, married Sir Thomas More's sister. John Heywood, the writer of interludes, was Rastell's son-in-law. In such a community where drama and wit were both understood the interlude had an opportunity of development.

John Heywood (1497?—1580?), whose plays were written soon after 1520, is the most considerable writer in the history of the interlude, his neatest works being *The Play of the Weather* and *The Four P's*.

Check your Progress:

1. Show how the influence of church was integral to the emergence of early medieval drama in England.
2. Write a brief note on the early mystery and miracle plays.
3. Show your acquaintance with the interludes.

1.3 THE BEGINNINGS

The English Drama took a sudden and spectacular step forward between 1530 and 1580. Renaissance and the revival of learning introduced the English playwrights as well as the audience to the treasure of classical literature, particularly the great Greek and Latin tragedies and comedies. The English audience was already familiar with the University Wits, and by 1588, Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* had fired up their imagination, resonating the renaissance theme of unrestrained ambition. The classical influence had incited the English dramatists to strive for more ambitious achievements, and fortunately their genius was adequate to answer their needs.

1.3.1 Seneca's Influence on Tragedy

In tragedy the foremost influence was that of the Roman dramatist Seneca's nine tragedies in rhetorical style. Most of his plays were not acted but became a major influence on English tragedy in the sixteenth century because, in the first place, they were far more accessible than any Greek dramatist for few of the Elizabethan dramatists could have read a play in Greek. Moreover, Seneca had all the advantage of seeming to give all the form of Greek drama, the unities the chorus, and the values

behind the themes. Above all, Seneca's indulgence in horror delighted men who knew a world where death was familiar and violence a part of life, both domestic and political. Thus the main classical influence on English tragedy is Latin, and not Greek.

Seneca's plays were performed in Latin at Cambridge in the 1560s, and were translated into English by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville (*Gorboduc*, 1561-62) and acted before the Queen at White Hall. From 1580 onwards, there is evidence of an increased Senecan influence when Thomas Norton issued his collection of *Seneca, His Ten Tragedies Translated into English* (1581). By the end of the decade competent dramatists had captured a popular Senecan tradition for the ordinary stage. The outstanding example was Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587-89). Seneca's influence is present in Marlowe and Shakespeare and revived later by Ben Jonson in *Sejanus* and in *Catiline*.

1.3.2 Histories or Chronicle Plays

Meanwhile, the English Chronicle or History play had shown a development with Senecan tragedy, though largely independent of it. Senecan tragedy was European while the Chronicle or History play was English. Some of the elements which went into its making were the medieval pageants and the plays of the lives of Saints, such as are known to have existed on the Life of St. George. Further there is evidence that there were some local traditions for the dramatic rendering of historical events.

The Chronicle Play was one which relied for its sources on the English chronicles and with some period of English history. It gained in the hands of Shakespeare an identity with tragedy, for to contemporary audiences *King Lear* and *Macbeth* were chronicle plays. John Bayle's *King Johann* (1536) though its title promises a history play it was a Morality play full of Protestant propaganda. *Gorboduc* (1562) is important in that it links the Senecan tradition of tragedy with the native Chronicle Play. It takes an English story from Geoffrey of Monmouth and develops it on the Senecan pattern. Richard III's career as Shakespeare was later to discover, developed very easily from history into the pattern of tragedy. *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588), was another attempt to apply Senecan form to national themes. *Lochrine*, sometimes ascribed to Kyd, was an attempt to introduce more popular elements while keeping to the Senecan pattern.

The earliest of the extant chronicles is *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (1588): a formless piece but one that had had considerable popularity. No attempt is made here at tragedy, but history is dramatically presented by a number of incidents taken from the reigns of Henry IV and Henry V. Shakespeare, who knew this early piece, went over the same ground with a more ample inclusion of historical material in *Henry I* and in *Henry II*. The Prince and his low companions are already present in the early play but there is no Falstaff. The Senecan model is not employed, but unfortunately no other model has replaced it. From the shapelessness of a piece such as this, one realizes what the dramatists gained by the example of Seneca whatever may have been the incidental liabilities of his influence. *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (1588—90), which has Holinshed's chronicle as a source, was an advance on the formlessness of *The Famous Victories*. The presentation of material is still diffuse and even Shakespeare, who knew this play, failed to give the same theme a full unity. The comic matter is not as clownish as in *The Famous Victories*, and the chronicle matter is handled with an eye to dramatic propriety. The spirit is Protestant which Shakespeare converts to a national atmosphere.

The years around the Armada mark a great period of the popularity of the chronicle and history play. Peele's *Edward I* (printed 1593), apparently a hastily written piece seems to mark no advance on the general type. The True Chronicle of King Lear (1594, printed 1605) has a rough effectiveness and holds a place of pride as the predecessor of Shakespeare's most profound tragedy. Similarly *The True Tragedie of Richard III* (printed 1594) is a source for the development of the chronicle into tragedy in Shakespeare's *Richard III*. With Marlowe's *Edward II* (printed 1594) the chronicle was disciplined into tragedy and the events of twenty years are reduced to what may be digested in a play. Nor is the tragedy diffuse, for it concentrates on an uncommon conception of a weak man as a central protagonist, a type found again, with ample modifications, in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. It must be confessed, however, that perhaps *Edward II* is a better play to talk about than to see on the stage. Probably one of Shakespeare's earliest tasks in the theatre was his share in the three parts of *Henry VI*, and how great that share was, remains a disputed problem in Shakespearian criticism. A reasonable view is that the whole of the second and third parts are his and some scenes of the first. It was from his attachment to the chronicle play that he discovered such original forms as *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, and it was through this same type that he discovered his major way into tragedy.

1.3.3. The Early Comedies.

While there were these developments in tragedy and chronicle plays during the sixteenth century there were also changes in comedy. Comedy had a strong native tradition and might well have developed successfully, though in a different way, without foreign influence. The study of two Latin authors, of Plautus and Terence, gave to English comedy a sense of pattern which it had not previously possessed. This Latin influence was partly due to a number of schoolmasters who read Latin plays with their pupils. The first comedy on classical models is *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553-54, printed 1566), written by a school teacher, Nicholas Udall, who worked first at Eton, and later at Westminster. The main plot of the play is simple enough. Ralph Roister Doister is in love with Dame Christian Custance. He fails in his love owing to his own pride and stupidity. To further his suit he employs a comic rascal Matthew Merygreeke who is developed into one of the major characters in the play. A more effective comedy was *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (about 1553, printed 1575) which is described as "a right pithy, pleasant and merry Comedy". The authorship is ascribed to "Mr. S. Master of Art". Whoever the author was he had learned something from Latin drama, but in character scene and plot he is native and original. Meanwhile in *Supposes* (1566) George Gascoigne, basing himself on Ariosto's comedy in intrigue *I Suppositi*, wrote the first prose comedy in English and so gained a new liberty of form for the comic drama. Such were the beginnings of tragedy, the history play and comedy. Meanwhile, there had been important developments in the ways in which plays were produced. The early, medieval drama had been performed by the guilds and was the work of amateurs, though presumably they had someone as producer who approached to a professional status. Such performances continued long after the professional theatre had been established and there must have been several types of performers between the amateurs and the regular theatre. In medieval times the choir boys were associated with the burlesque ceremony of the boy-bishop and possibly they were also used seriously in the liturgical plays. By the sixteenth century the choir boys under their master were engaged in the performance of regular plays. This paved the way for professional theatre in the Elizabethan England. Each of the Elizabethan theatre companies carried the name of some nobleman, such as the Earl of Leicester's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's Men, to which Shakespeare was attached. This led to the establishment of private theatres as the Globe Theatre and the Blackfriars, which were entirely enclosed and its stage would permit of elaborate scenic effects.

Check Your Progress:

1. Write a brief note on Seneca's influence on English tragedy.
2. Give an account of the early comedies in England.

1.4. THE CONTEXT OF DRAMA

The production of history and its representation in literature is a manipulated text that caters to the ideological underpinning of the author as well as the time of the text's production. The text therefore becomes a cultural formation as well as a consequence of the material realities of the companies and the theatres. History therefore in most times becomes a construct more than ascertainable facts. Dramatic texts in a similar way are discourses that are worked around history but also around the fictionality of history.

The social structure of England during the sixteenth century seemed to present an 'order' which homogenized all modes of inequality. However as writers of the age such as Shakespeare and Marlowe reiterate, the truth was the reverse. The social inequality that existed was more or less institutionalized. The economic condition became a seminal factor in determining the status of the people. Nobility had now to be compromised with as status could well be bought by wealth. This was strengthened by the fact that 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.

England had evidenced a changing economic and thereby social history since 1500 with feudalism giving way to capitalism. This resulted in an increase in population especially in London which turned out to be England's commercial and shipping hub. This concentration in London has its origin in the fact of the Tudor monarchs-Henry VII, Henry VIII and Elizabeth who consolidated power in the hands of the central government at the expense of local authorities. Subsequently people migrated from the provinces to London for economic prospects. The effect on theatre companies was that even as it still went from town to town to present drama, it started to concentrate in London since it gathered a wealthy paying audience.

1.5 PLAYHOUSES AND PLAYERS

In late sixteenth-century London, suburban theatres which were beyond the control of City magistrates, had begun to establish themselves as an essential and internationally acknowledged, part of popular metropolitan culture. They

were visited and (fortunately for theatre historians) described and sketched by European visitors; companies of English actors were, in turn, to perform plays on the Continent (Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, for example, was acted at Frankfurt in 1601 and at Dresden in 1626 when its popularity at home was waning). Such prestige, even if qualified by incomprehension of the English language as a medium, is testimony to the flourish and flexibility of the public theatres and Theatre Company's of late sixteenth century London. Both were relatively new creations. A Royal Patent was granted to the Earl of Leicester's men in 1574 and by 1576 James Burbage a joiner turned actor turned entrepreneur, had recognized the opening presented by royal and aristocratic favour and established a permanent playhouse in Shoreditch. This playhouse, trumpeting its classical pretensions by calling itself the Theatre, signalled the end of the rudimentary performances by actors in inn-yards. The Theatre was followed in 1577 by Burbage's second purpose built playhouse, the Curtain (also in Shoreditch), and by the more celebrated structures on the south bank of the Thames, the Rose (1587), the Swan (1595) the Globe (1599), and the Hope (1613). From what is known of these theatres, each probably followed a related, pragmatic, but rapidly evolving plan. These wooden, unroofed amphitheatres were either polygonal or so shaped as to allow a polygon to pass itself off as a circle (the 'wooden O' of the Globe referred to in Shakespeare's *Henry V*). It is possible that, both in shape and in orientation, the later playhouses, such as the Globe, contained echoes of the principles of theatre design established by Greek and Roman architects, though the vagaries of the London weather required a roofed stage and unbanked tiers of covered galleries in which richer spectators were seated. In 1597 Burbage attempted a new venture by leasing the remains of the domestic buildings of the disused Dominican Friar' at Blackfriars and requesting permission to convert it into an indoor commercial theatre. Although the move was temporarily blocked by local residents it was to the new Blackfriars Theatre that Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, moved in 1609.

A Dutch visitor to Bankside in 1596 claimed that the Swan Theatre held as many as 3,000 people, a figure which has been recently justified by estimates that the smaller Rose (the remains of which were excavated in 1989) could hold some 1,937 spectators, a capacity which was increased to an uncomfortable maximum of 2,395 when the theatre was rebuilt in 1592. Given London's population of between 150,000 and 200,000 people, this implies that by 1620 perhaps as many as 25,000 theatre-goers per week visited the six playhouses then working. In 1624 the Spanish ambassador complained that 12,000 people had seen Thomas Middleton's anti-Spanish political satire *A Game at Chess*. The theatres that these large audiences patronized were likely to have been richly decorated according to current English interpretations of Renaissance ornament.

Given the substantial income that these audiences brought in, the professional actors they saw were expensively, even extravagantly, costumed. Surviving records indicate, for example, that the wardrobe for Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* contained scarlet and purple satin cloaks, white satin and cloth—of-gold gowns for women characters and, for Tamburlaine himself, a particularly sumptuous doublet in copper lace and carnation velvet; in 1613 the management of the Globe paid no less than £38 for a costume for Cardinal Wolsey in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* (Shakespeare himself had paid £60 for his large house in Stratford). These costumes may have set the actors apart from their audiences. They worked without sets but in close physical proximity to a mass of spectator referred to by Jonson as 'a rude, barbarous crew'. They would scarcely have expected the reverential atmosphere of a modern auditorium. A company would initially have performed a new play a mere handful of times, reviving it or adapting it only on occasion and public demand, or if a wide repertory determined it. Finally, it should be remembered that the professional companies were composed exclusively of male actors, with boys or, as seems more likely given the demands of certain parts, young men playing women's roles.

Check Your Progress:

1. How would you account for the popularity of theatre in the Elizabethan period.

—xxx—

UNIT 2

Critical Analysis

ACT I

Sc. i.

The play opens with an enthusiastic Barabas surrounded by the opulence of his wealth in his counting house. He has a heap of gold and precious stones from all over the world before him. A sense of pride and complacency fills him as he inspects his full coffers and ruminates over the wealth he has gathered during his lifetime. He has stored precious pearls such that they are compared pebbles:

*Bags of fiery opals, sapphires, amethysts,
Jacinths, hard topaz, grass-green emeralds,
Beauteous rubies, sparkling diamonds,
And seld-seen costly stones of so great price,*

In a proud acclamation of his wealth he says that its value can ransom great kings from captivity. Barabas awaits for more wealth from the ships coming in from Egypt to Malta. A merchant comes to inform him that his ships have safely landed in the harbour and he is required to be present there to clear them from the customs. Barabas orders the merchant, who is the captain of his ship, to go there on his behalf and observe all the formalities. When the merchant hesitates because he feels that the customs duty “far exceeds” his credit, Barabas says:

*“Go tell ‘em the Jew of Malta sent thee, man:
Tush, who amongst em knows not Barabas?”*

The merchant commands Barabas’s ship named Speranza. He wonders how Barabas has entrusted such a decrepit ship to carry such huge wealth; Barabas however, understands the capacity of his ship. He asks the merchant to tell his attorney to get the ship unloaded and send the wealth to him.

Another merchant enters to inform Barabas that another ship “Laden with riches, all exceeding store/Of Parsian silk, of gold, and orient pearl” on its way to Malta from Alexandria has been chased by the Turkish ships within the Malta territory. But the Jew is certain that the Turks are headed for Sicily, and they mean no harm. The second merchant also goes to the customs and gets the ship discharged.

The scene highlights the racial divide which is evident in the way Barabas is hated because he is a Jew. He in turn hates all Christians.

Barabas has a daughter Abigail and she is the sole love of her father. Barabas's fellow Jews bring him news about the arrival of Turks in Malta demanding tribute under an agreement with the Governor. But Barabas assures them that the Turks mean no harm. In fact he wants that the Turks come and destroy Malta so that he, his daughter Abigail, who is also his sole love and his wealth be spared:

*Nay, let 'em combat, conquer, and kill all,
So they spare me, my daughter, and my wealth.*

Sc. ii.

The scene reflects on the anti-Semitic stance that cuts through the Christian world. Ferneze, the Governor of Malta manipulates policies to draw money out of the Jews, on the pretext that even as they are non-natives they have gathered money in Malta and therefore, can justifiably be taxed on.

The scene begins with Ferneze, the Governor of Malta, in conference with the Turks led by Selim-Calymath, son of the Turkish Emperor, in the Senate House. The Maltese are in arrears of tribute for ten years. But since the amount is "over-great" and Calymath is not prepared to wait any longer, Ferneze requests for a month's time to collect the money. Barabas enters along with three other Jews who have been summoned by the Governor. Ferneze feels that they have no funds to pay the tribute to the Turks as they have been constantly at war. The Jews must part with their wealth so that the tribute is paid to the Turks. Barabas pleads that the Jews are not the natives of Malta; they are "strangers". "Are strangers with your tribute to be taxed?" But he is told that the Jews have amassed their wealth in Malta and they must "contribute" to maintaining peace there. It has been decided that half of the Jews' wealth must be confiscated in order to pay the tribute to the Turks. Any Jew, who refuses to pay, "shall straight become a Christian". And one who resists this decree will lose all his wealth.

Barabas understands the policy of the scheming Ferneze who bounds Jews to pay or force proselytization. He refuses to be exploited thus and challenges Ferneze on grounds of being singled out because of being a Jew:

*Will you then steal my goods?
Is theft the ground of your religion?*

He is not convinced that he is being deprived of his wealth for the "common good". Ferneze assures him that he will not be banished from Malta; in fact, he can earn more wealth by staying there: "Be patient, and thy riches will increase."

Barabas refuses to part with his money and consequently his wealth is seized and the house is converted into a nunnery. The order is promptly carried out and an

officer returns to inform the Governor that “the goods and wares of Barabas, which, being valued, amount to more than all the wealth of Malta”. In case of the other pliant Jews, half their wealth has been seized as per the decree. Barabas is furious. He asserts that all that is now left is his life and they can deprive him of that as well. They have caused him untold misery. But they pay no heed to them and leave, as it is their “policy” only to collect wealth from the Jews and pay the tribute to the Turks.

Barabas mocks such a “policy”. He berates his countrymen, the other Jews who have willingly parted with half their wealth; they have meekly agreed to “extortion” while he, by resisting the unjust decree, has forfeited all his wealth. All his life’s efforts to amass wealth have come to naught, and he wants to be left alone.

Barabas’ daughter Abigail was disheartened by the turn of events in their lives but her father assures her that he has made enough provision for her and himself by hiding gold, jewels and precious stones in the house because he could foresee such an eventuality.

However, procuring the hidden wealth from their old house was not possible now because according to Abigail the house has already been converted into a nunnery and men are not allowed to enter the premises. Barabas even as he is disconsolate plots to recover his wealth with Abigail’s help. She must go there and enlist herself as a nun by confessing all her real or imagined sins. Once she gains entry into the nunnery by pretending to be converted to Christianity, she should at night remove the wooden plank that runs along the upper chamber floor and take out all the gold and jewels, and pass them on to him by dropping them from the window.

On the other hand Mathias, the lover of Abigail is shocked on seeing Abigail turning into a nun. He tells his friend Lodowick, the Governor’s son, about this turn of events. Both of them decide to visit Abigail in the nunnery.

ACT II

Sc. i.

This scene works on the execution of Barabas’ plan to procure his hidden wealth. Late that night, Barabas comes towards his house with a light. He is seen cursing the Christians for having robbed him of his riches. He stands below the window waiting for Abigail, hoping that she has found his wealth hidden under the plank on the upper chamber floor of the house.

Abigail has found “the gold, the pearls, and jewels” hidden by her father. Barabas sees her and she drops down the bags. He then plans Abigail’s escape from the nunnery.

Sc.ii.

Ferneze, the Governor of Malta, seeks a new alliance with the Spanish Vice-Admiral, Martin del Bosco, against the Turks. Bosco wants to sell some Turkish slaves in Malta, but Ferneze is apprehensive as they already have a treaty with the Turks. His knights manage to convince him that the money raised by selling the Turkish slaves will help pay the tribute to the Turks themselves. Bosco chides Ferneze for entering into a league with the infidel Turks “to Europe’s shame”. When Ferneze explains that Malta’s army is too small to face the Turks and the tribute to the Turks is in arrears tantamount to a hundred thousand crowns, Del Bosco promises to write to the Spanish King for assistance to face the Turks. He decides to stay in Malta along with his men till the Spanish soldiers arrive there. Ferneze agrees to the sale of the Turkish slaves in Malta on this condition and Bosco pledges him all assistance in fighting the Turks. This encourages Ferneze who promises to greet the Turks with bullets instead of gold when they visit Malta next time.

Sc.iii

The scene highlights Barabas’ revenge executed through Mathias and Lodowick by giving them both the bait of his daughter. This scene also shows Barabas procuring a cunning slave Ithamore.

Two officers bring some Turkish slaves to the market for selling them, with the price written on the back of each slave. Barabas, with his hidden wealth at his disposal, is now “as wealthy” as he was earlier. His daughter Abigail has left the nunnery and he has bought a house “as great and fair as the Governor’s”. But he cannot forget the injury done to him by the Christians, especially the Governor Ferneze. He has now decided to be outwardly humble and subservient.

The Governor’s son Lodowick is in love with Abigail, and it is through him that Barabas plans to get even with Ferneze. Lodowick also wants to earn Barabas’ favour for getting close to Abigail. Lodowick’s ploy for this is to consult the Jew and seek his opinion about buying a diamond. Barabas understands Lodowick’s intentions; he goes along with the ploy and offers him his virgin daughter Abigail. He invites Lodowick to his house so that he can inspect the “diamond” and wreak his vengeance on Ferneze.

Meanwhile Barabas inspects the Turkish slaves in the market-place and haggles about their price. A miser that he *is*, he wants not a youthful and lusty slave but selects *a* lean slave called Ithamore who was born in Thrace and brought up in Arabia. Barabas wants Ithamore mainly because of his villainish looks and humble demeanour, he wants to use Ithamore for furthering his plan of revenge against the Christians.

Mathias, a gentleman, enters with his widowed mother Katharine. They are also out to buy a slave for themselves. Mathias is surprised to see Barabas and Lodowick talking “so private”. He immediately suspects that it has to do, something with his beloved Abigail. Barabas knows that Abigail is in love with Mathias and he plans to play Mathias against Lodowick. Mathias pretends not to know Barabas in the presence of his mother. Barabas calls him “son” and invites him home after he has brought *a* slave and seen his mother back in their house.

Mathias is curious *to* know why Lodowick was with Barabas. Barabas assures him that Lodowick was talking *to* him about purchasing a diamond, adding deliberately and insinuatingly, “not of Abigail”.

Barabas spells out to Ithamore what he wants of him as a slave. He promises to teach him a few lessons that Ithamore would do well to remember if he wants to be useful to his master.

As for himself, Barabas goes out at nights and kills sick people moaning with suffering. He poisons wells and shelters Christian thieves. He has studied medicine in his youth, killed many Italian priests and buried them. He has been an engineer who, under the pretext of serving the French King Charles V has killed many friends and enemies by his tricks. As a heartless moneylender he has driven many poor and needy people to suicide by charging them enormous interest and when they failed to pay, by appropriating their assets. By trading in stocks and shares, he has been responsible for turning many Christian merchants bankrupts and landing them in jail. His victims are Christians because he loathes them and would do anything to exterminate them.

Barabas now wants to know how Ithamore has been engaged so far and Ithamore comes out with all the misdeeds and crimes he has committed. He has taken an active part in “setting Christian villages on fire, chaining of eunuchs, binding galley slaves”. As an ostler at an inn, he would often steal into the rooms of the travelers, rob and kill them. He would sprinkle powder on the marble stones where the Christians knelt and prayed, so that they went home “on stilts” as they were in unbearable pain from itching. Barabas agrees that they are “villains both”, united in their hatred of Christians. What is more, both of them are “circumcised”. Barabas asks him to stand aside as he sees Lodowick approach him. He then invites Lodowick home.

When they reach home, Barabas asks his daughter Abigail to entertain Lodowick and extend “all the courtesy you can afford” to the Governor’s son. She should “use him” without losing her “maidenhead”. Abigail protests that she is in love with Mathias. Barabas says that he knows it but, for his sake, Abigail should go inside and pretend to be in love with Lodowick because he wants Lodowick’s death as a part of his plan to avenge himself on those who have wronged him. By putting the two friends, Mathias and Lodowick, against each other, he would bring about the death of both of them.

Mathias comes to see Abigail. Barabas swears that he intends to marry his daughter to Mathias. But the Governor’s son is inside wooing Abigail against his wishes. He has forced his way in, and has already sent several presents — “bracelets, jewels, rings” as well as love letters to Abigail. Abigail has returned all these and locked herself inside her room, but Lodowick insists on talking to her through the keyhole while she waits for Mathias to come and rescue her.

Mathias is furious at the “treachery” of his friend. He wants to confront Lodowick but Barabas advises him against it because he doesn’t want “any quarrels” in his house. Mathias should hide himself somewhere so that he can see Lodowick and Abigail. As for himself, Barabas will issue a stern warning to Lodowick not to visit Abigail again.

Mathias cannot bear to see Lodowick and Abigail walking together hand in hand but Barabas cautions restraint. Mathias vows revenge and leaves. Lodowick sees Mathias, “the widow’s son”, leaving and Barabas tells him that Mathias has “sworn” his death. ‘This infuriates Lodowick. Barabas pretends to be surprised that the two friends should be ready to fight over the affections of his daughter, “a paltry silly girl”.

Abigail is agitated at this sudden turn of events stage managed by her intriguing, wily father. When Lodowick expresses a desire to marry her, Barabas agrees even though the Governor’s son is a Christian, and promises to give a rich dowry. Abigail is shocked at being betrothed to Lodowick without her consent, but Barabas advises to be patient till Mathias comes to claim her hand. Abigail consents to Lodowick’s proposal and leaves in distress. Barabas attributes it to her grief and sorrow to leaving her father’s house after marriage. He assures Lodowick: “She is thy wife, and thou shalt be my heir.”

Mathias, who has witnessed all this, wants to chase Lodowick and settle the issue once and for all. But Barabas advises him to have his revenge when he meets Lodowick next. Lodowick has gone to inform Mathias’s mother of his love for Abigail, so he should exercise self-control. Abigail asks Barabas:

“Father, why have you incensed them both?” Barabas now pulls her up for being in love with a Christian:

He orders Ithamore to confine Abigail to her room.

Ithamore now understands Barabas's plan:

Faith, Muster, I think by this

You purchase both their lives: is it not so?

ACT III

The Act is significant as it introduces the **sub-plot** with Bellamira and PiliaBorza as characters. The inter-linking of this plot with the main plot is how the eyes of these characters are set on Barabas's money. Bellamira enamours Ithamore with the sole intention of acquiring some part of Barabas' money.

The Act also critiques the notion of purity and innocence because the dying Abigail even as she confesses to the Friars in the nunnery, ensures that her father's treachery in killing Mathias and Lodovick, must not be let out.

Sc.i

Bellamira, a prostitute, did not have many customers since the town was besieged by the Turks. She has been forced to remain chaste because no one has been visiting her. All that she has for company now is the pimp, PiliaBorza, who gives her some silver coins for spending. The only way to get rich, he says, is by robbing the rich Jew who has plenty of gold with him. Pilia-Borza had climbed up to the Jew's counting-house last night to steal his money but had to abandon his plan because he heard some noise in the house. He could only manage to steal some silver coins which he now offers her.

When they see Ithamore enter, Pilia-Borza asks Bellamira to hide the stolen bag of silver coins and not to look at Ithamore so as not to betray her intentions. Ithamore is charmed by the courtesan. He is prepared to do anything to win her favours: "I know she is a courtesan by her attire: now I would give a hundred of the Jew's crowns that I had such a concubine." He has already delivered the challenge to both Mathias and Lodowick.

Sc. ii.

Mathias and Lodowick, having received the challenge, vow revenge on each other and fight. Barabas appears and cheers them on while the crowd gathered there shouts: "Part 'em, part 'em." Barabas leaves, after they die fighting each other..

Ferneze, the Governor, enters with his Attendants, as does Mathias's mother Katharine. Both of them are shocked at the death of their sons. Katharine blames Ferneze's son for having killed her son. Both of them were friends. They wonder what made them fight and kill each other. Ferneze orders that both of them be interred in the same grave so that he and Katharine can together grieve over their loss.

Sc.iii.

Ithamore is pleased at the success of the plan hatched by Barabas and executed by him:

*Why, was there ever seen such villainy,
So neatly plotted. and so well performed?
Both held in hand, and flatly both beguiled.*

He tells the grieving Abigail that the whole thing was planned by her father Barabas and the role he himself played in bringing about the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick.

A disillusioned Abigail asks Ithamore to go to the "new-made nunnery" and request one of the friars there to come and speak to her. Her father had used her to destroy both Lodowick and Mathias. She can understand his enmity with Lodowick, but Mathias, her beloved was innocent.

*But I perceive there is no love on earth.
Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks.*

When Friar Jacomo arrives, Abigail regrets her earlier decision of leaving the nunnery. But now that she has experience, "purchaed with grief", she wishes really and truly to become a nun. The change, she says, has come about because of her father but she checks herself in time and does not betray her father's machinations, though he hardly deserves it. The friar leads her to the nunnery.

Sc.iv

Barabas is shocked to learn that Abigail has become a nun again. In her letter, she has also asked him to repent his sins. He hopes that she does not know of his role in bringing about the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick. He is, however, certain that his daughter does not love him anymore.

All his affections are now transferred to his slave Ithamore who according to him has become his second life. Ithamore informs him that Abigail had sent for a friar through him and herself opted to become a nun. Barabas disowns Abigail and curses her. Ithamore ingratiates himself further with Barabas by saying: "I'll do anything for your sweet sake" and Barabas now adopts Ithamore as his "only heir".

Barabas however acts against what he says, but he wants to keep Ithamore on his side for the latter is privy to his secrets and further his diabolical plans. He wishes to poison Abigail and all the nuns with rice porridge. The rice porridge, spiced with a rare powder, infects the victim within forty hours of consumption and does not leave a mark. It is used in Malta for sending alms to the nunneries through a dark passage so that the identity of the sender and the messenger is not known.

Sc.v

The Turks return to claim their tribute from Ferneze, the Governor of Malta, when the grace period of one month expires. He goes back on his word to pay the tribute in gold, for gold is only to be found in the West Indies and there are "no golden minerals" in Malta. He is prepared to fight the Turks because Bosco, the Spanish Vice-Admiral, has promised him all help in driving out the infidels from Europe. Calymath is furious, since Ferneze has violated the treaty. He claims that he will himself:

And with brass bullets batter down your towers.

And turn proud Malta to a wilderness...

Ferneze asks his soldiers to get ready to face the Turks by fortifying their towers and underground tunnels, declaring:

And naught is to he looked for now but wars,

And naught to us more welcome is than wars.

Sc.vi.

The poison in the rice porridge makes all nuns sick; they are about to die and send for the friars to confess their sins. Friar Barnardine insinuates to Friar Jacomo about the kind of sins that the Abbess must have committed in her lifetime so as to confess them before she dies.

Abigail enters to inform that everyone in the nunnery is dead; she, too, is dying. Since Jacomo has gone to the nunnery for the confession of other nuns, Abigail requests him to be her “ghostly father” and reveals to him her father’s role in bringing about the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick.

She writes it down on a piece of paper and hands it over to Barnardine, so that she can die in peace. But she ensures that the secret is not to be revealed to anyone till *after* her father’s death. Barnardine assures her on grounds that religion forbids it.

Having confessed, Abigail wants the friar to witness that she dies “a Christian”.

When Jacomo returns, Barnardine seeks his help to bury Abigail and reveals the secret she has entrusted to him about Barabas’s perfidy. He thus betrays Abigail’s trust in him, and now both the friars decide to blackmail Barabas over his daughter’s confession. His only regret is that Abigail had died a virgin, thus hinting at the sexual malpractices prevalent, in the clergy of the time. This reinforces Ithamore’s earlier query to Abigail about what goes on behind the scenes in nunneries: “Have not the nuns fine sport with the friars now and then?”

ACT IV

The Act projects the general attitude of the Elizabethan audience against the Roman Catholics and the Semites. The deaths of Ithamore, Bellamira and Pilia Borza do not arouse the sympathy of the audience because these deaths seem justified as they were equally tainted. The avarice of the Friars, Barnardine and Jacomo are revealed in the way they take advantage of Abigail’s confession and blackmail Barabas.

Sc. i

Church bells are heard ringing to mourn the death of the nuns, and Barabas finds sweet music in them. He is gratified that the poison has worked and that all the nuns are dead. Ithamore promises not to reveal the secret to anyone. Barabas threatens to cut his throat if he does. There is a royal monastery close by and Ithamore suggests that they poison all the friars as well, but Barabas assures him: He does not grieve his daughter’s death because, having born a Hebrew, she has chosen to die a Christian by betraying her faith.

The Blackmailing Friars Jacomo and Barnardine enter. They ask Barabas to repent his sins, otherwise he will be damned. But Barabas being a Jew doesn’t need any confession. They remind him of his daughter’s death but all that he is prepared to confess that he has been a heartless moneylender and that he was sexually involved

with a woman in another country, but she is dead now. When they remind him of plotting the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick, Barabas decides to “dissemble” and act humble while secretly plotting their deaths. He offers to do “penance”. But that would not do, according to the friars. They want his enormous wealth in return for not revealing his secret to the authorities. Barabas agrees and invites them home, assuring them that he is prepared to become a Christian.

Overcome by greed, Giacomo and Barnardine start fighting but he separates them and swears them to secrecy. Then he calls them home one by one at night so that he can murder one and lay the blame on the other.

The play is not a “Revenge Play” in the normal sense of the term. In the formal “Revenge Tragedy” injustice often escaped being castigated and the sinner flourished for a time at least, but always in the end the villain was killed by the “revenger” and in such a way as to make clear to him the moral of his death. Marlowe has varied this theme, punctuating his play with a host of ironical references. Aristotle’s heroes were men of quality but with a “tragic flaw”. To the Elizabethans the Machiavellian was a familiar villain, who would never be a hero; Marlowe, however, never has any sympathy for orthodox conventions and chooses a most unorthodox character as the central figure of his play.

The irony of the play must have been apparent to Elizabethan playgoers as they see the successful Barabas heading towards his doom. By stages he loses his dignity as he fights with every conceivable weapon he can lay hands on, including his own daughter, forged letters, poison, the noose and finally the cauldron; till at last he is caught in a web of his own weaving.

The final scene of the play is dramatically arranged as Barabas gets the cords and cranes and pulleys in place for the trapping of Calymath. He does not care if all the world perishes as long as he is alive. Yet his policy at last fails him. He has overreached himself and does not realise that there are villains cleverer than he. Too trustingly he gives the knife to Ferneze who has made his preparations with a greater finesse than Barabas has. Barabas is caught in his own trap but dying has unwittingly done a good turn to Ferneze, for, with the destruction of his soldiers by Barabas, Calymath is left in the hands of the Christians.

The Christian order is restored. Abigail dies a Christian. Barabas meets his well deserved end, but the play closes on a satirical note with the hypocrite Ferneze piously saying:

So march away, and let due praise be given

Neither to Fate nor Fortune, but to Heaven.

The lines are spoken by one who has practiced deceit with almost as consummate a skill as Barabas and knows that the present situation is not the result of Fortune but is unmistakably the result of cunning.

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UNIT 3

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Character Analysis
- 3.2 Sub-Plot
- 3.3 Theme of Christian Hypocrisy

3.0 INTRODUCTION:

This unit will introduce you to some of the conventions of Elizabethan drama. These are the issues of characterisation, use of sub-plot, and engagement with certain themes woven into the fabric of the play. We shall deal with only one major theme, that of Christian hypocrisy. In addition to this, the play also engages with the themes of love, avarice, revenge, hypocrisy, anti-Semitism, anti-Christianity, and betrayal. You may use the text and other study material referred to at the end of this unit to explore these varied themes.

3.1 CHARACTER ANALYSIS:

Barabas

The typical Aristotelian hero is not vicious or depraved, but is fallible and therefore some tragedy befalls him because of his own "hamartia". However, Barabas is a Machiavellian hero, who is in a way reminiscent of Shakespeare's Jew Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Barabas' power is derived from his wealthy status. However, his religious minority in Malta places him in the position of victim as he is taxed by the Governor on the grounds that he is an outsider. However, Barabas, cold and calculative as he is, plans the revenge and sees that all those who were against him are avenged. In the first instance, he sends Abigail to become a nun so that he can procure his wealth. The single-mindedness of Barabas is again revealed when he gets back his treasure. He is once again wealthy. His daughter is home again from the nunnery. We would imagine that he is at peace with himself. But no, he belongs to the tribe of Levi and cannot "so soon forget an injury". Exhibiting the slyness of Shylock, he grumbles:

We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please:

And when we grin we bile, yet are our looks

As innocent and harmless as a lamb 's.

*I learned in Florence how to kiss my hand,
Heave up my shoulders when they call me dog,
And duck as low as any barefoot friar.*

Here is a man belonging to a minority community, subject to indignities, who dare not air his wrongs openly. He will, however, bare his fangs for he has in him “more of the serpent than the dove”. He is no fool either but a self-confessed knave. He has no love for the Christians who “of mere charity and Christian truth” claim to bring him to religious purity, but have taken all his goods.

Barabas’s true character is revealed with the appearance of Ithamore on the scene. In him Barabas finds he has got a co-knave, a collaborator *with* whose help he “shall do much villainy”. Ithamore is ready to put his hand to anything, for his profession is “what you please”. Barabas teaches him to be void of “compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear”. He teaches him to “smile when the Christians moan”. But the villainy he teaches Ithamore rightly recoils on him. Barabas is wantonly cruel. He has done a thousand dreadful things as casually as one would swat a fly.

As an engineer he slew friend and enemy alike with his stratagems. As a usurer “he filled the jails with bankrupts in a year”.

The subsequent unfolding of his character does not belie this description. As Ithamore gives Barabas a review of his own misdeeds, the latter comes to a happy conclusion:

*We are villains both;
we hate Christians both.*

As his desire for revenge increases, Barabas seems to pay less attention to his wealth. The news, that one of his merchants who owes him a hundred tons of wine has fled, is dismissed with a snap of his fingers. He plays Lodowick against Mathias for he holds: “It’s no sin to deceive a Christian’s on the ground that they, the Christians themselves, hold it a principle that “Faith is not to hold with heretics”. According to him, all are heretics that are not Jews. Unmindful of the misery he is causing his daughter, he sets her lover Mathias against Lodowick, the Governor’s son. The brevity of the duel scene keeps the interest focused on the arch villain of it all. Barabas loses from now on whatever sympathy he had of us. Ithamore’s comment on the dual murder is:

*Why, was there ever seen such villainy’,
So neatly plotted, and so well performed?*

Disillusioned with the father she loves, Abigail, this “hopeless daughter of a hapless Jew”, flies from the scene and rejoins the nunnery. Barabas’s reaction to Abigail’s conversion is worth noting. Whereas he fumes and rages at the loss of his wealth, his sole exclamation at the “loss” of his daughter is:

False, credulous, inconstant Abigail!

But let ‘em go.

Not realizing it is he himself who has been false and unkind, he accuses Abigail of unkindness, for her adoption of Christianity has disgraced him. He now plots the most heinous of his crimes —the death of his own daughter.

Feeling he has been deserted by his daughter, Barabas showers his affection on Ithamore and adopts him as his heir and successor. His life is empty of love. His daughter is no longer his own, how long will Ithamore be his? It is in this very exaggerated display of Barabas’s affection for his slave that the barrenness of his emotional life lies. Ithamore in the very villainy of his nature cannot remain faithful to his master for long. He betrays Barabas at the behest of Bellamira and Pilia-Borza.

The play exposes evil in its most naked form. There is no mental conflict or psychological suffering in Barabas. The interest of the play centers round the suffering he causes to others, a suffering to which he is totally impervious. Having poisoned the nuns he listens to the music of the church bells. It sounds sweet. It had at other times sounded like “tinker’s pans”. Even the hard-hearted Ithamore is surprised and asks if he feels no sorrow for the death of his daughter, to which Barabas replies: “No, but I grieve because she lived so long.”

With admirable cunning Barabas sets the two Friars at loggerheads in an attempt to destroy proof of his crime. Pretending to persuade them, he lets them do the wooing, till both unwittingly fall into his trap.

Sick of Ithamore’s constant demands for money to humor the courtesan Bellamira, Barabas disguises himself as a French musician and poisons them both as well as the pimp Pilia-Borsa. But when they do not immediately die, Barabas realizes that perhaps the poison was not swift or potent enough to achieve the desired end.

Through deceit and treachery, Barabas becomes the Governor of Malta and means to maintain that position by “firm policy”. He plays Selim against Ferneze:

The final scene of the play is dramatically arranged as Barabas gets the cords and cranes and pulleys in place for the trapping of Calymath. He does not care if the world perishes as long as he is alive. Yet his policy at last fails him. He has overreached himself and does not realize that there are villains cleverer than he.

Too trustingly he gives the knife to Ferneze who has made his preparations with greater finesse than Barabas has. Barabas is caught in his own trap but his dying has unwittingly done a good turn to Ferneze, for, with the destruction of his soldiers by Barabas, Calymath is left in the hands of the Christians.

Barabas meets his well deserved end. Even in his dying moments he knows that the present situation is not the result of Fortune but is unmistakably the result of cunning, defeated by superior cunning. His pride does not desert him even at the bitter end. His last words breathe delight in the success of his stratagems:

*And, villains, know you cannot help me now-
Know, governor, 'I was I that slew thy son;
framed the challenge that did make them ineet,
Know, Calymath, I aimed thy overthrow',
And had I but escaped this stratagem,
I would have brought confusion on you all.*

We can almost imagine the applause of the audience as he meets his end. In the words of Harry Levin: "He (Barabas) is not merely sinned against than sinning; he is the very incarnation of sin ... contrasted with the amoral Tamburlaine, Barabas is an immoralist who acknowledges values by overturning them. Contrasted with the devil worshipping Faustus, he is more consistently and superficially diabolic."

Ithamore

Barabas's estate is confiscated by the Governor of Malta in order to pay the longstanding tribute money to the Turks. But the wile Jew has had the forethought in anticipating this eventuality. He hides away a major part of his wealth in his house. He is distracted with grief when the Governor converts his house into a nunnery. He persuades his daughter Abigail to join the nunnery so that she can locate the bags of gold hidden behind the chamber on the upper floor of the house. She does that and Barabas is once again wealthy. He then selects a Turkish slave from the market place who is "somewhat leaner" as he would not consume much food.

The slave is Ithamore, born in "Thrace, brought up in Arabia". Barabas immediately recognises him as one who shall be of help in his "villainy". Ithamore assures him: "Faith, Sir, my birth is but mean, my name is Ithamore, my profession what you please." Barabas is a self confessed knave. He has no love for the uncircumcised Christians who "of mere charity and Christian truth", to bring him to religious purity, have taken all his goods.

Barabas's true character is revealed with the appearance of Ithamore on the scene. In Ithamore Barabas finds he has got a collaborator with whose help he "shall do much villainy". Ithamore is more than ready to put his hand to anything, for his profession is "what you please". Barabas teaches him to be void of "compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear". He teaches him to "smile when the Christians moan". Barabas is wantonly cruel. He has done a thousand dreadful things as casually as one would swat a fly, his victims being all Christians whom he despises.

On his part, Ithamore gives a review to Barabas of his own misdeeds. He has spent his time:

*In setting Christian villages on fire,
Chaining of eunuchs, binding galley-slaves.
One time I was an hostler at an inn,
And in the nighttime secretly I would steal
To travellers' chambers, and there cut their throats;
Once at Jerusalem, where the pilgrims kneeled,
I straddled power on the marble stones,
And therewithal their knees would rankle so
That I have laughed a good to see the cripples
Go limping home to Christendom on stiets.*

This immensely pleases Barabas, who recognises that both of them are villains; both of them are circumcised; and both of them hate Christians.

Barabas plays the Governor's son Lodowick against his daughter Abigail's lover Mathias, for he holds: "It's no sin to deceive a Christian on the ground that they, the Christians themselves, hold it a principle that "Faith is not to be held with heretics". According to him, all are heretics who are not Jews. Ithamore carries the forged challenge to both the young men who are fast friends. When Lodowick and Mathias die fighting each other, Ithamore's comment on the dual murder is:

*Why, was there ever seen such villainy,
So neatly plotted, and so well performed?*

Abigail is disillusioned with her "hard-hearted father, unkind Barabas" when Ithamore informs her how her father has plotted the murder of her two lovers. She rejoins the nunnery. Feeling he has been deserted by his daughter, Barabas showers his affection on his slave:

O Ithamore, come near;

Come near, my love; come near, the master's life.

My trusty servant, nay, my second self

He gives Ithamore the keys to his counting-house allowing him to use half his money as long as he is alive. After Barabas's death, Ithamore will be his sole heir and successor.

Barabas now plans to poison his daughter— “False, credulous, inconstant Abigail”—by poisoning all the nuns in the nunnery. He poisons rice-porridge which is to be left at the dark entrance to the nunnery. Ithamore appreciatingly says: “Was ever pot of rice-porridge so sauced!” And after having committed that foul deed, Ithamore wants to beat his own master at this macabre game by poisoning all the monks too. But Barabas assures him that it is not required, for now the nuns are dead.

With admirable cunning Barabas sets the two Friars Giacomo and Barnardine— against each other in an attempt to destroy proof of his crime. Pretending to persuade them, he lets them do the wooing till both of them unwittingly fall into his trap. Barabas and Ithamore strangle Barnardine and lay the blame on Giacomo for having murdered him. Both of them drag Friar Giacomo to the court and he is ordered to be hanged.

But all the villainy that Barabas teaches Ithamore rightly enough recoils on him. It is while returning from Friar Giacomo's hanging that Ithamore is accosted by the courtesan Bellamira's pimp Pilia-Borza with a letter from his mistress. Ithamore is overwhelmed: “That such a base slave as he should be saluted by such a tall man as I am, from such a beautiful dame as you.” He falls into the trap laid by Bellamira and Pilia-Borza. While the courtesan professes undying love for him, Pilia-Borza becomes his messenger to Barabas demanding money. He loses all sense of propriety as his notes to his master beginning with “Master Barabas” start ending with “Sirrah Jew, as you love your life, send me five hundred crowns, and give the bearer a hundred.” Ithamore, who is as villainous as Barabas is, and who was once ready to jump into the sea at his master's bidding, now turns tail and declares: “To undo a Jew is charity, not sin.”

The wily Barabas senses the designs of “that wicked courtesan” and decides to take things in his own hands. He disguises himself as a French musician and visits Bellamira where Ithamore is dallying, with Pilia-Borza in attendance. He carries a posy of poisoned flowers in his hat. But the poison is not swift enough or potent enough. The trio goes to Ferneze, the Governor, and exposes Barabas's crimes. Barabas is arrested. He drugs himself and his body is thrown over the fort. But he

recovers soon after to pursue his diabolical plans. Meanwhile, the poison has its effect on Ithamore, Bellamira and Pilia Borza and they succumb to death.

Abigail

Abigail is the fourteen year-old daughter of Barabas. As any devoted daughter she loves her father unquestioningly but in Barabas's scheme of things she comes only after-himself, and his wealth. Her lover Mathias describes her as

*A fair young maid, scarce fourteen years of age,
The sweetest flower in Cythrea 'sfield*

After his wealth has been confiscated by the Governor of Malta, Barabas assures Abigail:

*Oh, what has made my lovely daughter sad?
What, woman, moan not her a little loss:
They father has enough in store for thee.*
However she is sad for her dear father:
*Not for myself, but aged Barabas,
Father, for thee lamenteth Abigail.*

He has better plans for the future for, as he tells her:

*Things past recovery
Are hardly cured with exclamations.*

In Abigail we see all that is humane in contrast to her father. Her sorrow at the confiscation is all for him, not for herself. So great is her love for her father that she is ready to attempt anything to avenge the wrong done to him, little knowing that she is going to be the unwitting instrument of his heinous revenges. Barabas holds her

*As dear
As Agamemnon did his Iphigen.*

But ironically enough, though Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter for an ostensibly noble cause and Barabas for a personal, selfish one, the evil price they both pay, is bound some day to bring down evil upon them. Like Iphigen, Abigail does not escape the sacrificer's hand.

Hearing that his house, together with his hidden gold, has been taken over by the Governor and converted into a nunnery, Barabas persuades Abigail to join the nunnery and locate his gold hidden behind a plank on the upper-chamber. Abigail obeys and his hopes of regaining his treasure are fulfilled. She locates the treasure and throws down the bags to him waiting under the balcony of the house. Barabas receives his bags and hugs them in a fever of ecstasy, exclaiming all the while: "O girl! O gold! O beauty! O my bliss!" much in the same manner as Shylock later cries out: "O my daughter, O my ducats!"

Barabas is once again wealthy. Abigail is home again from the nunnery. But in his pursuit of revenge, Barabas uses Abigail to entice Lodowick, the Governor's son, and profess love to him whereas she actually loves Lodowick's friend Mathias. But he tells her: "It's no sin to deceive a Christian" on the ground that they, the Christians themselves, hold it a principle that "Faith is not to be held with heretics—i' and according to him, all are heretics that are not Jews.

Barabas plots a duel between Lodowick and Mathias in which both of them die. When Ithamore informs Abigail of this, in heartfelt agony she cries out:

Hard-hearted father unkind Barabas!

Was this the pursuit of thy policy?

Disillusioned with the father she loves, this "hopeless daughter of a hapless Jew" flies from the scene and immediately decides to rejoin the nunnery for she perceives:

There is no love on earth,

Pity in Jews, or piety in Turks.

Yet she will never betray Barabas. She does not blame him but blames instead the infidelity inherent in the race. However, the "hard-hearted" Barabas's reaction at the "loss" of his daughter is:

False, credulous, in constant Abigail!

But let 'em go.

Not realising that it is he himself who has been false and unkind, he accuses Abigail of unkindness, for her adoption of Christianity has disgraced him. He now plots the most heinous of his crimes—the death of his own daughter.

Barabas sends the "sauces" rice porridge to the nunnery through his slave Ithamore. Consequently all the nuns die. So does Abigail. But before she dies, she confesses her sins to Friar Barnardine as well as the role played by her father in bringing about the deaths of Lodowick and Mathias through deceit and

treachery. She entreats him not to reveal it, “for then my father dies.” Even the hard-hearted Ithamore is surprised and asks Barabas if he feels no sorrow for the death of his daughter, to which Barabas coolly replies:

“No, but I grieve she lived so long.”

3.2 SUB-PLOT

The Bellamira — Pilia-Borza episode in *The Jew of Malta* serves a definite purpose. Enamoured and entrapped by the courtesan Bellamira, Barabas’s slave Ithamore starts extorting money from his master and eventually betrays him to Ferneze, the Governor of Malta.

Bellamira, the courtesan, did not have much business since the war started and the town was besieged by the Turks demanding their long-standing tribute money from the rulers of Malta. She has had clients in the past who would freely give her a hundred ducats for spending a night with her. “But now against my’ will I must be chaste,” she laments. Her pimp Pilia-Borza has managed to steal a few silver coins from the Jew’s hoard. He hands over the money to her to tide over the hard times they are facing. But Bellamira “disclaims” silver. Pilia-Borza informs her that he has stolen the money from Barbas’s bags last night by climbing over the balcony of the Jew’s house. He would have got more money had it not been for some “rumbling in the house” at that time. Just then, Ithamore, the Jew’s slave, is passing by. He is instantly attracted to “the sweetest face I ever beheld”. He recognises Bellamira as a courtesan by her “attire” and wishes to have her as his concubine even if he has to pay her “a hundred of the Jew’s crowns”. Bellamira and Pilia take advantage of Ithamore’s weakness and entraps him.

While he is returning from Friar Jacomo’s hanging, Ithamore is accosted by Pilia Borza who hands over a letter from Bellamira to him. Ithamore is spell-bound.

Pilia-Borza describes his response as:

... for at the reading of t. e letter, he looked like a man of another world

... That such a base slave as he should be saluted by such a tail man as I am, from such a beautiful dame as you.

Ithamore is overwhelmed when Pilia-Borza addresses him as a “gentleman” and Bellamira calls him a “sweet-faced youth”. He is totally enamoured by the courtesan’s overtures: “Though a woman’s modesty should hale me back, I can withhold no longer; welcome, sweet love.”

Ithamore's first thought is to go and steal some money from his master for the sake of "Sweet Allamira" but he knows that it is hidden underground and he has no clue to the place where Barabashas hidden his treasure. PiliaBorza suggests that he write to the Jew demanding money. Ithamore is advised not to write "so submissively" to his master but threaten him with exposure of the crimes he has committed if he does not send him money immediately through Pilia-Borza. So Ithamore's first letter to "Master Barabas" charges him to send three hundred crowns through Pilia-Borza, "and this shall be your warrant: if you do not no more but so".

As Bellamira professes undying love to him, Ithamore promises to extort more money from the Jew and "leave this paltry-land" with her for Greece where they will constantly be making love in the meadows. Meanwhile Barabas grows increasingly wary of the constant demands made by Ithamore whose letters to him are no more addressed to "Master Barabas" but assume an increasingly threatening tone: "Sirrah Jew, as you love your life, send my five hundred crowns, and give the bearer a hundred."

Ithamore becomes ecstatic by Bellamira's intimate gestures:

"That kiss again; she runs division of my lips. What an eye she casts on me! It twinkles like a star."

Barabas is shocked at being addressed as "Plain Barabas" by the slave who had earlier professed loyalty to him and whom he had declared his heir and successor. He is also scared that Ithamore may expose him to the authorities, for that would mean a certain death for him. He sends him the money demanded through Pilia-Borza but decides to take the matter in his hands:

Barabas disguises himself as a French musician with a lute. He sticks a posy of poisoned flowers in his hat and visits Bellamira's lodging, where he finds Bellamira entertaining Ithamore with drinks and Pilia-Borza dancing attendance on them. Ithamore reveals how he has been a partner in all the crimes that the Jew has committed. If the Jew refuses to send him the money he demands, Ithamore will expose him while the courtesan and the pimp applaud his exploits.

PiliaBorza *wants* to rush to the Governor with this confession but Bellamira holds him back till they have extracted more money from the Jew through Ithamore.

When Barabas enters disguised as a French musician, Ithamore wants him to play some music for them. But Barabas bides him time on the pretext of tuning his lute so that he can watch them. He gladly parts with the poisoned posy of flowers stuck in his hat when Bellamira asks for it while engaging Ithamore in conversation about his master. He seethes with anger as Ithamore runs down Barabas for his miserliness and uncouth dress. But his purpose is only partly

fulfilled when the trio still live after having smelt the poisoned flowers. Ithamore decides not to write any more letters to Barabas pleading for money but rather make demands “by word of mouth now” through the pimp: “Bid him deliver thee thousand crowns, by the same token that the nuns loved rice, that Friar Barnardine slept in his own clothes.”

Ithamore, Bellamira and Pilia-Borza now approach the Governor and expose Barabas, who is hauled up for his crimes. On seeing them alive, Barabas regrets: “One dram of powder more had made all sure: What a damned slave was I.

He demands that he be tried under the law for the crimes he has allegedly committed while Bellamira, Ithamore and Pilia-Borza are sent to the prison. The poison has its effect now and they die. The cunning and scheming Barabas pretends to be dead by drinking a potion of a “sleepy drink” and lives on to betray the Christians to the Turks.

The Bellamira -Pilia-Borza episode thus turns Barabas’s co-knave and collaborator Ithamore into a traitor and the villainy Barabas teaches Ithamore rightly enough recoils on him. Ithamore beats his own master at his macabre game. The BellamiraPilia-Borza episode thus serves a definite purpose. It turns one arch villain against another and leads to the play’s *denouement*.

3.3. THE CHRISTIAN HYPOCRISY

The keynote of the play is struck by Machiavel in the Prologue:

*I count religion but a childish toy,
And hold there is no sin but ignorance.*

With his bags “crammed with gold”, Barabas is seemingly at peace with himself and the world. His “infinite riches” are “inclosed . . . in a little room” in the land-locked island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea. He is rich and knows that he is hated by the Christians for his happiness. But he would not change this scheme of things. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that wealth does not give him power which is exercised by Christians the world over as well as in Malta. He has no love lost for the Christians a feeling which is equally reciprocated by his adversaries on the other side of the fence.

The First Move

This would have continued till Ferneze, the Governor of Malta, summons the Jews, those beings “accursed in the sight of Heaven,” and demands their wealth in order to pay the long-standing tribute to the Turks. When Barabas protests, he is told:

*Thou art a merchant and a moneyed man,
And 'tis thy money, Barabas, we seek.*

The Jews are “strangers” to the land and they have become rich at the expense of Christians in Malta. They are

*. infidels;
For through our sufferance of your hateful lives
(who stand accursed in the sight of Heaven)
These taxes and afflictions are befallen,
And therefore thus we are determined.*

If they refuse to part with half their wealth, they are to become Christians. While the other merchants easily yield to the state decree, Barabas resists it. As a result, all his wealth is confiscated. He has our sympathy then as with great dignity he scolds his kinsmen for so tamely giving up half their estate. We even admire his forethought in anticipating this eventuality and hiding away part of his wealth. We recognise the speciousness of the arguments of Ferneze and appreciate the retort of Barabas:

*What, bring you scripture to confirm your wrongs?
Preach me out of my possessions.*

When Barabas suggests that the “flinty hearts” of the Christians will now demand his life, as they have demanded his wealth, the Governor self-righteously says:

*No, Barabas, to stain our hands with blood
Is far from us and our profession.*

Barabas puts his fingers on the spot when he says “policy” is their profession. But policy seems to be the profession of all in the play except the innocent Abigail, the daughter of Barabas who now relentlessly pursues a policy of revenge against the Christians and emerges as the arch villain of the play, and not its hero. All his crimes stem from this first move made by the Christian rulers of Malta.

There are other Machiavellian characters besides Barabas in the play. The Christians are a force to be reckoned with and, from the beginning, Marlowe shows scant sympathy for them. He never whitewashes the character of the Governor, for he cannot excuse Christian hypocrisy. Ferneze has no conscience he plays with the side where his advantage lies. He swears he will give tribute to “great Selim Calymath”, but when Del Bosco, the Vice-Admiral of the King of

Spain, promises aid against the Turks, he is ready to join hands with him. Forgetting that he has dishonoured a promise, he proudly declares he will fight it out with Calymath, for “Honour is bought with blood and not with gold.”

In the final scene of the play when Barabas too trustingly gives the knife to Ferneze, who has made his preparations with greater finesse than Barabas has, Ferneze cuts the cord and signals to his waiting knights. Barabas falls into the cauldron of boiling oil he had prepared for the Turks and the Christian order is restored. Barabas knows that his nemesis is not the result of Fortune but is unmistakably the result of cunning, defeated by superior cunning (practiced by Ferneze). No pity is evoked by the death of Barabas, for his end is proportionate to the extent of his crimes. But the Christians come off in no better light than the diabolic Jew.

The Christian clergy also comes under Marlowe’s scanner for being hypocritical and false to their religion. The friar’s illicit liaisons with nuns in the nunnery are referred to slyly by Ithamore when he asks Abigail a “very feeling” question: “Have not the nuns fine sport with the friars now and then?”

Later when the nuns are poisoned and Friars Jacomo and Barnardine are called for their dying confessions, Jacomo prefers to go to Maria for obvious reasons while Barnardine laments:

The Abbess sent for me to be confessed.

Oh what a sad confession will there be!

The dying Abigail also confesses to Friar Barnardine and tells him about the crimes committed by her “hardhearted father” Barabas, with the injunction not to reveal it to anyone. Barnardine assures her:

Know that confession must be not be revealed;

The canon law forbids it, and the priest

That makes it known, being degraded first,

Shall be condemned, and then sent to the fire.

Yet he does precisely the reverse when Barnardine shares it with Jacomo. When she dies, his cryptic comment is: “Ay, and a virgin too; that grieves me most.” It is in this comment of the Friar’s and his greedy acceptance later, of Barabas’s proffered treasure that Marlowe skilfully demonstrates his contempt for the clergy.

Jacomo and Barnardine know that revealing Abigail’s secret means a certain death for the Jew. But Barabas exploits their greed with admirable cunning Barabas sets the two Friars at loggerheads in an attempt to destroy proof of his crime.

Pretending to persuade them, he lets them do the wooing, till both unwittingly fall into his trap. He can then lift up his gaze and call piously to the Heavens:

What, afriar a murderer?

When shall you see a Jew commit the like?

He calls Barnardine home and strangles him with Ithamore's help. When Jacomo turns up, he squarely lays the blame for murdering Barnardine on him and hands him over to the law-enforcing authorities. Jacomo is hanged even though he keeps protesting that he is innocent, and "a sacred person".

Assessment Questions:

1. Write a critical note on the role of the church in the emergence of English theatre.
2. Enumerate the distinctive phases in the secularization of medieval drama in England.
3. Discuss the classical influence on English drama with reference to early tragedies and comedies.
4. Marlow's play is concerned with religious and racial motifs. Do you think Marlow was biased in his approach to these themes?
5. Examine the character of Abigail in the play. Would you consider her character to be that of a tragic heroine or that of a victim of circumstances?
6. How does Marlow engage with the themes of anti-Christianity and anti-Semitism in the play?
7. Write a critical note comparing the two conversions of Abigail. How does it serve to advance the plot?
8. How does Marlow present his anti-Christian views in the play? Substantiate your answer with references from the text.
9. 'Barabas is more a victim than a villain'. Discuss
10. Discuss *The Jew of Malta* as a tragedy.

Suggestions for Further Reading.:

1. Bartels, Emily C. ed. *Critical Essays on Christopher Marlow*. New York. 1997

2. Marlow, Christopher. *Doctor Faustus and other Plays*. ed. David Bevington and Eric Ramussen, Oxford university Press. 1998
3. Nicoll, Allardyce. *British Drama*. Barnes & Noble. New York. 1961.
4. Nicoll, Allardyce. *English Drama*. George & Harrap & co. London. 1968

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Block-I
Part -II
BEN JONSON'S VOLPONE

Unit I : Ben Jonson : Life and Works

CONTENTS:

- 1.0 Learning Objectives
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- 1.5 The Classical Qualities of Jonson's comedies and theory of 'humour'
- 1.6 Let us sum up
- 1.7 Keywords
- 1.8 Suggested readings
 - Possible Answers to CYP
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 - Model Questions

1.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Discuss the life and works of Ben Jonson
- Understand the Social and literary background of the age.
- Discuss Ben Jonson's classicism.
- Discuss the theory of 'humours'.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The present unit takes up one of the most popular plays of Ben Jonson, *Volpone*. But before, we explore the detailed content of the play; we shall gain

an insight into the life and works of this great dramatist who is generally regarded as the second most important English playwright during the reign of James I after William Shakespeare.

1.2 BEN JONSON: THE DRAMATIST

Benjamin “Ben” Jonson was a great English playwright, poet, actor and literary critic of the Jacobean age. Let us first explore the life of Ben Jonson and the times in which he wrote.

1.2.1 His Life and Work:

Ben Jonson was born in Westminster in late 1572, a month after his father died. Two years after his birth, his mother married a bricklayer. Jonson was sent to a private school in St. Martin’s Church. Later he was sent to Westminster School, where the Headmaster was William Camden, the famous scholar, to whom he dedicated his *Every Man in His Humour*. He was also Jonson’s first guide in the study of the classics. His studies were however, interrupted due to poverty and sometime after leaving school he worked with his stepfather as a bricklayer. However he had no interest in this trade and after a while abandoned it. He became a soldier and went to fight in Flanders. After his return from Flanders, Jonson lived for some time an obscure life in London. Around 1592 he married a woman, by the name of Anne Lewis. Their eldest daughter, Mary died in November, 1593, when she was only six months old. Then a decade later, in 1603, his eldest son died of the Bubonic Plague when he was seven years old. To lament and honour the dead boy, Jonson wrote the elegiac, *On My First Sonne* (1603). Moreover, another son died in 1635. In that period Ben Jonson and his wife lived apart for five years during which he enjoyed the residential hospitality of his patrons, Sir Robert Townshend and Lord Albany.

Jonson’s first known connection with the theatre was as a member of a touring company of actors in 1597. Soon he came into contact with Philip Henslowe, the manager of London’s second company, the Admiral’s Men, and started working with him as an actor and a playwright in July 1597. He was given twenty shillings for a play to be completed before Christmas. The play was the *Isle of Dogs*. It was officially condemned as seditious and slanderous, and several members of the company, including Jonson were imprisoned. Soon, however, he was back writing plays for Henslowe. By 1598 Jonson was hailed as one of the “best for

tragedy,” but he was to get success as a writer of comedy rather than tragedy. Jonson in the same year produced *Every Man in his Humour*, one of the most famous English comedies. It was first acted by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men with great success at the Curtain Theatre in September, 1598 in which Shakespeare also played one of the characters. The play was an immediate success and established Jonson’s reputation as a dramatist. It was the first of his “humour” comedies and made him popular because of its realism. In the Prologue to this play Jonson declared his didactic aim as a dramatist of reforming the follies of his age by exposing them and holding them up to ridicule.

Soon after the production of his play Jonson again found himself in prison for killing an actor of Henslowe’s company in self-defense. He was arrested for felony and narrowly escaped the gallows by pleading the ancient right of benefit of clergy as a literate man. While in prison he became a Roman Catholic and remained one for twelve years until 1610. The affair, however, did not affect his reputation as a dramatist and in 1599 he presented the Chamberlain’s Men with his second “humour” play, *Every Man Out of his Humour*. Between 1599 and 1601 Jonson was deeply involved in the complicated so-called “war of the theatres” between the select play-houses and the public ones on Bankside. In 1600 he brought out *Cynthia’s Revels*, designed primarily as a compliment to Queen Elizabeth and contained attacks on his old friends and associates. *The Poetaster* (1601) was an attack on Jonson’s literary rivals, chiefly directed against Marston and Dekker. In 1603, Jonson produced the first of his two extant tragic works, *Sejanus*. It sought to restore classic loftiness to tragedy, but the common people were appalled by its long speeches and there was a violent popular protest against it. Soon after this, Jonson joined collaborated with Chapman and Marston in writing *Eastward Hoe!*, which was a satire against the Scots in general, and the King in particular. Chapman and Marston were imprisoned and Jonson voluntarily joined them. However, powerful friends intervened and they were released.

The accession of James I in 1603 marked the beginning of an era of lavish court entertainments, particularly the masque. The masque was a form of festive courtly entertainment that flourished in 16th and early 17th century Europe. It involved music and dancing, singing and acting with elaborate stage designs and costumes. Jonson took the opportunity and started writing masques and entertainments and became the chief court entertainer. From 1605 until the end of James reign, Jonson produced some thirty of these court entertainments, most of them in

collaboration with Inigo Jones, with whom, however, he soon quarreled. Some of his notable masques include: *The Satyr*, *The Masque of Blackness*, *Hymenaei*; *The Masque of Beauty*; *The Hue and Cry After Cupid*; *The Masque of Queens* and *Oberon*. By 1616 he had produced nearly all the plays on which his present reputation as a dramatist is based. They include the tragedy of *Catiline* (acted and printed 1611), and the comedies *Volpone* (1605) *Epicoene*, or the *Silent Woman* (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and *The Devil is an Ass* (1616). In 1616, Jonson received a modest pension of one hundred marks and in the same year he published the first volume of his collected works. In 1618 he set out for Scotland, his ancestral country. He spent more than a year and a half in that country and there, enjoyed the hospitality of the learned Scottish poet, William Drummond. The literary product of this association was Jonson's *Conversations*, the most important single record concerning his career. In 1623 there was a fire in Jonson's library which destroyed many of his works of previous years. In May, 1619, Jonson visited Oxford to receive the honorary degree of M.A. In 1621, his pension was increased to two hundred pounds and in 1628 he was appointed Historiographer to the City of London.

The last years of Jonson's life were plagued with sickness and debt. His productivity began to decline in the 1620s, but he remained well-known in the literary world. He influenced a whole generation of poets known as "the tribe of Ben". This group sincerely admired him, and cheered his last days. However, a series of setbacks drained his strength and damaged his reputation. The important comedies of the latter part of Jonson's life – *The Staple of News* (1625), *The New Inn* (1629), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632) and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633) were not as outstanding as his earlier comedies and met with failure on the stage.

Jonson died on August 6, 1637 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. On his tombstone were inscribed the words: "O Rare Ben Jonson" as a mark of tribute to this great dramatist.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Write a few lines on Ben Jonson's origins.

Ans.....

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Q2. Name the important works of Ben Jonson.

Ans.....
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Q3. What is a masque?

Ans.....
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1.3 A BRIEF SURVEY OF ENGLISH COMEDY UPTO JONSON:

In order to assess properly the greatness of Jonson and his contribution to English drama, it is essential to make a brief survey of English comedy upto Jonson. Drama in England had a distinctly religious origin. It had its origin in religious ceremonials. It was the work of the priests who used it as a means of conveying the truths of their religion to the illiterate masses. These plays were at first written in Latin and acted by different churchmen. The early religious plays were, broadly, of two types: the Mysteries based upon subjects taken from the Bible; and the Miracles dealing with the lives of saints. Gradually, the venue of the performances shifted from the Church premises to the market-place. Laymen began to take part in the performances and secular guild organizations took up the entire control as well as management of the performances. A characteristic of the Mystery and the Miracle was the introduction of humorous scenes. The Biblical

subject-matter was expanded here and there, and the anonymous author or producer often added comic scenes of his own invention to give variety and diversion. A number of humorous scenes and figures made the stage alive with mirth and merriment. Noah's wife was, for instance, made a comic figure. The shepherds at the Nativity and the sheep stealing episodes also contributed to the humour. The Morality plays marks the next stage in the growth of the drama in England. These plays were also didactic and religious but the characters were personified abstractions. Among such personifications, a prominent place was given to Vice. Vice was a humorous personification of evil and the recognized fun-maker of the piece. This character can be seen as the direct fore-runner of the Shakespearean clown. By the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the Moralities had a new wing, known as the Moral Interlude. The Interludes served to provide entertainment in the midst of other festivities or a banquet, and so they were both short and amusing. They were short, needed no stage accessories and they were mostly performed by four to five actors. These early experiments are of great importance historically, because they prepared the way for the regular English drama. Under the influence of the Renaissance (the Revival of Learning) and the consequent study of the classical drama of Greece and Rome, there was a sweeping advancement to regular comedies, tragedies and history plays. The comedies of Terence and Plautus, and the tragedies of Seneca served as the inspiration and attempts were made to fashion English plays on these models. The first regular English comedy is *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, of unknown authorship written about 1550. It is a coarse, low comedy on the English country life of the time and there is sufficient evidence of the classical influence. Another English comedy was *Ralph Roister Doister*, also written about 1550, by Nicholas Uddal who had been headmaster of Eton. The play is divided into acts and scenes written in rhyming couplets. These early comedies are no work of significance. They are actually farcical plays and their humour is rude and slight. They are, however, found to contribute to the subsequent advancement of English comedies. The period from 1550 to 1575 was a period of great confusion in the history of English drama. There was a conflict between those who wanted to follow the classical tradition and those who wanted to write according to the strong national taste of the English public. The formers were the founders of the "Classical" drama, and the latter that of the "Romantic" drama. The best known follower of the classical form is Ben Jonson, and Shakespeare, the best known exponent of the Romantic. In the end the national taste won. By the time Shakespeare began his career as a playwright, the romantic drama was firmly established. This was the achievement of a group of young men who were Shakespeare's immediate predecessors. They are known as "University Wits" and included John Lyly, Thomas Kyd, George Peele, Robert Greene, Christopher

Marlowe and Thomas Nash. They were all of a good birth and social position. They were university scholars, members of learned societies and well cultivated by foreign travels. Their historic importance is great, for it were they who paved the way for that free and flexible drama which Shakespeare was to make his own. In the field of comedy, particularly, Lyly's importance is immense. He established high comedy as a form of drama, highly appealing to the people of breeding and culture. The previous farcical comedies, produced by physical sensationalism, is found replaced by the intellectual comic sense, so wonderfully exhibited in Lyly's plays, designated as high comedies. Lyly was the author of several popular comedies, of which the best are *Campaspe and Diogenes*, *Sapho and Phao*, *Gallathea*, and *Endimion*. Their interest depends not on plot or characterization, but on language, wit, ingenuity, and grace of the dialogue. Another successful dramatist of comedy is George Peele. Among the several plays written by him is *The Old Wives' Tale*, which is built round a fairy tale. It is an amusing tale of farcical incidents and may be regarded as the first dramatic literary satire in English. A more successful dramatist than Lyly and Peele was, perhaps, Robert Greene. His well known plays include *The Comicall Historie of Alphonsus*, *King of Aragon*, *A Looking Glasse for London and England*, written with Lodge, *The Historie of Orlando Furioso*, *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth* and *The Honorable Historie of Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay*. Greene's comedies may well be taken as the earliest specimens of the genre of comedy, popularly characterized as the romantic comedy. Shakespeare's great comedies *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* are found effectively anticipated in Greene's plays. Moreover he has also anticipated Shakespeare by mingling pure and simple verse with humorous prose in his comedies. Thus, the University Wits, as Shakespeare's worthy predecessors, have certainly shown their contributions to the development of the English drama. They formed collectively a mighty force in the elevation of the status of the drama, as a literary medium that swept the Elizabethan theatre and created a long lasting tradition.

Shakespeare's comedies are essentially romantic comedies. In them he mingled romantic love-interest with fun. These plays are a mixture of serious and comic elements and further they do not observe the classical unities (of time, place and action). He wrote such immortal comedies as *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. They are rich in variety and depth of characterization.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q4. How did drama originate in England?

Ans.....
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Q5. What comic elements do we find in the mysteries and Miracle plays?

Ans.....
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Q6. What were the Morality plays?

Ans.....
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Q7. How did the University Wits influence Shakespeare in the field of comedy?

Ans.....
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1.4 THE AGE OF BEN JONSON:

The age of Jonson roughly covers the period from the last quarter of the 16th century to the first four decades or so of the 17th century. In a way, Jonson is the connecting link between the glorious Elizabethan age and the Puritan age which followed. It was an age of disillusionment, of increasing gloom and pessimism, and this melancholy and gloom of the age is reflected in the literature of the period.

Social Background:

Historically, this was the age of the rise of the Puritans. Let us first understand who the Puritans were. Puritanism, in the broadest sense may be regarded as the renaissance of the moral sense of man. It was the greatest movement for moral and political reform. It aimed at (1) religious liberty, which means the freedom of people to worship according to their conscience, and (2) civil liberty. The Puritans wanted to make men honest and free. They stressed on purity of life. In matters of religion they held extreme views. They did not accept the Anglican Church, which was a sort of compromise between the Catholics and the Protestants made during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. They wanted church reforms. They had very strict views about life and conduct. They were even against common pleasures like drama, singing and dancing. They thus stood for church reforms, reform of social life and for both religious and political liberty. They were some causes for the rise of the Puritans. First, the theory of the Divine Right of Kings of James I proved to be very unpopular among the people. This theory held that the King could do no wrong and was above blame and criticism. James I was not a popular king. He was ill-mannered and immoral and soon made the English Court the laughing stock of Europe. Second, the King and his Court was immoral and corrupt which widened the gap between the king and his people. Thirdly, the absence of foreign wars did much to contribute towards internal dissensions. As there were no foreign wars, people turned to the discussion of domestic politics. There was widespread criticism of the king and the court. Thus the appeal of Puritanism increased and it became a significant force in national life. Further, Charles I, the son of James I who ascended the throne after his father was tactless and did not give importance to the sentiments of the public. The result was that there emerged an open conflict between the king and the Parliament which broke out in the form of Civil War in 1642.

Literary Background:

There was a general decline from the Elizabethan standard during the age of Jonson. The literary output, especially of poetry, was much smaller, and the lyric dominated. The poetry of the period was largely lyrical and Ben Jonson and John Donne were the two major lyrical poets. The new poetry was more intellectual than passionate or profound. There was a marked increase in prose activity due to the decline of poetry. It was also the age of the decline of the drama. Many factors contributed to it. The dramatists who followed Shakespeare lacked his greatness and dramatic skill. The Court of James I was corrupt, vulgar and asked for plays with cleverness, sensationalism and violence. The best dramatists of the day pandered to the tastes of the court. Drama had also begun

to lose its appeal among the masses. Shakespeare had spoken for all the classes. But now the dramatists began to appeal only to a particular group of audience and thus became limited to a very narrow circle. Further dramatic work of the period is characterized by immorality, obscenity, sensationalism, violence and free use of unnatural themes, such as incest and sexual infidelity. Finally, there was the exhaustion of the creative impulse. It became difficult for the later dramatists to find fresh plots or variations of well-worn themes or fresh characters. Thus by the end of the first decade of the 17th century there was an all round decay in morals, characterization and technique and this ultimately led to the closure of the theatres when the Puritan revolution began.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q8. What is Puritanism?

Ans.....
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Q9. What were the reasons for the decline of the drama?

Ans.....
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1.5 THE CLASSICAL QUALITIES OF JONSON'S COMEDIES AND THEORY OF HUMOUR:

Ben Jonson's comedies were different. He was a classical dramatist. In theory and practice he adopted the models set up by the ancients. He wrote comedies in imitation of the Greek and Latin conventions, as they were found in the plays of Roman writers like Plautus and Terence. By the beginning of the 17th century, there was a reaction against the outmoded forms and conventions of Elizabethan drama. A tendency to imitate the classics had strongly begun to assert itself against the prevailing romantic drama. Sir Philip Sidney also expressed his disapproval of plays written in the native English model, and he was followed by a group of poets and critics who attacked all forms of romantic literature. In

the sphere of drama this movement was led by Jonson. All his life Jonson fought against the fantastic and extravagant qualities of the romantic drama. He wanted to bring in drama classical sanity and restraint. He advocated classical unities in place of romantic exuberance and imagination. He saw classical standards a cure for lawlessness and wanted to establish a realistic and satirical comedy on a rational plan. However, it should be remembered that his is a liberal classicism which follows the spirit and not the letter.

According to Jonson, a comedy should aim at truth to life. Both action and character must be keeping with the normal and the customary. Characters in drama must be typical to the class to which they belong. There should be no irrelevant inconsistencies and incongruities. There should be no mingling of the tragic and the comic. He was opposed to the writers of romantic comedy who mixed tragic and comic elements in the same play. To him the main purpose of comedy was to make people laugh, not for laughter's sake, but out of their follies and foibles. Shakespeare's comedies are full of imagination and irresponsible fancy while Jonson's comedies are realistic pictures of London life. His comedies are among the most informative plays of the period. Every aspect of Elizabethan society is well reflected in his plays. Jonson observes the three Classical Unities of Time, Place and Action in his plays. Classical unities are rules for drama derived from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Unity of action means that a play should have one action with minimal subplots. Unity of time means that the action in a play should occur over a period of not more than 24 hours. Unity of Place states that a play should exist in a single physical space and the stage should not represent more than one place. In his plays Jonson observes these unities, though the unity of action is not strictly followed in all the plays.

Further Jonson is known for his comedy of 'humours'. According to the medieval theory of humours there exist four fluids in the human body. These fluids were: blood (which was believed to be hot and moist); phlegm (cold and moist); yellow bile (hot and dry); and black bile (cold and dry). According to medieval medicine, a man was healthy if these four fluids existed in his body in a state of balance. The excess of any fluid was believed to cause some kind of imbalance in character. These fluids were also known as humours. The theory of these four fluids became more complex in the hands of Richard Burton who elaborated the theory in his famous book, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Jonson himself stated this theory of humours in his prologue to the play *Every Man Out of His Humour*. In short the word "humour" was used in the sense of some individual habit dominating a person, some folly or absurdity, some pretension, or temperamental abnormality, which holds a person in its grip. And Jonson believed that it was possible to rid a person of his particular humour by means of ridicule. Thus he saw comedy as having a corrective function and his own plays

were intended to accomplish this. Jonson endowed each of his characters with some particular whim or affectation, some exaggeration of manner, speech or dress, and he focused all his attention on that single trait to the exclusion of all. This device was employed by him in all his great comedies.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q10. How was Ben Jonson a classicist?

Ans.....
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Q11. What do you understand by Jonson’s comedy of ‘humour’?

Ans.....
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1.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, you will be able to learn about the life and works of Ben Jonson. Also, the discussion on the background of the play will help you comprehend the setting and context of the play while also gaining a brief insight into the literary contributions of Ben Jonson in the history of English literature.

1.7 KEYWORDS:

- Jacobean – The Jacobean age refers to the period in English and Scottish history that coincides with the reign of James VI of Scotland (1567-1625), who also inherited the crown of England in 1603 as James I. The Jacobean era came after the Elizabethan era and precedes the Caroline era (reign of Charles I, 1625-161642)
- Guild organization – A guild is an association of artisans or merchants who oversee the practice of their craft in a particular town.

- Classical age – It is the period in which Greek and Roman society flourished and had great influence throughout Europe, North Africa and Southwestern Asia.

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS:

- 1) Harp, Richard and Stewart, Stanley, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2000. Print.
- 2) Riggs, David. *Ben Jonson*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989. Print.

ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Ben Jonson was born in Westminster in late 1572, a month after his father died. Two years after his birth, his mother married a bricklayer. Jonson was sent to a private school in St. Martin's Church. Later he was sent to Westminster School, where the Headmaster was William Camden, the famous scholar, to whom he dedicated his *Every Man in His Humour*. He was also Jonson's first guide in the study of the classics. His studies were however, interrupted due to poverty and sometime after leaving school he worked with his stepfather as a bricklayer. However he had no interest in this trade and after a while abandoned it. He became a soldier and went to fight in Flanders. After his return from Flanders, Jonson lived for some time an obscure life in London. Around 1592 he married a woman, by the name of Anne Lewis.

Ans to Q No 2. Some of the important works of Ben Jonson are *Every Man in his Humour* (1598) *Volpone* (1605) *Epicoene*, or the *Silent Woman* (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and *The Devil is an Ass* (1616).

Ans to Q No 3. The accession of James I in 1603 marked the beginning of an era of lavish court entertainments, particularly the masque. The masque was a form of festive courtly entertainment that flourished in 16th and early 17th century Europe. It involved music and dancing, singing and acting with elaborate stage designs and costumes. Jonson wrote a number of masques. Some of his notable masques include: *The Satyr*; *The Masque of Blackness*, *Hymenaei*; *The Masque of Beauty*; *The Hue and Cry After Cupid*; *The Masque of Queens* and *Oberon*.

Ans. To Q no.4 Drama in England had a distinctly religious origin. It had its origin in religious ceremonials. It was the work of the priests who used it as a means of

conveying the truths of their religion to the illiterate masses. These plays were at first written in Latin and acted by different churchmen. The early religious plays were, broadly, of two types: the Mysteries based upon subjects taken from the Bible; and the Miracles dealing with the lives of saints.

Ans.to Q no.5. A characteristic of the Mystery and the Miracle was the introduction of humorous scenes. The Biblical subject-matter was expanded here and there, and the anonymous author or producer often added comic scenes of his own invention to give variety and diversion. A number of humorous scenes and figures made the stage alive with mirth and merriment. Noah's wife was, for instance, made a comic figure. The shepherds at the Nativity and the sheep stealing episodes also contributed to the humour.

Ans.to Q.6 The Morality plays marks the next stage in the growth of the drama in England after the Miracles and Mystery plays. These plays were also didactic and religious but the characters were personified abstractions and allegorical characters. They were concerned with the confrontation between the personified good and evil powers for the possession of the precious human soul.

Ans.to Q.7 The University Wits were university scholars, members of learned societies and well cultivated by foreign travels. Their historic importance is great, for it were they who paved the way for that free and flexible drama which Shakespeare was to make his own. In the field of comedy, particularly, Lyly's importance is immense. He established high comedy as a form of drama, highly appealing to the people of breeding and culture. Greene's comedies may well be taken as the earliest specimens of the genre of comedy, popularly characterized as the romantic comedy. Shakespeare's great comedies *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* are found effectively anticipated in Greene's plays. Moreover he has also anticipated Shakespeare by mingling pure and simple verse with humorous prose in his comedies.

Ans. to Q.8 Puritanism, in the broadest sense may be regarded as the renaissance of the moral sense of man. It was the greatest movement for moral and political reform. It aimed at (1) religious liberty, which means the freedom of people to worship according to their conscience, and (2) civil liberty. The Puritans wanted to make men honest and free. They stressed on purity of life. In matters of religion they held extreme views. They did not accept the Anglican Church, which was a sort of compromise between the Catholics and the Protestants made during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. They wanted church reforms.

Ans.to Q.9 The age of Jonson was also the age of the decline of the drama. Many factors contributed to it. The dramatists who followed Shakespeare lacked

his greatness and dramatic skill. The Court of James I was corrupt, vulgar and asked for plays with cleverness, sensationalism and violence. The best dramatists of the day pandered to the tastes of the court. Shakespeare had spoken for all the classes. But now the dramatists began to appeal only to a particular group of audience and thus became limited to a very narrow circle. Further dramatic work of the period is characterized by immorality, obscenity, sensationalism, violence and free use of unnatural themes, such as incest and sexual infidelity. Finally, there was the exhaustion of the creative impulse. It became difficult for the later dramatists to find fresh plots or variations of well-worn themes or fresh characters.

Ans.to Q.10 Ben Jonson was a classical dramatist. In theory and practice he adopted the models set up by the ancients. He wrote comedies in imitation of the Greek and Latin conventions, as they were found in the plays of Roman writers like Plautus and Terence. All his life Jonson fought against the fantastic and extravagant qualities of the romantic drama. He wanted to bring in drama classical sanity and restraint. He advocated classical unities in place of romantic exuberance and imagination. He saw classical standards a cure for lawlessness and wanted to establish a realistic and satirical comedy on a rational plan.

Ans.to Q.11 According to the medieval theory of humours there exist four fluids in the human body. These fluids were: blood(which was believed to be hot and moist); phlegm(cold and moist); yellow bile(hot and dry); and black bile(cold and dry) and a man was healthy if these four fluids existed in his body in a state of balance. The excess of any fluid was believed to cause some kind of imbalance in character. These fluids were also known as humours. Jonson himself stated this theory of humours in his prologue to the play *Every Man Out of His Humour*. In short the word “humour” was used in the sense of some individual habit dominating a person, some folly or absurdity, some pretension, or temperamental abnormality, which holds a person in its grip. Jonson endowed each of his characters with some particular whim or affectation, some exaggeration of manner, speech or dress, and he focused all his attention on that single odd trait. This device was employed by him in all his great comedies.

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MODEL QUESTIONS:

- a) Trace the beginning of Jonson's career as a dramatist.
- b) What were the factors for the rise of the Puritans?
- c) Write about the different stages of the growth of drama in England.
- d) Discuss the classical qualities in Jonson's comedies.
- e) Discuss Ben Jonson's contribution to masques.

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Unit II

VOLPONE (Summary and Explanation)

Contents:

- 1.0 Learning Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Background of the play
- 1.3 Explanation of the Text
- 1.4 Major Characters
- 1.5 Major Themes
- 1.6 Let us sum up
- 1.7 Keywords
- 1.8 Suggested Readings
 - Possible answers to CYP
 - Model Questions

1.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Explain the background of the play
- Discuss the content of the play
- Discuss the major characters in the play
- Analyze the main themes in the play

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

In the previous unit we learnt about the life and work of Ben Jonson. We also learnt about the age in which he lived and the classical elements in his comedy. Further we also became acquainted with Jonson's Comedy of 'Humours'. Now in this unit we will attempt to understand the content of the play and also discuss the major characters and themes in the play.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

Volpone (Italian for “sly fox”) is a comedy play by Ben Jonson. It was first performed by the King’s Men in 1605 at the Globe theatre and later both at Oxford and Cambridge, where it was highly appreciated. It was printed in the quarto form in 1607, and then in the collection of Jonson’s works published in the folio form in 1616. A merciless satire on greed and lust, it remains Jonson’s most-performed play, and it is ranked among the finest Jacobean era comedies. It is Jonson’s darkest comedy and fully shows his vigour and energy as a creative artist. Volpone is a savage satire on human greed for gold or wealth. In this play gold has been glorified as a diety. All the principal characters – Volpone, his parasite Mosca, and the legacy hunters Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino, and Lady Would-be are motivated by a single-minded passion for gold and wealth. The world of the play is a world of selfishness and greed and perverted human values. *Volpone* is widely considered by critics to be Jonson’s best play: the one in which his formal and human concerns achieve their most perfect balance.

1.3 EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT

Volpone (the fox) is a Venetian gentleman who loves and worships gold. He has no heir- wife, parent, child or kinsman to whom he can bequeath his wealth. He is free to choose his successor and this fact makes people bring him costly presents and flatter him in the hope that they would be rewarded. Volpone lets this all go on as he is a master in the art of plotting, intriguing and gulling people. In this scheme he is helped by his cunning parasite, Mosca who persuades the legacy-hunters to bring more and more costly presents for him. The three chief clients of Volpone are Voltore, a lawyer, Corbaccio, an old miser, and Corvino, a rich merchant, who has a beautiful wife called Celia. Another prospective heir is Lady Politic Would-be, who is the wife of Sir Politic Would-be, an English traveler. These clients visit Volpone one after another and bring costly presents for him. Volpone pretends to be on his deathbed after a long illness and Mosca encourages each man to believe that he has been named heir to Volpone’s fortune; in the course of which, Mosca persuades Corbaccio to disinherit his own son in favour of Volpone. Mosca also informs Volpone that Corvino has a beautiful wife, Celia, and praises her beauty. Volpone becomes eager to see her and plans to see her at her window in disguise. In the second Act we meet Sir Politic Would-be, Lady Politic’s husband, a self-important man who is conversing with Peregrine, a young English traveler who has just landed in Venice. Sir Politic takes a liking to the young boy and vows to teach him a thing or two about Venice and Venetians; Peregrine, too, enjoys the company of Sir Politic, but only because he is hilariously gullible and vain. The two are walking in

the public square in front of Corvino's house and are interrupted by the arrival of "Scoto Mantua." Actually Volpone, disguised as Scoto of Mantua, the famous Italian juggler and mountebank, comes to perform under a window of Corvino's house. Scoto engages in a long and colorful speech, about his new "oil", which is presented as a cure-all for disease and suffering. At the end of the speech, he asks the people to toss him their handkerchiefs, and Celia complies. But Corvino arrives on the scene and drives away "Scoto" (Volpone), who then becomes insistent that he must possess Celia as his own. Meanwhile Corvino scolds his wife bitterly for damaging his honour and imposes heavy restrictions on her movements. Just then Mosca arrives and deceives Corvino into believing that the weak and impotent Volpone will be cured of his illness if he lies in bed beside a young woman. Believing that Volpone has been rendered impotent by his illness, Corvino offers his wife in order that, when he is revived, Volpone will make Corvino his sole heir.

In the third Act we find Mosca meeting Bonario and inform the young man of his father's plans to disinherit him. He has Bonario come back to Volpone's house with him, in order to watch Corbaccio sign the documents (hoping that Bonario might kill Corbaccio then and there out of rage, thus allowing Volpone to gain his inheritance early). Meanwhile Lady Politic arrives at Volpone's residence and greatly irritates Volpone with her talkativeness. Mosca rescues Volpone by telling the Lady that Sir Politic has been seen in a gondola with a courtesan (a high-class prostitute). Volpone then prepares for his seduction of Celia, while Mosca hides Bonario in a corner of the bedroom, in anticipation of Corbaccio's arrival. But Celia and Corvino arrive first—Celia complains bitterly about being forced to be unfaithful, while Corvino tells her to be quiet and do her job. When Celia and Volpone are alone together, Volpone, first attempts to seduce her with fantastic promises of luxury and wealth. But when all his passionate speeches fail, he tries to rape her. But Bonario, who has been witnessing the scene from his hiding place the entire time, rescues Celia. Bonario wounds Mosca on his way out. Volpone feels greatly distressed at this mischance, and fears to be exposed, defamed and ruined. Mosca too feels confused and not know what to do. Now Corbaccio finally arrives, as does Voltore. Mosca, now tells Corbaccio that his son somehow came to know of his intention of disinheriting him. So he forcibly entered the house with a sword and threatened to kill both him and Volpone. Corbaccio is very angry and says that he will disinherit him in reality and hands over his will to Mosca. Meanwhile Voltore has overheard this conversation and begins to doubt Mosca's intentions. But Mosca again deceives him by convincing him that all this were done for the benefit of Voltore, so that he could inherit the property of both Volpone and Corbaccio. Mosca now plots, with Voltore's assistance, how to get Volpone out of this mess.

Act four begins with Peregrine and Sir Politic engaged in a conversation. Sir Politic gives the young traveler some advice on living in Venice and describes several schemes he has under consideration for making a great deal of money. They are soon interrupted by Lady Politic, who is convinced that Peregrine is the prostitute in male disguise Mosca told her about. She abuses Peregrine in strong terms. But Mosca arrives and tells Lady Politic that she is mistaken; the courtesan he referred to is now in front of the Senate (in other words, Celia). Lady Would-be immediately realizes her mistake, and apologizes to Peregrine. But Peregrine becomes sure that she is a woman of loose character and it was all a plot to entrap him. He resolves to take revenge on Sir Politic and humiliate him. The scene of action now shifts to the Scrutineo, the Venetian Senate building, where the case against Volpone is to be tried. Celia and Bonario inform the judges of Venice about Volpone's deceit, Volpone's attempt to rape Celia, Corbaccio's disinheritance of his son, and Corvino's decision to prostitute his wife. But the defendants make a very good case for themselves, led by their lawyer, Voltore. Voltore portrays Bonario and Celia as lovers, Corvino as an innocent jilted husband, and Corbaccio as a wounded father nearly killed by his evil son. The judges are swayed when Lady Politic comes in and identifies Celia as the seducer of her husband Sir Politic. Further, they are convinced when Volpone enters the courtroom, again acting ill. The judges order that Celia and Bonario be arrested and separated, as they are the real culprits.

In the final Act, Volpone decides to engage in one final prank on the legacy hunters. He spreads a rumor that he has died and then tells Mosca to pretend that he has been made his master's heir. The plan goes off perfectly, and all three legacy hunters are fooled. Volpone then disguises himself as a Venetian sergeant, so that he can tease and torture the legacy hunters to the best of his capacity without being recognized. But Mosca lets the audience know that Volpone is dead in the eyes of the world and that Mosca will not let him "return to the world of the living" unless Volpone pays up, giving Mosca a share of his wealth. Meanwhile, Peregrine in the disguise of a merchant takes revenge upon Sir Politic Would-be. He informs Politic that word has gotten out of his plan to sell Venice to the Turks. Politic, who once mentioned the idea in jest, is terrified. When three merchants who are Peregrine's partners knock on the door, Politic jumps into a tortoise-shell wine case to save himself. The merchants then rush in and enquire after him. They see the tortoise-shell in which Sir Politic is lying hidden, and beat it, jump upon it, and say to Peregrine that they want to see it creep. Sir Politic creeps on the floor. The merchants, then pull off the shell and discover him. In this way they all humiliate Sir Politic and make fun of him. Peregrine then reveals his identity and tells Sir Politic that he has revenged himself upon him. Sir Politic feels greatly humiliated and befooled, and decides to leave the country forever.

Meanwhile Volpone derives great fun in teasing and tormenting the legacy-hunters without being recognized. He takes every opportunity in tormenting his victims with his ironical remarks. But his plan backfires. Voltore, in a state of distress decides to reveal the truth. He confesses before the court that he has done a great offence in accusing the innocents, Bonario and Celia and begs to be pardoned. He also accuses Mosca of being the plotter and main culprit. Volpone, Corvino and Corbaccio are greatly surprised. Corvino tries to convince the magistrate that Voltore has gone mad. He also informs the court that Volpone is dead and Mosca is now the heir. However Voltore sticks to his declaration and hands certain papers to the magistrates, which contain a written account of the whole case. The court finds all this confusing and they wait for Mosca to come and clear all doubts. Meanwhile, Volpone disguised as a commandator whispers to Voltore that Mosca has sent word that his master is still alive and Voltore is still the man chosen to be his heir. Voltore is again convinced and on the advice of Volpone pretends to be possessed by the devil, so as to retract his statement. Now Mosca arrives dressed as a gentleman. Volpone whispers to Mosca to declare that he (Volpone) is alive. But Mosca demands half of his property. Volpone angrily refuses. Mosca then declares that his master is dead and he was delayed because he was busy in the funeral. Volpone now finds himself in a hopeless situation and agrees to share half of his property with Mosca. But Mosca does not agree even to that. Realizing that he has been betrayed, Volpone decides that rather than let Mosca inherit his wealth, he will turn them both in. Volpone takes off his disguise and finally reveals the truth about the events of the past day. Bonario and Celia are set free, Mosca is sentenced to imprisonment for his whole life, Volpone's property is confiscated and sent to prison. Voltore is disbarred, Corbaccio is stripped of his property (which is given to his son Bonario), and Corvino is publicly humiliated, forced to wear donkey's ears while being rowed around the canals of Venice. His wife Celia, is to be sent home to her father with her dowry trebled. Thus the play ends on a happy note. The criminals are exposed and punished, and the innocents are set free and rewarded.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

Q1. When was the play *Volpone* first performed?

Ans.....
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Q2. Who is Volpone?

Ans.....
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Q3. What is the role of Mosca?

Ans.....
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Q4. How do the legacy-hunters try to please Volpone?

Ans.....
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Q5. Why do Volpone disguise as Scoto of Mantua?

Ans.....
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Q6. What happens when Celia is left alone with Volpone?

Ans.....
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Q7. How do Voltore and the other legacy-hunters defend Volpone in the court?

Ans.....
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Q8. What happens at the end?

Ans.....
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1.4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

Volpone (or the Fox)

Volpone, along with Mosca, is the most important character in this comedy of intrigues. He is a greedy, childless Venetian nobleman. He is lustful, lecherous and greedy for pleasure. He is also at the same time a rare villain, a great poet, an expert imposter, an unscrupulous schemer and an accomplished actor. He is the most individualized and diversified character in the play. He worships his gold which he has acquired through deceitful means. The fact that, he is wealthy; and without any family, attracts the gulls more easily. His rank and position not only facilitate his frauds, but also influence the court in awarding him comparatively less rigorous punishment. But he does not have the polish and sophistication of a person of his rank and position. What he possesses is cunning, love for playing tricks and making new schemes to trick people, assuming various disguises to achieve his ends. He takes great delight in the tricks he plays for their own sake. His zest in scheming and great enthusiasm exposes himself to being cheated by his own servant. He is also a great poet. His hymn to gold, with which the play opens, is a rich specimen of his poetic powers. Similarly, when he attempts to seduce Celia he speaks in the language of a great poet. Volpone also has a love and passion for acting. He is an expert in assuming various disguises. He plays several roles and all of them are played with perfect skill and credibility.

Mosca(the Fly):

Mosca is Volpone's parasite. Like a true parasite he is always ready to satisfy his master's desires and help him in all matters. He is a very resourceful man and feels proud of his accomplishments. He has a high opinion of his profession. He is a highly individualized character and can adjust himself to any situation. He can take each legacy hunter into his confidence, and convince him by his manner of talking. He is not one of those who flatter their patrons to eke out a living, but can put his wits to better advantage. It is in his nature to take great risks. However, there is a great drawback in Mosca. Like his master he becomes too much involved and gets carried away by the jest of the game. He does not know when to stop and this proves to be his undoing. In the end he over-reaches himself and comes to grief. Finding himself in a better position than his master, he tries to cheat him of all his wealth. His growing confidence eventually brings him into conflict with Volpone and destroys them both.

Voltore (the Vulture):

Voltore, one of the legacy hunters is a lawyer by profession. He is intellectually sharp and fluent in speech. But he is also greedy and has an insatiable lust for wealth. This weakness of his is exploited by Mosca. He has full faith in

Mosca and easily believes what he says. He strongly believes that Mosca is working for his benefit. He betrays his profession to fulfill his selfish ends. He not only supports the wrong doers but also commits the sin of perjury in the court. He pleads on behalf of the culprits and uses all his intellectual power and fluency in speech to prove the innocents guilty. He gets Volpone acquitted of the charge of raping Celia. In the court he proves that Volpone is a weak and impotent old man, Celia is a woman of loose character and Bonario is her lover. The magistrates are easily deceived by his clever and argumentative skill and led to believe that Bonario and Celia are the real culprits. Thus, as a lawyer he is a liar and a villain in nature. He brings disrepute to his profession by telling lies in the court of law. In the end, however, in a state of distress he decides to reveal the truth. He confesses before the court that he has done a great offence in accusing the innocents, Bonario and Celia and begs to be pardoned. He also accuses Mosca of being the plotter and main culprit. As a punishment, he is banished from the state of Venice as well as from his profession. Ben Jonson, in satirizing Voltore, has satirized the entire profession of lawyers.

Corvino (the Crow):

Corvino, a rich merchant, is Celia's husband. He is a vile and dishonorable character who does not hesitate to offer his wife to Volpone to satisfy his selfish ends. At the beginning, he appears as a jealous husband who is very sensitive of his honour. He is fully aware of his wife's beauty and physical charms and has kept ten guards to keep watch over her. When Celia appears at the window, he gets enraged. He scolds her bitterly, makes vulgar remarks and threatens her of dire consequences for thus damaging his honour. He treats her brutally and unkindly. But he is also suffers from greed and has an insatiable lust for wealth. On Mosca's suggestion, he agrees to offer his wife to Volpone and he is so eager in this matter that he takes her to Volpone's house even before Mosca could send for him. His eagerness in this matter surprises even Mosca and leads to the failure of his carefully laid plans. Corvino, even does not hesitate to accuse his wife in the court and gives false evidence against her.

Corbaccio (the raven):

Corbaccio, the raven, is actually an old weak man and is much more likely to die before Volpone. Yet he foolishly hopes to survive Volpone, and enjoy his riches. He has a hearing problem and last to understand any problem or situation. His deafness is the cause of much fun in the play. His greed makes him an unnatural father and very cruel to his son. He plans to disinherit his son, Bonario, in favour of Volpone. Bonario is an upright and obedient son. But greed for wealth makes corbaccio blind even to the character and virtues of his son. He is as gullible as the rest of the legacy hunters and fully believes that Mosca is working

for his benefit .He is misled by Mosca to believe that his son has plotted against him and committed adultery with Celia. In the court he openly abuses his son and disinherits him.he in fact, a weak character. He is credulous, greedy, slow-witted and easily fooled by Mosca. At the end the Venetian court punishes him by transferring all his property to his son and banishing him to a Monastery to live till his death.

Celia:

Celia is the wife of Corvino. She is extremely beautiful and is known to be the most beautiful lady in Venice. She comes across as a good and pious lady and devoted to her husband, even though he treats her horribly. When she is persuaded by her husband to yield to Volpone’s pleasures, she is horrified. She fails to understand this change in his behavior and appeals to his sense of honour. With Volpone she refused to be seduced by all his promises of wealth and luxury and thwarts all his advances. She is rescued by Bonario when Volpone attempts to rape her. She does not deserve a husband like Corvino and at the court sends her to her father’s home with her dowry trebled.

Bonario:

Bonario is the son of Corbaccio. He is an upright and obedient son even though his father fails to see his character and virtues. He heroically rescues Celia from Volpone’s clutches and represents bravery and honor which the other characters lack. He also falls a victim to Mosca’s tricks when the latter meets him and convinces him that his father has decided to disown him. At the end, he and Celia are set free and his father’s property is transferred to him.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.9 Comment on the character of Volpone.

Ans.....

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Q10. How is Mosca a true parasite?
Ans.....
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1.5 MAJOR THEMES:

GREED:

Volpone is a savage satire on human avarice for gold, or greed for wealth. In this play, gold has been glorified and worshipped as a deity. All the principal characters – Volpone, his parasite Mosca, and the legacy hunters, Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino and lady Would-be – are motivated by a single-minded devotion to gold and wealth. They live and move in a world which is dominated by greed and perverted human values. The pattern of the play is set in the first twenty-seven lines of the play which contain Volpone’s celebrated invocation of gold. He hails gold as his own soul and also as the soul of the world. The world of Volpone is very materialistic and gold-centered. Gold becomes the symbol of worldly prosperity and is the driving force of most of the evil in the play. It is the greed of gold which makes Corbaccio disinherit his son, Corvino to become ready to offer his wife to Volpone, and Voltore to disgrace his legal profession and openly accuse the innocents in the court. Even lady Would-be, was ready at one stage to offer herself to Mosca to inherit Volpone’s property. Even Celia’s beauty is praised by Mosca in terms of gold:

“Bright as your gold, and lovely as your gold.”

The gold-centered world of Volpone is also an image of the materialistic culture of the Renaissance. The Renaissance was an age of the revival of learning and the liberation of human thought. There was a strong urge to extend the frontiers of knowledge and scientific advancement. This spirit is reflected not only in the people’s thirst for intellectual attainments but also for material power and glory. The excessive love of money and power led to the degradation of human character and values. The characters in the play are motivated by selfishness and greed, and deceive one another to acquire wealth.

ANIMALIZATION:

Volpone is a beast fable with the character's names associated with the names of animals. Fables are tales with simple moral messages, told for a didactic purpose. There is a cunning Fox (Volpone in Italian) who with the help of his Fly (Mosca) tricks several carrion-birds like a vulture (*Voltore*), a crow (*Corvino*) and a raven (*Corbaccio*). By giving them animalistic names, Jonson wanted to give us an insight into the corrupt nature of each character. By naming them after birds of prey, he wanted us to see these characters as 'scavengers' whose action can be interpreted as a primitive and brutal fight for Volpone's wealth. The beast/animal imagery seen in the language of the play is used to represent the moral depravity and degeneration of the characters and to portray Venice as a hot-bed of crime and lust.

PARASITISM:

Parasitism is a predominant theme of the play. Mosca in a soliloquy expresses his opinion that parasitism is a universal principle and that everyone is a parasite. Although Mosca is the main parasite, Corvino, Voltore, Corbaccio can also be considered parasites. They all want to live off of the wealth or livelihood of others; they all try to inherit the fortune of a dying man by winning his good will. Volpone's entire scam depends on Mosca's ability to fleece the other characters through cunning and deceit. Thus, we can say that, Volpone, Mosca and the clients are in fact, all competing parasites.

DECEPTION:

Like greed, deception pervades the whole play. Most of the characters try to out-do each other through deception and cunning. Mosca deceives all the legacy hunters into believing that he shall be made the sole heir of Volpone's fortunes. Volpone is so much in love with his ability to outsmart others that he does not know when to stop. And this proves to be his undoing. Even Mosca too revels in his ability to beguile others. In Volpone, Ben Jonson emphasizes the fun and the humor of deceit, but in the end all the deceivers are punished.

APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY:

What each of the characters understands as reality is not the truth. Each of the legacy hunters are deceived into thinking that he/she would be made the sole heir of Volpone's fortune. Corbaccio is deceived into disinheriting his own son in order to satisfy Volpone. Corvino is willing to offer his wife to Volpone thinking that the latter is too ill to take advantage. Voltore deceives the court and is punished when his deception is revealed. The reality is that each one is exposed and punished in the end. Even Mosca, whom Volpone trusts the most, also deceives his master.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q11. Discuss the use of animal imagery in the play.

Ans.....
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Q12. What is the role of deception in the play?

Ans.....
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1.6 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you will be able to discuss the Act-wise content of the play. The major characters have been discussed and the emergent themes have been highlighted for your detailed understanding of the play. The aim of this unit is to arouse your curiosity and interest to read the other plays of Ben Jonson.

1.7 KEY WORDS

- Avarice – An extreme greed for wealth or material gain.
- Imagery – *Imagery* means to use figurative language to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses. Usually it is thought that *imagery* makes use of particular words that create visual representation of ideas in our minds. The word *imagery* is associated with mental pictures.
- Beast Fable – the Beast fable or Animal fable, is usually a short story or poem, in which animals talk. It is a traditional form of allegorical writing.

Examples include the Panchatantra, Aesop fables, One thousand and One nights etc.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

- 1) Harp, Richard and Stewart, Stanley, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2000. Print.
- 2) Riggs, David. *Ben Jonson*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989. Print.

ANSWERS TO CYP:

Ans.to Q.1 *Volpone* (Italian for “sly fox”) is a comedy play by Ben Jonson. It was first performed by the King’s Men in 1605 at the Globe theatre and later both at Oxford and Cambridge, where it was highly appreciated.

Ans. to Q.2 Volpone (the fox) is a Venetian gentleman who loves and worships gold. He has no heir- wife, parent, child or kinsman to whom he can bequeath his wealth. He is free to choose his successor and this fact makes people bring him costly presents and flatter him in the hope that they would be rewarded.

Ans. to Q.3 Mosca is Volpone’s parasite. Like a true parasite he is always ready to satisfy his master’s desires and help him in all matters. He is a very resourceful man and feels proud of his accomplishments. He persuades the legacy-hunters to bring more and more costly presents and encourages each man to believe that he has been named heir to Volpone’s fortune

Ans. to Q.4 The legacy-hunters bring costly gifts for Volpone and flatter him in the hope that he/she would be made the heir to Volpone’s fortune.

Ans.to Q.5 Mosca informs Volpone that Corvino has a beautiful wife, Celia, and praises her beauty. Volpone becomes eager to see her and plans to see her at her window in disguise. So he disguises himself as Scoto of Mantua.

Ans. to Q.6 When Celia and Volpone are alone together, Volpone, first attempts to seduce her with fantastic promises of luxury and wealth. But when all his passionate speeches fail, he tries to rape her. But Bonario, who has been witnessing the scene from his hiding place the entire time, rescues Celia.

Ans. to Q.7 Voltore portrays Bonario and Celia as lovers, Corvino as an innocent jilted husband, and Corbaccio as a wounded father nearly killed by his evil son.

The judges are swayed when Lady Politic comes in and identifies Celia as the seducer of her husband Sir Politic. Further, they are convinced when Volpone enters the courtroom, again acting ill. The judges order that Celia and Bonario be arrested and separated, as they are the real culprits.

Ans. to Q.8 At the end Volpone enraged with Mosca's behavior takes off his disguise and reveals everything. The culprits are then punished and Bonario and Celia are declared as innocents and set free.

Ans. to Q.9 Volpone, along with Mosca, is the most important character in this comedy of intrigues. He is a greedy, childless Venetian nobleman. He is lustful, lecherous and greedy for pleasure. He is also at the same time a rare villain, a great poet, an expert imposter, an unscrupulous schemer and an accomplished actor. He is the most individualized and diversified character in the play. He worships his gold which he has acquired through deceitful means. He loves playing tricks and making new schemes to deceive people, assuming various disguises to achieve his ends. He takes great delight in the tricks he plays for their own sake. His zest in scheming and great enthusiasm exposes himself to being cheated by his own servant.

Ans. to Q.10 Mosca is Volpone's parasite. Like a true parasite he is always ready to satisfy his master's desires and help him in all matters. He is a very resourceful man and feels proud of his accomplishments. He has a high opinion of his profession. He is a highly individualized character and can adjust himself to any situation. He can take each legacy hunter into his confidence, and convince him by his manner of talking. It is in his nature to take great risks. However, there is a great drawback in Mosca. Like his master he becomes too much involved and gets carried away by the jest of the game. He does not know when to stop and this proves to be his undoing. In the end he over-reaches himself and comes to grief.

Ans. to Q.11 *Volpone* is a beast fable with the character's names associated with the names of animals. Fables are tales with simple moral messages, told for a didactic purpose. There is a cunning Fox (Volpone in Italian) who with the help of his Fly (Mosca) tricks several carrion-birds like a vulture (*Voltore*), a crow (*Corvino*) and a raven (*Corbaccio*). By giving them animalistic names, Jonson wanted to give us an insight into the corrupt nature of each character. By naming them after birds of prey, he wanted us to see these characters as 'scavengers' whose action can be interpreted as a primitive and brutal fight for Volpone's wealth. The beast/animal imagery seen in the language of the play is used to represent the moral depravity and degeneration of the characters and to portray Venice as a hot-bed of crime and lust.

Ans. to Q. 12 Like greed, deception pervades the whole play. Most of the characters try to out-do each other through deception and cunning. Mosca deceives all the legacy hunters into believing that he shall be made the sole heir of Volpone's fortunes. Volpone is so much in love with his ability to outsmart others that he does not know when to stop. And this proves to be his undoing. Even Mosca too revels in his ability to beguile others. In *Volpone*, Ben Jonson emphasizes the fun and the humor of deceit, but in the end all the deceivers are punished.

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- Sellergren, Andrew. Miller, W.C. ed. "*Volpone Themes*". *GradeSaver*, 2 November 2006 Web. 30 July 2017.
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MODEL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Discuss *Volpone* from the point of view of the observance of the three unities.
- 2) Write a note on Jonson's art of characterization in *Volpone*.
- 3) Discuss *Volpone* as a study of human avarice for gold, or greed for wealth.
- 4) Show how far *Volpone* illustrates Jonson's theory of comedy.

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Unit III:
**VOLPONE – PLOT STRUCTURE, ENDING,
REALISM, SATIRE**

Contents:

- 1.0 Learning Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Plot Structure
- 1.3 The Ending of *Volpone*
- 1.4 *Volpone* as a comedy of humour
- 1.5 Realism and satire in *Volpone*
- 1.6 Ben Jonson's Contribution to English comedy
- 1.7 Let us sum up
- 1.8 Keywords
- 1.9 Suggested Readings
 - Possible Answers to Check Your Progress
 - References
 - Model Questions

1.0 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to:

- Discuss the plot- structure of the play.
- Understand the catastrophic ending of the play.
- Discuss the classical elements in *Volpone*.
- Discuss *Volpone* as a comedy of humour.
- Comment on Ben Jonson's contribution to English drama.

1.2 PLOT STRUCTURE

The plot of *Volpone* is considered to be well-knit. Though there are various threads, Jonson handles the plot very skillfully and suspense gradually

increases with the progression of events. Human avarice or extreme greed for wealth or material gain is the main theme of the play and each character has his or her own small action which nevertheless forms an integral part of the play. However the plot has some imperfections too.

Jonson observes the three classical unities of Time, Place and Action in his plays. He was a classicist and wanted to give a realistic picture of the society of his times. In *Volpone*, he observes the unities of time and place closely. The action of the play is restricted to one day. The play opens after sunrise, Voltore visits Volpone early in the morning. Volpone plays the part of the mountebank early in the forenoon. The trial scene takes place in the afternoon, and it is announced that the judgement will be given before night. Regarding unity of place, the entire action takes place in only one city – Venice. But the unity of Action has not been fully observed. In *Volpone* the episodes of Sir Politic and Peregrine are not absolutely necessary to the whole structure. They are not an integral part of the play and this seems to be an obvious flaw from the structural point of view.

The first Act introduces the theme, characters and the atmosphere of the play. Volpone's opening speech sets the tone of the play. It introduces the theme of avarice and also shows the world of the play where gold is worshipped as a deity. Volpone's nature is revealed when he says that he feels happier "more in the cunning purchase of wealth than in the glad possession", and Mosca, like a true parasite supports his master. Then we have the strange episode of the dwarf, the eunuch and the hermaphrodite where they perform a play for the entertainment of Volpone. Structurally, it is part of the play for it shows the reversal of values shown in Volpone's opening speech and also prepares us for the arrival of the legacy-hunters. The three attendants of Volpone are physically deformed, while the three clients have become monsters of wickedness due to their greed. Thus the atmosphere of the play is indicated in the very beginning of the play. Before the act comes to a close, two other threads are introduced. Lady Would-be is asked to come three hours later and Mosca excites Volpone's curiosity about Celia.

The second Act introduces the complication that is Volpone's desire for Celia. The introduction of the episode of Sir Politic and Peregrine provides some relief from the grim world of greed and perverted values in the previous scene. Sir Politic tries to impress Peregrine with his practical knowledge of the world and life, but ends up by revealing his own stupidity. Volpone appears as a medicine-man in order to catch a glimpse of Celia. He displays his wit and resourcefulness in high flown poetic language. However his progress is cut short when Corvino arrives on the scene and gives him a good beating. Corvino's nature is now revealed to us when he scolds Celia and threatens her with violence.

The third Act opens with Mosca's soliloquy in praise of parasitism as a profession. In this act, the plotting reaches its climax. Mosca convinces Bonario, Corbaccio's son about his father's plan to disinherit him and hides him in a corner of the bedroom, in anticipation of Corbaccio's arrival. Then there is an interlude provided by the trio of grotesque figures followed by the arrival of Lady Would-be who greatly bores Volpone with her lengthy talks. However, Corvino arrives much before than it was decided and upsets the plan. When left alone with Celia, Volpone, at first, tries to woo her with poetic language and magnificent visions of worldly glory. But when all this fails, he attempts to rape her. However she is rescued when Bonario arrives on the scene. Volpone and Mosca are now faced with a crises and imminent ruin. But Mosca is very resourcefull and brings the situation under control.

The trial scene in act four is a great achievement on the part of the dramatist. It shows the triumph of vice and the defeat of virtue. In the court truth is deliberately manipulated and perverted and facts are distorted. Corbaccio disowns his son publicly, Corvino accuses his wife of having illicit affair with Bonario and lady Would-be gives false evidence against Celia. Lady Would-be's role is important to the plot. Volpone arrives on his sick bed. Thus everything goes against Celia and Bonario and they are convicted. Evil seems to have won.

However, Act V brings about the downfall of the villains. The two main villains overreach themselves and do not know when to stop. Their zest and wantonness prepares the way for their downfall. Volpone takes great delight in mocking his victims which leads the desperate Voltore to reveal all. Mosca too decides to cheat his master by demanding all his property. All this leads to the climax and finally everything is exposed. The birds of prey are banished or disgraced. Jonson winds up the play with true poetic justice where all the evil doers are punished and the virtuous rewarded.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1 Is *Volpone* a well-knit play? How?

Ans.....
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Q.2 Comment on Jonson's observance of the three unities in the play.

Ans.....

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Q.3 How is Act IV a great achievement on the part of the dramatist?

Ans.....

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1.3 THE ENDING OF VOLPONE

The catastrophic ending of *Volpone* has been the subject of criticism by some critics. Some Critics have found it unconvincing as it does not proceed naturally from the Fourth Act, while some others think that it is too severe and harsh and borders on tragedy. It is significant to note that the catastrophe is brought about by Volpone and Mosca themselves, and not by other characters. They become too ambitious in their scheming and this leads to their downfall. There are many critics who find the last act unconvincing. Dryden, for instance, finds a fault in the unity of design of the play. He however defends the final act on the grounds that Volpone's disguise agreed with his character as a voluptuary and by it the dramatist achieved what he aimed at – the punishment of vice and the reward of virtue. Richard Cumberland also does not find the ending of Volpone convincing. He thinks that Jonson has not very successfully executed it, and that it is not in keeping with the character of Volpone. Swinburne, however strongly defends the ending of Volpone and finds it incomparable in comedy in terms of completeness, propriety and effect.

Volpone is a forceful play and presents a horrifying and disgusting vision of life. Jonson's aim in this play was to expose the contemporary follies of his times. He himself acknowledges that the ending of the play is harsh and out of

tune with the comic spirit of times. But he defends his departure from comic traditions on the grounds that the classical comedies also did not always have a happy ending. He is of the opinion that it is the function of the comic poet “to imitate justice and instruct to life.” It should be remembered that Jonson’s plays are didactic and moral in tone. He took his job of a critic seriously and the moralist in him could not allow evil to go unpunished in the end. In the Dedication to the play he makes his objective clear. He apologizes to his critics for the semi-tragic ending to his play and asks them to be liberal in passing judgements. In the words of the magistrate he places before the audience and critics the moral lesson of the play:

“Mischiefs feed
Like beasts, till they be fat, and then they bleed.”

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.4 What faults do the critics generally find with the ending of the play?

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Q.5 On what grounds does Jonson defend his departure from tradition regarding the ending of the play?

Ans.....
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1.4 VOLPONE AS A COMEDY OF HUMOUR

Ben Jonson was a classical dramatist. In theory and practice he adopted the models set up by the ancients. He wrote comedies in imitation of the Greek and Latin conventions, as they were found in the plays of writers like Plautus and Terence. By the beginning of the 17th century, there was a reaction against the outmoded forms and conventions of Elizabethan drama. In the sphere of drama this movement was led by Jonson. He represents the revolt against Elizabethan literary tradition. He was a conscious artist and advocated the theory that comedy should deal with real life rather than fantasy. He wanted to establish classical norms as a permanent cure of the absurdities of the English romantic drama.

The term 'humour' which is often used to denote some predominant trait of character, comes from medieval theory. According to the medieval theory of humours there exist four fluids in the human body. These fluids were: blood(which was believed to be hot and moist); phlegm(cold and moist); yellow bile(hot and dry); and black bile(cold and dry). According to medieval medicine, a man was healthy if these four fluids existed in his body in a state of balance. The excess of any fluid was believed to cause some kind of imbalance in character. These fluids were also known as humours. The theory of these four fluids became more complex in the hands of Richard Burton who elaborated the theory in his famous book, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Jonson himself stated this theory of humours in his prologue to the play *Every Man Out of His Humour*. In short the word "humour" was used in the sense of some individual habit dominating a person, some folly or absurdity, some pretension, or temperamental abnormality, which holds a person in its grip. And Jonson believed that it was possible to rid a person of his particular humour by means of ridicule. Thus he saw comedy as having a corrective function and his own plays were intended to accomplish this. Jonson endowed each of his characters with some particular whim or affectation, some exaggeration of manner, speech or dress, and he focused all his attention on that single trait to the exclusion of all. This device was employed by him in all his great comedies. His characters are dominated by a single ruling trait or passion. From this point of view they are different from the characters of Shakespeare, who presents a fascinating complexity of human behavior and conduct in his plays. However, as a 'comedy of humours' *Volpone* differs from some other plays of Jonson like *Every man in his Humour* and *Every man out of His Humour*. This play deals with only one dominant passion or 'humour', while the other plays deal with several traits or 'humours' of characters. Further, the two main characters – Volpone and Mosca – apart from being greedy show certain other traits in their characters which are equally powerful. For instance, Volpone is also a good actor and poet. He loves disguises and takes great delight in the discomfiture of others. He has an individuality of his own. Similarly, Mosca loves

his skill in devising plans and fooling others. He is a true parasite and glorifies his profession. He is very resourceful and can “change a visor swifter than a thought”. He loves his skill in devising plans and greatly enjoys fooling others. Thus we see the two major characters displaying a variety of interests, complexity and range of activities. They have their own separate individualities and cannot be fitted into the restricted scope of the comedy of humours.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.6 How is *Volpone* different from other comedies of humour of Ben Jonson?

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Q.7 In what sense did Jonson use the word humour?

Ans.....
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1.5 REALISM AND SATIRE IN VOLPONE

Jonson was a realist and satirist. His plays were didactic and had a moral purpose. He assigned a high and serious purpose to comedy. He advocated greater order and decorum in comedy and wanted it to represent the life and manners of his day in a satirical tone so that reforms may be brought about in society. According to Jonson a comedy should aim at truth to life. Both action and character must be keeping with the normal and the customary. Characters in drama must be typical of the class to which they belong. There should be no inconsistencies or incongruities. As a classicist Jonson followed the principle of keeping the tragic and the comic separate. He opposed the writers of romantic comedy who mingled the tragic and comic elements. To him the main purpose of

comedy was to make men laugh, not for the sake of laughter but out of their follies and mistakes. Jonson's characters are conceived in terms of the theory of humour. He concentrates on one ruling trait or passion of his characters to the exclusion of others. Thus he differs from Shakespeare who presents the fascinating complexity of human behaviour. Jonson's characters are real men and women seen from a particular angle and are true to life. He believed that the aim of the comic dramatist is to imitate and hold up to ridicule men's follies in character and conduct, so as to correct them. This emphasis on realism led him to confine his comedy to an image of the times.

The characters in *Volpone* are dominated by a master passion –avarice for gold, or greed for wealth which affects the whole group. All the principal characters – Volpone, his parasite Mosca, the legacy-hunters –Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino and Lady Would-be – are motivated by a single-minded devotion and passion for wealth and material gains. Every action in the play is motivated directly or indirectly by greed. The characters live and move in a world dominated by greed and perverted human values. Jonson, through these characters criticized and ridiculed the absurd passion of the rich to become richer, which he felt tainted his time. The theme of legacy-hunting or *captatio* existed in Rome. The practice of offering gifts to a wealthy, childless old man on the brink of death in expectation of rewards was found in Rome. Such characters have been criticized and ridiculed in Roman literature by writers like Horace, Juvenal and Pliny. Jonson found this Roman custom of *captatio* very suitable for his dramatic purposes and used it in his play. Further, the use of Venice as a setting for the play also fulfilled the same purpose. Jonson and his contemporaries associated Venice with vice, luxury, lust and crime. He wanted to portray the meanness, greed, selfishness and various other vices of man. And Venice seemed to be the perfect place for the purpose of ridiculing human greed and lust for gold.

Volpone is also a satire on the materialistic culture of the Renaissance. The Renaissance led to a thirst in the people not only for intellectual attainments but also for worldly glory. There was the emergence of a materialistic and utilitarian attitude in life. The excessive love for wealth and glory led to the degradation of human values. *Volpone* is a reflection of such a culture. All the characters are motivated by selfishness and greed and deceive one another. They are the targets of the Jonson's satire. Even Sir Politic and his wife Lady Would-be are objects of the dramatist's ridicule. He is a pompous, artificial knight who thinks that he has a vast knowledge and experience of the world. But in reality he is shallow, superficial and can be easily fooled. His wife is also a superficial character who gives much importance to continental fashions and appearance. Similarly, Jonson criticizes the courtiers, the usurers, the mill-owners, the doctors, the puritans and the entrepreneurs of his time. Thus, *Volpone* is a true satire on the evils of the age.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.8 What is the true purpose of comedy according to Jonson?

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Q.9. Why did Jonson choose Venice as the setting for the play?

Ans.....
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1.6 CONTRIBUTION OF BEN JONSON TO ENGLISH DRAMA

Of the contemporaries of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson is, perhaps, the most widely-known name in the history of English drama. We find in him a classical scholar, with a clear vision and a deep sense of realism. Regarded as the first great neo-classical author, he is remembered much for his revolt against the uncontrolled romantic exuberance of romantic Elizabethan literature. To Jonson belongs the credit of infusing successfully social realism into the field of comedy. To him owes the origin of the realistic comedy of humour. He brought to the comic world realistic plots, characterization and dramatic monologue. In the *Prologue* to his most popular play, *Every Man in His Humour*, he declared his objective to present no thrilling romantic episode, no sensational stage-trick, but to present human follies and hold them up to ridicule. Ben Jonson's comedy of humour follows the classical model and introduces the element of humour to ridicule different types of men and women. His purpose is to bring out the imbalance in the human temper as a result of the lack of proportions of these humours. In *Volpone*, Jonson introduced several characters who somehow or other suffer from the excess of humour. All the main characters suffer from an

excessive lust for money and wealth. Jonson's purpose is to show men, not merely as human beings influenced by social forces, but as creatures, dominated by obsessions or ruling passions. The comedies of humour, as introduced by Jonson, are distinctly different from the romantic comedy of Shakespeare or his predecessors. Jonson's comedies are more natural, realistic and opposed to Shakespeare's idealistic, romantic and imaginative comedies.

The influence of the Jonsonian comedies of humour can be distinctly seen in the later English comedies. The comedy of manners of the Restoration, the anti-sentimental comedy of the 18th century and the purpose comedy of modern times are found more or less inspired by Jonson's comedy of humour. Jonson had a wide influence not only in his own time but also on succeeding dramatists. He was imitated by a number of writers like Chapman, Brome, Field and Shadwell. Jonson's contribution to comedy consists in his realism and in the creation of 'humour' characters treated satirically.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.10 Comment on Jonson's contribution to comedy.

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Q.11. What influence did Jonson have on the later dramatists?

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1.7 LET US SUM UP:

After having gone through the unit, you will be able to examine the plot structure of *Volpone* and discuss the ending of the play. Also you will be able to appreciate the satire and realism in the play. Further we were also able to gain a brief insight into the literary contributions of Ben Jonson to the history of English literature.

1.8 KEYWORDS

- Catastrophe – involving or causing sudden great damage or suffering. Eg. “a catastrophic earthquake”
- Satire – the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people’s stupidity or vices.
- Neo-classical – It is the name given to Western movements in literature, theatre, music and architecture that draw inspiration from the ‘classical’ art and culture of Ancient Greece or Rome.

1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS:

- 1) Harp, Richard and Stewart, Stanley, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2000. Print.
- 2) Riggs, David. *Ben Jonson*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989. Print.

ANSWERS TO CYP:

Ans.to Q1. The plot of *Volpone* is considered to be well-knit. Though there are various threads, Jonson handles the plot very skillfully and suspense gradually increases with the progression of events. Human avarice or extreme greed for wealth or material gain is the main theme of the play and each character has his or her own small action which nevertheless forms an integral part of the play.

Ans. to Q.2. Jonson observes the three classical unities of Time, Place and Action in his plays. He was a classicist and wanted to give a realistic picture of the society of his times. In *Volpone*, he observes the unities of time and place closely. The action of the play is restricted to one day. The play opens after sunrise, Voltore visits Volpone early in the morning. Volpone plays the part of the mountebank early in the forenoon. The trial scene takes place in the afternoon,

and it is announced that the judgement will be given before night. Regarding unity of place, the entire action takes place in only one city – Venice. But the unity of Action has not been fully observed.

Ans. to Q.3. The trial scene in act four is a great achievement on the part of the dramatist. It shows the triumph of vice and the defeat of virtue. In the court truth is deliberately manipulated and perverted and facts are distorted.

Ans. to Q.4. Critics generally find two faults with the catastrophic ending of *Volpone*. Some Critics have found it unconvincing as it does not proceed naturally from the Fourth Act, while some others think that it is too severe and harsh and borders on tragedy.

Ans. to Q.5. Jonson defends his departure from comic traditions on the grounds that the classical comedies also did not always have a happy ending. He is of the opinion that it is the function of the comic poet “to imitate justice and instruct to life.”

Ans. to Q.6. *Volpone* differs from some other plays of Jonson like *Every man in his Humour* and *Every man out of His Humour*. This play deals with only one dominant passion or ‘humour’, while the other plays deal with several traits or ‘humours’ of characters. Further, the two main characters – Volpone and Mosca – apart from being greedy show certain other traits in their characters which are equally powerful.

Ans. to Q.7. Jonson used the word “humour” in the sense of some individual habit dominating a person, some folly or absurdity, some pretension, or temperamental abnormality, which holds a person in its grip. And Jonson believed that it was possible to rid a person of his particular humour by means of ridicule. Thus he saw comedy as having a corrective function and his own plays were intended to accomplish this.

Ans. to Q.8. To Jonson the main purpose of comedy was to make men laugh, not for the sake of laughter but out of their follies and mistakes. A comedy should aim at truth to life. Both action and character must be keeping with the normal and the customary.

Ans. to Q.9. Jonson and his contemporaries associated Venice with vice, luxury, lust and crime. He wanted to portray the meanness, greed, selfishness and various other vices of man. And Venice seemed to be the perfect place for the purpose of ridiculing human greed and lust for gold.

Ans. to Q.10. . Jonson’s contribution to comedy consists in his realism and in the creation of ‘humour’ characters treated satirically. Regarded as the first great neo-classical author, he is remembered much for his revolt against the uncontrolled romantic exuberance of romantic Elizabethan literature. To Jonson belongs the credit of infusing successfully social realism into the field of comedy. To him owes the origin of the realistic comedy of humour. He brought to the comic world realistic plots, characterization and dramatic monologue.

Ans. to Q.11. The influence of the Jonsonian comedies of humour can be distinctly seen in the later English comedies. The comedy of manners of the Restoration, the anti-sentimental comedy of the 18th century and the purpose comedy of modern times are found more or less inspired by Jonson’s comedy of humour. Jonson had a wide influence not only in his own time but also on succeeding dramatists. He was imitated by a number of writers like Chapman, Brome, Field and Shadwell.

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MODEL QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss the plot construction in Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*.
2. Explain *Volpone* as a Comedy of Humours.
3. Comment on the ending of *Volpone*.
4. Discuss the realism and satire in Ben Jonson’s *Volpone*.
5. Discuss Ben Jonson’s contribution to English comedy.

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BLOCK - 2

SHAKESPEARE'S *HAMLET*

BLOCK – II : PART - I : SHAKESPEARE’S *HAMLET*

Unit I: William Shakespeare: The Great Elizabethan Dramatist

Contents:

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Background of Elizabethan Age and Drama
 - Check Your Progress 1
- 1.3 The Life and Works of William Shakespeare
 - 1.3.1 Life
 - 1.3.2 Works
 - Check Your Progress 2
- 1.4 Introduction to the Major Tragedies of Shakespeare
 - Check Your Progress 3
- 1.5 Let us Sum up
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 References
 - Suggested Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES:

In this unit, you will be acquainted with the background of Elizabethan drama and the life and works of Shakespeare. After going through this unit you will be able to

- *Explain* the background of the Elizabethan drama
- *Analyse* the contribution of the major Elizabethan dramatists
- *Examine* the life and literary works of Shakespeare
- *Discuss* the thematic patterns of Shakespeare’s tragedies

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to the background of the Elizabethan Age and drama in general. You have already read about the development of English drama. You must be familiar with some other dramatists of the Elizabethan period. This unit will refresh your memory by giving you an account of the major dramatists of the Elizabethan period. This unit, will help you to analyse the life and literary works of Shakespeare, one of the greatest dramatists of the Elizabethan period.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF ELIZABETHAN AGE AND DRAMA

In this section, you will get a specific idea about the Elizabethan Age and drama in general. Let us discuss the background of Elizabethan drama and the major dramatists of this period.

The Elizabethan Era is the epoch in English history marked by the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603). Historians often depict it as the golden age in English history. The symbol of Britannia was first used in 1572, and often thereafter, to mark the Elizabethan age as a renaissance that inspired national pride through classical ideals, international expansion, and naval triumph over the Spanish — at the time, a rival kingdom much hated by the people of the land. This “golden age” represented the apogee of the English Renaissance and saw the flowering of poetry, music and literature. The era is most famous for theatre, as William Shakespeare and many others composed plays that broke free of England’s earlier style of theatre. It was an age of exploration and expansion abroad, while back at home, the Protestant Reformation became more acceptable to the people, most certainly after the Spanish Armada was repulsed. It was also the end of the period when England was a separate realm before its royal union with Scotland. The Elizabethan Age may be viewed especially highly when considered in light of the failings of the periods preceding Elizabeth’s reign and those which followed. It was a brief period of internal peace between the English Reformation and the religious battles between Protestants and Catholics and then the political battles between parliament and the monarchy that engulfed the remainder of the seventeenth century. The Protestant/Catholic divide was settled, for a time, by the Elizabethan Religious Settlement, and parliament was not yet strong enough to challenge royal absolutism.

England was also well-off compared to the other nations of Europe. The Italian Renaissance had come to an end under the weight of Spanish domination of the peninsula. France was embroiled in its own religious

battles due to significant Spanish intervention, that would only be settled in 1598 with the Edict of Nantes. In part because of this, but also because the English had been expelled from their last outposts on the continent by Spain's tercios, the centuries-long conflict between France and England was largely suspended for most of Elizabeth's reign. The one great rival was Spain, with whom England clashed both in Europe and the Americas in skirmishes that exploded into the Anglo-Spanish War of 1585–1604. An attempt by Philip II of Spain to invade England with the Spanish Armada in 1588 was famously defeated, but the tide of war turned against England with an unsuccessful expedition to Portugal and the Azores, the Drake-Norris Expedition of 1589. Thereafter, Spain provided some support for Irish Catholics in a debilitating rebellion against English rule, and Spanish naval and land forces inflicted a series of reversals against English offensives. This drained both the English Exchequer and economy that had been so carefully restored under Elizabeth's prudent guidance. English commercial and territorial expansion would be limited until the signing of the Treaty of London the year following Elizabeth's death.

England during this period had a centralized, well-organized, and effective government, largely a result of the reforms of Henry VII and Henry VIII, as well as Elizabeth's harsh punishments for any dissenters. Economically, the country began to benefit greatly from the new era of trans-Atlantic trade, persistent theft of Spanish treasure, and the African slave trade. Elizabethan England was not particularly successful in a military sense during the period, but it avoided major defeats and built up a powerful navy. On balance, it can be said that Elizabeth provided the country with a long period of general if not total peace and generally increased prosperity due in large part to stealing from Spanish treasure ships, raiding settlements with low defenses, and selling African slaves (*Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_era*). Having inherited a virtually bankrupt state from previous reigns, her frugal policies restored fiscal responsibility. Her fiscal restraint cleared the regime of debt by 1574, and ten years later the Crown enjoyed a surplus of £300,000. Economically, Sir Thomas Gresham's founding of the Royal Exchange (1565), the first stock exchange in England and one of the earliest in Europe, proved to be a development of the first importance, for the economic development of England and soon for the world as a whole. With taxes lower than other European countries of the period, the economy expanded; though the wealth was distributed with wild unevenness, there was clearly more wealth to go around at the end of Elizabeth's reign than at the beginning. This general peace and prosperity allowed the attractive developments that "Golden Age" advocates have stressed.

England prospered in the second half of Elizabeth's reign, and many of the great works of English literature were produced during these years: art, poetry,

drama, and learning in general flourished as the confidence and nationalism Elizabeth inspired spilled from the economic sector to cultural achievements. Elizabeth's reign saw playwrights like Christopher Marlowe, poets like Edmund Spenser, and men of science and letters like Francis Bacon. The era also saw the beginning of William Shakespeare's work. Many of the writers, thinkers and artists of the day enjoyed the patronage of members of Elizabeth's court, and their works often involved or referred to the great Queen; indeed, she was *the* symbol of the day. The "Elizabethan Age," generally considered one of golden ages in English literature, was thus appropriately named: these cultural achievements did not just happen to be created while Elizabeth was on the throne; rather, Elizabeth's specific actions, her image, and the court atmosphere she nurtured significantly influenced—even inspired—great works of literature.

From the beginning of her reign, Elizabeth was always a major patron of the stage, and drama flourished under her support. In the 1560s, the first blank verse tragedies appeared, ultimately giving rise to an art form that remains heavily studied today. In 1562, one of the earliest of these blank verse plays, *Gorboduc*, was performed for the Queen. Initially, a certain amount of class conflict arose over the production of plays, as the puritanical Elizabethan middle class tried to shut down the London theaters on the basis of their "immorality." Thus, under major pressure, the Mayor of London attempted to close all of the city's theaters in 1580. The Privy Council, citing Elizabeth's fondness for plays, prevented this measure from taking place, although they did allow the crowded theaters to be shut down in times of epidemics. Elizabeth, who liked to invite theater companies to her palaces, was against shutting down the theaters because she wanted them to have fully practiced their plays before bringing them to her. As a result, plays became more socially respectable, and by the 1570s and 1580s, exclusive boys' schools like St. Paul's and Merchant Taylor's integrated the performance of both English and Latin plays into their curriculum, initiating the custom of the school play. The Queen even watched some of these school plays herself. In 1595, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed at Greenwich palace during the marriage celebration of Burleigh's granddaughter. The play contained several references to Elizabeth and her court, especially to the water-pageant Leicester had put on for Elizabeth at Kenilworth Castle in 1575. Then at Christmastime while Essex was gone on the campaign in Ireland, Elizabeth saw a performance of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

Of all the arts in Elizabethan England, drama was the most popular, and left behind the most enduring legacy. Not a single theater existed in England until well after Elizabeth I (1533–1603) took the throne in 1558. Within two decades of the building of the first major theater in the mid-1570s, however, a huge and varied body of Elizabethan comedy, tragedy, revenge plays, and history chronicles

arose. Rising Elizabethan dramatists like John Lyly (1554–1606), Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), and Thomas Kyd (1558–1594) surpassed the limits of known drama—European theater and the classical drama of ancient Greece and Rome—by portraying complex political, psychological, and historical themes. The most noted playwright of the English language, William Shakespeare (1564–1616), was only twelve years old when the first theater was built in England. With his plays Shakespeare brought Elizabethan drama—and English culture in general—to unexpected new heights.

At the beginning of the Elizabethan Era, the period associated with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) that is often considered to be a golden age in English history, most English drama was based on two ancient genres: mystery plays and morality plays. Mystery plays were simple enactments of scenes from the Bible. Performed in churches or churchyards, they were popular on religious holidays like Christmas and Easter. Morality plays were allegories (stories that represent abstract ideas or principles as characters, figures, or events) that depicted a struggle between the forces of good and evil. The characters of these plays had names like Justice or Vice. They did not have developed personalities because they were intended to represent either a moral virtue or a form of evil rather than a flesh-and-blood human being. Morality plays could be very long—some lasted an entire day—and their goal was to improve their audiences' moral behavior.

By the 1550s plays were almost exclusively being performed by acting companies—small groups of four to ten adult men and possibly a boy or two. Women were not permitted to act on stage until long after the Elizabethan Era, so female parts were played by boys or men dressed as women. The acting companies traveled from town to town carrying their stage scenery and costumes in wagons. Although most townspeople were eager to be entertained, the local authorities and religious leaders viewed the acting companies as a threat to the morals, health, and safety of their towns. At the time actors were not viewed as working artists; they were usually scorned for being homeless and unemployed. Indeed, though some acting troops were honest professionals, others were notorious for committing petty crimes and behaving improperly.

In 1572 Elizabeth banned all companies that were not bound to a patron, a nobleman who was responsible for them. This law made it difficult for the troublemakers to stay in business, since no one would sponsor them. All troops soon became known by their patron's name. Some of the major acting companies in the early 1570s were Leicester's Men, the company that worked for Robert Dudley (Earl of Leicester; 1532–1588), Lord Oxford's Men, Lord Admiral's Men, Lord Buckingham's Men, and so forth (*Source: Wikipedia*). On special

occasions these acting companies performed at their patron's estates to entertain guests. But the noble patrons did not financially support the acting troops, and to earn a living the companies spent most of their time traveling throughout England, performing for any town that agreed to let them set up their makeshift stage in the yard of a local inn. Local farmers and working people, as well as the upper classes, eagerly gathered to watch, paying what they could when a hat was passed around to collect money after the performance.

The Reformation—the sixteenth-century religious movement that aimed to reform the Roman Catholic Church and resulted in the establishment of Protestant churches—created an altogether new environment for drama. During the reign of the Catholic Mary I (1516–1558; reigned 1553–58), mystery and morality plays had been popular, and the Bible was viewed as the most appropriate source for drama. When Elizabeth took the throne and made Anglicanism (a form of Protestantism) the national religion, she was concerned that religious plays would be used to stir English Catholics against the Anglican church and herself. In 1559 Elizabeth prohibited all plays that were not licensed by the crown. Drama quickly became more secular. In accordance with Protestant beliefs, in the 1570s she banned all mystery plays in which men played the role of God, which were considered by Protestants to be idolatry, or the worship of religious icons (sacred images, statues, objects, and monuments). Many other religious plays were banned, particularly those that allowed too much freedom of the imagination in dealing with Bible stories, which many Protestants believed should be understood literally, that is, according to the exact words of the Bible. The effect of this regulation was to shift the dramatic arts away from religion.

The English population in the mid-sixteenth century had a large appetite for blood and gore in their entertainment. They did not consider the theater as high art, but rather as a spectator entertainment along the lines of bearbaiting and cockfighting. Bearbaiting and cockfighting were extremely popular among most of the English people, including the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate. Queen Elizabeth enjoyed watching bearbaiting, and she ordered it performed for visiting diplomats from Europe as a special treat. Bearbaiting pits were situated close to the early theaters. It was not unusual for a family to divide their holiday afternoon between watching a bearbaiting and attending a play. To compete, the plays often provided violent action such as sword fights, murder, and other bloody crimes onstage. In 1574 Elizabeth placed her Master of the Revels in charge of licensing all plays performed in England. The Master of the Revels was an officer of the state who worked for the Lord Chamberlain, the chief officer of the royal household. The queen's Master of Revels had the authority to censor all English plays. He could ban entire plays or delete parts of plays that were considered objectionable, and it was his job to eliminate anything that seemed to be critical

of the queen or the Anglican church. For a time the crown licensed only a few acting troops, but the demand for plays in London was so great that competing acting companies arose and prospered despite the regulations.

By late sixteenth century London was a bustling city of about two hundred thousand people. The city had become the center of a thriving capitalist economy. (Capitalism is an economic system in which private individuals or companies own and invest in the country's businesses and industries with little government control.) There was a large demand for entertainment among all segments of London's population—working people, merchants, and nobles. Intelligent investors quickly learned there was money to be made in the theater. In 1576 actor James Burbage (1531–1597) decided to build a permanent structure in which plays could be staged. He called it simply The Theater. The Theater was a huge amphitheater (a large semi-circular outdoor theater with seats rising in tiers from a central acting area), capable of holding about three thousand spectators. It had a very large outdoor stage with a small, enclosed room at the back, in which the actors changed costumes and waited for their cues to go on stage. The stage was surrounded on all sides by a yard into which standing spectators crowded for the low admission of one penny. These crowds ate, drank, talked, and moved around in the standing yard as the play was performed. It was necessary for the acting to be extremely bold and loud to compete with the commotion in the yard. For those who could afford higher priced tickets, there were three tiers of seating along the walls above the standing yard. For the wealthy, there were enclosed boxes over the stage.

Playhouses were not allowed within the city because authorities viewed the theaters as a cause of lawlessness, neglect of work, and the spread of the plague, a deadly and highly contagious disease. London's city leaders were mostly Puritans (a group of Protestants that followed strict religious standards), and believed that acting in itself was ungodly. Puritans considered it a sin to play any role other than one's own God-given identity. But even with the flood of Puritan sermons and pamphlets against the theater, the London public could not get enough of it. Because of the city's restrictions, investors simply built theaters outside of city limits but within walking distance. The Theater did so well that five more amphitheater playhouses were built in areas surrounding London: the Curtain in 1577, the Rose in 1587, the Swan in 1595, the Globe in 1599, and the Fortune in 1600. The Swan, Rose, and Globe were all built across the Thames River in the Bankside district. The amphitheater playhouse neighborhoods, much to the concern of the Puritans, were filled with taverns, gambling dens, and houses of prostitution, as well as bearbaiting and cockfighting pits. The neighborhoods became notorious for petty crimes such as picking pockets and fist fighting, but crowds continued to fill the theaters anyway.

The large amphitheaters outside the city attracted people of all classes, but these were not the only places where dramas were performed. The most prestigious site for drama was the royal court. Elizabeth was extremely fond of theater. Initially her favorite nobles tried to amuse her by presenting their own plays, but as the London theater improved the queen preferred the professionals. In 1583 Elizabeth instructed her Master of the Revels to bring together a company of the top actors in England. Leading actors were selected from all the good acting companies and these became the Lord Chamberlain's Men. For actors nothing promised a brighter or more lucrative future than being selected to play in the royal court. Elite audiences might also attend plays in the halls of schools, universities, and law courts. Young boys at the Chapel Royal and St. Paul's Cathedral choir schools in London began to perform plays around 1575. Higher admission was charged at these smaller and more intimate indoor halls than at the amphitheaters. The audiences tended to be educated and wealthy, and the plays were more likely to be based on the Greek and Roman classics, using highly elaborate language. Some were even performed in Latin. Because of regulations against public playhouses within the city of London, private theaters were built on former monastery and church grounds that were not under the control of the city authorities.

In 1578 the queen, trying to keep the theater under control, licensed only six acting companies: the Children of the Chapel Royal, the Children of St. Paul's, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Lord Warwick's Men, Leicester's Men, and Essex's Men (*Source: Wikipedia*). These companies, and others that arose later, became competitive businesses. Most companies had been formed by a core group of actors who had invested in them. These investors were called sharers, or partners, and they divided up the profits of the company among themselves. Though the sharers were often the principal actors in the company, they hired other actors as well. Hoping to compete with other companies, the sharers hired writers to create entertaining and popular plays and searched for top-quality actors. Every actor in the company had a specialty: some played clowns, some played warriors, and some played women. All actors were expected to be able to sing, dance, and do their own stunts in battle scenes. By the 1580s the acting companies that had survived the competition had become highly professional.

For centuries the purpose of England's two large universities, Cambridge and Oxford, had been to educate young men who were preparing for the clergy. By the 1570s, though, increasing numbers of middle-class young men were attending college, far too many for all of them to enter careers in the church. The growing theater industry presented a new opportunity for some of the recent university graduates. By the late sixteenth century the theater companies produced

new plays on an almost daily basis; by one estimate, at least fifteen hundred plays were produced during the Elizabethan Era. Theater companies sought writers who could quickly write entertaining plays. Becoming a professional playwright was suddenly an acceptable way for educated young men to earn a living. It is important to note, however, that university-educated young gentlemen would never consider acting in a theater company or participating in the business aspect of the company, as this was considered beneath their social standing.

A small group of top professional playwrights, known as the University Wits, arose from 1584 to 1594. These young men developed the signature characteristics of Elizabethan drama. Included in this group were: John Lyly, George Peele (c. 1556–1596), Robert Greene (1558–1592), Thomas Kyd, and Christopher Marlowe. Lyly had made a name for himself with his prose fiction (see Chapter 9). In the 1580s he became an assistant director of the child acting company of St. Paul's Cathedral. He also worked for the Queen's Men, and he wrote plays for both companies. In his early dramas Lyly used his highly elaborate style, but in his later works he began to experiment with the more natural manner of ancient Roman comedy. (A comedy is a play written in a light and amusing manner that presents the struggles and eventual successes of everyday heroes as they overcome ordinary problems.) Though Lyly is considered only a minor playwright today, he was nevertheless a pioneer in the development of the romantic comedy and a strong influence on the playwrights who followed him.

George Peele brought a different set of standards to English theater. He had a strong interest in pageantry, derived from his father's work as a designer of pageants, or dramatic presentations that often depict a historical, biblical, or traditional event. His plays, often written for church events, can be seen as attempts to match spectacle and poetry to dramatic action, and he was known for both history chronicles (plays based on historic people or events) and biblical plays. Robert Greene's best-known plays, *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, are a blend of humor, myth, history, and fairy-tale. They are notable for creating a strong sense of the specific world in which the play takes place. This world, though fanciful and idealized, is recognizably Elizabethan.

Thomas Kyd produced his most significant (and only surviving) work, *The Spanish Tragedy*, sometime between 1583 and 1589. This extremely popular play did much to shape the great tragedies to come. Tragedy is serious drama, usually featuring an admirable but flawed hero who undergoes a momentous struggle that ends in a devastating downfall. Tragedy had developed in ancient Greece and Rome, but had not yet found popularity in Europe. Kyd found his model for the *The Spanish Tragedy* in the tragedies of the ancient Roman

playwright Seneca (c. 4 bce–65 ce), whose bloody chronicles of royal family history were well known among Elizabethans. In Kyd's play a father, driven mad by grief over his son's murder, plans revenge. He stages a play in which the murderers are enlisted as actors. In a sword-fight scene in this play-within-the-play the murderers are actually stabbed to death before an unsuspecting audience's eyes. The father then relates to the audience the story of his son's murder. He then bites out his own tongue before killing himself. Kyd's play was the first Elizabethan example of a popular genre that became known as the revenge tragedy, a play concerned with the theme of vengeance for a past wrong—usually murder. *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's famous (and only) revenge play, is thought to be taken from a play Kyd wrote known as *Ur-Hamlet* (or "original Hamlet") that has not survived. *The Spanish Tragedy* is viewed as a crude example of Elizabethan tragedy today. Its speeches are very artificial and its gory violence is similar to today's bloody horror films. But it was immensely popular in its own time. It gave the English audience the gore it demanded, and at the same time presented the downfall of hated enemies, the Spanish, with whom the English were at war at the time. Kyd's play glorifies England as God's chosen place on Earth.

Christopher Marlowe was the son of a shoemaker who, with the help of a scholarship, obtained his master's degree at Cambridge in 1587. Marlowe associated with some influential members of the court, such as explorer and statesman Walter Raleigh (1552–1618) and poet Edmund Spenser (c. 1552–1599), and he was closely acquainted with the queen's secretary of state, Francis Walsingham (1532–1590). Many historians believe that Marlowe was one of Walsingham's spies, working undercover to expose Catholic plots against the queen, but this has not been proved. In his short life of twenty-nine years, Marlowe became known for his wild, nonconforming ways. He was an avowed atheist, or someone who does not believe in God, and he was said to have openly promoted homosexuality. At a young age he was involved in killing a man, though this was eventually determined an act of self defense. The six or seven plays Marlowe managed to write before his early death were highly successful. In 1587 his play *Tamburlaine* was first staged in one of the London theaters. Its hero, Tamburlaine, is a shepherd who forms a gang of warriors. He stops at nothing to fulfill his ambition for power. Tamburlaine becomes a mighty conqueror of several kingdoms. Even after his successful advancement from peasant to ruler, he continues to conquer distant territories. Tamburlaine declares that, though he was born a peasant, he was meant to rule. His success in conquering monarchs who inherited their power by a claim of divine right calls into question the very basis of the English power system. In Elizabeth's time it was considered treason to question the divine right of the monarch. Nonetheless, this bloody and violent

play was extremely popular with English audiences. After the first part of *Tamburlaine* met with great success, a sequel followed. Marlowe went on to write several other notable plays, including *The Jew of Malta*, after which Shakespeare modeled his *The Merchant of Venice*. *Doctor Faustus*, generally considered Marlowe's greatest work, was probably also his last. Its central figure, a scholar who feels he already knows everything available to human learning, attempts to gain the ultimate knowledge and power by selling his soul to the devil. The high point of the play comes in the portrayal of the hero's final moments, as he awaits the powers of darkness that demand his soul.

Although earlier English dramatists had achieved success in the field of comedy, Marlowe and Kyd made the first significant advances in tragedy. Unlike Kyd's rather crude dramatic lines, however, Marlowe's blank verse proved remarkably effective. Marlowe's poetic line and his drama earned him the title of the greatest dramatist in England—until the almost immediate rise of Shakespeare.

Stop to Consider



Preceded by [Tudor period](#)
Followed by [Stuart period \(Jacobean era\)](#)
Monarch [Queen Elizabeth I](#)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_era

Queen Elizabeth : Elizabeth I (7 September 1533 – 24 March 1603) was Queen of England and Ireland from 17 November 1558 until her death.

Sometimes called The Virgin Queen, Gloriana or Good Queen Bess, the childless Elizabeth was the last monarch of the House of Tudor. Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII of England and Anne Boleyn, his second wife, who was executed two-and-a-half years after Elizabeth's birth. Anne's marriage to Henry VIII was annulled, and Elizabeth was declared illegitimate. Her half-brother, Edward VI of England, ruled until his death in 1553, bequeathing the crown to Lady Jane Grey and ignoring the claims of his two half-sisters, Elizabeth and the Roman Catholic Mary, in spite of statute law to the contrary. Edward's will was set aside and Mary became queen, deposing Lady Jane Grey. During Mary's reign, Elizabeth was imprisoned for nearly a year on suspicion of supporting Protestant rebels.

In 1558, Elizabeth succeeded her half-sister to the throne and set out to rule by good counsel. She depended heavily on a group of trusted advisers, led by William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley. One of her first actions as queen was the establishment of an English Protestant church, of which she became the Supreme Governor. This Elizabethan Religious Settlement was to evolve into the Church of England. It was expected that Elizabeth would marry and produce an heir to continue the Tudor line. She never did, despite numerous courtships. As she grew older, Elizabeth became famous for her virginity. A cult grew around her which was celebrated in the portraits, pageants, and literature of the day. Elizabeth's reign is known as the Elizabethan era. The period is famous for the flourishing of English drama, led by playwrights such as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, and for the seafaring prowess of English adventurers such as Francis Drake. Some historians depict Elizabeth as a short-tempered, sometimes indecisive ruler, who enjoyed more than her share of luck. Towards the end of her reign, a series of economic and military problems weakened her popularity. Elizabeth is acknowledged as a charismatic performer and a dogged survivor in an era when government was ramshackle and limited, and when monarchs in neighbouring countries faced internal problems that jeopardized their thrones. Such was the case with Elizabeth's rival, Mary, Queen of Scots, whom she imprisoned in 1568 and had executed in 1587. After the short reigns of Elizabeth's half-siblings, her 44 years on the throne provided welcome stability for the kingdom and helped forge a sense of national identity.

Gorboduc : *The Tragedie of Gorboduc*, also titled *Ferrex and Porrex*, is an English play from 1561. It was first performed at the Christmas celebration given by the Inner Temple in 1561, and performed before Queen Elizabeth I on 18 January 1562, by the Gentlemen of the Inner Temple. The authors were Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, said to be responsible for the first

three Acts, and the final two, respectively. The first quarto, published by the bookseller William Griffith, was published 22 September 1565. A second authorized quarto corrected by the authors followed in 1570 printed by John Day with the title *The Tragedie of Ferrex and Porrex*. A third edition was published in 1590 by Edward Alde.

The play is notable for several reasons: as the first verse drama in English to employ blank verse; for its political subject matter (the realm of Gorboduc is disputed by his sons Ferrex and Porrex), which was still a touchy area in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, while the succession to the throne was unclear; for its manner, progressing from the models of the morality play and Senecan tragedy in the direction which would be followed by later playwrights. That is, it can be seen as a forerunner of the whole trend that would later produce *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear*.

Check Your Progress –1

(Answer the following questions within 250-300 words)

1. Write a note on the political development in the Elizabethan Period.

Ans.....
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2. Write a short note on the religious background of England in the Elizabethan period.

Ans.....
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3. How did the theater develop in Elizabethan England?

Ans.....
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4. Who are the University wits? Write a short note on their contribution to Elizabethan drama.

Ans.....
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.....

1.2 THE LIFE AND WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

1.3.1 Life

From the previous section, you have learnt about the background of the Elizabethan drama and the major Elizabethan dramatists. In this section, we shall discuss the life and works of William Shakespeare. William Shakespeare (26 April 1564 (baptized) – 23 April 1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world’s pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England’s national poet, and the “Bard of Avon”. His extant works, including collaborations, consist of approximately 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. Shakespeare was born and brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children: Susanna, and twins Hamnet and Judith. Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, later known as the King’s Men. He appears to have retired to Stratford around 1613, at age 49, where he died three years later. Few records of Shakespeare’s private life survive, which has stimulated considerable speculation about such matters as his physical appearance, sexuality, religious beliefs, and whether the works attributed to him were written by others.

Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were primarily comedies and histories, which are regarded as some of the best work ever produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, considered some of the

finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights. Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his lifetime. In 1623, however, John Heminges and Henry Condell, two friends and fellow actors of Shakespeare, published a more definitive text known as the First Folio, a posthumous collected edition of his dramatic works that included all but two of the plays now recognised as Shakespeare's. It was prefaced with a poem by Ben Jonson, in which Shakespeare is hailed, presciently, as "not of an age, but for all time". In the 20th and 21st centuries, his works have been repeatedly adapted and rediscovered by new movements in scholarship and performance. His plays remain highly popular and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, an alderman and a successful glover originally from Snitterfield, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and baptized there on 26 April 1564. His actual date of birth remains unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, Saint George's Day. This date, which can be traced back to an 18th-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing to biographers because Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616. He was the third child of eight and the eldest surviving son. Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare was probably educated at the King's New School in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, about a quarter-mile (400 m) from his home. Grammar schools varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but grammar school curricula were largely similar: the basic Latin text was standardized by royal decree, and the school would have provided an intensive education in grammar based upon Latin classical authors.

At the age of 18, Shakespeare married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. The consistory court of the Diocese of Worcester issued a marriage license on 27 November 1582. The next day, two of Hathaway's neighbours posted bonds guaranteeing that no lawful claims impeded the marriage. The ceremony may have been arranged in some haste since the Worcester chancellor allowed the marriage banns to be read once instead of the usual three times, and six months after the marriage Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna, baptized 26 May 1583. Twins, son Hamnet and daughter Judith, followed almost two years later and were baptized 2 February 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes at the age of 11 and was buried 11 August 1596.

After the birth of the twins, Shakespeare left few historical traces until he is mentioned as part of the London theatre scene in 1592. The exception is the appearance of his name in the “complaints bill” of a law case before the Queen’s Bench court at Westminster dated Michaelmas Term 1588 and 9 October 1589. Scholars refer to the years between 1585 and 1592 as Shakespeare’s “lost years”. Biographers attempting to account for this period have reported many apocryphal stories. Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare’s first biographer, recounted a Stratford legend that Shakespeare fled the town for London to escape prosecution for deer poaching in the estate of local squire Thomas Lucy. Shakespeare is also supposed to have taken his revenge on Lucy by writing a scurrilous ballad about him. Another 18th-century story has Shakespeare starting his theatrical career minding the horses of theatre patrons in London. John Aubrey reported that Shakespeare had been a country schoolmaster. The 20th-century scholars have suggested that Shakespeare may have been employed as a schoolmaster by Alexander Hoghton of Lancashire, a Catholic landowner who named a certain “William Shakeshafte” in his will. Little evidence substantiates such stories other than hearsay collected after his death, and Shakeshafte was a common name in the Lancashire area

1.3.2 Works

You have got an idea about William Shakespeare’s life from the previous section. In this section, we shall discuss the works of Shakespeare. Most playwrights of the period typically collaborated with others at some point, and critics agree that Shakespeare did the same, mostly early and late in his career. Some attributions, such as *Titus Andronicus* and the early history plays, remain controversial while *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and the lost *Cardenio* have well-attested contemporary documentation. Textual evidence also supports the view that several of the plays were revised by other writers after their original composition. The first recorded works of Shakespeare are *Richard III* and the three parts of *Henry VI*, written in the early 1590s during a vogue for historical drama. Shakespeare’s plays are difficult to date precisely, however, and studies of the texts suggest that *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* may also belong to Shakespeare’s earliest period. His first histories, which draw heavily on the 1587 edition of Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England*,

Scotland, and Ireland, dramatize the destructive results of weak or corrupt rule and have been interpreted as a justification for the origins of the Tudor dynasty. The early plays were influenced by the works of other Elizabethan dramatists, especially Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe, by the traditions of medieval drama, and by the plays of Seneca. *The Comedy of Errors* was also based on classical models, but no source for *The Taming of the Shrew* has been found, though it is related to a separate play of the same name and may have derived from a folk story. Like *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in which two friends appear to approve of rape, the *Shrew's* story of the taming of a woman's independent spirit by a man sometimes troubles modern critics and directors.

Shakespeare's early classical comedies, containing tight double plots and precise comic sequences, give way in the mid-1590s to the romantic atmosphere of his most acclaimed comedies. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a witty mixture of romance, fairy magic, and comic lowlife scenes. Shakespeare's next comedy, the equally romantic *Merchant of Venice*, contains a portrayal of the vengeful Jewish moneylender Shylock, which reflects Elizabethan views but may appear derogatory to modern audiences. The wit and wordplay of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the charming rural setting of *As You Like It*, and the lively merrymaking of *Twelfth Night* complete Shakespeare's sequence of great comedies. After the lyrical *Richard II*, written almost entirely in verse, Shakespeare introduced prose comedy into the histories of the late 1590s, *Henry IV, parts 1 and 2*, and *Henry V*. His characters become more complex and tender as he switches deftly between comic and serious scenes, prose and poetry, and achieves the narrative variety of his mature work. This period begins and ends with two tragedies: *Romeo and Juliet*, the famous romantic tragedy of sexually charged adolescence, love, and death; and *Julius Caesar*—based on Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*—which introduced a new kind of drama. In the early 17th century, Shakespeare wrote the so-called "problem plays" *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well* and a number of his best known tragedies. Many critics believe that Shakespeare's greatest tragedies represent the peak of his art. The titular hero of one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies, *Hamlet*, has probably been discussed more than any other Shakespearean character, especially for his famous soliloquy which begins "To be or not to be; that is the question". Unlike the introverted Hamlet, whose fatal flaw is hesitation, the heroes of the tragedies that followed,

Othello and King Lear, are undone by hasty errors of judgement. The plots of Shakespeare's tragedies often hinge on such fatal errors or flaws, which overturn order and destroy the hero and those he loves. In *Othello*, the villain Iago stokes Othello's sexual jealousy to the point where he murders the innocent wife who loves him. In *King Lear*, the old king commits the tragic error of giving up his powers, initiating the events which lead to the torture and blinding of the Earl of Gloucester and the murder of Lear's youngest daughter Cordelia. In *Macbeth*, the shortest and most compressed of Shakespeare's tragedies, uncontrollable ambition incites Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth, to murder the rightful king and usurp the throne until their own guilt destroys them in turn.] In this play, Shakespeare adds a supernatural element to the tragic structure. His last major tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, contain some of Shakespeare's finest poetry and were considered his most successful tragedies by the poet and critic T. S. Eliot.

In his final period, Shakespeare turned to romance or tragicomedy and completed three more major plays: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, as well as the collaboration, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Less bleak than the tragedies, these four plays are graver in tone than the comedies of the 1590s, but they end with reconciliation and the forgiveness of potentially tragic errors. Some commentators have seen this change in mood as evidence of a more serene view of life on Shakespeare's part, but it may merely reflect the theatrical fashion of the day. Shakespeare collaborated on two further surviving plays, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, probably with John Fletcher. In 1593 and 1594, when the theatres were closed because of plague, Shakespeare published two narrative poems on erotic themes, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. He dedicated them to Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton. In *Venus and Adonis*, an innocent Adonis rejects the sexual advances of Venus; while in *The Rape of Lucrece*, the virtuous wife Lucrece is raped by the lustful Tarquin. Influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the poems show the guilt and moral confusion that result from uncontrolled lust. Both proved popular and were often reprinted during Shakespeare's lifetime. A third narrative poem, *A Lover's Complaint*, in which a young woman laments her seduction by a persuasive suitor, was printed in the first edition of the *Sonnets* in 1609. Most scholars now accept that Shakespeare wrote *A Lover's Complaint*. Critics consider that its fine qualities are marred by leaden effects. *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, printed in Robert

Chester's 1601 *Love's Martyr*, mourns the deaths of the legendary phoenix and his lover, the faithful turtle dove. In 1599, two early drafts of sonnets 138 and 144 appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim*, published under Shakespeare's name but without his permission.

Published in 1609, the *Sonnets* were the last of Shakespeare's non-dramatic works to be printed. Scholars are not certain when each of the 154 sonnets was composed, but evidence suggests that Shakespeare wrote sonnets throughout his career for a private readership. Even before the two unauthorized sonnets appeared in *The Passionate Pilgrim* in 1599, Francis Meres had referred in 1598 to Shakespeare's "sugred Sonnets among his private friends". Few analysts believe that the published collection follows Shakespeare's intended sequence. He seems to have planned two contrasting series: one about uncontrollable lust for a married woman of dark complexion (the "dark lady"), and one about conflicted love for a fair young man (the "fair youth"). It remains unclear if these figures represent real individuals, or if the authorial "I" who addresses them represents Shakespeare himself, though Wordsworth believed that with the sonnets "Shakespeare unlocked his heart". The 1609 edition was dedicated to a "Mr. W.H.", credited as "the only begetter" of the poems. It is not known whether this was written by Shakespeare himself or by the publisher, Thomas Thorpe, whose initials appear at the foot of the dedication page; nor is it known who Mr. W.H. was, despite numerous theories, or whether Shakespeare even authorised the publication. Critics praise the *Sonnets* as a profound meditation on the nature of love, sexual passion, procreation, death, and time.

Check Your Progress 2

(Answer the following questions within 250-300 words)

1. Write a brief note on the biography of William Shakespeare.

Ans.....
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2. Which plays did Shakespeare write in the earlier stage of his career as a dramatist?

Ans.....

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3. Mention the names of tragedies written by Shakespeare. What are the basic themes of these tragedies?

Ans.....
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4. Which plays did Shakespeare write in the final stage of his career?

Ans.....
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1.4 INTRODUCTION TO THE MAJOR TRAGEDIES OF SHAKESPEARE

The previous sections have enhanced your knowledge of William Shakespeare. This unit will give you an idea about the thematic patterns of Shakespeare's tragedies.

Tragedies

Some tragedies are probably inspired by Shakespeare's study of *Lives* (trans.1597) by Greek historian and essayist Plutarch and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587). Some are reworkings of previous stories, many based on English or Roman history. The dates given here are when they are said to have been first performed, followed by approximate printing dates in brackets, listed in chronological order of performance.

Titus Andronicus first performed in 1594 (printed in 1594),

Romeo and Juliet 1594-95 (1597),

Hamlet 1600-01 (1603),

Julius Caesar 1600-01 (1623),

Othello 1604-05 (1622),

Antony and Cleopatra 1606-07 (1623),

King Lear 1606 (1608),

Coriolanus 1607-08 (1623), derived from Plutarch

Timon of Athens 1607-08 (1623), and
Macbeth 1611-1612 (1623).

Historical Plays

Shakespeare's series of historical dramas, based on the English Kings from John to Henry VIII were a tremendous undertaking to dramatize the lives and rule of kings and the changing political events of his time. No other playwright had attempted such an ambitious body of work. Some were printed on their own or in the *First Folio* (1623).

King Henry VI Part 1 1592 (printed in 1594);

King Henry VI Part 2 1592-93 (1594);

King Henry VI Part 3 1592-93 (1623);

King John 1596-97 (1623);

King Henry IV Part 1 1597-98 (1598);

King Henry IV Part 2 1597-98 (1600);

King Henry V 1598-99 (1600);

Richard II 1600-01 (1597);

Richard III 1601 (1597); and

King Henry VIII 1612-13 (1623)

Comedies, listed in chronological order of performance.

Taming of the Shrew first performed 1593-94 (1623),

Comedy of Errors 1594 (1623),

Two Gentlemen of Verona 1594-95 (1623),

Love's Labour's Lost 1594-95 (1598),

Midsummer Night's Dream 1595-96 (1600),

Merchant of Venice 1596-1597 (1600),

Much Ado About Nothing 1598-1599 (1600),

As You Like It 1599-00 (1623),

Merry Wives of Windsor 1600-01 (1602),

Troilus and Cressida 1602 (1609),

Twelfth Night 1602 (1623),

All's Well That Ends Well 1602-03 (1623),

Measure for Measure 1604 (1623),

Pericles, Prince of Tyre 1608-09 (1609),

Tempest (1611),

Cymbeline 1611-12 (1623),

Winter's Tale 1611-12 (1623).

Shakespeare came under the influence of Kyd and Marlowe at the beginning of his career as a writer of tragedies. *Romeo and Juliet* is the first tragedy in which Shakespeare asserts his independence and gives free scope to his dramatic genius. The story of the play has two aspects. First, there is a blood-thirsty feud between two ancient families in the city of Verona. Second, two young lovers Romeo and Juliet, belonging to the rival families, appear to be under the influence of a malignant fate. These two aspects, fate and feud have been combined to create an atmosphere of inevitable death and destruction.

Julius Caesar was written by the turn of the century. It deals with military despotism and the conspiracy to overthrow it. *Hamlet* is the first great tragedy written by Shakespeare. The story is based on the motive of revenge which was a familiar theme to the Elizabethan audience. The dramatist depicts the inner struggle in the mind of the hero. Hamlet fights not only against adverse circumstances but also against his own temperamental weakness. The conception of the tragic hero, fundamentally great and noble but endowed with an inherent weakness which makes him a failure in life, is also illustrated in *Othello*. Hamlet and Othello are studies in contrast. Hamlet is a man of thought, whereas Othello is a man of action. Hamlet is a scholar but Othello is a soldier. The one thinks, pauses and calculates, the other rushes headlong into action. Yet, both of them have noble characters and in their misery and misfortune we witness the tragic spectacle of human nobility falling victim to the force of Evil in life.

King Lear has a three-fold story: the story of Lear and his three daughters, the story of Gloucester and the story of Edmund. The three stories have been interwoven with a great skill. It presents a world of sin, corruption and filial ingratitude. The play ends in total ruin and deaths of Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cordelia and Lear. *Macbeth* is the last of the four great tragedies and deals with crime and retribution. The play can be divided into three parts. The first shows the rushing tide of ambition that sweeps away. Macbeth is to commit the act of treachery. In the second part, Macbeth wears the crown but loses the peace of mind. The third part completes the ruin of Macbeth. Macbeth differs from the three preceding tragedies in two ways. First, the heroes in the other tragedies are of noble character. Hamlet is full of idealism. Othello is frank and sincere. Lear is loving and generous by nature. But Macbeth is an evil-minded person who

commits a great crime to fulfill his ambition. He is incited by his wife who is Macbeth's evil genius. This leads to the second point of difference. In other tragedies the heroines are innocent and virtuous. But Lady Macbeth takes an active part in the murder of Duncan. This is the reason why the atmosphere in this play is surcharged with terrible gloom and intense despair. *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens* are the last tragedies written by Shakespeare. These plays do not mark an advance in Shakespeare's dramatic art. The development in Shakespeare's art of tragic drama reaches its culmination in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

Check Your Progress – 3

(Answer the following questions within 100-150 words)

1. Mention the names of Shakespeare's Historical plays.

Ans.....
.....
.....

2. Mention the names of Shakespeare's tragedies in chronological order?

Ans.....
.....
.....

1.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have got a general idea about the Elizabethan Age. You have also learnt about the Elizabethan drama and the major dramatists who have made significant contributions to English literature. The section containing the life and works of Shakespeare has enhanced your knowledge of Shakespeare's background and literary works. The discussion of the major tragedies of Shakespeare gives you an idea about the thematic patterns of his tragedies. This has incited your interest in the plays of Shakespeare. You have also learnt from the additional informations given in the boxes. The given exercises have enhanced your comprehension as well as writing skills. With these improved skills, you have already taken a step forward towards the next unit where you will learn about *Hamlet*, one of the most significant tragedies by Shakespeare.

1.5 KEY WORDS

Epoch: A particular period of history, especially one considered remarkable or noteworthy

Apogee: (astronomy) The point, in an orbit about the Earth, that is furthest from the Earth; the apoapsis of an Earth orbiter; (figuratively) The highest point

Renaissance: A rebirth or revival; The transition period between the medieval and modern times

Epidemic: A widespread disease that affects many individuals in a population.

Comedy: A light, amusing play with a happy ending; A dramatic work that is light and humorous or satirical in tone

Tragedy: A drama or similar work, in which the main character is brought to ruin or otherwise suffers the extreme consequences of some tragic flaw or weakness of character.

Chronicle: A written account of events and when they happened, ordered by time.

Allegory: The representation of abstract principles by characters or figures

Anglicanism: The beliefs and practices of the Anglican Church; Any of the churches worldwide that are in communion with the church of England, have the same doctrine and have the Archbishop of Canterbury as Supreme head.

Idolatry: The worship of Idols.

Amphitheater: A semi-circular acoustic backdrop behind performers for an outdoor venue.

Posthumous: After the death of someone

Apocryphal: Of doubtful authenticity, or lacking authority; not regarded as canonical

Sonnet: A fixed verse of Italian origin consisting of fourteen lines that are typically five-foot iambics and rhyme according to one of a few prescribed schemes.

Despotism: Government by a singular authority, either a single person or tight-knit group, which rules with absolute power, especially in a cruel and oppressive way.

1.6 REFERENCES

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Suggested Reading

Choudhury, Bibhash. *English Social and Cultural History*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited, 2009

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Unit II: William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

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- 2.0 Objectives
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- 2.2 Summary of *Hamlet*
- 2.3 *Hamlet* as a Tragedy
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 - 2.4.5 The Theme of Intrigue
 - Check Your Progress 2
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2.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit, you have learnt about the background of Elizabethan drama. You are also acquainted with the major dramatists of the Elizabethan period. The life and literary works of Shakespeare have also been discussed in that unit. You have got the idea about the major tragedies of Shakespeare. In this unit, we are going to discuss *Hamlet*, a tragedy by Shakespeare. This unit will help you to

- *Formulate an idea about the play, Hamlet*
- *Interpret Hamlet as a tragedy*
- *Analyse the various themes in the play*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

You have already learnt about the major tragedies of Shakespeare. In this unit, you will be introduced to the play, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. After going through this unit, you will be able to discuss *Hamlet* as a tragedy. You will also be able to analyse the different themes in the play.

2.2 SUMMARY OF *HAMLET*

In this section, you will be acquainted with the story of *Hamlet*. The *Tragical History Of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, or, as it's more simply known, *Hamlet*, is a play that holds immense importance in English literature. This drama was written by William Shakespeare between 1599 and 1601. The plot is set in the country of Denmark, and the main protagonist is Prince Hamlet. *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's longest drama. It is still considered a pioneer in English literature. Several films and plays have been made as adaptations featuring many renowned actors.

Hamlet, the young prince of Denmark, is a student at the University of Wittenbury. He is summoned home to attend the funeral ceremony of his father, The King of Denmark, who is supposed to have died of snake-bite while sleeping in the garden. The Queen has wed Hamlet's Uncle Claudius, the dead king's brother. To Hamlet, the marriage is "foul incest." Hamlet does not feel it very much that he has been excluded from the throne, his lawful inheritance. But he is deeply perturbed by the hasty re-marriage of his mother. Hamlet suspects foul play. When his father's ghost visits the castle, Hamlet's suspicions are confirmed. The Ghost complains that he is unable to rest in peace because he was murdered. The Ghost says that Claudius poured poison in the King's ear while the old king napped. Unable to confess and find salvation, the King is now consigned, for a time, to spend his days in Purgatory and walk the earth by night. He entreats Hamlet to avenge his death, but to spare Gertrude, to let Heaven decide her fate.

Hamlet vows to affect madness — puts "an antic disposition on" — to wear a mask that will enable him to observe the interactions in the castle, but finds himself more confused than ever. In his persistent confusion, he questions the Ghost's trustworthiness. What if the Ghost is not a true spirit, but rather an agent of the devil sent to tempt him? What if killing Claudius results in Hamlet's having to relive his memories for all eternity? Hamlet agonizes over what he perceives as his cowardice because he cannot stop himself from thinking. Words immobilize Hamlet, but the world he lives in prizes action. In order to test the Ghost's sincerity, Hamlet enlists the help of a troupe of players who perform a play called *The Murder of Gonzago* which Hamlet has added scenes that

recreate the murder the Ghost described. Hamlet calls the revised play *The Mousetrap*, and the ploy proves a success. As Hamlet had hoped, Claudius' reaction to the staged murder reveals the King to be conscience-stricken. Claudius leaves the room because he cannot breathe, and his vision is dimmed for want of light. Convinced now that Claudius is a villain, Hamlet resolves to kill him. But, as Hamlet observes, "conscience doth make cowards of us all."

In his continued reluctance to dispatch Claudius, Hamlet actually causes six ancillary deaths. The first death belongs to Polonius, whom Hamlet stabs through a wall hanging as the old man spies on Hamlet and Gertrude in the Queen's private chamber. Claudius punishes Hamlet for Polonius' death by exiling him to England. He has brought Hamlet's school chums Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to Denmark from Germany to spy on his nephew, and now he instructs them to deliver Hamlet into the English king's hands for execution. Hamlet discovers the plot and arranges for the hanging of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern instead. Ophelia, distraught over her father's death and Hamlet's behavior, drowns while singing sad love songs bemoaning the fate of a spurned lover. Her brother, Laertes, falls next. Laertes, returned to Denmark from France to avenge his father's death, witnesses Ophelia's descent into madness. After her funeral, where he and Hamlet come to blows over which of them loved Ophelia most, Laertes vows to punish Hamlet for her death as well.

Unencumbered by words, Laertes plots with Claudius to kill Hamlet. In the midst of the sword fight, however, Laertes drops his poisoned sword. Hamlet retrieves the sword and cuts Laertes. The lethal poison kills Laertes. Before he dies, Laertes tells Hamlet that because Hamlet has already been cut with the same sword, he too will shortly die. Horatio diverts Hamlet's attention from Laertes for a moment by pointing out that "The Queen falls." Gertrude, believing that Hamlet's hitting Laertes means her son is winning the fencing match, has drunk a toast to her son from the poisoned cup Claudius had intended for Hamlet. The Queen dies. As Laertes lies dying, he confesses to Hamlet his part in the plot and explains that Gertrude's death lies on Claudius' head. Finally enraged, Hamlet stabs Claudius with the poisoned sword and then pours the last of the poisoned wine down the King's throat. Before he dies, Hamlet declares that the throne should now pass to Prince Fortinbras of Norway, and he implores his true friend Horatio to accurately explain the events that have led to the bloodbath at Elsinore. With his last breath, he releases himself from the prison of his words: "The rest is silence." The play ends as Prince Fortinbras, in his first act as King of Denmark, orders a funeral with full military honors for slain Prince Hamlet.

2.3 *HAMLET AS A TRAGEDY*

From the previous section, you have come to know the story of *Hamlet*. In this section, we shall discuss the tragic elements in the play. One of the foremost Elizabethan tragedies in the canon of English literature is *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare and one of the earliest critics of tragedy is Aristotle. One way to measure Shakespeare's work, *Hamlet* is to appraise it using the methods of classical critics to see if it meets the criteria for a tragedy. *Hamlet* is one of the most recognizable and most often quoted tragedies in all of English literature. Aristotle, who is concerned with the proper presentation of tragic plays and poetry, defines tragedy as: "...a representation of an action that is worth serious attention, complete in itself, and of some amplitude; in language enriched by a variety of artistic devices appropriate to the several parts of the play; presented in the form of action, not narration; by means of pity and fear bringing about the purgation of such emotion." (Aristotle 38 - 9) Shakespeare uses character, plot and setting to create a mood of disgust and a theme of proper revenge, as opposed to fear and pity, hence Aristotle would have disapproved of *Hamlet* as being a tragedy. It is the above mentioned elements; character, plot and setting, used in a non-Aristotelian way, that makes *Hamlet* one of the most renowned tragedies in English. By proper revenge, we refer to the Elizabethan view that revenge must be sought in certain cases, for the world to continue properly.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines for us, the element of plot and shows us how he believes it must be put together. He also believes in various unities which he states are necessary for a proper tragedy. Aristotle believes in what he calls "Unity of plot" (Aristotle 42 - 3). This "Unity" leaves no room for subplots, which are crucial to the theme of *Hamlet*. Without the subplot of Laertes' revenge and the subplot of Fortinbras' revenge, we are left with a lugubrious play where the ending, although necessary, is pointless. The three sub-plots together as a unit, allow us to understand what Shakespeare thought of revenge. Another of the ways Aristotle defines plot in tragedy as "The noble actions and the doings of noble persons" (Aristotle 35). By this definition, *Hamlet* should be a noble person, who does only noble things. Aristotle would have objected to *Hamlet*'s refusal to kill Claudius during prayer which forms the turning point of *Hamlet*. This is significant because if he were to have achieved his revenge at that point, Claudius' soul may have been clean. *Hamlet* wishes to get revenge when Claudius' "Soul may be as damn'd and black / As hell, whereto it goes (*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene III, P. 94 - 5). By waiting for the right time, *Hamlet* loses his chance to achieve revenge. This ignoble act does add to the theme of proper revenge, not in the primary plot, but when all three revenge sub-plots are considered together. Aristotle also believed in heroes that are "First and foremost good (Aristotle 51)." Although *Hamlet* spends much time deliberating good and evil, and what the greatest good

is, when it comes time, he cannot act. Laertes does act, but he acts rashly, and cannot perform good either. Fortinbras is the type of hero that Aristotle would have preferred, although from Fortinbras' point of view the play is not tragic; instead it is a comedy where all of the other characters run about and in the end through no fault of his own, Fortinbras receives the kingship of Denmark. The plot events with which Aristotle disagrees give meaning to Hamlet's theme.

Shakespeare uses the plot to help create the mood of Hamlet by incorporating subplots and by having his tragic hero do things which are particularly unheroic. Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia is particularly barbaric. By the same token Ophelia's unstinting devotion to her father, and by that, her poor treatment of Hamlet, causes us to question which of the two is not the worthier, but the least evil. Both of their actions invoke disgust. Aristotle would have objected to Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia because of his aforementioned belief in the character attributes of the hero. The only characters who act particularly heroic are Horatio, who is devoted to Hamlet, and Fortinbras. These two characters are the only ones who survive. The rest of the characters are left dead and bleeding. When we see the bodies lying on the ground at the end of the play we realize the futility of Hamlet's actions and that evokes disgust. It is the evocation of this emotion that Aristotle would have disagreed with. Shakespeare's character's in *Hamlet* illustrate the theme of the drama, however Aristotle would have disagreed with Shakespeare's choices. To understand character in terms of theme one must compare the characters. Samuel Johnson calls Hamlet "through the whole piece an instrument rather than an agent". This is giving too much credence to the soliloquies, when Hamlet ponders, and gives too little credence to the fact that he sent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths without hesitating, and the fact that he was the first on the pirate ship when attacked on the high seas. It is the type of revenge that Hamlet insists on that shapes his character and forces the bloodshed at the end of the play. This contrasts with a play of which Aristotle did approve.

Hamlet has the chance to do good, in this case revenge a murderer, but he lets passion sway his reason. This "madness" is what leads Hamlet astray, leads him to kill Polonius, leads Ophelia to commit suicide and leads to the carnage of the final scene. Rather than learn from experience, Hamlet follows his own will. Aristotle had no room for noble characters with no amplitude and therefore he would have disliked most of the characters in *Hamlet*, except for Horatio and Fortinbras. In contrasting Fortinbras, Hamlet and Laertes we have three men of noble birth, all of whom have a legitimate reason to seek revenge. The main difference is the way that each seeks his revenge. Laertes seeks revenge in a rash and illicit ways and he dies. Hamlet seeks revenge in an ignoble way and he dies. Fortinbras seeks a Christian revenge and is successful. In this way Shakespeare's

characters further the theme of Hamlet in a non-Aristotelian way. The characters that Shakespeare has chosen for *Hamlet* are not the type one would find in a typical Greek tragedy, the kind of tragedy that Aristotle was used to criticizing. Oedipus the King, includes a number of elements that Shakespeare does not use in *Hamlet*. The chorus is used as a character in Oedipus the King to allow us a sympathetic view of Oedipus, in his time of travail. Oedipus has accepted responsibility for his fate and blinded himself. The audience feels sympathy and therefore feels pity. No such sympathy is given to Hamlet. It is not the fact that he does not have some sympathetic qualities; rather he has too few sympathetic characteristics which we wish to empathize. Hamlet wants to do the right things, but it is the way he does them that makes us dislike him. Hamlet also spends much of his time deliberating rather than doing. Almost every character in the play is a doer. The irony is that the characters who most enjoy life are those who face death on a regular basis. This juxtaposition not only foreshadows the conclusion of the play but also adds to the mood of disgust. One of the elements contributing to mood is character, however it is used in a non-Aristotelian way. Aristotle ignored the concept that a play could take place in many different settings and still retain meaning. In his elements of tragedy Aristotle mentions “Plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song. (Aristotle 39).” He does not include setting as a separate entity. It is implicit, however, in his conception of “Unities” that more than one setting was not acceptable. One example may be found in Oedipus the King, where all of the action takes place in one setting, and where the geographical setting of the play, in terms of a historical context, does not in itself add any meaning.

Aristotle did, however, believe in “Unity of Time”, where each action follows the previous action, and builds to form a single “thread” of action. We would include the time in play as part of the setting. Another axiom of Unity of time is that one stage minute equals one real minute. It is only by ignoring Aristotelian convention in setting, specifically unity of time, that Shakespeare can properly tell his story. Hamlet takes place entirely in Castle Elsinore and on its grounds. The first scene takes place at approximately midnight as does Act 1, Scene 4. Shakespeare completely ignores the Aristotelian convention of “Unity of Time”. It is only by ignoring this convention that Shakespeare can allow Hamlet to have the scene with the ghost, a twenty minute scene, that Shakespeare elongates from midnight to dawn. By the same token it is this elongation that allows Hamlet to talk with the ghost and gives the ghost a dramatic reason, the dawn, to leave the stage. This allows Shakespeare to develop his plot and therefore to develop his theme. These temporal manipulations do not end here. Hamlet leaves for England by boat, is waylaid by pirates and returns to Elsinore between Act 4, Scene 3 and Act 5 Scene 1. This allows Laertes to return and demand

revenge, Ophelia to go mad and kill herself and Hamlet to return just in time for the funeral. Without this compression of time, Shakespeare could not have fitted in the plot points he needs to build the theme of revenge. Laertes leaves Denmark in the second scene of the first act, and returns in the fourth act and demands revenge for the death of his father, Polonius. Shakespeare has, again ignored the time frame of the play in order to facilitate the plot. It by ignoring the temporal aspect of setting that Shakespeare has the room he needs to develop the plot, and therefore the theme of Hamlet. Shakespeare uses Castle Elsinore and environs to depict a sordid and depressing place where incest and murder are a part of normal life, where revenge is commonplace motivation, and where the feigning of madness is a normal strategy to dissemble ones feelings. This is the setting for Hamlet. Shakespeare created this setting to tell us a story of revenge gone wrong. He also created a mood of disgust. When at the end of the play, things are brought to their right order and Fortinbras becomes king, we look back and see the depraved way of life that existed at Castle Elsinore and its logical conclusion, a room littered with bodies and Fortinbras taking his lawful place as king, we feel disgust and its purgation.

Stop to Consider

Aristotle: Aristotle (384–322 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist born in the city of Stagira, Chalkidice, on the northern periphery of Classical Greece. His father, Nicomachus, died when Aristotle was a child, whereafter Proxenus of Atarneus became his guardian. At seventeen or eighteen years of age, he joined Plato's Academy in Athens and remained there until the age of thirty-seven (347 BC). His writings cover many subjects – including physics, biology, zoology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, aesthetics, poetry, theater, music, rhetoric, linguistics, politics and government – and constitute the first comprehensive system of Western philosophy. Shortly after Plato died, Aristotle left Athens and, at the request of Philip II of Macedon, tutored Alexander the Great beginning in 343 BC. Teaching Alexander the Great gave Aristotle many opportunities and an abundance of supplies. He established a library in the Lyceum which aided in the production of many of his hundreds of books, which were written on papyrus scrolls. The fact that Aristotle was a pupil of Plato contributed to his former views of Platonism, but, following Plato's death, Aristotle immersed himself in empirical studies and shifted from Platonism to empiricism. He believed all peoples' concepts and all of their knowledge was ultimately based on perception. Aristotle's views on natural sciences represent the groundwork underlying many of his works.

Aristotle's views on physical science profoundly shaped medieval scholarship. Their influence extended from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages into the Renaissance, and were not replaced systematically until the Enlightenment and theories such as classical mechanics. Some of Aristotle's zoological observations, such as on the hectocotyl (reproductive) arm of the octopus, were not confirmed or refuted until the 19th century. His works contain the earliest known formal study of logic, which was incorporated in the late 19th century into modern formal logic.

Oedipus: Oedipus was a mythical Greek king of Thebes. A tragic hero in Greek mythology, Oedipus accidentally fulfilled a prophecy that he would end up killing his father and marrying his mother, thereby bringing disaster to his city and family.

The story of Oedipus is the subject of Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, which was followed by *Oedipus at Colonus* and then *Antigone*. Together, these plays make up Sophocles' three Theban plays. Oedipus represents two enduring themes of Greek myth and drama: the flawed nature of humanity and an individual's role in the course of destiny in a harsh universe.

In the most well-known version of the myth, Oedipus was born to King Laius and Queen Jocasta. Laius wished to thwart a prophecy, so he left Oedipus to die on a mountainside. However, the baby was found by shepherds and raised by King Polybus and Queen Merope as their own. Oedipus learned from the oracle at Delphi of the prophecy that he would end up killing his father and marrying his mother but, unaware of his true parentage, believed he was fated to murder Polybus and marry Merope, so left for Thebes. On his way he met an older man and quarrelled, and Oedipus killed the stranger. Continuing on to Thebes, he found that the king of the city (Laius) had been recently killed, and that the city was at the mercy of the Sphinx. Oedipus answered the monster's riddle correctly, defeating it and winning the throne of the dead king - and the hand in marriage of the king's widow, and (unbeknownst to him) his mother Jocasta.

Years later, to end a plague on Thebes, Oedipus searched to find who had killed Laius, and discovered that he himself was responsible. Jocasta, upon realizing that she had married both her own son, and her husband's murderer, hanged herself. Oedipus then seized two pins from her dress and blinded himself with them.

The legend of Oedipus has been retold in many versions, and was used by Sigmund Freud to name and give mythic precedent to the Oedipus complex

Source: Wikipedia

Check Your Progress – 1

1. What is a tragedy? (100-150 words)

Ans.....
.....
.....

2. Discuss *Hamlet* as a tragedy? (600-1000 words)

Ans.....
.....
.....

2.4 THEMES

After going through the previous section, you have learnt to analyse the tragic elements in *Hamlet*. In this section we shall discuss the various themes that will enhance your understanding of the play.

2.4.1 Theme of Revenge

One of the important themes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the theme of revenge. Throughout the play, several different people want revenge on somebody. Hamlet, the prince of Denmark, wants revenge on the current King of his country, his uncle, who killed Hamlet's father, the original King, in order to take the crown and marry the Queen. When trying to revenge his father by killing his Uncle, Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius, the father of one of his best friends Laertes. In turn, Laertes wants to revenge his father's death by killing Hamlet. Hamlet's father's arch nemesis, the King of Norway, was killed by Hamlet's father in battle. The King of Norway's son, prince of Norway, Fortinbras, therefore wanted revenge on Denmark.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is definitely an exquisite piece of English literature. A Shakespearean tragedy is built upon a central conflict which runs through from the beginning to the end of the tragedy until the conflict is finally resolved. The conflict provides the exposition, suspense, climax and the catastrophe of the play. In the case of *Hamlet* it is not otherwise. The play is built upon the long, tragic conflict between Hamlet and Claudius and the conflict is built upon the motif of revenge. So, the driving force that shapes the turns of the plot of the play namely exposition, gradual development of the plot, the suspense, climax and the catastrophe of the

play is the revenge, especially the revenge for the death of father. It is not only Hamlet's desire to take revenge, but also that of Laertes' that also acts as the driving force behind the plot. In the play *Hamlet* two of the character's fathers are brutally murdered. The first murdered character is King Hamlet who is supposed to be revenged by his son prince Hamlet. The second murder is Polonius who is supposed to be revenged by his son Laertes. Both Prince Hamlet and Laertes go to seek revenge for the death of fathers, however they will each use different methods to accomplish their deeds.

But the play in which the central action springs from the revenge motif is called the revenge tragedy, which shares some other typical features. So, before going further let us see what motivated Shakespeare write such a tragedy in which revenge takes the driving wheel. At first, the writer was certainly influenced by his age. *Hamlet* is a play that very closely follows the dramatic conventions of revenge in Elizabethan theater. All revenge tragedies originally stemmed from the Greeks, who wrote and performed the first plays. After the Greeks came Seneca who was very influential to all Elizabethan tragedy writers, including William Shakespeare. The two most famous English revenge tragedies written in the Elizabethan era were *Hamlet*, written by Shakespeare and *The Spanish Tragedy*, written by Thomas Kyd. These two plays used mostly all of the Elizabethan conventions for revenge tragedies in their plays. *Hamlet* especially incorporated all revenge conventions in one way or another, which truly made *Hamlet* a typical revenge play.

It is said that most of the time Shakespeare wrote the dramas that his contemporary audience wanted. During the time of Elizabethan theater, plays about tragedy and revenge were very common and a regular convention seemed to be formed on what aspects should be put into a typical revenge tragedy. Now let us discuss in details how the revenge motif helps to carry out the plot. Before introducing the revenge motif, the dramatist at first sets an appropriate setting. In the beginning, Shakespeare sets up the scene, having a ghost on a dark night. Everyone is working and something strange is happening in Denmark. It is as if Shakespeare is saying that some kind of foul play has been committed. This sets up for the major theme in the play which is of course revenge.

The real tension of the play begins as soon as the ghost of the late king tells Hamlet about his murder. Hamlet learns that his father's death was no mistake, but it was Hamlet's uncle's plan to murder him. The ghost also tells Hamlet that he has been given the role of the person

who will take revenge upon Claudius. So, like a typical revenge tragedy, in *Hamlet* a crime (the killing of the king) is committed and for various reasons laws and justice cannot punish the crime so the individual, Hamlet proceeds on to take revenge in spite of everything. Hamlet must now think of how to take revenge on Claudius, although he doesn't know what to do about it. He ponders his thoughts for a long period of time, expecting to do the deed immediately, but instead he drags it on until the end of the play. The conflict of the play gets further development when Hamlet feigns to be insane. Thus, the revenge motif drives him to disguise himself as a mad. Hamlet starts a battle of wits with Claudius by acting mad and calling it his "antic disposition", although the whole thing was a ploy to get closer to Claudius to be able to avenge his father's death more easily. The tactic was a disadvantage in that it drew all attention upon him. More importantly though it was an advantage that his "antic disposition", isolated him from the rest of the court because of the people not paying attention to what he thought or did because of his craziness.

After this the revenge motif also structures the middle of the play. One important part of all revenge plays is that after the revenge is finally decided upon, the tragic hero delays the actual revenge until the end of the play. Hamlet does the same thing and his delay of killing Claudius takes on three distinct stages. Firstly he had to prove that the ghost was actually telling the truth, secondly his not killing of Claudius while praying and finally his accidental killing of Polonius. Hamlet first decides to act abnormal which does not accomplish much besides warning his uncle that he might know he killed his father. Later in the play a troop of actors come to act out a play, and Hamlet has them reenact the murder of his father in front of his uncle Claudius. The actor's murder scenes also make Hamlet question himself about the fact that he has done nothing yet to avenge his father. Hamlet says,

"But am I Pigeon-livered and lack gall / to make oppression bitter, or ere this / I should ha' fatted all the region kites / With this slave's offal. Bloody, bawdy villain! "(Act II scene II page 84 lines 577- 580)

During the play Hamlet watches his uncle Claudius to see his reaction when the actors perform the murder scene. Hamlet's plan works, his uncle throws a fit and runs out the room, where Hamlet goes after him. Now, Hamlet knows that Claudius is guilty. Afterwards Hamlet finds his uncle as praying, and he pulls out his sword and gets ready to kill Claudius. But suddenly Hamlet changes his mind because if he kills his uncle while

he is praying, he will go to heaven, and Hamlet wants him to go to hell. If Hamlet had done it here then Claudius would have gone to heaven because he confessed while Hamlet's father was in purgatory because he did not get the opportunity to confess. So Hamlet therefore decided not to murder Claudius at this point in the play. So Hamlet postpones the execution of his uncle.

The third delay was the fact that he got side tracked. He accidentally killed Polonius which created a whole new problem with the fact that Laertes now wanted Hamlet dead. After he commits this murder he was also sent off and unable to see the king for another few weeks until he could finally do the job. So, the next confrontation between Hamlet and Claudius does not happen till the end of the book when Hamlet escapes from the latter's ill murder attempt on his life. Claudius tells Laertes that Hamlet is the one who killed his father and thus inspires Laertes to take revenge on Hamlet. Claudius hatches a plan according to which Hamlet and Laertes will have a mock sword fight, but Laertes will be using a real poisoned sword. Laertes agrees with this, ready to claim Hamlet's life for his father's vile murder.

Thus, Hamlet sword fences with Laertes. All the sudden Hamlet's mother Queen Gertrude drinks a poison glass intended for Hamlet. When Hamlet is not looking Laertes stabs him with a poison sword then Hamlet takes hold of the poisoned sword, and stabs Laertes with it. As this happens Queen Ge

trude dies from the poison drink. As Laertes lays down dying he reveals to Hamlet that his uncle King Claudius was behind it all, the poisoned sword and drink that has just killed his mother. Hamlet then in a fit of rage runs his uncle through with the poison sword. Hamlet has now finally revenged his father through much time then after his task is completed he finally collapses from the poison on the sword.

In *Hamlet* these two characters Hamlet and Laertes both seek to avenge their slayed fathers. Hamlet with his passive and scheming approach manages to kill his father's murderer his uncle Claudius. Laertes with his direct, and forceful dedication slays his father's killer Prince Hamlet. Although Laertes took a much more direct approach than Hamlet wasting no time, they both however accomplished their goal but at the ultimate price of both their lives.

2.4.2 Theme of Madness

Another important theme of the play is the theme of madness. By the time *Hamlet* was written, madness was already a well-established element in many revenge tragedies. The most popular revenge tragedy of the Elizabethan period, *The Spanish Tragedy*, also features a main character, Hieronymo, who goes mad in the build-up to his revenge, as does the title character in Shakespeare's first revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*. But *Hamlet* is unique among revenge tragedies in its treatment of madness because Hamlet's madness is deeply ambiguous. Whereas previous revenge tragedy protagonists are unambiguously insane, Hamlet plays with the idea of insanity, putting on "an antic disposition," as he says, for some not-perfectly-clear reason.

Of course, there is a practical advantage to appearing mad. In Shakespeare's source for the plot of *Hamlet*, "Amneth" (as the legendary hero is known) feigns madness in order to avoid the suspicion of the fratricidal king as he plots his revenge. But Hamlet's feigned madness is not so simple as this. His performance of madness, rather than aiding his revenge, almost distracts him from it, as he spends the great majority of the play exhibiting very little interest in pursuing the ghost's mission even after he has proven, via "The Mouse Trap," that Claudius is indeed guilty as sin.

Hamlet's madness has been a resilient point of critical controversy since the seventeenth century. The traditional question is perhaps the least interesting one to ask of his madness — is he really insane or is he faking it? It seems clear from the text that he is, indeed, playing the role of the madman (he says he will do just that) and using his veneer of lunacy to have a great deal of fun with the many fools who populate Elsinore, especially Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Perhaps this feigned madness does at times edge into actual madness, in the same way that all acted emotions come very close to their genuine models, but, as he says, he is but mad north-northwest, and knows a hawk from a handsaw. When he is alone, or with Horatio, and free from the need to act the lunatic, Hamlet is incredibly lucid and self-aware, perhaps a bit manic but hardly insane.

Hamlet, in keeping with the play in general, seems almost to act the madman because he knows in some bizarre way that he is playing a role in a revenge tragedy. He knows that he is expected to act mad, because he thinks that that is what one does when seeking revenge — perhaps because he has seen *The Spanish Tragedy*. Shakespeare does

exhibit self-aware theatricality throughout the play, and if he hasn't seen *The Spanish Tragedy*, he has certainly seen *The Death of Gonzago*, and many more plays besides. He knows his role, or what his role should be, even as he is unable to play it satisfactorily. Hamlet is beautifully miscast as the revenger — he is constitutionally unfitted for so vulgar and unintelligent a fate — and likewise his attempt to play the madman, while a valiant effort, is forced, insincere, anxious, ambiguous, and full of doubts. Perhaps Hamlet himself, if we could ask him, would not know why he chooses to feign madness any more than we do.

Needless to say, Hamlet is not the only person who goes insane in the play. Ophelia's madness serves as a clear foil to his own strange antics. She is truly, unambiguously, innocently, simply mad. Whereas Hamlet's madness seems to increase his self-awareness, Ophelia loses every vestige of composure and self-knowledge, just as the truly insane tend to do.

2.4.3 The Theme of Delay

Hamlet has been a source of endless speculation to critics and readers and the main interest has been almost exactly fixed on the problem of delay. Why does Hamlet delay carrying out the task entrusted to him by the Ghost? Stoll is of the opinion that if at all there is any delay, it is Shakespeare's, not Hamlet's, for he believes if Hamlet had killed Claudius at once there would have been no play at all. Bradley strongly objects to this opinion and says, '*certainly there is delay. Two months elapse and Claudius still lives*'. Even the critics, who agree that there is delay, disagree about the causes of delay. Both external and internal causes account for Hamlet's delay.

The external causes of Hamlet's delay are physical difficulties in situation. Claudius is not a weak king. He is a shrewd man who does everything to protect his life from unforeseen attacks. He is not only surrounded by courtiers but also strongly protected by Swiss bodyguards. Hence Hamlet would find it difficult to meet his enemy alone. Also he does not in the beginning have any strong proof of Claudius' guilt except the Ghost's story. With this he cannot hope to win the people's help in deposing the king.

However, these external difficulties are not major hindrances. Hamlet himself does not speak as if there were external difficulties in the way of killing Claudius. In act III, scene III, when he sees Claudius at

prayer, he postpones the idea of killing saying that he will kill him, 'when he is drunk asleep, or in his rage'. Shakespeare shows Laertes easily raising the people against Claudius. If Laertes could do that, Hamlet, as a popular prince, could more easily have raised the people against Claudius. Hence the external difficulties do not account much for this delay.

Internal causes which make Hamlet delay his action are within his own character. Most of the time he is torn between Christian scruples and the obedience to fulfill his father's desire. In his soliloquies he wishes to commit suicide, 'To be or not to be, that is the question'. But he puts aside this thought on the ground of Christian ethics that committing suicide is a sin. We notice, however, that Hamlet hesitates to kill Claudius not on the ground of Christian spirit but because of a most revengeful thought that his soul should go to hell straight and not to heaven. In addition he feels no remorse at the deaths of Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. So this theory also does not account for his delay. Some feel that the cause of his delay is irresolution, which is due to an excess of thinking and reflection. The energy that should have gone out as an action is spent in the process of cogitation.

Hamlet is a procrastinator. Faced with the imperative act of bloody revenge, his intellect, his philosophical bent, his morality and his own emotional instability, it is impossible for him to act swiftly and decisively. He has to be sure of Claudius' guilt. When everyone at court is pretending to be what they are not, it is difficult to distinguish between appearance and reality, and this inhibits action. If however we analyze the action of *Hamlet*, we find the cause of delay linked to the theme of the play. Hamlet is not merely concerned with Killing of his father's murderer. In doing so he feels he must set right the decay in the world around him and in the heart of man. Shakespeare has endowed *Hamlet* and the action of the play with a complexity in the context of which the delay is understandable and inevitably has tragic consequences.

2.4.4 Theme of Mortality

One of the important theme in *Hamlet* is the theme of mortality. The weight of one's mortality and the complexities of life and death are introduced from the beginning of *Hamlet*. In the wake of his father's death, Hamlet can't stop pondering and considering the meaning of life — and its eventual ending. It is the uncertainty of the afterlife that frightens

Hamlet away from suicide, even though he's obsessed with the notion. A turning point for Hamlet occurs in the graveyard scene in Act V. Before, Hamlet has been appalled and revolted by the moral corruption of the living. Seeing Yorick's skull (someone Hamlet loved and respected) propels Hamlet's realization that death eliminates the differences between people.

The sheer number of bodies at the end of *Hamlet* can be misleading. Even though eight of the nine primary characters die, the question of mortality is not fully answered. *Hamlet* is unprecedented for the depth and variety of its meditations on death. Mortality is the shadow that darkens every scene of the play. The questions about death, suicide, and what comes after are left unanswered. What *Hamlet* presents is an exploration and discussion without a true resolution.

2.4.5 Theme of Intrigue

Another theme in the play *Hamlet* is the theme of intrigue. Elsinore is full of political intrigue. The murder of Old Hamlet, of course, is the primary instance of such sinister workings, but it is hardly the only one. Polonius, especially, spends nearly every waking moment (it seems) spying on this or that person, checking up on his son in Paris, instructing Ophelia in every detail of her behavior, hiding behind tapestries to eavesdrop. He is the parody of a politician, convinced that the truth can only be known through the most roundabout and sneaking ways. This is never clearer than in his appearances in Act Two. First, he instructs Reynaldo in the most incredibly convoluted espionage methods; second, he hatches and pursues his misguided theory that Hamlet is mad because his heart has been broken by Ophelia.

Claudius, too, is quite the inept Machiavellian. He naively invites Fortinbras to march across his country with a full army; he stupidly enlists Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as his chief spies; his attempt to poison Hamlet ends in total tragedy. He is little better than Polonius. This political ineptitude goes a long way toward revealing how weak Denmark has become under Claudius' rule. He is not a natural king, to be sure; he is more interested in drinking and sex than in war, reconnaissance, or political plotting. This is partly why his one successful political move, the murder of his brother, is so ironic and foul. He has somehow done away with much the better ruler, the Hyperion to his satyr (as Hamlet puts it).

It's worth noting that there is one extremely capable politician in the play — Hamlet himself. He is always on top of everyone's motives, everyone's doings and goings. He plays Polonius like a pipe and evades every effort of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to do the same to him. He sniffs out Claudius' plot to have him killed in England and sends his erstwhile friends off to die instead. Hamlet is a true Machiavellian when he wants to be. He certainly wouldn't have been as warlike as his father, but had he gotten the chance he might have been his father's equal as a ruler, simply due to his penetration and acumen.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Discuss the theme of revenge in *Hamlet*. (300-350 words)

Ans.....
.....
.....

2. Write a brief note on the theme of madness in *Hamlet*. (300-350 words)

Ans.....
.....
.....

3. Do you think that the problem of delay is an important theme in *Hamlet*? Discuss.(300-350 words)

Ans.....
.....
.....

1.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* deals with crucial themes like revenge, madness and problem of delay, mortality and intrigue. The discussion of the tragic elements in the play have enhanced your understanding of tragedy and its applicability to the play. You are now acquainted with the various themes of the play. The informations and the questions in the boxes have enhanced your knowledge as well as your writing skills. In the next unit, we shall discuss the significant scenes and the importance of soliloquies in *Hamlet*.

1.6 KEY-WORDS

Purgation: The process or act of purging, such as by the use of a purgative;
The process or act of cleansing from sin or guilt

Lugubrious: Gloomy, mournful or dismal, especially to an exaggerated degree

Soliloquy: The act of a character speaking to themselves so as to reveal their thoughts to the audience.

Carnage: Death and destruction

Juxtaposition: Two or more contrasting sounds, colours, styles etc. placed together for stylistic effect; The close placement of two ideas to imply a link that may not exist.

Nemesis: A person or character who specifically brings about the downfall of another person or character.

Catastrophe: Any large and disastrous event of great significance

Fratricidal: The killing of one's brother or sister

Lunacy: The state of being mad, insanity

Procrastinator: One who delays working on things.

Intrigue: A complicated plot or scheme intended to effect some purpose by secret artifice; conspiracy

Espionage: The act or process of learning secret information through secret means.

Machiavelli: Italian statesman and writer, whose work *The Prince* advises that acquiring and exercising power may require unethical methods.

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Unit III:

Hamlet: Significant Scenes and Soliloquies

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- 3.2 Scenes
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 - Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit, you have gone through Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* and you have come to know the tragic elements and the themes in the play. This unit will help you to

- *Assess* the significant scenes in the play
- *Identify* the important soliloquies in *Hamlet*
- *Examine* the dramatic significance of the soliloquies

3.1 INTRODUCTION

You are already acquainted with the story of *Hamlet*. You have learnt to interpret the play as a tragedy. The discussion of the various themes has enhanced

your understanding of the play. In this unit, we shall discuss the significant scenes and the importance of the soliloquies in the play which will make your understanding of *Hamlet* more comprehensive.

3.2 SCENES

3.2.1 The Nunnery Scene

The nunnery scene has been a puzzle to many critics of the play *Hamlet*. Hamlet's unduly harsh attitude towards Ophelia has made them wonder if he ever loved her. The truth of the matter becomes clear, however, if we closely study the sequence of events. In the very first soliloquy Hamlet gives expression to his innermost feelings of sorrow and despair. His ideal conception of womanhood has been shattered to pieces by the hasty re-marriage of his mother. In sheer despair, he cries out: "Frailty! Thy name is woman." Even then in his heart of hearts he may have still cherished a faint hope of finding honesty and integrity in some women. He looks up to Ophelia with hope and encouragement. If Ophelia's initial encouraging response to his advances had not come to an abrupt ending, Hamlet's outlook would have been brighter and happier and the course of his life might have changed altogether. But the sudden and unaccountable change in the attitude of Ophelia extinguished the last flicker of hope in the mind of Hamlet. Hamlet's heart was hungering for sincere love and Ophelia alone could have satisfied this hunger. But that was not to be.

When Hamlet comes to Ophelia's closet in a state of mental agony, he cannot even express his feelings. His sorrow and disillusionment are too deep for words. He comes with his knees knocking each other and 'with a look so piteous' that he seemed to come out of hell. Even then Ophelia does not give him one word of solace or one gesture of love. Hamlet raises 'a sigh so piteous and profound' that it might have ended his life. Completely frustrated and disillusioned, Hamlet goes away.

It is against this background that we must try to understand the significance of the Nunnery scene. When Hamlet is thinking deeply about 'to be or not to be' in the first scene of the third Act, Ophelia stealthily walks about with a prayer book in her hands. Hamlet's first reaction on catching sight of Ophelia is one of tender regard and consideration. It is only when Ophelia falsely accuses him of coldness and returns his gifts to her that Hamlet becomes angry and resentful. The dormant hatred for

womankind in his heart now bursts out in words of scornful rebuke: “Ha, ha! Are you honest?” The implication is that she is insincere and deceitful. Ophelia is tutored to play the part assigned to her by her father. But this only increases the hatred and anger in the mind of Hamlet. He suddenly becomes suspicious about the hidden presence of Polonius and asks Ophelia, “Where’s your father?” Ophelia tells a lie but in doing so, she confirms Hamlet’s suspicion that she is spying upon him. The seeming innocence of the girl who is the object of his love and adoration conceals underneath the deceit and hypocrisy. This is his strong impression about her and so Hamlet gets more and more excited and his behaviour becomes harsher. In mocking derision he speaks about women and rushes out in sheer disgust after giving Ophelia the parting advice to go to a nunnery.

The Nunnery scene marks the turning-point in Hamlet’s life. Henceforth he loses all faith in purity and sincerity and the feeling of melancholy takes a deep root in his character and temperament. If in his hour of desolation and despair, Ophelia could give him sincere love and sympathetic understanding, there would have been no tragedy either in the life of Ophelia or in that of Hamlet. But the final estrangement between the two takes place in the nunnery scene which accelerates the pace of tragic forces which lead both of them to their inevitable doom. This is the dramatic significance of the Nunnery scene.

3.2.2 The Play Scene

The Dumb show is a part of the Play scene. It puts in a nutshell a complete picture of what is going to be enacted on the stage. The loving embrace of the King and Queen, her show of love to him, the King’s falling asleep, her leaving him, the entrance of the murderer who pours poison into the sleeper’s ears, the lamentations of the Queen and her subsequent acceptance of the love of the murderer—all these taken together constitute a faithful portrayal of the actual crime committed by Claudius and his subsequent marriage with Gertrude. It has puzzled many critics why Claudius was not perturbed at the outset to see the Dumb show as he was when the same thing was represented through dialogue and action by the players upon the stage. The fact is that there is tension in the atmosphere with the introduction of the Dumb show. It certainly rouses suspicion in the mind of King Claudius. But he controls his suspicion and resentment and decides to watch the play further.

Hamlet keeps a close watch upon the King’s countenance, all the time pretending complete innocence. The king is too shrewd a man

to fall into the 'mouse-trap' and show his anxiety resentment and thus awakens the suspicion of the Courtiers about the complicity in the crime. He, therefore, struggles with his suspicion, anger and resentment and tries to keep as calm as possible. As the scene advances, the tension mounts, the King's inner struggle deepens and there is increasing excitement on the part of Hamlet and Horatio. In fact, the dramatic interest of the play scene lies precisely in this undercurrent of feelings and emotions which the rival protagonists try to conceal from each other and from the public as long as they can.

The Player King and the Player Queen carry the point further. When the Player Queen says: "in second husband let me be accurst! None wed the second but, who killed the first?" These words drive home into the hearts of both Claudius and Gertrude. We can we; imagine how the curious glances of the entire court assembled there must have been directed towards the King and Queen to see how they took it all. A few moments after this, when the Player King sleeps, the King's suspicion mounts high and he asks Hamlet: "Have you heard the argument? Is there any offence in it?" Hamlet denies that there is any offence in it. It is this interplay of suspicion and resentment, struggle and excitement, tension and suspense, on the part of the King and Queen, Hamlet and Horatio and courtiers that reveals the dramatist's superb craftsmanship.

The climax is reached with the entrance of Lucianus and his utterance of those fateful six lines which finally break down the King's self-possession and completely upset him. When Lucianus pours poison into the sleeper's ear, the King can no longer control himself. His suspicion is now fully confirmed. He is now certain that Hamlet knows the secret, he feels himself exposed and humiliated, and he suddenly rises and goes away. The courtiers must have wondered at the sudden departure of the King, but Hamlet is now convinced about the guilt of the King and the truthfulness of the ghost. This is Hamlet's hour of triumph against the King and the Play scene marks the climax of the play.

3.2.3 The Closet Scene

As soon as the Play scene is over and all of them disperse, Hamlet receives a message to see his mother in her closet. On the way to see his mother, Hamlet finds the King kneeling in prayer. He thinks of killing him, but he hesitates and considers for a moment, and finally spares him for a more suitable occasion. He then meets his mother in her closet and this is why it is called the closet scene.

Gertrude's over hasty marriage has already shattered Hamlet's faith in the purity and sincerity of womankind. He comes to see his mother with the determination to make her realise her guilt and feel penitent, if possible. As soon as Hamlet meets her, he begins to upbraid her severely for her moral lapse. When Hamlet kills Polonius, she cries out: "O, What a rash and bloody deed is this."

To it Hamlet replies:

"A bloody deed! Almost as bad, good mother,

As kill a king, and marry with his brother.

The Queen exclaims with astonishment,

As kill a king!"

This cry of horror and astonishment at the awful accusation convinces Hamlet that she is innocent of the major crime and he does not press the point further. Hamlet draws a comparison between her dignified and majestic previous husband who had 'Hyperion's curls and the front of Jove himself' and her vile-looking present husband. Hamlet's object is to make his mother realise her guilt and express repentance. So he says: "Confess yourself to heaven; Repent what is past; avoid what is to come." Hamlet's object is fulfilled. Gertrude feels sorry and repentant. She cries out: "O, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain." Hamlet succeeds in driving home to his mother the enormity of her guilt in yielding to her passionate desire and transferring her love and loyalty to a person much inferior to her previous husband. In his success there is also a reconciliation between mother and son. Hamlet is glad to note that his mother is penitent.

Gertrude is happy to learn that her son is not really mad but that he is in full control of his intellect and senses. She promises to keep this knowledge a secret to King Claudius and we know she keeps her promise. The dramatic significance of this scene lies in this that it clears away the misunderstanding between mother and son and opens a new chapter of love and mutual understanding. This is noticed in the graveyard scene where the Queen tries to shield her son against being denounced for his wild behaviour and finally it becomes evident in the last scene when the Queen clearly takes the side of her son against King Claudius and dies with the name of her son, 'dear Hamlet' on her lips.

Check Your Progress – 1

(Answer the following questions within 400-450 words)

1. Write a note on the importance of the nunnery scene in *Hamlet*.

Ans.....
.....
.....

2. Critically examine the Play Scene in *Hamlet*.

Ans.....
.....
.....

3. Write a note on the Closet Scene in the play *Hamlet*.

Ans.....
.....
.....

3.3 THE SOLILOQUIES

In the previous section you have learnt about the Nunnery scene, the Play scene and the Closet scene. In this section, we shall discuss the soliloquies in the play and the dramatic significance of the soliloquies

3.3.1 Important Soliloquies from the Play

The soliloquies in *Hamlet* reveal the depths of Hamlet's inner personality and reflect his anguished mind. They also mark the different stages in the development of action. They may be called the nerve-centres of the play. From time to time in the play, Hamlet delivers a soliloquy, or a speech that the audience can hear, but the other characters cannot. These speeches let us know what Hamlet is thinking but not saying, and there are seven soliloquies in all. To really understand the plot development of *Hamlet*, one needs to understand the actual meaning and concept of each of Hamlet's soliloquies. In these seven soliloquies, Hamlet shares his inner feelings, thoughts, and plans for the future. These soliloquies are the pivotal pillars of the drama and are still considered some of Shakespeare's most brilliant writing. You will likely recognize lines, such

as the famous “To be or not to be...” Without reading these seven soliloquies, one cannot enjoy the true experience of this amazing drama

1. Hamlet’s First Soliloquy

*O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!... (Act I, Scene II)*

2. Hamlet’s Second Soliloquy

*O all you host of heaven! O earth! what else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! — Hold, my heart... (Act I, Scene V)*

3. Hamlet’s Third Soliloquy

*Ay, so, God b’wi’ye!
Now I am alone.
O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!... (Act II, Scene II)*

4. Hamlet’s Fourth Soliloquy (to be or not to be)

*To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?... (Act III, Scene I)*

5. Hamlet’s Fifth Soliloquy

*’Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world...
Soft! now to my mother...
Let me be cruel, not unnatural;
I will speak daggers to her, but use none... (Act III, Scene II)*

6. Hamlet’s Sixth Soliloquy

*Now might I do it pat now he is praying,
And now I’ll do it, and so he goes to heaven.
And so am I revenged, that would be scanned... (Act III, Scene III)*

7. Hamlet's Seventh Soliloquy

How all occasions do inform against me

And spur my dull revenge!... (Act IV, Scene IV)

3.3.2 Dramatic Significance of the Soliloquies

Soliloquy is a dramatic technique of speaking alone on the stage. It is a dramatic convention of exposing to the audience – the intentions, thoughts and feelings of a character who speaks to himself while no one remains on the stage. Shakespeare often has his characters speak in soliloquies during the course of his plays. Soliloquies are essential to the presentation of a story through the medium of a play because they provide the opportunity the chance to tell the audience specific pieces of information which cannot be disclosed through normal conversation. In his work, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's title character is shown to speak in seven soliloquies. Each soliloquy advances the plot, reveals Hamlet's inner thoughts to the audience and helps to create an atmosphere in the play. Here in the tragic play *Hamlet* the soliloquies spoken by the protagonist are directed to the audience, rather than seeming like conversations with himself. Some of the famous Hamlet's soliloquies have been elucidated below.

Hamlet's first soliloquy reveals him to be thoroughly disgusted with Gertrude, Claudius and at the world in general. He considers the world to be an unweeded garden with no significance of life and in a grievous tone says:

*“O God! God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!”*

He is saddened at the death of his father, whom he admired as a king and husband to his mother. His grief over his father's death is compounded by his mother's hasty marriage to Claudius. Hamlet believes that even a beast that has no power of reasoning, would mourn longer but she had not. The worst part is that he cannot tell them how he feels. This soliloquy kindles an interest in the readers and provides a glimpse on Hamlet's thoughts while informing the audience of the history of his family's tribulations.

In the second soliloquy, Hamlet calls on the audience 'the distracted globe' to hear his vow to take revenge on his uncle. Now he promises to erase all the foolish lessons in order to remember the

commandment of the ghost. The ghost that resembles his father has told him that King Claudius has murdered his father and his soul cannot rest until the revenge is taken. The audience here learns Hamlet's promise to make Claudius pay for this unnatural crime. Already the audience is excited at Hamlet's promise because it is giving them something to look forward.

In his third soliloquy, Hamlet admits to the audience that he is a coward. So for his inaction like a day dreamer, he is chiding himself in this way:

"O, vengeance!

Why, what an ass am I!

Then he is telling the audience about his new idea of justifying the credibility of the news provided by the ghost. This results in delay to reach his goal. Although heaven and hell urge him to take revenge, he must examine the truth through the play with the poison pouring scene. If his uncle reacts to the scene, he will be confirmed of his uncle's involvement in the murder. Now the audiences have even more of a buildup of what is to come.

In the fourth soliloquy, the Prince of Denmark is in a dilemma whether to commit suicide or to accept the pangs of the world stoically or to fight back against them.

"To be or no to be – that is the question;"

Then he is frightened of the consequences of the life after death and its punishment. He puts a logic that if there were no punishment of God for suicide, nobody would tolerate injustice, the insults of the world, the arrogance of the undeserving superiors, the sufferings of the unrequited love, the delay of law, adversities and the cruelty of a tyrant. It is such fear that robs of courage to commit suicide and transforms us into a coward. Here the audience observes that Hamlet is incapable of taking revenge, as he is always contemplative.

In conclusion, it is clear from the above discussion that the audience is always being included in Hamlet's thinking process through the use of the soliloquies. Such involvement of the audience helps the real meaning of the play shine through. Some critics view that without the soliloquies, the play "Hamlet" would degenerate into a cheap melodrama.

The first soliloquy which Hamlet delivers gives the audience their first glimpse of him as a character. Hamlet is reflective and depicts the way he views his own position; he tells of his father's death and then his

mother's quick remarriage. He says, "It is not, nor it cannot come to good" (I, ii, 163), when referring to the marriage of his mother. This gives the audience a hint of foreshadowing because it is the first time when Hamlet mentions the future. This speech also reveals his thoughts further when he says that his mother is frail because she is a woman, while he also admits that he knows he must hold his tongue. During the course of this speech Hamlet makes several allusions to historical figures and this demonstrates to the audience that he is an intelligent young man. One of these allusions is when he compares the love his late father had for his mother to Hyperion to Satyr; this is a reference to the sun god and his affections. This clearly shows the audience that his heart is breaking not only for the loss of affections towards his mother but the fact that she does not seem to care about this loss. A second allusion made during the course of this soliloquy is a reference to Niobe, a figure in Greek mythology who was so grief stricken she could not stop crying and turned to stone. Hamlet compares his mother to this figure and says Gertrude should be as grief stricken as Niobe. He also compares himself to Hercules saying that his uncle is as similar to his father as he is to Hercules. All of this information put together gives the audience a very strong first impression of Hamlet as a character.

The second time which the audience sees Hamlet speak in a soliloquy is in Scene V of Act I when Hamlet has just met the ghost of his father and has received some disturbing news. His father has just revealed that he was murdered by his own brother, this news deeply upsets Hamlet. This soliloquy reveals Hamlet's thoughts when he says he is going to wipe away all trivial knowledge from his brain and live by thy commandments. When he says, "Now to my word ... I have sworn it" (I, V, 116-119), he is letting the audience know that he will avenge his father's death therefore creating anticipation as the audience wonders how he will achieve retribution. While speaking, Hamlet creates an atmosphere because he repeats the last words the ghost has told him, "Adieu, adieu, remember me" (I, V, 118). This line is important because the ghost does not want to be forgotten and Hamlet does not want to forget him. The repetition makes the audience realize the significance of this line because the ghost wants his true story to be told and he wishes to be remembered as a hero and someone who was wronged. There is also contrast present when Hamlet talks about smiling and being a villain. This shows that Hamlet is now aware that people may not always be as they seem and one must be careful. His attitude has changed because now Hamlet has even more of a reason to despise his uncle and the audience is now caught up in the moment of surprise and suspense.

The next time the audience sees Hamlet alone, more information has been gathered about his character, because although a lot can be learned for what Hamlet says about himself, information can also be learned by what others say about him and the actions that Hamlet does. It is now known that Hamlet is mad, although he has revealed to Guildenstern and Rosencrantz that he is only pretending. He further explains the plan to foil his uncle in this soliloquy, saying he will watch closely the way his uncle reacts to a play that is very similar in plot line to the actions Claudius has taken to become King. Hamlet reveals that he feels he has taken a cowardly approach to making sure that the ghost was telling the truth and that his uncle really is the murderer but he also discloses that he is worried the ghost may have been the devil. This soliloquy also creates atmosphere because of the way Hamlet talks about himself; he uses harsh language and calls himself names such as rogue, peasant slave, ass, and whore. This language makes the audience sympathize with Hamlet because he has a lot to worry about with his mother marrying to soon and his uncle possibly having married his mother. It gives Hamlet a reason to be acting so mad because there is a lot to deal with in his life, his character becomes relatable to the audience because he is overwhelmed therefore allowing there to be some justification of his actions.

Hamlet is seen again in Act III, speaking directly to the audience during his famous to be or not to be speech. This soliloquy is especially important to the play because it is written with masterful language and reveals a new side of Hamlet. This soliloquy shows Hamlet's softer emotional side when he speaks of suffering and lists multiple opposing things, showing once again the inner turmoil that Hamlet is facing. The big question that Hamlet is trying to answer for himself during the course of this soliloquy is whether or not it is noble to take up arms and die defending what you believe is right. He compares dying to sleeping because it is peaceful and may lead to dreams. By discussing mortality Hamlet again allows the audience to relate to him because he reveals he is afraid of dying. The soliloquy ends on a strong note giving the audience pause to consider his actions he says, "be all my sins remembered" (Act III, Scene I, P.98). This quote tells the audience that Hamlet has decided that seeking revenge is in fact a noble deed and justifiable. The last few lines also mention Ophelia, and as the audience knows Ophelia refuses to see him now and Hamlet is acting mad towards her. This shows that Hamlet continues to act mad and seek revenge and he is aware that he will lose Ophelia during the course of these events. This creates

atmosphere for the audience and prepares them for the actions that Hamlet will take in the near future.

The next soliloquy in which the audience sees Hamlet is at the end of Scene III Act II, in which he has just watched the play which he orchestrated to get a reaction out of Claudius to see if he is guilty or not. During the course of the play Hamlet makes bawdy comments to Ophelia and Claudius has rushed out of the play. Gertrude is furious with Hamlet and wants to see him immediately. The audience can see how Hamlet really feels about these events during the course of his soliloquy; his feelings are apparent within the first line where he says it is the witching time of night. Hamlet is aware that it is time to take action because he has figured out the truth about what his uncle has done. Hamlet goes on to reveal his feelings about his mother when he says, "I will speak daggers to her, but use none" (III, ii, 429). This metaphor creates atmosphere because although Hamlet says he will speak daggers and not use them it tells the audience his train of thought is leading him close to daggers and using daggers. During the course of this soliloquy Hamlet reveals that he does not want his heart to lose her nature and he wishes for the soul of Nero to enter his bosom. Nero was an infamous roman emperor who performed numerous executions including that of his mother. By wishing to have a soul such as Nero's enter his bosom it is clear that Hamlet is revealing to the audience how his intentions may not be as pure as he portrays them.

When Hamlet presents his next soliloquy he is not alone on stage but there with his uncle who cannot hear him. Hamlet walks in on his uncle who he believes to be kneeling in prayer, Hamlet at first thinks this will be the perfect opportunity to murder his uncle and gain his revenge but his soliloquy quickly reveal that his thoughts have brought him somewhere else. Hamlet decides that he cannot kill his uncle while he is in prayer because then his soul will go to Heaven and this will not be just punishment for the acts which he has committed. "And that his soul will be as damned and black as hell" (III, iii, 99-100) this metaphor adds atmosphere because Hamlet compares his uncle's soul to blackness and hell. Hamlet then decides that he will kill his uncle at a more appropriate time such as when he is drinking or when he is in his incestuous bed filled with pleasures. That way, Hamlet reveals his uncle's soul will go to hell and not to heaven. By not wanting his uncle to go to Heaven the audience learns a new side of Hamlet in which his thoughts are becoming increasingly rash and angry now that he is convinced that his uncle did in fact murder his father. Because Hamlet is waiting for what he considers a better opportunity to kill his uncle this creates anticipation for the audience

as they will be wondering when and how Hamlet will achieve his ultimate revenge.

The final soliloquy that Hamlet presents to the audience is one of the last times Hamlet appears on stage. It is at the end of Scene IV Act IV and takes place after Hamlet has encountered Fortinbras' army and talked with Fortinbras himself. Hamlet reveals to the audience that he feels that if a man has no purpose he is no better than a beast so he must use his encounter with Fortinbras to spur his revenge. He believes that God has created humans in his image to achieve great things and he also tells the audience that he doesn't just want to sit there anymore while his father is not avenged and his mother is stained by the actions she has taken to be with his uncle. He is inspired by Fortinbras and his army of twenty thousand men who walk towards certain death and yet they do it with noble hearts and courage because their honor is at stake. Hamlet also contemplates on the meaning of mortality and how death can come so quickly. This reveals to the audience that Hamlet does not feel as though he is invulnerable and that he is scared of dying. At the end of his soliloquy Hamlet vows, "O, from this time forth/My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!" (IV, iv, 68-69) These lines show that Hamlet has gained new resolve and will try to kill his uncle no matter what to avenge his father's death and Hamlet is convinced that all of his actions are justifiable. This closing line gives the audience a chance to connect with Hamlet because it is easy for one to understand feelings of being wronged and wanting to get revenge.

Before Hamlet's death, he kills his uncle and avenges his father and this allows the audience to breathe a sigh of relief towards Hamlet because he has achieved the purpose which he often alludes to during his soliloquies. Each of the seven soliloquies allows the audience a deeper perspective into who Hamlet is as a character as he reveals his thoughts, advances the plot and adds atmosphere. When Hamlet speaks in these soliloquies he is always his true self; never pretending to be mad or taking on a superficial way of talking as he did at times in dialogue with others. These soliloquies, therefore, adds much to the overall content of the play *Hamlet* and allows Shakespeare's audience a much better understanding of the plot.

Check your Progress – 2

1. What is a soliloquy? How many soliloquies are there in *Hamlet*? Mention. (within 150-200 words)

Ans.....
.....
.....

2. Examine the dramatic significance of the soliloquies in *Hamlet*. (within 600 words)

Ans.....
.....
.....

3.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have understood the significant scenes like the nunnery scene, the play scene and the closet scene in the play. You have also learnt about the important soliloquies and their dramatic significance in the play. The questions in the boxes have enhanced your comprehension as well as your writing skills. In the next unit we shall discuss the characters and the diction and imagery in the play.

3.5 KEY-WORDS

Frailty: The condition of being mentally or physically fragile; weak; infirm

Nunnery: A place of residence for nuns

Countenance: Appearance, especially the features and expression of the face.

Closet: A small private chamber

Penitent: Feeling pain or sorrow on account of sins or offences; repentant

Invulnerable: Incapable of being wounded, or of receiving injury; not vulnerable.

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Unit IV:

Hamlet: A Study of Characters, Diction and Imagery

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4.0 Objectives

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4.2.8 The Ghost

4.2.9 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Check Your Progress 1

4.3 Diction and Imagery in *Hamlet*

Check Your Progress 2

4.4 Let Us Sum Up

4.5 Key-Words

4.6 References

Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit, you have learnt about the significant scenes like the nunnery scene, the play scene and the closet scene in the play. You have also learnt about the important soliloquies and their dramatic significance in the play. In this unit we are going to discuss the significant characters in *Hamlet*. We shall also discuss the diction and imagery in the play. This unit will help you to

- *Identify* the major and minor characters in the novel

- *Assess* the significance of the characters in the play
- *Acquaint* yourself with the diction and imagery in the play

4.1 INTRODUCTION

You are already acquainted with the significance of the scenes like the nunnery scene, the play scene and the closet scene in *Hamlet*. You have learnt to identify the important soliloquies in the play. The dramatic significance of the soliloquies has enhanced your understanding of the play. In this unit, we shall discuss the characters and the diction and imagery in the play which will make your understanding of *Hamlet* clearer.

4.2 CHARACTERS

In the previous unit, you have learnt about the Nunnery scene, The Play scene, the Closet scene and the dramatic significance of the soliloquies. Let us discuss the major and minor characters in *Hamlet*.

4.2.1 Hamlet

Hamlet is an enigma. No matter how many ways critics examine him, no absolute truth emerges. Hamlet breathes with the multiple dimensions of a living human being, and everyone understands him in a personal way. Hamlet's challenge to Guildenstern rings true for everyone who seeks to know him: "You would pluck out the heart of my mystery." None of us ever really does. The conundrum that is Hamlet stems from the fact that every time we look at him, he is different. In understanding literary characters, just as in understanding real people, our perceptions depend on what we bring to the investigation. Hamlet is so complete a character that, like an old friend or relative, our relationship to him changes each time we visit him, and he never ceases to surprise us.

The paradox of Hamlet's nature draws people to the character. He is at once the consummate iconoclast, in self-imposed exile from Elsinore Society, while, at the same time, he is the adulated champion of Denmark — the people's hero. He has no friends left, but Horatio loves him unconditionally. He is angry, dejected, depressed, and brooding; he is manic, elated, enthusiastic, and energetic. He is dark and suicidal, a man who loathes himself and his fate. Yet, at the same time, he is an existential thinker who accepts that he must deal with life on its own

terms, that he must choose to meet it head on. “We defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow.” Hamlet not only participates in his life, but astutely observes it as well. He recognizes the decay of the Danish society (represented by his Uncle Claudius), but also understands that he can blame no social ills on just one person. He remains aware of the ironies that constitute human endeavor, and he savors them. Though he says, “Man delights not me,” the contradictions that characterize us all intrigue him. “What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!” As astutely as he observes the world around him, Hamlet also keenly critiques himself. In his soliloquies he upbraids himself for his failure to act as well as for his propensity for words.

Hamlet is infuriatingly adept at twisting and manipulating words. He confuses his so-called friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern — whom he trusts as he “would adders fang’d” — with his dissertations on ambition, turning their observations around so that they seem to admire beggars more than their King. And he leads them on a merry chase in search of Polonius’ body. He openly mocks the dottering Polonius with his word plays, which elude the old man’s understanding. He continually spars with Claudius, who recognizes the danger of Hamlet’s wit but is never smart enough to defend himself against it. Words are Hamlet’s constant companions, his weapons, and his defenses. And yet, words also serve as Hamlet’s prison. He analyzes and examines every nuance of his situation until he has exhausted every angle. They cause him to be indecisive. He dallies in his own wit, intoxicated by the mix of words he can concoct; he frustrates his own burning desire to be more like his father, the Hyperion. When he says that Claudius is “. . . no more like my father than I to Hercules” he recognizes his enslavement to words, his inability to thrust home his sword of truth. No mythic character is Hamlet. He is stuck, unable to avenge his father’s death because words control him.

“What an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear murderèd
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,
And fall-a-cursing like a very drab,
A scallion!”

Hamlet unequivocally hates his stepfather and abhors the incestuous relationship between Claudius and Gertrude. But whether jealousy prompts his hatred, whether his fixation on his mother causes his inability to love Ophelia, and whether he lusts after Gertrude all depend on interpretation. And no interpretation is flawless. Hamlet's love life could result from his Puritanical nature. Like the Puritans whose presence was growing in England of the time, Hamlet is severely puritanical about love and sex. He is appalled by Gertrude's show of her pleasure at Claudius' touch, and he clearly loathes women. His anger over Claudius' and Gertrude's relationship could as easily result from a general distaste for sexual activity as from desire to be with his mother. Hamlet could be, at heart, a brutal misogynist, terrified of love because he is terrified of women. He verbally abuses Ophelia, using sexual innuendo and derision, and he encourages her to get to a nunnery. Another play on words, nunnery, in this instance, symbolizes both sexual abstinence and sexual perversity. In a cloister, Ophelia would take a vow of chastity, and in a brothel, she would serve as the basest sexual object.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle defined the tragic hero with Oedipus as the archetype a great man at the pinnacle of his power who, through a flaw in his own character, topples, taking everyone in his jurisdiction with him. Hamlet has no great power, though it is clear from Claudius' fears and from Claudius' assessment of Hamlet's popularity that he might have power were he to curry it among the people. His topple results as much from external factors as from his own flaws. Nevertheless, he certainly does take everyone with him when he falls. Shakespeare modified Aristotle's definition for his own age and created a tragic hero who can appeal to a larger, more enduring segment of the population. Hamlet fulfills the Aristotelian requirement that the tragic hero invoke in us a deep sense of pity and fear, that we learn from him how not to conduct our lives. Hamlet is our hero because he is, as we are, at once both confused and enticed by endless dilemmas that come from being, after all, merely human.

4.2.2 Ophelia

Ophelia is a difficult role to play because her character, like Gertrude's, is murky. Part of the difficulty is that Shakespeare wrote his female roles for men, and there were always limitations on them that restricted and defined the characterizations devised. The extent to which a boy could grasp subtle nuances might have prevented the playwright from fleshing out the character more fully.

We do know that Ophelia is torn between two contradictory poles. Her father and brother believe that Hamlet would use her, that he would take her virginity and throw it away because she could never be his wife. Her heart has convinced her that Hamlet loved her, though he swears he never did. To her father and brother, Ophelia is the eternal virgin, the vessel of morality whose purpose is to be a dutiful wife and steadfast mother. To Hamlet, she is a sexual object, a corrupt and deceitful lover. With no mother to guide her, she has no way of deciphering the contradictory expectations.

Just like Hamlet, the medieval precept that the father's word is unquestionable governs Ophelia. But her Renaissance sense of romantic love also rules her. How can she be obedient to her father and true to her love? When she lies to Hamlet and tells him that Polonius is home when he is concealed in the room eavesdropping, Ophelia proves she cannot live in both worlds. She has chosen one, and her choice seals her fate. The dilemma also forces her into madness. She has no way to reconcile the contradictory selves her men demand that she be and still retain an equilibrium. Ophelia's desperation literally drives her crazy, and she has no means with which to heal herself.

4.2.3 Gertrude

Gertrude is a shadowy character with little substance on which to hang a characterization. We can examine her through what others say about her more than through what she says. That she is "th'imperial jointress" to the throne of Denmark indicates that she wields some power and suggests that Claudius' decision to marry her had political implications. Yet Hamlet indicts all women by calling her fickle — "frailty, thy name is woman." We see through Hamlet the picture of a woman who one day lived obediently and in the shadow of one king to whom she was devoted. The next day she allies herself in love and politics with the polar opposite of the man she formerly called husband.

The most haunting questions about Gertrude's character revolve around whether she knows that Claudius is a criminal. Is she merely a dependent woman who needs to live through her man? Is she a conniving temptress who used her power to conspire with Claudius to kill King Hamlet and usurp Prince Hamlet's ascendancy?

No textual references are conclusive. The ghost of King Hamlet calls her his "most seeming virtuous queen." He entreats Hamlet to "Leave

her to Heaven / And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her.” These words could imply that she has reason to be guilty, that she is not blameless. Later, the ghost implores Hamlet to comfort her. “But look, amazement on thy mother sits. / Oh step between her and her fighting soul.” Again, he waxes protective of her but implies that she has some reason to be spiritually conflicted.

When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive at Elsinore, she tells them that they have been sent for because of the way Hamlet “hath talked of you,” and she promises them compensation fit for “ a king’s remembrance.” She exhibits apparent sincerity in her concern for Hamlet, and yet, even after Hamlet has told her what he knows about Claudius, even after he has shared his fears of the trip to England, even after Hamlet has clearly proved that something is rotten in the state of Denmark, she never opposes Claudius to protect Hamlet. Unless, as some critics believe, she drinks the poisoned wine as an act of maternal protectiveness. Does she know the wine is poisoned? When “the Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet” is she deliberately drinking to prevent Hamlet’s death? If Gertrude has overheard Claudius and Laertes plotting, she would know all. If she is in Claudius’ confidence, she would be complicit with all his conspiracies. Though Claudius professes love and admiration for Gertrude, he never confides to anyone the extent of their relationship. Gertrude describes her love for Hamlet when she asks him not to return to Wittenberg. When she shares with Ophelia her hope that the young woman would have married her Hamlet, she divulges her wish for his happiness. However, she never declares any kind of emotion for Claudius, either positive or negative.

Ultimately, Gertrude’s character remains malleable. In the hands of an astute actor and a clever director, she can come across as either Claudius’ co-conspirator or Hamlet’s defender. Either interpretation works, if built substantially.

4.2.4 The Ghost

The Elizabethan audience believed in the existence of Ghosts, witches and other supernatural beings. The dramatists of the period introduced these supernatural beings to create an atmosphere of horror and excite the imagination of the audience. Shakespeare also introduces them in his plays, but they have an intellectual appeal rather than cater to crude sensationalism. The Ghost in *Hamlet* is a solemn, majestic figure

which is at once mysterious and real. The way it haunts the vicinity of the castle at the dead hour of night gives us a mysterious thrill of the strange and unknown. But it is not a product of Hamlet's excited imagination. It appears on successive nights and is seen by several people. Horatio at first disbelieves in the existence of Ghosts. He calls it a 'fantasy' of his friends and dismisses their story saying, "Tush, tush, 'twill not appear." But when the Ghost actually appears, he cannot disbelieve his eyes. He says, "It harrows me with fear and wonder."

Hamlet has also the same feelings of fear and wonder when he first sees the apparition. He does not doubt the existence of the apparition, he doubts only his authenticity. The Ghost performs a major function in the play. It is his revelation about the murder that shocks the sensitive mind of Hamlet. It is his injunction to Hamlet to take revenge that creates the tragic problem for him. Hamlet instinctively feels that the burden is too heavy for him to bear. At the close of the scene he cries out in despair:

"The time is out of joint: O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!"

The invisible presence of the Ghost seems always to haunt the mind of Hamlet. Time and again, he remembers the command of the Ghost, his own delay in obeying the command and fulfilling it, and then he includes in self-reproach for the delay for which he finds no legitimate excuse. The appearance of the Ghost in the closet scene is meant to "to what" Hamlet's "almost blunted purpose" The Ghost intervenes at a critical moment when Hamlet is on the point of revealing the murder of his father and his timely intervention saves Hamlet's mother from the shock of the terrible revelation.

The fact that Queen Gertrude does not see the Ghost does not disprove the existence of the Ghost. Hamlet clearly asserts that it is not his 'ecstasy', for his pulse keeps time and makes healthful music. The Ghost is invisible to the Queen, for he wants to spare the Queen the knowledge of the Murder. According to the beliefs and practices of the Elizabethan audience, a Ghost could make itself visible to some and invisible to others according to his choice and inclination. The Ghost in *Hamlet* is therefore, real and objective and yet carries a sense of awe and mystery with its majestic personality. It sets the tragic forces in motion by revealing the fact of the hideous murder to Hamlet and exhorting him to take revenge as early as possible. It serves as a connecting link between this world and the world beyond and is a concrete symbol of the unseen and unknown.

4.2.5 Claudius

Shakespeare's villains are complex. Unlike the earlier anti-heroes of the revenge or morality plays that were popular in Elizabethan and Jacobean culture, Shakespearean criminals lack the simple clarity of absolute evil. Claudius is a perfect example of a quintessential Shakespearean antagonist. Claudius is socially adept, and his charm is genuine. He can exhibit deep distress over his "dear brother's death" and admiration for his wife, "Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state." He knows the value of a great funeral, but quickly turns mourning into celebration and moves on "With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage" to whatever lies ahead. He is a decisive man, fair in his politics and commanding — if Gertrude's allegiance is any indication — in his bedroom.

The Queen has chosen to marry Claudius, and she defends him even to her son. In fact, she never opposes Claudius in anything. Were he dark and sinister in all things, she would fear and despise him; she follows him willingly even when he arranges to send her beloved son into the jaws of death. He must be sincere in his love for her. He explains his feelings for her at the end of Act IV, but he has proved these feelings consistently throughout the play

The Queen his mother

Lives almost by his looks, and for myself,

My virtue or my plague, be it either which,

She's so conjunctive to my life and soul

That as the star moves not but in his sphere,

I could not by her.

A character who loves is not merely a cold-blooded killer. Like Hamlet, his conflicting imperatives tear him apart. Whereas he recognizes that he his "offense is rank" and "smells to heaven," he also admits that he will not make amends with God because he refuses to give up what his crime has bought him. He is willing to take the consequences of his actions.

In some ways, Claudius exhibits more heroism than Hamlet. He manipulates fortune and takes what is not rightfully his, but remains unapologetic for his actions; he possesses enough strength to admit that he would do the same again. Hamlet, torn by conscience to smite the morally deficient Claudius, causes the death of six innocent people before

he accomplishes his goal. By taking full responsibility for his actions, Claudius mitigates his evil nature. The mark of a great Shakespearean antagonist is how completely he mirrors the protagonist. Claudius is no more Machiavellian than Hamlet; both ultimately believe that the end justifies the means, and both ultimately sacrifice humanity and humaneness in the acquisition of their goals.

What makes Claudius a villain is that he is wrong, and Hamlet is right. Claudius is a sneak who murdered and lied. Hamlet commits his murders in the open and suffers the pangs of his own conscience. Claudius subverts his conscience and refuses to ask for divine forgiveness. Hamlet seeks contrition and absolves himself of guilt before he dies; Claudius receives no absolution and seeks none. Hamlet will spend eternity in Heaven; Claudius will burn in Hell.

4.2.6 Polonius

Polonius is a talkative fool who thinks himself to be a very wise man. The only words of prudence and wisdom he ever utters are those which he speaks to Laertes on the eve of his departure for Paris. Polonius has a highly suspicious nature. He suspects his own son, he suspects Ophelia and he suspects Hamlet and even the Queen. Soon after his son's departure, he sends Reynaldo to Paris to inquire secretly about the conduct of his son. He instructs Reynaldo to adopt some tricks and crooked means to ascertain if his son is leading an immoral way of life. He advises him to falsely accuse his son of such 'wild and usual slips' as gaming, drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling and drabbing to know if his son has gone farther astray than performing these actions. He concludes his advice with these words:

“See you now;
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,
With windlasses and with assays of bins,
By indirections find directions out:”

Polonius has no faith in Ophelia's power of understanding or her sense of honour. He gives her a wrong advice to sever all connections with Hamlet. It must be said here that Polonius gives this advice with the best of intentions. A loving father as he is, he is solicitous about the welfare and honour of his daughter. He is afraid that Hamlet the young Prince

may not be earnest in his advances towards Ophelia and that in any case, there may be impediments in the way of matrimony between a Prince and the daughter of a mere courtier. But this only shows his incapacity to judge the conduct of persons around him. This incapacity is combined with his dogmatic self-assurance that whatever he thinks must be right. This explains his dictatorial attitude towards his daughter.

The worst trait of his character is eavesdropping and meddling into the affairs of others. It is not his business to secretly listen to the talk between Hamlet and his mother. He thinks that Queen Gertrude may not honestly report everything to her husband and he should therefore spy upon the Queen and afterwards narrate to the King a faithful account of what takes place in the encounter between mother and son. So he says to the King:

“My lord, he’s going to his mother’s closet;
Behind the arras I’ll convey myself,
To bear the process.”

This proves to be his doom. The over-confident man who thinks that he has never positively said ‘tis so’ when it proved otherwise, deserves the fate which overcomes him.

4.2.7 Horatio

Horatio epitomizes the faithful friend. He only questions Hamlet’s judgment once, when Hamlet confides the fates of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Otherwise, Horatio supports every rash decision Hamlet makes. Horatio is the man Hamlet wants to be. He is intelligent, but not driven by his intellectual creativity. Horatio seems to accept the world as it is handed to him where Hamlet is driven by his impulse question all apparent truths. He can follow Hamlet’s elaborate wordplays, but he is not inclined to engage in any. He knows enough to value what ignorance he has that can protect him from political ruin, but neither ambition nor deceit determines his loyalties.

Horatio loves Hamlet so much that he would rather impale himself on his own sword than live on after Hamlet’s death. Hamlet passionately demonstrates his own deep love and admiration for Horatio in his request that Horatio tell Hamlet’s story. Hamlet trusts his friend enough to leave him the task of finding the words that will divine the truth. For Hamlet, entrusting the task to Horatio declares his love better than expressing

that love through any of Hamlet's poetry or philosophy. Action has at last spoken louder than words.

4.2.8 Laertes

Hamlet and Laertes presumably grew up together, fencing with one another and confiding in one another. Then Hamlet went away to Wittenberg and Laertes to Paris, parting the friendship. Still, Hamlet refers to Laertes as "a very noble youth." Hamlet recognizes what Shakespeare has made abundantly clear throughout the play, that Laertes is Hamlet's foil. He mirrors Hamlet but behaves in the opposite manner. Where Hamlet is verbal, Laertes is physical; where Hamlet broods, Laertes blusters. Laertes' love for Ophelia and duty to Polonius drive him to passionate action, while Hamlet's love for Gertrude and duty to King Hamlet drive him to passionate inaction. In Laertes resides the picture of what Hamlet could be if the sound of his own words did not mesmerize him.

4.2.9 Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Hamlet's school friends but, unlike Horatio, they are false friends. They are vile time-servers and contemptible spies and Hamlet has no difficulty in finding out what they are. Hamlet tells them bluntly, "you were sent for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks, which your modesties have not craft enough to colour. I know the good King and Queen have sent for you." Hamlet gives them a good rebuff for attempting to probe into his secret. He tells them plainly that they are soaking up, like a sponge, the King's countenance, his rewards and his authorities. He gives them also a warning, "When he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again."

We know Hamlet is escorted to England by these two so-called friends who carry with them the sealed letters for King Claudius purporting the death of Hamlet. We also know how Hamlet substitutes the letters, puts his father's seal upon them, and sends these traitors to their doom. Not a drop of tear is shed for their untimely end by anyone. They serve the dramatic purpose of providing a sharp contrast to Horatio who remains a true and steadfast friend to Hamlet till the last breath of his life.

Check Your Progress – 1

(Answer the following questions within 400-500 words)

1. Write a short note on the character of Hamlet.

Ans.....
.....
.....

2. Briefly discuss the role of the two women characters -Gertrude and Ophelia in prince Hamlet's life.

Ans.....
.....
.....

3. Do you consider Claudius to be the villain in *Hamlet*? If yes, then why?

Ans.....
.....
.....

4. Write a short note on the character of Polonius.

Ans.....
.....
.....

5. Who is Horatio? What role does he play in Hamlet's life?

Ans.....
.....
.....

4.3 DICTION AND IMAGERY IN *HAMLET*

Imagery, the words and phrases used by authors to provide pictures in the mind of the reader, draws upon the power of two imaginations-the writer's and the reader's. The writer as sender of the image selects the picture and puts it into words. Readers receive the words and reconstruct the picture for themselves. Imagery enhances the power of the description and conveys emotion as well as situation. Thus, used well, imagery is one of the most powerful functions of language. The most prevalent image in *Hamlet* is one of rotteness, disease and

corruption. Such imagery is obviously reflective of the events taking place in the kingdom. An early example of imagery is presented in Act I Scene one, lines 166-167 when Horatio states, "But look, the morn in russet mantle clad/ Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill". These words of Horatio literally translate into "dawn is coming". The image, however, is that of human figure ("walks"), wearing a deep orange-red-coloured cloak ("in russet mantle clad"), moving across the dew-wet ground of the eastern hill. The image with its figurative overtones, is graceful, colourful, rich in suggestion and appeals to the senses. It enhances the literal meaning of Horatio's words. Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy from the play Hamlet by Shakespeare, describes Hamlet's morbid and tempestuous feelings. Prior to the soliloquy, Hamlet's emotions have been in turmoil due to the appearance of his father's ghost and his mother's marriage to his uncle. Shakespeare's use of literary techniques such as diction, imagery and syntax give the reader insight into Hamlet's thoughts and feelings as he contemplates death and the afterlife, and the problems of life.

Throughout the soliloquy, Shakespeare's use of punctuation reveals where Hamlet begins to grow particularly emotional. The phrase "... and by a sleep to we end the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to..." is much longer than the short, terse phrases surrounding it, drawing the reader's attention. This long phrase shows the swelling of Hamlet's emotions, and allows the reader to deduce that Hamlet greatly dislikes his earthly pains and finds the bliss of death to be a "consummation devoutly to be wish'd." This quick terse phrase helps to emphasize Hamlet's opinion of death. At line 66, Hamlet says, "for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause." Hamlet's fears of the afterlife are emphasized by his outpouring of emotion, which he then pulls quickly to a stop.

Shakespeare's use of imagery also helps to convey Hamlet's belief that he is alone and battling against all odds. In line 58, Hamlet talks of the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" and of "taking arms against a sea of troubles." By stating that fortune bears weapons of war, Hamlet conveys the idea that he does not find fortune to be some kindhearted goddess, but cruel and unjust. The second phrase evokes an image of a lonely soul standing proudly alone as wave after waves of terrifying adversaries attempts to bring him down, which is how Hamlet feels at this moment. During the time of the soliloquy, Hamlet has no one to consult about the death of his father, and therefore feels that he is adrift with nobody to help. At line 70, Hamlet mentions "the whips and scorns of time," comparing time to a cruel taskmaster that drives men and women forward unwillingly. Hamlet does not appreciate the manner in which time has torn away the things he loves, including his father, and finds the passage of time to be painful.

Shakespeare's use of rather unusual syntax, especially colons and semicolons, draws the reader's attention to specific areas. Colons and semicolons tend to be a rather sparsely used form of punctuation, and its overuse indicates that something particularly significant is about to be told. "To die: to sleep; no more" and "To die: to sleep; to sleep: perchance to dream." are all amazingly short phrases of two or three words, separated by a semicolon or colon. The reader gains a feeling that Hamlet's thoughts grow ponderous here, and become so heavy that he is only able to express himself in simple phrases. Unlike the aforementioned long phrases, these are filled more with thought than emotion. In the selections, Hamlet equates dying to sleeping which leads the reader to believe that perhaps he does not find death quite so intimidating. Of course, further along in the soliloquy, Hamlet begins to have his doubts.

Some of Hamlet's doubts can be found by studying the diction of the play. The land that men travel to after death is referred to as the "undiscovered country," a term sufficiently "scary" enough to give the reader pause, (after all, who doesn't show some fear of the unknown) doesn't completely nullify the possibility of suicide. Hamlet also uses words such as "fardels," "ills" and "calamity" in describing life, showing how much he dislikes the painfulness of living. He also describes men as being "cowards" when they contemplate death and fear what is to come. Because Hamlet has been indecisive in taking action against his uncle, this may be a possible reference to what he thinks of himself, a coward. Having considered himself a coward, Hamlet ends his soliloquy by deciding that death is not preferable to life, due to the fact that death is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." Although, throughout the monologue, he gets very close to choosing death over life because of the agonies of living.

Just as Hamlet seems curious and questioning to the matter of life and death, Shakespeare leaves his audience inquisitive of the many controversial themes exposed in arguably his most dramatic play. Though Shakespeare consistently employs an abundance of rhetoric throughout his plays, much grandiosity of his prose relies on imagery to reflect and reinforce the many contentious themes he reveals within his pieces. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* exhibits themes of madness and betrayal to which he uses imagery to paint a picture in the reader's mind as to the deepest sentiments of the characters and their situations. While Hamlet is searching for an answer to his queries such as, "to be, or not to be," (Shakespeare, III, i, 58) the reader soon understands his dilemma through the extended imagery provided by William Shakespeare.

The reader is aware of Hamlet's disapproval to his mother's hasty wedding as of his first soliloquy early on in the play. Shakespeare uses much imagery to describe Hamlet's sadness and suicidal thoughts, as he feels his mother has

betrayed “so excellent a king” (Shakespeare, I, ii, 139). Hamlet describes his mother’s new obsession: “she would hang on him/ as if increase of appetite had grown/ by what it fed on,” (Shakespeare, I, ii, 143-145). Shakespeare uses imagery to emphasize the importance of the theme of betrayal, rather than simply mentioning that Hamlet feels betrayed. By doing so, the reader has a superior understanding of the magnitude of the theme, and recognizes its significance. Later in the play, additional imagery is used to further the theme of betrayal, as Hamlet cries to his mother of her poor choice to remarry. He says her choice was unwise, and compares her injudicious selection to one chosen by “eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,/ears without hands or eyes,/ smelling sans all,” (Shakespeare, III, iv, 80-83). Hamlet claims that even deprived of all but one sense, one would recognize the senselessness to the wedding, and wonders “what devil was’t” (Shakespeare, III, iv, 78) that compelled Gertrude to remarry such “Hyperion to a satyr” (Shakespeare, I, ii, 140). Through such imagery as mentioned above, Shakespeare is able to demonstrate the extent of Hamlet’s disapproval of the marriage, which furthers the theme of betrayal that dominates throughout the play.

Similarly, Shakespeare uses imagery to depict a theme of madness throughout the play. Following the murder of Polonius, Gertrude describes Hamlet’s madness by comparing it to the sea beneath a storm. She illustrates this by declaring Hamlet is as “mad as the sea and wind when both contend/ which is the mightier,” (Shakespeare, IV, i, 8-9). Shakespeare’s use of imagery allows the reader to compare the circumstances to a more familiar situation, thus highlighting the extent of Hamlet’s madness. Correspondingly, Shakespeare uses imagery in Laertes’ speech of Ophelia’s madness. The reader is aware of his distress, as Laertes cries, “O heat, dry up my brains! Tears seven times salt,/ burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye!” (Shakespeare IV, v, 130-131). Shakespeare creatively mentions the salted tears of which Laertes feels could burn his eyes out, allowing the reader to enter the piece and connect with Laertes’ anguish and sorrow as he witnesses Ophelia’s madness. The feeling of misery is developed through the imagery provided in the prose. Laertes continues; “By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight,/ till our scale turn the beam,” (Shakespeare, IV, v, 132-133). Shakespeare uses imagery once again here to allow the reader to picture an overflowing scale of revenge for Ophelia’s madness, which will be found in heaven. The theme of madness is portrayed through the wealth of imagery provided by Shakespeare, which allows the reader to connect to the characters while indicating the prominence of the theme.

Whether it is Hamlet who imagines death to be but a sleep possibly full of disturbing and never-ending nightmares, or Gertrude and Laertes who distinctly describe their misery with images which illustrate the madness of Hamlet and

Ophelia, Shakespeare never fails to provide the reader with a profusion of rhetoric, namely a cornucopia of imagery to exemplify the themes of betrayal and madness rich in significance throughout his play. Such descriptive language evokes sensory experience, enabling the reader to enter Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and recognize these essential themes. Providing the reader with the ability to relate to the characters' situations through imagery and comparisons to more familiar circumstances, Shakespeare not only creates an excessive ornateness of language, but persistently reflects and reinforces his themes through the appealing technique.

Check Your Progress 2

(Answer the following questions within 400-500 words)

1. What kind of imageries is used by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*? Briefly discuss.

Ans.....

2. Write a note on the diction used by Shakespeare in *Hamlet*.

Ans.....

4.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have understood the significance of the characters in the play. The discussion on the diction and imagery has enhanced your understanding of Shakespeare's writing style in *Hamlet*. The questions in the boxes have enhanced your comprehension as well as your writing skills. In the next unit, we shall analyze the play from critical perspective. In that unit, you will also be acquainted with some critical opinions on *Hamlet*.

4.5 KEY-WORDS

Diction: The effectiveness and degree of clarity of word choice and presentation of said words

Imagery: Rhetorical decoration in writing or speaking; vivid descriptions presenting or suggesting images of sensible objects

Conundrum: A difficult question or riddle, especially one using a pun, or similar humorous use of language

Iconoclast: One who destroys religious images, especially an opponent of the Orthodox church in the 8th and 9th centuries; One who attacks cherished beliefs

Hyperion: (Greek god) A Titan, the son of Gaia and Uranus and the father of Helios, Selene and Eos

Misogynist: One who professes hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women.

Innuendo: A derogatory hint or reference to a person or thing.

Archetype: An original model of which all other similar persons, objects or concepts are merely derivative, copied, patterned or emulated.

Conniving: That connives; conspiratorial

Malleable: Flexible, liable to change

Supernatural: Above nature; that which is beyond or added to nature, often so considered because it is given by a deity or some force beyond that which humans are born with.

Antagonist: An opponent or enemy

Rhetoric: The art of using language, especially public speaking, as a means to persuade

Cornucopia: (Greek mythology) A goat's horn endlessly overflowing with fruit, flowers and grain; or full of whatever its owner wanted; An abundance or plentiful supply.

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SUGGESTED READING

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Unit V:

***Hamlet*: Critical Estimate and Critical Opinions**

Contents:

5.0 Objectives

5.1 Introduction

5.2 *Hamlet*: Critical Estimate of the Play

Check Your Progress 1

5.3 *Hamlet*: Some Critical Opinions

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5.5 Key-Words

5.6 References

Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous unit, you have learnt about the major and minor characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. You have also learnt to examine the diction and imagery in the play. This unit will help you to

- *Provide* a critical estimate of the play
- *Acquaint* yourself with the critical opinions on the play

5.1 INTRODUCTION

You are already acquainted with the major and minor characters in *Hamlet*. You have learnt to examine the diction and imagery in the play. In this unit, we shall discuss the play from a critical perspective and examine the critical opinions given by different critics.

5.2 HAMLET: CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF THE PLAY

Hamlet has remained the most perplexing, as well as the most popular, of William Shakespeare's tragedies. Whether considered as literature, philosophy,

or drama, its artistic stature is universally admitted. To explain the reasons for its excellence in a few words, however, is a daunting task. Apart from the matchless artistry of its language, the play's appeal rests in large measure on the character of Hamlet himself. Called upon to avenge his father's murder, he is compelled to face problems of duty, morality, and ethics that have been human concerns through the ages. The play has tantalized critics with what has become known as the Hamlet mystery, that of Hamlet's complex behavior, most notably his indecision and his reluctance to act.

Freudian critics have located Hamlet's motivation in the psychodynamic triad of the father-mother-son relationship. According to this view, Hamlet is disturbed and eventually deranged by his Oedipal jealousy of the uncle who has done what, Freud claimed, all sons long to do themselves. Other critics have taken the more conventional tack of identifying as Hamlet's tragic flaw the lack of courage or moral resolution. In this view, Hamlet's indecision is a sign of moral ambivalence that he overcomes too late. Both of these views presuppose a precise discovery of Hamlet's motivation. However, Renaissance drama is not generally a drama of motivation, either by psychological character or moral predetermination. Rather, the Renaissance tendency is to present characters with well-delineated moral and ethical dispositions who are faced with dilemmas. It is the outcome of these conflicts, the consequences rather than the process, that normally holds center stage. What Shakespeare presents in *Hamlet* is an agonizing confrontation between the will of a good and intelligent man and the uncongenial role—that of avenger—that fate calls upon him to play.

The role of avenger is a familiar one in Renaissance drama. In the opening description of Hamlet as bereft by the death of his father and distressed by his mother's hasty marriage, Shakespeare creates an ideal candidate to assume such a role. Hamlet's despondency need not be Oedipal to explain the extremity of his grief. His father, whom he deeply loved and admired, is recently deceased, and he himself seems to have been robbed of his birthright. Shakespeare points to Hamlet's shock at Gertrude's disrespect to the memory of his father, rather than his love for his mother, as the source of his distress. Hamlet's suspicion is reinforced by the ghostly visitation and the revelation of murder.

If Hamlet had simply proceeded to act out the avenger role assigned to him, the play would have lacked the moral and theological complexity that provides its special fascination. Hamlet has, after all, been a student of theology at Wittenberg, and his knowledge complicates the situation. His accusation of incest is not an adolescent excess but an accurate theological description of a marriage between a widow and her dead husband's brother. Moreover, Hamlet's theological accomplishments do more than exacerbate his feelings. For the ordinary avenger,

the commission from the ghost of a murdered father would be more than enough, but Hamlet is aware of the unreliability of otherworldly apparitions and consequently reluctant to heed the ghost's injunction to perform an action that to him seems objectively evil. In addition, the fear that his father was murdered in a state of sin and is condemned to hell not only increases Hamlet's sense of injustice but also, paradoxically, casts further doubt on the reliability of the ghost's exhortation, for the ghost may be an infernal spirit goading him to sin.

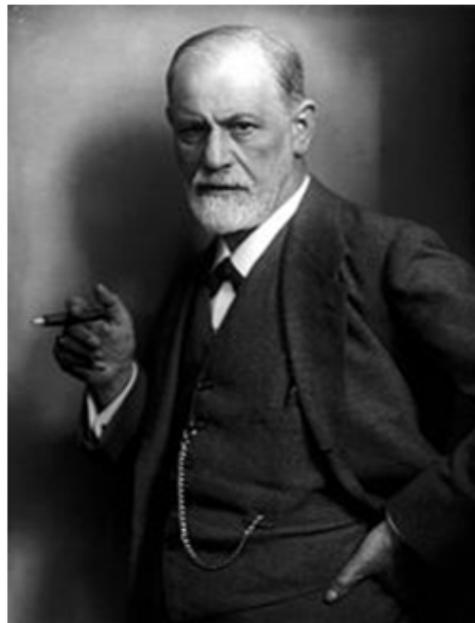
Hamlet's indecision is therefore not an indication of weakness but the result of his complex understanding of the moral dilemma with which he is faced. He is unwilling to act unjustly, yet he is afraid that he is failing to exact a deserved retribution. He debates the murky issue until he becomes unsure whether his own behavior is caused by moral scruple or cowardice. His ruminations stand in sharp contrast with the cynicism of Claudius and the verbose moral platitudes of Polonius, just as the play stands in sharp contrast with the moral simplicity of the ordinary revenge tragedy. Through Hamlet's intelligence, Shakespeare transformed a stock situation into a unique internal conflict.

Hamlet believes that he must have greater certitude of Claudius's guilt if he is to take action. The device of the play within a play provides greater assurance that Claudius is suffering from a guilty conscience, but it simultaneously sharpens Hamlet's anguish. Seeing a re-creation of his father's death and Claudius's response stiffens Hamlet's resolve to act, but once again he hesitates when he sees Claudius in prayer. Hamlet's inaction in this scene is not the result of cowardice or even of a perception of moral ambiguity but rather of the very thoroughness of his commitment: Having once decided on revenge, he wants to destroy his uncle body and soul. It is ironic that Hamlet is thwarted this time by the combination of theological insight with the extreme ferocity of his vengeful intention. After he leaves Claudius in prayer, the irony of the scene is intensified, for Claudius reveals to the audience that he has not been praying successfully and was not in a state of grace after all.

That Hamlet loses his mental stability is arguable from his behavior toward Ophelia and his subsequent meanderings. Circumstance has forced upon the prince a role whose enormity has overwhelmed the fine emotional and intellectual balance of a sensitive, well-educated man. Gradually, he is shown regaining control of himself and arming himself with a cold determination to do what he has decided is the just thing. Even then, it is only in the carnage of the concluding scenes that Hamlet finally carries out his intention. Having concluded that "the readiness is all," he strikes his uncle only after he has discovered Claudius's final scheme to kill him.

The arrival of Fortinbras, who has been lurking in the background throughout the play, superficially seems to indicate that a new, more direct and courageous order will prevail in the place of the evil of Claudius and the weakness of Hamlet. Fortinbras' superiority is only superficial, however. He brings stasis and stability back to a disordered kingdom but does not have the self-consciousness and moral sensitivity that destroy and redeem Hamlet. Gerald Else has interpreted Aristotle's notion of catharsis to be not a purging of the emotions but a purging of the moral horror, pity, and fear ordinarily associated with them. If that is so, then Hamlet, by the conflict of his ethical will with his role, has purged the avenger of his bloodthirstiness and turned the stock figure into a self-conscious hero in moral conflict.

Stop to Consider



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud

Sigmund Freud (6 May 1856 – 23 September 1939) was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology through dialogue between a patient and a psychoanalyst. Freud was born to Galician Jewish parents in the Moravian town of Freiberg, in the Austrian Empire. He qualified as a doctor of medicine in 1881 at the University of Vienna. Upon completing his habilitation in 1885, he was appointed a docent in neuropathology and became an affiliated professor in 1902. Freud lived and worked in Vienna, having set up his clinical practice there in 1886. In 1938 Freud left Austria to escape the Nazis. He died in exile

in the United Kingdom in 1939. In creating psychoanalysis, Freud developed therapeutic techniques such as the use of free association and discovered transference, establishing its central role in the analytic process. Freud's redefinition of sexuality to include its infantile forms led him to formulate the Oedipus complex as the central tenet of psychoanalytical theory. His analysis of dreams as wish-fulfillments provided him with models for the clinical analysis of symptom formation and the underlying mechanisms of repression. On this basis Freud elaborated his theory of the unconscious and went on to develop a model of psychic structure comprising id, ego and super-ego. Freud postulated the existence of libido, an energy with which mental processes and structures are invested and which generates erotic attachments, and a death drive, the source of compulsive repetition, hate, aggression and neurotic guilt. In his later work Freud developed a wide-ranging interpretation and critique of religion and culture.

Check Your Progress 1

(Answer the following question within 600-800 words)

1. Give a critical estimate of the play *Hamlet*.

Ans.....
.....
.....

5.3 HAMLET: SOME CRITICAL OPINIONS

From the previous section, you are now able to interpret the play critically. In this section you will be acquainted with some critical opinions on the play *Hamlet* by the renowned critics. Samuel Johnson gives his opinion:

“We must allow to the tragedy of Hamlet the praise of variety. The incidents are so numerous that the arguments of the play would make a long tale: The scenes interchangeably diversified with merriment and solemnity; with merriment that includes judicious and instructive observation and solemnity, not strained by poetical violence above the natural sentiments of man. New characters appear from time to time in continual succession exhibiting various forms of life and particular modes of conversation. The pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth, the mournful desolation of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness and every personage produces the effect intended, from the apparition that in the first Act chills the blood with horror to the fight in the last, that exposes affectation to just contempt.”

Romantic poet, critic S.T. Coleridge gives the following opinion:

“In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses and our meditation on the working of our minds- an equilibrium between the real and imaginary worlds. In *Hamlet* this balance is disturbed; his thoughts and the images of his fancy are far more vivid than his actual perceptions and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the medium of his contemplations acquire as they pass a form and colour not naturally their own. Hence we see a great and almost enormous intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities.”

A.C. Bradley is the pioneer of Shakespeare criticism in the 20th century, but in point of ideas he belongs to 19th century. His emphasis on character study places him with the romantic critics like Coleridge and Hazlitt. His masterly study of Shakespeare's tragedies is a fine specimen of deep study, subtle analysis and a penetrative insight. He is rightly considered as the greatest critic of the 20th century in respect of Shakespeare's tragedies. Bradley gives his critical opinion in the following way:

“Melancholy accounts for Hamlet's inaction. The immediate cause of this is simply that his habitual feeling is one of disgust at life and everything in it, rising at times into a longing for death, sinking often into weary apathy, but is never dispelled for more than brief intervals. Such a state of feeling is inevitably adverse to any kind of decided action; the body is inert, the mind indifferent or worse; its response is, 'it does not matter,' 'it is not worth while', 'it is not good'. And the action required of Hamlet is very exceptional. It is violent, dangerous, difficult to accomplish perfectly, on one side repulsive to a man of honour and sensitive feeling, on another side involved in a mystery. These obstacles would not suffice to prevent Hamlet from acting, if his state were normal; and against them there operate even in his morbid state, healthy and positive feelings, love of his father, loathing of his uncle, desire of revenge, desire to do duty. But the retarding motives acquire an unnatural strength because they have an ally in something far stronger than themselves, the melancholic disgust and apathy, while the healthy motives, emerging from the central mass of diseased feelings, rapidly sink back into it and lose the name of action.”

Critic Stopford Brooke gives the following opinion:

“All men of genius are mad, genius itself is a kind of madness. If genius is madness, Hamlet was mad, but the maddest man that lived in England was Shakespeare, who made Hamlet. The fact is that Shakespeare never intended

to represent Hamlet as mad or half mad or verging on madness. He expressly made him feign of madness, and when he wished to represent real madness and to contrast it with feigned madness, he created the real madness of Ophelia and did it with wonderful truth and skill. There is not a trace of madness in Hamlet.”

Critic Helen L. Gardner comments on Hamlet:

“Hamlet is not led by reason; any more than are the other heroes of Shakespeare’s tragedies, the irascible Lear, the credulous Othello, or Macbeth, who knows before he does the murder that he will get nothing by it. But Hamlet is to a greater degree dominated by mood and impulse. His behavior is incalculable; that is partly why the King fears him. That he plays upon this fear, in assuming the antic disposition, and delight in exploiting the situation is obvious, but too much method must not be read into his madness.”

G. Wilson Knight has emphasized poetry, imagery and metaphor in Shakespeare’s plays but has not ignored plot and character. He has tried to find a particular atmosphere which is dominant in each play. Wilson Knight considers a play as an “expanded metaphor”. He suggests that a true philosophic and imaginative interpretation will reveal below the surface that spiritual reality from which each play derives its nature and meaning. Critic G. Wilson Knight gives the following opinion on Hamlet:

“The horror of humanity doomed to death and decay has disintegrated Hamlet’s mind. From the first scene to the last the shadow of Death broods over his play. Death is indeed the theme of this play, for Hamlet’s disease is mental and spiritual death. Hamlet remembers not alone his father’s ghost, but all the Death of which it is a symbol. What would have been the use of killing Claudius? Would that have saved his mother’s honour, have brought life to his father’s mouldering body, have enabled Hamlet himself, who had so long lived in Death, to have found again childish joy in the kisses of Ophelia? Would that have altered the Universal Scheme? To Hamlet, the universe smells of mortality, and his soul is sick to death.”

The spirit of scientific investigation in the 20th century has made a great contribution to the proper study and appreciation of Shakespeare’s versatile genius. The modern critic takes his stand not on faith and sentiment but on reason and understanding. Yet it cannot be said that we have reached the last phase of Shakespeare criticism. Shakespeare’s plays will always reveal new secrets and thus the flow of Shakespeare criticism will continue forever.

STOP TO CONSIDER

Samuel Johnson (18 September 1709 – 13 December 1784), often referred to as Dr. Johnson, was an English writer who made lasting contributions to English literature as a poet, essayist, moralist, literary critic, biographer, editor and lexicographer. Johnson was a devout Anglican and committed Tory, and is described by the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* as “arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history”. He is also the subject of perhaps the most famous biography in English literature, namely *The Life of Samuel Johnson* by James Boswell. Born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, Johnson attended Pembroke College, Oxford for just over a year, before his lack of funds forced him to leave. After working as a teacher, he moved to London, where he began to write for *The Gentleman’s Magazine*. His early works include the biography *Life of Mr Richard Savage*, the poems *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, and the play *Irene*.

After nine years of work, Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* was published in 1755. It had a far-reaching effect on Modern English and has been described as “one of the greatest single achievements of scholarship”. This work brought Johnson popularity and success. Until the completion of the *Oxford English Dictionary* 150 years later, Johnson’s was viewed as the pre-eminent British dictionary. His later works included essays, an influential annotated edition of *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, and the widely read tale *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia*. In 1763, he befriended James Boswell, with whom he later travelled to Scotland; Johnson described their travels in *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*. Towards the end of his life, he produced the massive and influential *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, a collection of biographies and evaluations of 17th- and 18th-century poets.

After a series of illnesses, he died on the evening of 13 December 1784, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. In the years following his death, Johnson began to be recognised as having had a lasting effect on literary criticism, and he was claimed by some to be the only truly great critic of English literature

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834) was an English poet, literary critic, philosopher and theologian who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England and a member of the Lake Poets. He wrote the poems *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*, as well as the major prose work *Biographia Literaria*. His critical work, especially on William Shakespeare, was highly influential, and he helped introduce German idealist philosophy to English-

speaking culture. Coleridge coined many familiar words and phrases, including suspension of disbelief.

Andrew Cecil Bradley (26 March 1851 – 2 September 1935) was an English literary scholar, best remembered for his work on Shakespeare. Bradley was born at Park Hill, Clapham, Surrey. He was the youngest of the twenty-one children born to the preacher Charles Bradley (1789–1871) and his second wife Emma Linton. Among his siblings was the philosopher Francis Herbert Bradley. Bradley studied at Balliol College, Oxford. He obtained a Balliol Fellowship in 1874 and lectured first in English and subsequently in philosophy until 1881. He then took a permanent position at the University of Liverpool where he lectured on literature. In 1889 he moved to Glasgow as Regius Professor. In 1901 he was elected to the Oxford professorship of poetry. During his five years in this post he produced *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) and *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (1909). He was later made an honorary fellow of Balliol and was awarded honorary doctorates from Liverpool, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Durham, and was offered (but declined) the King Edward VII chair at Cambridge. Bradley never married; he lived in London with his sister and died at 6 Holland Park Road, Kensington, London, on 2 September 1935. His will established a research fellowship for young scholars of English Letters. The outcome of his five years as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University were A. C. Bradley's two major works, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), and *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (1909). All his published work was originally delivered in the form of lectures. Bradley's pedagogical manner and his self-confidence made him a real guide for many students to the meaning of Shakespeare

Stopford Augustus Brooke (14 November 1832 – 18 March 1916) was an Irish churchman, royal chaplain and writer. He was born in the rectory of Glendoen, near Letterkenny, Donegal, Ireland, of which parish his maternal grandfather, Joseph Stopford, was then rector. He was the eldest son of the Rev. Richard Sinclair Brooke, later incumbent of the Mariners' church, Kingstown (now Dún Laoghaire), and was educated at Trinity College, Dublin. He was ordained in the Church of England in 1857, and held various charges in London. From 1863 to 1865 he was chaplain to the Empress Frederick in Berlin. In 1869 with his brother Edward he made long tours of Donegal and Sligo, and spent much time at Kells studying Irish antiquities. Between 1866 and 1875 he was the minister at St James's Chapel, a Proprietary Chapel, and after it closed he took services at Bedford Chapel, Bloomsbury where he continued to attract large congregations. In 1875, he became chaplain in ordinary to Queen Victoria. But in 1880 he seceded from the Church, being no longer able to accept its leading dogmas, and officiated as an independent preacher for some years at Bedford chapel, Bloomsbury.

Bedford chapel was pulled down about 1894, and from that time he had no church of his own, but his eloquence and powerful religious personality continued to make themselves felt among a wide circle. A man of independent means, he was always keenly interested in literature and art, and a fine critic of both. The two-volume *Life and Letters of Stopford Brooke*, written by his son-in-law L.P.Jacks and published in 1917, contains many details of different facets of his life. In 1890-1 he took the lead in raising the funds to purchase Dove Cottage, William Wordsworth's home in Grasmere from 1800 to 1808, and establishing it "for the eternal possession of those who love English poetry all over the world". Dove Cottage is now administered by the Wordsworth Trust. Brooke published in 1865 his *Life and Letters of FW Robertson (of Brighton)*, and in 1876 wrote an admirable primer of *English Literature* (new and revised ed., 1900—but see below), followed in 1892 by *The History of Early English Literature* (2 vols, 1892) down to the accession of Alfred the Great, and *English Literature from the Beginnings to the Norman Conquest* (1898). He gave the inaugural lecture to the Irish Literary Society, London, on "The Need and Use of Getting Irish Literature into the English Tongue" (Bloomsbury House, 11 March 1893).

His other works include:

- *Poems* (1888)
- *Dove Cottage* (1890)
- *Theology in the English Poets Cowper, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Burns* (1874)
- *Tennyson, his Art and Relation to Modern Life* (1894)
- *A Treasury of Irish Poetry in the English Tongue* (co-edited with his son-in-law T.W.Rolleston) (1900)
- *The Poetry of Robert Browning* (1902)
- *On Ten Plays of Shakespeare* (1905)
- *The Life Superlative* (1906)

Helen Louise Gardner (13 February 1908 – 4 June 1986) was an English literary critic and academic. She was best known for her work on the poets John Donne and T. S. Eliot. Helen Louise Gardner was born in Finchley, Middlesex in 1908, the middle child and only daughter of the journalist Charles Gardner and his wife, also named Helen. She was eleven when her father died and the family thereafter made their home with her grandparents. Helen's mother was highly ambitious for her gifted daughter, who demonstrated artistic talent from an early age. Gardner's early education was at the North London Collegiate

School. In 1926 she went to St Hilda's College, Oxford, and in 1929 obtained a first-class honours degree in English language and literature: in 1935 she became M.A. (University of Oxford) Her teaching career began at the University of Birmingham, where she held a temporary post. After three years as an assistant lecturer at Royal Holloway College in London, she returned to Birmingham, as a member of the English department (1934–41). She became a tutor at Oxford in 1941 and was a fellow of St Hilda's College, Oxford from 1942. In 1966, she became Merton Professor of English literature in the University of Oxford, the first woman to hold this chair. Her specialist areas were T. S. Eliot, the metaphysical poets, Milton and religious poetry, with many essays published on these subjects, as well as on literary criticism itself. She edited *The New Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250–1950* (1972) and *The Metaphysical Poets*. She retired from the chair in 1975.

George Richard Wilson Knight (1897–1985) was an English literary critic and academic, known particularly for his interpretation of mythic content in literature, and his essays *The Wheel of Fire* on Shakespeare's drama. He was also an actor and theatrical director, and considered an outstanding lecturer. He was educated at Dean Close School and Dulwich College and, after serving as a dispatch rider in World War I in Iraq, India and Persia. At St Edmund Hall, Oxford, he went into teaching. From 1923 to 1931 he taught at Hawtreys, Westgate-on-Sea and at Dean Close School, Cheltenham. His first academic post was at Trinity College, Toronto in 1931. He taught at Stowe School from 1941 to 1946. In 1946 he became a Reader in English Literature at the University of Leeds. He remained at Leeds as Professor of English Literature from 1956 until his retirement in 1962. Knight's critical works on Shakespeare are

- *Myth and Miracle: an Essay on the Mystic Symbolism of Shakespeare* (1929)
- *The Wheel of Fire, Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy* (1930)
- *The Shakespearian Tempest* (1932)
- *Shakespeare and Tolstoy* (1934)
- *Principles of Shakespeare's Production* (1936)
- *The Sceptred Isle: Shakespeare's Message for England at War* (1940)
- *The Olive and the Sword: a Study of England's Shakespeare* (1944)
- *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Final Plays* (1947)

- *The Imperial Theme: Further Interpretations of Shakespeare's Tragedies, including the Roman Plays* (1951)
- *The Mutual Flame: on Shakespeare's Sonnets and The Phoenix and the Turtle* (1955)
- *Byron and Hamlet* (1962)
- *Byron and Shakespeare* (1966)
- *Shakespeare and Religion: Essays of Forty Years*
- *Virgil and Shakespeare* (1977)
- *Shakespeare's Dramatic Challenge: on the Rise of Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (1977)
- *Shakespearian Dimensions* (1984)

(Source: Wikipedia)

Check Your Progress – 2

(Answer the following questions within 250-300 words)

1. Examine the critical opinion of Samuel Johnson on the play *Hamlet*.

Ans.....

2. What is A.C. Bradley's critical comment on Hamlet's melancholy?

Ans.....

3. Examine the critical opinion of G. Wilson Knight on Hamlet.

Ans.....

5.4 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you are able to examine the play from a critical perspective. You have also learnt about the critical opinions on the play. The additional informations and the exercises in the boxes have enhanced your comprehension as well as your writing skills. With these improved skills, you have taken a step forward towards the next part where you will learn about *The Tempest*, a tragicomedy by Shakespeare.

5.5 KEY-WORDS

Oedipal: Of or relating to Oedipus Complex

Flaw: A defect, fault or imperfection, especially one that is hidden

Avenge: To take vengeance; to vindicate by inflicting pain or evil on a wrongdoer.

Theology: n organized method of interpreting spiritual works and beliefs into practical form

Infernal: Of or relating to hell or the world of the dead

Rumination: Deep thought or consideration

Cynicism: A distrustful attitude

Catharsis: A release of emotional tension after an overwhelming vicarious experience, resulting in the purification of the emotions, as through watching a tragedy

Melancholy: Affected with great sadness or depression

5.6 REFERENCE

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BLOCK - II : (Part -II) *THE TEMPEST*
UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO *THE TEMPEST*

Contents:

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 A Background Study of *The Tempest*
- 1.3 A Brief Summary of The Play
 - 1.3.1 Act I
 - 1.3.2 Act II
 - Check Your Progress-1*
 - 1.3.3 Act III
 - 1.3.4 Act IV
 - 1.3.5 Act V
 - Check Your Progress-2*
- 1.4 Analysis of Major Characters in The Play
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Glossary
- 1.7 Suggested Readings
- 1.8 Possible Answers to CYP Questions
- 1.9 References
- 1.10 Model Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is designed to help you in understanding and critically analyzing one of Shakespeare's important plays *The Tempest*. After going through this unit you will be able to:

- *Discuss* the backdrop and context of the play.
- *Describe* the various possible sources of the play.
- *Discuss* the basic plot of the play.

- *Analyze* the major characters in the play.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous block we discussed one of the most famous tragedies of Shakespeare- *Hamlet*. While reading *Hamlet* you must have observed that it has a very dark and sombre undertone provided by the revenge motif in the play. But in this block we shall discuss another play by Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, which is rather light in tone compared to our previous play. In this play you will find that despite a pervading tragic undertone, it finally ends in a happy note with the reconciliation of all the characters. In this particular unit, you will be familiarized with the backdrop of the play as well as the various sources from which the basic plot of the play has been borrowed. Further, you will also be acquainted with a brief summary of the plot and in the next section you will find an analysis of the major characters in the play. This unit will help you in understanding the context of the play as well as give a clear picture of the characters and events in the play through our discussion of all the acts. A thorough reading of this unit will help you in understanding the next unit which concerns the major issues and themes in the text, as well as guide you to some of the critical approaches towards the play.

1.2 A BACKGROUND STUDY OF *THE TEMPEST*

The Tempest is one of the last plays of Shakespeare which was probably written in 1611. The first known performances of the play were at the court of James I, in 1611 and 1613. The betrothal masque appearing in the Act IV (which was perhaps added for the 1613 performance) serves as an evidence to the play's performance at the royal court since the play was staged as part of a celebration of the wedding of King James I's daughter Elizabeth.

The Tempest is generally categorised with the final group of Shakespeare's plays, the so-called "romances" which includes the *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. All these plays were supposedly written between 1609 and 1612. These three plays present a different kind of imagination of the author which was quite different from the earlier psychological realism represented in the 'great tragedies'. The subjects chosen for these later plays are tragic in nature, but they ultimately end with some fortunate consequences. Despite the main characters making great mistakes or deeply wronged, the end brings forgiveness and re-union of all. *The Tempest* is also different from the earlier comedies and tragedies of Shakespeare. Unlike those plays, *The Tempest* (as well as the other three "romances") cannot be categorised as either comedy or tragedy. For many years, *The Tempest* was regarded as a comedy but because

of the presence of both the elements of tragedy and comedy, later critics preferred to call it a 'tragicomedy'³.

As it has already been mentioned above that *The Tempest* is one of the last plays of Shakespeare, therefore critics often suggest that this play is an allegory symbolising Shakespeare's final goodbye to the stage. The voice of Prospero in this drama is often said to be the voice of Shakespeare himself. When Prospero announces in the end that he will now "abjure" his "rough music" and "drown" his magic books we can hear an echo of the dramatist bidding adieu to his dramatic career (V.i.50-57). Apart from this, the epilogue⁴ spoken by Prospero to the audience has a similar tone of leave-taking. From this perspective, it can be said that the play is somewhat autobiographical in nature.

Critics also suggest that the basic plot of *The Tempest* is inspired by William Strachey's account of the wreckage of Sir George Somer's ship. This ship belonged to the Virginia Company which was formed around 1606. In 1609, a fleet was sent out from England with four hundred colonists who were supposed to land in Virginia. However, a hurricane hit the fleet as they approached the coast and the governor's ship was separated from the others. Fortunately, they found themselves near Bermuda and were able to land safely there. This account was recorded by one of the survivors named William Strachey and it was printed in 1625. However, even before print, Strachey's letter gained a wide audience and manuscripts of it were circulated. Shakespeare knew many personalities who were involved in the Virginia Company and thus it is assumed that he may have known Strachey as well. Some remarkable similarities are found between Strachey's account and the events described in *The Tempest*. Thus, it is more than likely that Shakespeare was familiar with Strachey's text and was perhaps inspired by it to write the play which appeared at the royal court in 1611; a year after the letter was circulated in London. Apart from this, some other critics suggest that the plot of this play is based upon the German play *Die Schone Sidea* (The Beautiful Sidea) written by Jacob Ayrer. Although there are many differences between the two plays, the central situations in them present a striking similarity. Both the stories revolve around a deposed ruler, expelled with his daughter and later he brings into his power his enemy's son who falls in love with his daughter. The story closes with the marriage of the lovers and the reconciliation of the parents. This striking resemblance between the two stories suggests that either both Shakespeare and Ayrer borrowed from a common source or that Shakespeare borrowed it from Ayrer's play. Apart from these, there are several other sources which seem to have inspired different parts of *The Tempest*. The first is the Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essays* (1580) which contains the description of an imaginary nation of Cannibals. This description echoes a similar description of Gonzalo's description of his imaginary commonwealth in Act II,

Scene i of *The Tempest*. Hakluyt's *Voyages* published in 1598 may have also provided some inspiration to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. For instance, in Act III, Scene iii Gonzalo's reference to "men whose heads stood in their breasts" may be based on the following passage in Hakluyt's *Voyages*: "On that branch, which is called Caora, are a nation of people whose heads appear not above their shoulders. They are reported to have their eyes in their shoulders and their mouths in the middle of their breasts." Apart from it, critics also suggest that Eden's *History of Travale in the East and WestIndies* probably provided Shakespeare with the names like Setebos, Alonso, Ferdinand, Sebastian, Gonzalo and Antonio. Thus, it can be asumed that there is no particular or a single book which can be regarded as the source of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He seems to have collected ideas and incidents from several sources and incorporated them, whether consciously or unconsciously, in his play.

1.3 A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

After going through the previous section you must have formed some idea about the context of the play. Now let us go through a brief act- wise summary of the play.

1.3.1 Act I

The play opens with a ship confronting a storm at sea. The ship has some important passengers on board like Alonso, the King of Naples; Sebastian, his brother; Antonio, the usurping Duke of Milan; Ferdinand, son of the King of Naples; Gonzalo, an honest old Counsellor, and others. All the passengers on the ship are shouting and screaming in fear for an imminent ship-wreck. The captains and the other crew members are making frantic efforts to save the ship while Alonso, Ferdinand, Gonzalo and all others are praying for their survival. The next scene takes us to an island where Prospero is living with his young daughter Miranda. Prospero and Miranda are talking in front of the former's cell and the daughter is appealing to her father to calm the storm in the sea which he has brought about by his magic powers. Miranda's heart is full of pity at the sad fate which the ship and her passengers must have met. But Prospero assures her that no misfortune has befallen upon them and everyone on the ship is absolutely safe. As a justification of his act, Prospero now narrates to Miranda the story of the misfortunes that both he and Miranda had undergone twelve years ago because of those very people who are now on board that ship. Miranda had absolutely no knowledge of the story

that her father narrated. Prospero informs her that twelve years ago he was the Duke of Milan; but being a scholar in liberal arts he had to devote most of his time in studies and therefore, had entrusted the administration of the state to his brother Antonio. After attaining administrative powers Antonio began to rule the state according to his own whims and wishes. Moreover, along with the King of Naples he conspired to usurp the throne and drive Prospero out of the country. Accordingly, Prospero and his infant daughter Miranda were put on a leaky, rigged boat which was towed out to some distance. Prospero and Miranda would have died on the sea had Gonzalo not helped them secretly by putting some necessary provisions on the boat along with the valuable books belonging to Prospero. Finally, they reached this island where Prospero spent his time in study and in educating Miranda. Coming back to the present, Prospero informs Miranda that now the turn of events have brought his enemies to this very island and he will make the best use of this opportunity. Listening to this story, Miranda suddenly falls asleep under some magic spell of her father. At this point enters Ariel who informs Prospero that he has successfully executed his orders of bringing the tempest in the sea. Having satisfied with his work, Prospero now asks him to carry out another task. Suddenly, Ariel reminds Prospero that he had not kept the promise of granting freedom to him which he had demanded after the completion of the task. Prospero rebukes him for demanding freedom before the completion of the agreed period. He even reminds Ariel how he had saved him from the clutches of his earlier mistress- an evil witch called Sycorax. She had made Ariel a prisoner for twelve years when he refused to obey her orders. Finally, Ariel helplessly agrees to fulfil the commands of his master. Prospero now orders Ariel to change into a sea-nymph and become invisible to all others except him. Ariel follows the order and takes leave of his master. At this moment, enters Caliban who curses Prospero for having kept him as a slave. Caliban is the son of Sycorax and thus he claims that after the death of his mother, he is actually the rightful owner of the island. Caliban even threatens Prospero that one day he will inhabit the island with offspring brought out of a union between himself and Miranda. This infuriates Prospero and he asks Caliban to obey his commands or else bear the brunt of his magic powers which will inflict sufferings upon him. Fearful of Prospero's powerful magic, Caliban promises to obey him. On the other hand, Ariel re-enters the scene as an invisible sea-nymph and sings a melodious song. Ferdinand, who has been separated from all the other members of the ship, is mesmerized by this song and he begins following

the music. Spotting Ferdinand at a distance, Prospero asks Miranda to observe the person whom Miranda calls a “thing divine” as she has never seen anything so grand in a human shape. Prospero inwardly feels happy thinking that his plan was working as desired. Ferdinand also gets mesmerized by Miranda’s beauty the moment his eyes fall upon her. He immediately proposes her and vows to make her the Queen of Naples. Prospero feels happy on hearing this but he feigns displeasure before Ferdinand and Miranda. He falsely accuses Ferdinand that he had come to the island with the ulterior motive of conquering the island and therefore, he shall never agree to the marriage of his daughter to Ferdinand. Miranda pleads before her father to show some kindness towards Ferdinand and accept him as her partner. On the other hand, Ferdinand promises that he is ready to face all kinds of struggle in order to win his love.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-1

1. When and where was *The Tempest* first performed?
2. What is the incident that is described in William Strachey’s letter?
3. How did Antonio usurp the kingdom from his brother?
4. What is the name of King Alonso’s butler?
 - (a) Trinculo
 - (b) Ariel
 - (c) Caliban
 - (d) Stephano

1.3.2 Act II

This act begins with King Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, Gonzalo, Francisco and others conversing in another part of the island. King Alonso is deeply sad as he is under the impression that his son Ferdinand has drowned in the sea. The king’s old counsellor Gonzalo assures him that he need not worry because Prince Ferdinand must still be alive. While all of them are engaged in this conversation, Ariel enters invisible and plays a solemn music to them which makes everyone fall asleep except Antonio and Sebastian. Taking this opportunity, Antonio instigates Sebastian to kill his brother and usurp the kingdom of Naples. He says to Sebastian that King Alonso is growing old and therefore must retire very soon from his position. After him, the throne of Naples would anyway become empty as Ferdinand has already died (as it is presumed) and Alonso’s daughter

Claribel has been married off to faraway Tunis in Africa. After resisting initially, Sebastian finally submits to Antonio's evil conspiracy and agrees to kill Alonso and Gonzalo while they are still asleep. All the while, Ariel is listening to their conversation and thus, in order to save Alonso and Gonzalo he sings into Gonzalo's ears that their enemies are going to kill them in their sleep. This awakens Gonzalo and Alonso as soon as Antonio and Sebastian draw their swords to kill them. Seeing them with their swords thus drawn, Alonso and Gonzalo inquires them about it. Antonio and Sebastian say that they heard a loud roar as of bulls or lions and therefore, have drawn their swords to save themselves and their king. The next scene takes us once again to Caliban who is collecting firewood and cursing Prospero for he always torments him by employing different spirits against him. Suddenly he sees Trinculo, a jester in King Alonso's court who is walking alone as he has been separated from the other members of the ship. Caliban takes him to be a spirit sent by Prospero and therefore hides himself. Meanwhile, Trinculo also sees Caliban and thinks him to be a savage native of the island who has been struck by lightning. He too hides himself under the cloak of Caliban. At this point enters Stephano, butler of King Alonso, with a bottle in his hand. Seeing the legs of both Caliban and Trinculo huddled together on the ground, Stephano takes it to be a four-legged monster and pours liquor into its mouth. By now, Trinculo recognizes Stephano and comes out of Caliban's cloak. Meanwhile, under the effect of the liquor that Stephano had poured into Caliban's mouth, the latter feels elated and begins to think Stephano to be God. He even swears his everlasting loyalty to Stephano and says that he would no longer serve Prospero.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-2

1. When and where *The Tempest* was first performed?
2. Which of the following plays are categorised as the final group of Shakespeare's plays termed as the "romances"?
 - (i) *Pericles*
 - (ii) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
 - (iii) *The Winter's Tale*
 - (iv) *Much Ado About Nothing*

Choose the correct option from the following:

- (A) (i) and (ii) are correct
 - (B) (ii) , (iii) and (iv) are correct
 - (C) Only (i) is correct
 - (D) (i) and (iii) are correct
3. What was the incident described in the letter of William Strachey?
4. How did Antonio usurp the Dukedom of Milan?
5. What was the name of Alonso's butler?
- (A) Ariel
 - (B) Trinculo
 - (C) Caliban
 - (D) Stephano

1.3.3 Act III

This act begins with Ferdinand carrying logs of wood to Prospero's cell. In order to test Ferdinand's love for Miranda, Prospero has subjected him to hard labour. Despite the physical exertions, he is performing the task happily because his love for Miranda is genuine and deep. On the other hand, Miranda is deeply hurt to see her lover performing such arduous tasks in order to prove his love to her father. Prospero secretly observes the agony of the lovers by remaining invisible and feels deeply hurt to see his daughter in pain. At the same time, he is more than happy that Ferdinand and Miranda are falling deeply in love with each other. In another scene, we once again find Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo drinking more wine and planning to kill Prospero. Caliban instigates Stephano to kill Prospero and become the lord of the island upon which Caliban and Trinculo will serve as his viceroys. Ariel overhears this conversation and goes to inform his master. The next scene once again takes us to Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio, Sebastian and others who are walking round the island in order to find Ferdinand. Antonio and Sebastian privately talk that they must once again look for an opportunity to kill Alonso and Gonzalo. Meanwhile, Prospero enters invisible and along with him enters several strange Shapes, carrying trays for a feast for the king and others and after gesturing them to eat, they depart. Everyone is surprised to see these supernatural beings and say that they have now seen with their own eyes that such mysterious creatures indeed exist in these remote islands. As they are about to eat the food brought to them by these Shapes, enters Ariel like a harpy and makes the food

disappear. He then calls them sinners and reminds Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio of their sin of overthrowing Prospero from dukedom and exposing him and his little daughter to the dangers of the sea. The harpy further says that it is because of this sin, that very sea has now punished them by wrecking their ship and killing the king's son Ferdinand. Ariel disappears after charging them thus and leaving King Alonso in deep guilt. Sebastian and Antonio also leave the place. Gonzalo utters to himself that all three are perhaps feeling a sense of guilt for the sin that they had committed twelve years ago.

1.3.4 Act IV

This act begins with Prospero informing Ferdinand that he is satisfied and certain about the genuineness of his love for Miranda. He happily agrees to offer his daughter's hand in marriage to Ferdinand. Prospero commands Ariel to bring to him all the spirits who are under his control and begins a masque in honour of the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda. Various spirits come to this masque in the disguise of gods and goddesses like Iris, Ceres, Juno and several other nymphs. After the end of this masque, Ariel informs Prospero that Caliban was planning to kill him with the help of Stephano and Trinculo. In order to punish these conspirators, Prospero calls a number of spirits disguised as dogs and hounds. He orders the spirits to torment Caliban and the two others in every possible way. He also informs Ariel that his period of service is nearing its end and he shall shortly be set free.

1.3.5 Act V

The final act begins with Prospero and Ariel talking in front of Prospero's cell. Prospero asks Ariel what has happened to Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio. Ariel informs him that all three had been left as prisoners in the grove of lime-trees from where they cannot move unless he orders their release. He further informs him that all three are going crazy in that state and Gonzalo is grieving over their condition. Prospero is moved upon hearing this and he orders Ariel to release them. Ariel goes and releases all three of them and brings them to Prospero. Prospero appears before them and announces that he is the Duke of Milan who was expelled from his own country. He thanks Gonzalo for his loyalty and sympathetic nature. He then privately says to Sebastian and Antonio that he very well knows about the evil conspiracy which they had hatched

against the king. He threatens Antonio that he must now give back his Dukedom. Alonso bewails the loss of his son whereupon Prospero says that he too has lost his daughter. Alonso feels sad upon hearing it and says that if his son and Prospero's daughter would have been alive then they could have married each other and become the King and Queen of Naples. Alonso further enquires Prospero how he lost his daughter. Prospero promises that he would narrate the whole story but before that he would like to repay him with a favour in return of the favour that he had done by restoring him his Dukedom. Prospero now takes him to his cell where Ferdinand and Miranda are playing chess. Alonso is happy and surprised to find his son alive and Ferdinand too becomes more than happy on finding his father safe and sound. Ferdinand informs his father that he is in love with Prospero's daughter Miranda. Alonso immediately agrees to their marriage and blesses them for a happy life. Ariel is now ordered to bring Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo. Prospero relates the history of Caliban to his guests and tells them of the plot that Caliban had hatched with Stephano and Trinculo against his life. Alonso recognizes his butler and jester. Caliban feels sorry to have been deceived into thinking the drunken Stephano as a god. It is now decided that the party should spend the night in the cell and they would all sail for Naples the next morning where they would attend the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. Prospero shall then move to his native Milan. He gives his last command to Ariel to arrange for fair weather during their voyage and then sets him absolutely free.

In the epilogue, Prospero, addressing his audience, says that as he has got his dukedom and pardoned his enemies so there is no need for him to stay on that island any longer. He says that he has also given up his magic completely and so he shall now die in despair unless the audience save him by praying on his behalf. He appeals to them to set him free by showing their kindness and leniency towards him.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-3

1. With whom does Caliban plan to kill Prospero?
2. Under the disguise of which gods and goddesses do the spirits appear in the masque?
3. How does Prospero repay the favour of King Alonso?
4. What was Prospero's final command to Ariel?

5. Which of the following statements are correct?

- (i) Prospero never wanted the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda.
- (ii) Caliban always cursed his master Prospero.
- (iii) Ariel sought freedom from Prospero.
- (iv) Prospero could not restore his Dukedom from Antonio

Choose the correct option:

- (A) (i), (iii) and (iv) are correct.
- (B) (ii) and (iii) are correct.
- (C) (iii) and (iv) are correct.
- (D) (ii) and (iv) are correct.

1.4 ANALYSIS OF THE MAJOR CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

PROSPERO: Prospero is one of the most enigmatic protagonists of Shakespeare's plays. Initially, he appears as a victim when the audience is informed about the injustice meted out in his past life. But in the rest of the play, he appears as a vindictive and, at times, cruel lord who will go to any extent to punish his enemies and his subordinates. Throughout the play he appears as the absolute powerful lord who is controlling the fate of all the other characters. After being banished from his own country he settles in this particular island with his daughter and when fate provides him the opportunity to seek revenge upon his evil-doers he leaves no stone unturned to make it happen. He raises a storm in the sea and brings Alonso's ship on the verge of wreckage. They are stranded on the island and with the help of Ariel and his magical powers, he manipulates the events and the characters to suit his great design of restoring his Dukedom from his enemies. For instance, he makes Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love with each other. Then again, in Act III Scene iii, Prospero makes Ariel remind Alonso and others about the injustice that they had done to Prospero twelve years ago which makes Alonso repentant of it. Not only does Prospero manipulate the minds of his character, he even behaves as an authoritarian to all the characters. He manipulates every action in such a manner that people are bound to succumb to his orders. For instance, in order to restore his Dukedom from Antonio in the end, Prospero threatens to reveal the conspiracy that Antonio and Sebastian were hatching against Alonso lest he refuses to give back his Dukedom. Similarly, he threatens Ariel every time the latter demands his freedom. Prospero reminds him that it was he who had saved Ariel from Sycorax, the evil witch. The following lines will provide you with an understanding of the power of Prospero over his subordinates;

Prospero. Thou best know'st
 What torment I did find thee in; thy groans
 Did make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts
 Of ever-angry bears: it was a torment
 To lay upon the damn'd, which Sycorax
 Could not again undo: it was mine art
 When I arrived and heard thee that made gape
 The pine and let thee out.

Ariel. I thank thee, master.

Prospero. If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak
 And peg thee in his knotty entrails till
 Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters.

(I.ii.286-97)

Critics, therefore, suggest that the character of Prospero corresponds to the dramatist himself because like Shakespeare, Prospero also emerges as a creator of all the events that occur on the island starting with the tempest till the re-union of all the characters in the end. He generates the plot of the play almost single-handedly by employing all his schemes, spells and manipulations to achieve the play's happy ending. Despite controlling the events and the fate of the other characters, we find certain shortcomings in him. For instance, his over-indulgence in his studies gets him into trouble in the first place. Had he not neglected his duties as a duke, his brother would never have got the opportunity to overthrow him. Then again, his ill-treatment towards Ariel and Caliban makes them rebellious towards their master and Caliban even goes to the extent of conspiring to murder him. Thus, he seems autocratic and unsympathetic at certain places in the play, but in the final two acts of the play he emerges as a more sympathetic and likeable figure. His love for Miranda, his forgiveness of his enemies and his granting freedom to Ariel ultimately shows that beneath the veil of this autocratic master, there is a virtuous person who merely wanted to bring about a happy re-union even at the cost of creating some discomforts to all. As the audience finally realize the greater intent of Prospero's plan and share his understanding of the world, he becomes a more agreeable character.

MIRANDA:From her very first scene Miranda appears as a naive, gentle and passive heroine. But the most striking personality in her is her compassion towards others which we find in her introductory scene where she shows her concerns for the unknown people on the ship facing the sea-storm. She cries out to her father:

Miranda.O, I have suffer'd
With those that I saw suffer; a brave vessel
Who had, no doubt, some noble creatures in her,
Dash'd all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart. Poor souls, they perish'd.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
It should the good ship so have swallow'd and
The fraughting souls within her.

(I.ii.5-13)

On the other hand, she is also an innocent, naive and obedient daughter. Having seen no other person ever in her life other than her father, she immediately falls for the “divine” Ferdinand as soon as she sees him. But it cannot be said with full certainty that it was Miranda herself who fell for Ferdinand considering the fact that Prospero wanted the union of Ferdinand and Miranda and he had the magical powers to control his daughter’s mind. Although Miranda appears to be passive and naive in most of the instances in the play, we get a few glimpses of her boldness in some scenes in the play. For instance, in Act III, Scene i, Miranda uninhibitedly proposes to Ferdinand and even agrees to become his maid lest he refuses her proposal. Apart from this, the lines 358-361 in Act I, Scene ii vehemently rebuking Caliban were earlier attributed to Miranda. These lines are quite surprising coming from her and are completely inconsistent with the overall presentation of Miranda. Thus, editors amended the text and attributed these lines to Prospero considering it to be a mistake on the part of the earlier editors. However, if one sees these lines as actually belonging to Miranda then it can be said that she certainly exhibits boldness in speaking her mind out in certain situations. But all in all, Miranda merely appears as a meek and passive character who serves as an important pawn in Prospero’s plan of getting back his Dukedom.

CALIBAN: Called “a savage and deformed Slave” in the *dramatis personae* itself, Caliban appears likewise to most of the other characters in the play as well. In his very first appearance in the play, the audience certainly begins abhorring him when they are informed that he had tried to rape Miranda. Later, he himself says that he would inhabit the island with children born out of his union with Miranda. In the later part of the play, we find Caliban hatching a conspiracy to kill his own master Prospero with the help of Stephano and Trinculo. Thus, for the Elizabethan audience Caliban appears as one of the most abhorred characters

both in terms of his physical appearance as well as his unethical deeds. But Shakespeare has sketched his character in such an intriguing manner that later critics see him almost as the alternate protagonist of the play. For the postcolonial critics, Caliban's character holds extreme significance as he represents the colonized 'other' who is dark, mysterious, savage and uncultured. The forceful subordination of Caliban by Prospero and making a slave in the former's own island reflects the attitude of the European colonizers who were similarly dominating their colonized territories. Caliban and Ariel both serve Prospero but while Ariel maintains his dignity and his freedom by serving Prospero willingly, Caliban shows a different kind of dignity by refusing to serve Prospero though unsuccessfully. He constantly curses his master but the fear of Prospero's magical powers ultimately makes him submit to the orders of his master. Despite the grotesque appearance of the character, the audience is acquainted to the nobler and sensitive side of Caliban through his certain beautiful speeches about his island. His beautiful descriptions about the island prove that Caliban had certainly occupied the island before Prospero and thus he was the rightful owner of the island.



Actor Dion Johnstone as Caliban in the Stratford Festival's 2010 production of *The Tempest*.

ARIEL: Ariel is one of the most important characters in the play as it is Ariel who performs all the magic tricks as ordered by Prospero. Ariel is a spirit of the air who takes up the disguises of other spirits according to the tasks assigned to him. Thus, we find Ariel becoming a flame in the ship and at other times turning into a harpy and confronting Alonso for his sins. Although Ariel dutifully follows all the orders of Prospero, he does not carry them out without any favour. The sole thing that he keeps on demanding his master is his liberty. In his very first appearance in the play, we see him coming to Prospero with the news that he

had raised the tempest in the sea and made an impression upon the rest of the fleet as well as upon the members of the King's ship that the King's ship had been destroyed in the tempest. He further says that, as ordered by Prospero, he has actually kept the King's ship in a safe harbour and lulled the crew members into deep sleep by his magical spell. Prospero is satisfied with Ariel's proper execution of the plan and the moment he is about to assign his next task, Ariel reminds him of the promise that he had not kept. Prospero vehemently replies him that he shall not fulfil any demands of Ariel before the completion of the agreed period. As in the case of Caliban, Prospero's dominating attitude towards Ariel once again reflects a typical colonial mentality of the colonizers. The counter-argument of the colonized is, however, clearly heard in the following lines of Ariel;

Ariel. I prithee
 Remember I have done thee worthy service;
 Told thee no lies, made thee no mistakings, served
 Without or grudge or grumblings: thou didst promise
 To bate me a full year.

(I.ii.246-49)

In order to stop the rebelliousness of Ariel, Prospero reminds him how he had rescued him from the spell of the evil Sycorax. Finally, he threatens Ariel that he would imprison him in an oak tree for the next twelve years if he refuses to follow his orders. This makes Ariel scared and he once again submits to Prospero. Thus, we find similar sort of subjugation by Prospero in the cases of Ariel as well as Caliban. Prospero intimidates both of them with the power of his magic, yet there are some differences between the manners of resistance portrayed by both the servants. While Ariel earnestly yet strongly demands his freedom, Caliban vehemently curses Prospero without much strong argument. Further, Ariel is more grateful to Prospero than Caliban, primarily for two reasons. First, he is fully aware of the fact that he is significant for Prospero and therefore, he would get freedom sooner or later if he keeps on following his master's orders. Secondly, it was Prospero who had rescued him from his earlier captivity. On the other hand, Caliban doesn't show such concerns for Prospero because he sees him as his usurper who snatched away the island from him. Thus, he does not even hesitate in conspiring to kill Prospero. However, it is perhaps the loyalty of Ariel that finally grants him his freedom. While in the case of Caliban we do not see Prospero handing him the sovereignty of the island.

FERDINAND: Ferdinand is the son of Alonso, the King of Naples. He is separated from the rest of the members of the ship after the tempest and stranded alone in the island. It appears to be the plan of Prospero to keep him away from his father and other crew members and make him fall in love with his daughter. He is lured into coming near Miranda by Ariel's music. Thereby, he falls in love with her immediately on seeing her and even forgets quickly about the fate of his father. After Prospero feigns to reject their union, he even prepares himself to perform all the laborious tasks that Prospero assigns him as proof of his true love for Miranda. Thus, Ferdinand is also subtly used by Prospero for his own advantage of getting back his throne. However, although Ferdinand appears to be a naive and love-smitten prince, his ambition for his father's throne is clearly reflected in certain instances in the play. Twice in the play we see him undoubtedly stating the death of his father and himself the successor of Naples when the truth was that King Alonso was still alive. For example in Act I, Scene ii Ferdinand tells Prospero thus: "myself am Naples,/ Who with mine eyes, never since at ebb, beheld/ The king my father wrecked" (434-36).

ANTONIO: Antonio is the brother of Prospero and the Duke of Milan. He usurped the kingdom of Milan from his brother when the latter turned his attention more to his studies, neglecting his duties of administration. Taking the help of the King of Naples Alonso, he ruthlessly drove away his own brother and his little niece from the country. This incident is brought before the audience when Prospero narrates his past life to Miranda. Later on, when we encounter Antonio personally we find him as the same scheming, evil person that he was twelve years ago. After overthrowing his own brother and usurping Milan, he now instigates Sebastian to do the same to his brother King Alonso. Although Sebastian initially refuses to agree to his plan, Antonio manages to convince him through his shrewd and logical arguments. In the end, we find Antonio trapped in Prospero's plan whereby Prospero threatens to spill the beans about the former's conspiracy to kill Alonso. Willingly or unwillingly, Antonio is forced to give back the Dukedom to Prospero. Antonio's fewer responses towards the later part of the play make it difficult for the readers to understand whether Antonio felt repentant about his crimes.

ALONSO: Alonso, the king of Naples appears as the grieving father who is anxious about the well-being of his only son Ferdinand. He fears that his son had drowned in the sea and thus sets out in search of him in the island when his associates tell him that Ferdinand might possibly be alive. In his concerns about Ferdinand, we also find the lamentations of a king who has supposedly lost his heir to the throne. He laments that he made a mistake by marrying off his only daughter Claribel to far-off Tunis. The repentance of Alonso about his another mistake is witnessed once again in Act III, Scene iii when Ariel reminds him of his

injustice towards Prospero. Blaming himself now for the loss of his son, he speaks thus:

Alonso. That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced
 The name of Prospero: it did bass my trespass.
 Therefore my son i' the ooze is bedded, and
 I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded.
 And with him there lie mudded. (III.iii.98-102)

Alonso's repentance in the end is rewarded with a surprise in the climax when Prospero re-unites him with his son Ferdinand. Not only this, he even gives the hand of his daughter in marriage to Ferdinand and thereby brings about the happy reconciliation in the story.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt about the context of the play as well as a brief summary of the play. Further, we have analysed some of the major characters in the play like Prospero, Miranda, Ariel, Caliban, Ferdinand, Antonio and Alonso. So, let us quickly go through some of the major points that can be highlighted from this unit, such as:

- *The Tempest* was probably written in 1611 and it was performed for the first time in the same year in the court of King James I.
- *The Tempest* has been categorized with the last plays of Shakespeare called the "romances" along with *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*.
- Critics often call this play a "tragicomedy" because it contains elements from varied genres like tragedy, comedy and romance.
- According to some critics, the play is an allegory symbolising Shakespeare's final goodbye to his dramatic career.
- The basic source of the plot of this play is considered the account of the wreckage of Sir George Somers's ship as described by William Strachey in one of his letters.
- The basic plot of the play revolves around Prospero, the erstwhile Duke of Milan and a master in magical arts who brings about a tempest in the sea and wrecks the ship of his enemies in order to seek revenge against them and restore his Dukedom from his usurping brother Antonio.

- We find many supernatural elements in the play with several characters like Ariel, nymphs and several other airy spirits. Further, we come across several instances where Prospero and Ariel cast their magic spell on the characters and make them drowsy or unconscious.
- Prospero is the protagonist in the play and he often emerges as the creator of the plot who manipulates the fate of all the other characters in order to put everything in his grand scheme of things.
- Miranda is the only female character in the play; she is gentle, compassionate and obedient. She falls in love with Ferdinand as desired by her father.
- Caliban is described as a savage, grotesque slave to Prospero; he is one of the most intriguing characters in the play. Despite being an original inhabitant of the island, he becomes a slave in his island because of Prospero's power and domination over him.
- Ariel is the prime machinery with the help of which Prospero carries out all the supernatural tricks in the story. Although he demands freedom from Prospero, he follows all the orders of his master dutifully for which he is later rewarded with his liberty.
- Ferdinand is the prince of Naples who falls in love with Miranda in the island and is later re-united with his father Alonso by Prospero.
- Antonio is the shrewd, evil-natured brother of Prospero who had overthrown his brother from Dukedom twelve years ago. In the course of the play, we witness him once again plotting against Alonso with the help of Sebastian.
- Alonso is the old King of Naples who was once involved in the conspiracy against Prospero but in the present circumstances in the play he appears as an anxious father as well as a remorseful king in search of his son.

1.6 GLOSSARY

¹**Masque:** A form of festive courtly entertainment that flourished in 16th and early 17th century Europe though it was earlier developed in Italy. It involved music, dance and acting framed within an elaborate stage design.

²**Psychological realism:** A literary genre which emphasizes on interior characterization as well as on the motives, circumstances and internal action which is derivative from and creates external action.

³**Tragicomedy:** A type of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama that combines the standard characters and subject matter, as well as the typical plot-forms of tragedy and comedy. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* is another example of tragicomedy.

⁴**Epilogue:** A piece of writing at the end of a work of literature which is usually used to bring a closure to the work. It serves as a comment on or conclusion to what has happened in the text.

⁵**Postcolonialism:** Broadly speaking, an academic discipline that analyzes explains and responds to the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism. It questions and re-invents the manner in which a culture is being viewed, challenging the narratives that were propagated during the colonial era.

1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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1.8 POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO CYP QUESTIONS

Check your progress-1

Answer 1: *The Tempest* was first performed in the court of King James I in the year 1611.

Answer 2: Option (D) (i) and (iii) are correct.

Answer 3: William Strachey's letter gives an account of the wreckage of Sir George Somer's ship belonging to the Virginia Company which was formed in the year 1606. A fleet was taken out by this Company from England in the year 1609 with four hundred colonists in it and it was supposed to land in Virginia. But a hurricane hit the fleet as it was nearing the coast and the governor's ship was separated from the rest of the ship. However, they safely landed in Bermuda and they stayed there for some time. This is the incident described in the letter of Strachey which got circulated since 1610 and was later printed in 1625.

Answer 4: Even after becoming the Duke of Milan, Prospero devoted more time to studies. As a result, he entrusted the administration of the state to his brother Antonio. Taking advantage of this situation, Antonio started running the

state according to his own free will. He even conspired with the King of Naples and other officers to drive out Prospero from the state. Accordingly, one day Prospero and his infant daughter Miranda were put on a leaky boat and sailed out of the country. In this way, Antonio usurped the Dukedom of Milan.

Answer 5: The name of King Alonso's butler is (D) Stephano.

Check your progress-2

Answer 1: Caliban plans to kill Prospero with the help of Stephano and Trinculo.

Answer 2: The spirits dress up in the disguises of Iris, Juno and Ceres and appear in the betrothal masque of Ferdinand and Miranda.

Answer 3: Prospero repayed the favour of King Alonso by showing him that his son Ferdinand was still alive.

Answer 4: The final command of Prospero to Ariel was to arrange for a fair weather in their return voyage to Naples.

Answer 5: Option (B) (ii) and (iii) are correct.

1.9 REFERENCES

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1.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Briefly discuss the context of *The Tempest* and describe the various possible sources of the play.
2. Narrate the incidents that led to the banishment of Prospero from Milan. How did he plan to restore his Dukedom?
3. Describe the comic episode involving Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban.
4. What kind of supernatural elements did Prospero employ in order to execute his entire plan?
5. Bring out a comparison between the characters of Ariel and Caliban.
6. “*The Tempest* is often regarded as Shakespeare’s farewell to the stage”. Discuss the play in the light of the above statement.

—xxx—

UNIT 2:

THEMES AND MAJOR ISSUES IN *THE TEMPEST*

Contents:

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Major Issues in The Play
 - 2.2.1 *The Tempest*-A Romance or A Tragicomedy?
 - 2.2.2 Supernatural Elements in *The Tempest*
 - 2.2.3 The Significance of The Masque
 - Check Your Progress-1*
 - 2.2.4 *The Tempest*- A Postcolonial Reading
 - 2.2.5 Female Characters and Their Absence from The Play
 - Check Your Progress-2*
- 2.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.4 Glossary
- 2.5 Suggested Readings
- 2.6 Possible Answers to CYP Questions
- 2.7 References
- 2.8 Model Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you in understanding the major critical issues in *The Tempest*. After going through this unit you will be able to:

- *Analyze* the genre of the play.
- *Describe* and *analyze* the significance of the supernatural elements in the play.
- *Discuss* the significance of the masque.
- *Analyze* the play from a postcolonial perspective.
- *Discuss* the presence/absence of women in the play in a critical manner.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we discussed the play in brief exploring some of its major characteristics. In this unit, you shall be familiarized with some of the major themes or critical issues in the play. The first issue that we are going to discuss is the genre of the play. There has been quite a debate about the genre into which *The Tempest* should be categorized. The First Folio of Shakespeare published in 1623 classifies this play as a 'comedy'. But, as discussed in the earlier unit, the underlying tragic note pervading throughout the play hardly makes it a comedy. Thus, in this unit we shall discuss in detail the problem of classifying this play into one fixed genre. Secondly, after going through the summary of the play you must have realised that supernatural and magical elements form an integral part in the play. We shall, therefore, discuss broadly the purpose and significance of magic and supernatural elements in the context of the play. The masque in Act IV, Scene i also has a particular significance in the play which we shall focus upon in the present unit. Critical approaches towards the play have run a gamut since its inception in 1611 till the present postmodern period. Traditional critics viewed the play as a romance dealing primarily with the theme of forgiveness and reconciliation. However, since the publication of the psychoanalytic treatise of Octave Mannoni called *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* in 1956, the play came to be analyzed more and more through the lens of postcolonial theory. As such, by the twentieth century Prospero the traditional protagonist symbolising moral virtue and righteousness came to be replaced with a new protagonist, that is, Caliban. Thus, we shall focus on the reading of the play from a postcolonial perspective. Lastly, we shall discuss the female characters in the play. Although the play has only one female character (Miranda) in person, yet there are a few women in the context of the story who remain physically inconspicuous but serve significant purposes in the play. Thus, a thorough study of the importance of the women characters is essential which shall also be attained in this particular unit.

2.2 MAJOR ISSUES IN THE PLAY

After reading the introduction you must have understood the major topics that we shall be focusing upon in this particular section. So, let us first begin with the discussion regarding the genre of this play.

2.2.1 *The Tempest*: A Romance or A Tragicomedy?

In the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays published in 1623, *The Tempest* is classified as a comedy. A comedy is generally a fictional

work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to interest and amuse us. The other plays included in this category are *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, etc. However, when the play first came about, it came to be regarded as a tragicomedy, a genre which was then brought into the theatre by John Fletcher with the publication of his *The Faithful Shepherdess* in 1610. This play features shepherds and shepherdesses engaged in amorous misunderstandings which are presented comically but lead to tragic conclusions. The happy resolution is brought about with the help of magic herbs, a satyr and the god of the river. As Shakespeare's *The Tempest* similarly presents a tragic story in a light-hearted manner leading to a happy resolution effected with magical and supernatural interventions, so this play could easily be termed as a tragicomedy. Prospero's fall from power, his and Miranda's suffering twelve years ago, the inhumane treatment of Prospero towards Caliban, Ariel's constant demand for freedom and Antonio and Sebastian's conspiracy to kill Alonso- are the serious issues in the play. But the play provides many comic and light-hearted moments as well. For instance, the love affair between Ferdinand and Miranda; the humorous sub-plot revolving around Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban; the scene of the betrothal masque and the reconciliation of the characters in the end- all makes up the comic side of the play.

Shakespeare's last four plays-*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*- are today classified as "romances"¹. The genre of romance generally involves tales about heroes on quests in which magic and improbable coincidence would lead to a happy resolution and where warring families and lovers are eventually reunited, often after much suffering on the way. The movement of the plot is normally from sorrow to joy, from division to unity. Let us now check some of the elements which make *The Tempest* a romance:

- **Magical and supernatural elements:** The presence of magic and supernaturalism is one of the prime characteristics of a romance. In the case of *The Tempest*, we observe from the very beginning that it is replete with various unnatural events and occurrences brought about by the protagonist himself. As Prospero himself is a magician, we witness him indulging in magical activities. Thus, he conjures a tempest in the sea, orders Ariel to become invisible and eavesdrop on the secret conversations of Sebastian and Antonio by employing his magic powers. The play is set in a remote, enchanted island which is full of "noises, sounds and sweet airs that give delight and

hurt not" (III.ii.131-32). The entire atmosphere of the island is imbued with magic and enchantment. The astonishment of Alonso, Sebastian and the others on seeing the dancing shapes in Act III, Scene iii shows that the magical happenings in the island is beyond anyone's belief.

- **A journey or quest of the protagonist:** Romances generally narrate the tale of the hero who moves on in the quest of his love. In other words, it involves a journey undertaken by the hero. Here, we see a similar journey undertaken by Prospero when he is banished from his kingdom and he finds himself stranded on this unknown island with his little daughter Miranda. For the next twelve years he stays in the island tending his daughter and remaining in the company of his books. Thus, the motif of journey is very much present in the play. Apart from this, Prospero's quest for seeking appropriate revenge from his enemies also presents another kind of journey altogether. In his quest for restoring his lost Dukedom he plans every move and executes them very subtly. Finally, he succeeds in his motive and after making every move in his desired direction he restores his Dukedom from Antonio and also finds a suitable partner for his daughter in Ferdinand. Although Prospero does not make any physical journey in the actual action of the play but his journey towards restoring his Dukedom certainly makes it a play in the tradition of a romance.
- **A romantic plot:** A romantic love story is one of the essential features of romances. The medieval chivalric romances primarily had a quest undertaken by a knight in order to gain a lady's favour where he faces struggles and fights with demons, dragons and monsters in order to save his damsel. Although we do not find the entire plot revolving around two lovers in this play, *The Tempest* definitely has the engaging love story of Miranda and Ferdinand. And although Ferdinand does not fight any demon or monster for Miranda's sake, he certainly labours hard in order to prove his love in front of Prospero. Thus, we see Ferdinand carrying logs of wood under Prospero's order in Act III, Scene i. Ferdinand's pain makes Miranda restless and she wishes that her father soon agrees to their marriage. The romantic conversation between the two lovers and their love and care for each other melts the heart of the audience and adds a perfect romantic element to the play.

- **The concept of loss and recovery:** The idea of loss and recovery is typical of almost all the Shakespearean romances. A similar theme is found in *The Tempest* when Prospero loses his Dukedom because of his brother Antonio twelve years ago. Fate provides him the opportunity to restore his losses when twelve years later his brother Antonio and the King of Naples Alonso, are shipwrecked and are stranded on Prospero's island. With the help of the spirit Ariel, Prospero now employs every possible trick in order to mould the entire situation in his favour. Eventually, he succeeds in recovering Milan and he even finds a suitable partner for his daughter.

After going through this discussion it can now be said that *The Tempest* definitely has the features of both tragicomedy as well as romances. Critics like Gerald Eades Bentley have argued in 1948 that *The Tempest* and the other three late plays of Shakespeare should be termed as tragicomedies as the mixed mode of these plays resemble the Jacobean tragicomedies of Beaumont and Fletcher. However, other critics like Lee Bliss and Joan Hartwig argued that the Beaumont and Fletcher paradigm of tragicomedies does not fit the Shakespearean plays. Therefore, according to some critics it is problematic to force a play like *The Tempest* into a generic box and it is more convenient to accept it as a play which subverts the typical generic expectations of Shakespearean audience.

2.2.2 Supernatural Elements in The Tempest

Enter Prospero invisible. Enter several strange Shapes, carrying trays for a feast; they dance around the trays and dishes with gestures of greeting; and, inviting the King and others to start eating, they depart.

The above indented lines are the stage directions of Act III, Scene iii of *The Tempest* which clearly suggests that supernatural elements and magical fantasy forms a core part of this play. The traditional protagonist of the play, that is, Prospero is himself a magician. The power of his magic is witnessed at several instances in the play. For example, while narrating the story of his past life to Miranda, he suddenly makes her drowsy and fall asleep the moment Ariel enters the scene. Then again, he orders Ariel to bring some spirits so that he could display his magical power before Miranda and Ferdinand during the scene of the betrothal masque. Prospero even employs his magical powers to punish his evil-doers as observed in the following lines when he orders Ariel to torment his conspirators Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo:

Prospero. Go, charge my goblins that they grind their joints
With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews
With aged cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them
Than pard or cat o' mountain.

(IV.i.256-59)

The island is also enchanted with various baffling noises, haze of illusions and bewildering confusions. For instance, we find Ferdinand being captivated by the music of Ariel which lures him towards Miranda and even makes him forget his father's disappearance. Again, in the Act II, Scene i suddenly Alonso, Gonzalo and all others fall asleep when Ariel starts playing solemn music to them. The mysterious nature of the island is also described beautifully by Caliban when Stephano feels afraid on hearing Ariel's music. Caliban asks him not to be frightened as the island is full of "noises, sounds and sweet airs" which gives delight to all but never hurts anyone. He further says that sometimes a mixture of various musical instruments is heard while at other, only voices are heard which makes anyone go drowsy and lull into sleep. Thus, the magical nature of the island itself heightens the supernatural effects in the play.

It is important to note that the supernatural elements do not feature as a mere backdrop in the play but rather serves as an integral part in the plot. The action of the story is moved forward with the help of these supernatural elements. Firstly, the story would not have started in the first place had the ship been not wrecked by Prospero with the help of his magical powers. Secondly, it is because of Ariel's captivating musical spell which brings Ferdinand to Miranda and from then begins their love story. Thirdly, once again it is Ariel who invisibly whispers into the ears of Gonzalo that Alonso and Sebastian are conspiring to kill his master Alonso. Fourthly, the appearance of Ariel as a harpy in Act III, Scene iii and confronting Alonso and others for their twelve-year-old sin also serves as a major turning point in the plot. It is at this point that Alonso realizes the crime he committed against Prospero and feels that he is getting its punishment in the form of losing his only son Ferdinand. Lastly, we also observe that Ariel listens to the conversation among Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban and learns of their conspiracy to kill Prospero and capture the island. Later on, he informs Prospero and thus saves his master from falling prey to this evil conspiracy. Thus, it can be said that the plot progresses to a large extent, by the use of various supernatural elements.

It is observed that Ariel is the prime supernatural machinery with whose help Prospero carries out all his magical tricks. However, there are four different kinds of spirits which Ariel evokes in order to carry out specific tasks. These four kinds of spirits are: Spirits of Fire, Spirits of water, Spirits of earth and Spirits of air. Ariel is itself a spirit of air but he takes the form of other spirits in several instances in the play. For instance, he takes the form of a flame in the ship, creates havoc among all the passengers and then causes great thunder and lightning which brings the tempest in the sea. Then again, we are also informed in Act II, Scene ii, that Prospero often sets his spirits of fire as firebrands to lead Caliban out of his way in the dark. The spirits of water appear in the form of sea-nymphs and as elves living in brooks and in lakes. Ferdinand hears the songs of these sea-nymphs who inform him that his father has drowned into the sea and his spirit is now lying under the ocean. Again, during the masque presented in Act IV, we find some fresh-water elves dancing with the reapers. Spirits of earth or goblins are also employed by Prospero especially as an instrument of punishment. For instance, Caliban complains that the Spirits of Earth pinches him and torments him in the shape of apes, hedgehogs and adders. Later, in Act IV Scene i, Prospero makes these spirits of earth appear in the guise of hounds and dogs and sets them after Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo. The spirits of air are also employed by Prospero at several instances. The masque is chiefly performed by the spirits of air. As soon as the masque is over, these spirits disappear into the air under Prospero's orders. In this way, several forms of spirits are employed by Prospero who performs the various supernatural tasks in the play.

On a practical level, the supernatural elements also catered to the fascination of the Elizabethan audience who desired to see magic and other unnatural things on the stage. Further, Prospero's complete control over these elements reiterated the Humanist motto that man is at the centre of the universe. It spoke to the Elizabethan audience about the boundless possibilities of the Renaissance² man. As a man of knowledge, Prospero attains unlimited power over all beings- the humans as well as the supernatural. Moreover, we find that boundless knowledge does not make him an over-reacher as it had happened with Marlowe's Faustus³. Unlike Faustus, Prospero does not make any pact with the devil or indulge in any black magic to fulfil his desired plan. Whatever magic Prospero performs over his characters causes no fatal harm to them but they are effective enough to bring about a positive change in them. Thus, we find Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban submitting to Prospero and accepting

him as their master after being punished by him. Similarly, Alonso also accepts and repents the crime that he had committed twelve years ago in front of Prospero after being tormented by him. He even agrees to the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda and promises to restore the Dukedom of Milan to Prospero.

Thus, through this discussion it can be said that the supernatural elements form an integral part of *The Tempest*. Not only does it move the action of the play but also provide the element of mystery which is typical of a romance. Further, it catered to the taste of the Elizabethan audience who desired to see those fantastical elements on the stage.

2.2.3 The Significance of The Masque in *The Tempest*

A masque is an elaborate form of court entertainment that combined poetic drama, music, song, dance, splendid costume and stage spectacle. These diverse elements are often held together by a slender plot which is mainly mythological and allegorical in nature. This form of entertainment were called 'masques' because it had speaking characters who wore masks and at the end of the play the players doffed their masques and joined the audience in an entertaining dance. The masque originated in Renaissance Italy and flourished in England during the reigns of Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I. As the masque was primarily a courtly entertainment, it was a lavish production and thus cost a fortune. Moreover, the finest talents were employed for the production of the masques. For instance, in the early seventeenth century England, Ben Jonson was hired for the poetic script while famous architect like Inigo Jones was hired for the elaborate sets, costumes and other stage machinery. However, like all other dramatic forms, the masques were also abruptly ended when the Puritans shut down the theatres in 1642. Some of the famous masques written by Ben Jonson are *The Masque of Blacknesse* and *The Masque of Queens*.

The masque in *The Tempest* is one of the two best-known examples of masque-within-a-play, the other being Milton's *Comus* (1634). The masque in *The Tempest* is presented in the first scene of the fourth act. Prospero organizes this masque on the occasion of the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda. He instructs Ariel to bring some spirits because he wanted to "bestow upon the eyes of this young couple/ Some vanity of [his] art..." (IV.i.40-41). Ariel immediately follows this order and in no time brings a host of spirits disguised as various goddesses. The first one

to appear is Iris who welcomes and hails the goddess of agriculture Ceres. She says that all the fields of grains, the grassy mountains along with the vineyards belong to Ceres. Iris further says that being the messenger of Juno, the queen of heaven, she invites Ceres to come and play with Juno in this particular place. Upon this invitation, enters Ceres who welcomes the “many-coloured messenger” Iris. She hails Iris that it is her moisture which falls on the flowers and refreshes them. Ceres call Iris a “rich scarf” which decorates the earth with her variant colours and thereby increases its beauty. Ceres now enquires the reason behind her summoning to this place by Juno. Iris informs that she has been summoned to celebrate a union of two faithful lovers and bestow their blessings upon the couple. On learning the reason, Ceres enquires of Iris whether Juno is being attended by Venus and her son Cupid because she has kept some distance from them ever since they contrived to take away her daughter Proserpina to the kingdom of death. Iris replies that Ceres need not be apprehensive about the possibility of meeting Venus and Cupid in this place because she had seen her flying through the air towards Paphos. Iris further informs that Venus and Cupid, however, had intended to come to this place to cast a spell upon the lovers (Ferdinand and Miranda) which would have aroused lust in them. But Venus and Cupid did not succeed in their attempt because these lovers had taken a vow of not gratifying their sexual desires till they tie the holy matrimonial knot. This had disappointed Venus and Cupid to such an extent that Cupid has now taken a vow not to inspire love in any human being by shooting his arrows. At this juncture, Juno enters the scene and asks Iris and Ceres to join her in singing the song of blessing for the lovely couple. Ferdinand is totally mesmerized by the whole vision and he enquires Prospero if the singers are unearthly. Prospero replies that the spirits are certainly unearthly but they have been summoned by his power of magic. Suddenly, Juno and Ceres whisper something among them and send Iris for a task. Prospero asks Ferdinand to pay attention as there was something more. Iris now calls upon certain nymphs from fresh water and asks them to bless the couple under Juno’s orders. Further, she summons the sun-burnt reapers and asks them to join the nymphs in a country dance. The nymphs and the reapers dance merrily. At the end of this dance, Prospero suddenly remembers that Caliban and his companions were conspiring against his life and then he makes all the spirits vanish abruptly. Thus ends the betrothal masque of Ferdinand and Miranda.

Critics mostly suggest that the masque does not hold much significance in the play. Some critics suggest that the masque was not

written by Shakespeare himself. Whatever the case may be, it would be wrong to assume that the masque is totally insignificant or serves no purpose in the play. Firstly, the masque is closely connected with the story in so far as it is related to the betrothal and the forthcoming marriage of the two lovers. Secondly, it is an attempt on the part of Shakespeare to display the power of his magic before Ferdinand and Miranda. Thirdly, through the conversation between Iris and Ceres, Prospero once again reminds Ferdinand his promise of not indulging in any sort of physical relation with Miranda. Lastly, the masque serves another dramatic purpose: it allows time for the ripening of Caliban's conspiracy against Prospero. In terms of the form, the masque is replete with lyrical beauty and charming images. Iris and Ceres' opening lines has long descriptions but they are rendered with great beauty as they are written in rhyming couplets. However, it is the next few lines describing Venus and Cupid which has some striking images. The following lines can be taken as an example:

Iris. Whose vows are, that no bed-right shall be paid
Till Hymen's torch be lighted; but in vain;
Mars's hot minion is returned again;
Her waspish-headed son has broke his arrows,
Swears he will shoot no more but play with sparrows
And be a boy right out.

(IV.i.96-101)

Thus, it can be said that the masque has certain dramatic as well as aesthetic significance in the play. Despite being not indispensable to the central plot, it certainly brings some relief to the story and enlivens the audience with some song and dance. Moreover, the primary significance of the masque lies not in terms of catering to the demands of Elizabethan audience but to the royal household indeed. It is noteworthy that the second performance of *The Tempest* was held in 1613 on the occasion of the marriage of Princess Elizabeth on February 14, to Frederick V. Thus, from this point of view the inclusion of this masque is perfectly suited for this royal wedding.



(from Left to Right) Elly Condron as Iris, Daniel Easton as Ferdinand, Jennifer Weaton as Juno, Jenny Rainsford as Miranda and Samantha Ray as Ceres in *The Tempest* produced by Royal Shakespeare Company and performed at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford upon Avon in November 2016.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-I

1. When was the First Folio of Shakespeare published?

(A) 1613	(C) 1621
(B) 1615	(D) 1623
2. What do you mean by a “romance”? Answer briefly.
3. What are the four different kinds of spirits that appear in *The Tempest*?
4. Which of the following statements are correct?
 - (i) Ariel is the prime supernatural machinery employed by Prospero.
 - (ii) Caliban is one of the spirits of Prospero.
 - (iii) Prospero has no control over the supernatural elements.
 - (iv) The supernatural elements attracted the Elizabethan audience.

Choose the correct option from below:

(A) Only (i) is correct
(B) (i) and (iii) are correct
(C) (i) and (iv) are correct
(D) (i), (ii) and (iv) are correct
5. The masque in *The Tempest* is presented in _____ scene of the _____ act of the play.

2.2.4 *The Tempest*- A Postcolonial Reading

Post colonialism in literature refers to the practice of looking back at the colonial history and re-visiting or rejecting the “master narrative “of Western imperialism. In other words, postcolonial writers often attempt to replace the Eurocentric discourse and represent the subjugated voices of the colonized. The concept of postcolonialism had originated in the colonial period itself but as a literary and cultural theory it basically developed with the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978. In this text, Said argued that power is disseminated among the colonized by the European colonizers through “cultural imperialism”. This mode of imperialism imposed power not by force but by effectively propagating the Eurocentric discourse that assumed everything Western as normal and superior while simultaneously representing everything oriental as exotic and inferior.

Postcolonial study of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is quite a recent development. For a long time, critics had primarily interpreted this play as Shakespeare’s final goodbye to the stage and had placed Prospero as the central character as easily discernible in the text. The decolonisation movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, Caribbean and Latin America led to a renewed interest in the play and gave an altogether different perspective to it. The European colonial period roughly covers the period from sixteenth century to the mid twentieth century when several European powers established their colonies in Asia, Africa and America. Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* was written in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Thus, there is every possibility that Shakespeare unconsciously had the political narrative in mind while writing the play. However, the most interesting part is that being a European himself, Shakespeare’s text provides much scope for a postcolonial reading.

One of the primary aspects of postcolonialism is that it involves the attempt to work out an image changeover through the process of re-reading of documents that go against the grain established during the colonial rule. Such kinds of revisionism became imminent in the case of *The Tempest* in the 1960s during the decolonisation movements which mobilised the play in the defence of Caliban. Caliban began to be seen as the exotic ‘other’ subjugated by the ‘superior’ colonizing Prospero. Prospero’s claim over Caliban’s island, the inhumane treatment meted out towards him and the representation of Caliban as a savage, grotesque and abominable figure- all reflected the manner in which the Europeans established their supremacy over the colonized. Prospero’s lordship over

Caliban is heard in his very first address towards him: “Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/ Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!” (I.ii.319-320). The following counter-argument of Caliban after a few lines starkly shows that he is the original inhabitant of the island while Prospero is the outsider in it:

Caliban. This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother.
Which thou tak’st from me. (I.ii.331-32)

He further reminds Prospero how he had acquainted him with every part of the island when Prospero first arrived there. Caliban says that Prospero taught him about the sun and the moon while he showed him all the qualities of the island like the “fresh-springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile” (I.ii.338). These lines clearly echo the voice of the colonized that are tricked by the colonizers into admiring them first as their saviours or messiahs and later on forced into accepting them as their masters. You will be able to relate it easily with our own colonial history. When the British first arrived as traders in India and gradually started driving away every other foreign power from the country, the Indians started admiring them. Unaware of the fact that the British would soon establish their political supremacy over the country and one day, most of the middle-class Indians would be serving their colonial masters. It was only much later that the Indians realized that the British rule over the country is causing immense harm and that the country needs to be governed by its own people. A similar note of disenchantment is heard in Caliban’s rebuttal.

The above instance shows that *The Tempest* not only reflects early European attempts at colonizing the world, but the play itself functions as a colonial text in its plot and language by re-enacting the colonial discourse and helping to perpetuate it. Considering the canonical position of the text, it was Italian psychologist Octave Mannoni who first attempted a reading of *The Tempest* in order to explain the psychological causes and effects of colonization. In his book *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* published in 1956, Mannoni writes that Prospero represents the inferiority complex of the colonizers who feel the need to overcompensate and establish themselves as aggressors while Caliban represents the colonized who are the victims of a ‘dependence complex’ and who welcome the dominance. Although these ideas were not much welcomed by the postcolonial critics, Mannoni’s text certainly made them explore their own experiences of colonization.

The politics of language and colonization is another aspect that the postcolonial critics have explored much in the text. In his book *The Pleasures of Exile* published in 1960 Caribbean writer George Lamming writes that being a colonized person, he could identify himself with Caliban, both in terms of the colonial experience and the colonial education. The most significant parallel that can be drawn between Lamming's own colonial experience and Shakespeare's play is the education of Caliban and teaching and learning of the colonial tongue. The following statements of Prospero perfectly echo the Euro-centrism of the colonizers:

Prospero. I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other; when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, (1.2.353-57)

Stephan Greenblatt writes in his essay "Learning to Curse: Linguistic Colonialism in *The Tempest*" that Prospero's refusal to recognize the legitimacy of Caliban's language reveals the colonizers' inability to accept and appreciate things that are different or non-Western. Thus, Prospero feels the need to teach Caliban his language and refashion him. In this way, the colonized is subjugated through another form of colonialism, that is, linguistic colonialism. Although the colonized is now completely subjugated and rendered helpless, his greatest victory lies in his ability to curse his master in the language taught by him:

Caliban. You taught me language; and my profit on 't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language! (1.2.363-65)

Some critics have also viewed the theme of servitude in the play as a commentary on slavery, which is nothing but an extension of colonialism. The theme of servitude is observed in the play in the case of two characters-Caliban and Ariel- both of whom are forced to submit before Prospero. However, we find some differences between the services of both the slaves. As pointed out by Derek Cohen, Caliban represents the rebellious slave who vehemently shows his anger and resentment at his enslavement, while Ariel almost represents the indentured labourer whose period of service is limited and who has been enticed with the promise of freedom at the end of the period.

In the recent times, some of the critics have refuted and contested the postcolonial readings of *The Tempest*. They argue that it is unhistorical to surmise that Shakespeare or his audience ever saw the play as about the colonized world and in fact, England had not yet emerged as a colonial superpower till the early part of the seventeenth century. Despite this counter criticism of the text, one cannot deny the fact that the play certainly offers a broad scope of postcolonial interpretations.

2.2.5 Female Characters and Their Absence from The Play

The female characters in Shakespeare's plays have always been a source of great interest for the critics. Women in Shakespeare's plays often have significant roles in the story and more often than not, they are responsible for causing some kind of differences to the world of the male characters. We see that happening in the case of Lady Macbeth (in *Macbeth*), Desdemona (in *Othello*) or Portia (in *The Merchant of Venice*). In other words, women in Shakespeare's plays certainly make their presence felt in the course of the plot. In comparison to other plays of Shakespeare, however, *The Tempest* apparently gives least significance to women. According to Judith Buchanan, no other play of Shakespeare shows such a startlingly extreme gender imbalance as in the case of *The Tempest*. Miranda is the only female character in the entire action of the play. Although the goddesses Iris, Ceres and Juno appear in the masque scene but their gender is questionable; firstly, because they are supernatural beings and secondly, they are spirits who merely appear in the guise of goddesses to bless the young couple. Apart from the presence of a sole female character, the representation of this character too seems somewhat flimsy and inconsequential. No doubt, Miranda has the most integral part to play in Prospero's scheme of gaining his lost Dukedom, yet her character lacks any such striking trait which can distinguish her from other characters in the play. She merely fits into Prospero's grand design by falling in love with Ferdinand and accepting him as her partner.

Unlike Miranda, there are three other women who remain physically absent in the play yet make themselves more conspicuous and prominent even in their absence. The first is Sycorax, the "damn'd witch" and the mother of Caliban whom Prospero first mentions while talking to Ariel. Prospero's description about Sycorax carries the same amount of disgust and abomination towards the woman as we find towards Caliban in the rest of the play. However, there is a striking difference between the contempt of Prospero towards both the characters. While Caliban evokes

nothing but sheer hatred in Prospero, Sycorax seems to evoke some kind of admiration in the magician. This could be due the fact that both of them had power over the magical elements and both had succeeded in establishing supremacy over their subordinates. Another similarity between them is that both of them had been banished from their native islands with their children and they establish their power over the island single-handedly. In other words, Sycorax can be termed as the female counterpart of Prospero. Simultaneously, her character can be easily contrasted with that of Miranda who hardly has a voice of her own despite being visibly present in the play. Another noteworthy point is that Sycorax is not only absent in the play but she had died long before the commencement of the present story. Despite her complete absence from the frame of the story, the repeated references to the character show that she is still alive in the consciousness of characters like Prospero and Caliban. Thus, we find Caliban bringing in her reference while claiming his rights over the island and Prospero referring to the torments that she had subjected Ariel to. By evoking her image before Ariel, Prospero threatens him of similar punishments on one hand and justifies his own act of supremacy by comparing it with that of Sycorax.

The second woman referred to by many characters at several instances in the play is Claribel, King Alonso's daughter. We hear about her for the first time when Gonzalo refers to her marriage which was held in Africa to the King of Tunis. Few lines later, we hear her father lamenting about his decision to marry her off to faraway Tunis. It is to be noted that this regret of Alonso occurs at a time when the king is apprehensive about his son's survival and thus fears that he would have no heir to succeed his throne. While Claribel's distance from Naples is a cause of concern for her father, it also holds great significance for two other persons- Antonio and Sebastian- who are now planning to kill Alonso after the supposed death of Ferdinand. The only obstacle in their dream of capturing the throne is Claribel, the heir-apparent after Ferdinand but her absence from the picture makes their task easy.

The third female character who remains similarly absent in terms of physical presence is the wife of Prospero and the supposed mother of Miranda. Stephen Orgel in his essay "Prospero's Wife" points out that Prospero's allusion to Miranda's mother has a vital significance in the course of the story. The allusion comes in Act I, Scene ii when Prospero, while narrating his past life to his daughter, announces that he is the rightful Duke of Milan. Shocked at this sudden revelation, Miranda immediately enquires, "Sir, are you not my father?" Upon this, Prospero replies as follows:

Prospero. Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and
She said thou wast my daughter; and thy father
Was Duke of Milan; and his only heir
And princess: no worse issued. (1.2.55-59)

According to Orgel, Prospero's identification of his wife as a virtuous woman has serious implications in the context of the story because it is only through her true word as a virtuous lady that the legitimacy of Miranda can be confirmed. The establishment of Miranda's legitimacy is very crucial to the restoration of Prospero's dukedom. However, except for this instance, we do not find any reference to Prospero's wife, either by him or his daughter.

Thus, through this discussion we can say that women in *The Tempest* are more conspicuous and indispensable in their absence rather than their presence. While Miranda is overshadowed by all the male characters in the course of the plot, she is even dwarfed by the other 'absent' women in terms of their characterisations in the play.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS-2

1. Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published in the year _____.
2. Which of the following statements are correct?
 - (i) Post colonialism implies revisiting the colonial discourse.
 - (ii) Post colonialism does not study the experiences of the colonized.
 - (iii) Postcolonial critics often considered Caliban as the central figure in the story.
 - (iv) *The Tempest* is a postcolonial text because it was written by Shakespeare after the end of the European colonial period.
3. Choose the correct option:
 - (A) Only (i) is correct
 - (B) (i) and (iii) are correct
 - (C) (iii) and (iv) are correct
 - (D) (i) and (iv) are correct.
4. Who wrote the book *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*?
5. What was the name of Caliban's mother?

2.3 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you must have gained a comprehensive and deeper understanding of the play. Few of the important issues have been discussed in some detail in the unit. Let us quickly recapitulate the major issues of the play in a very brief manner:

- The first issue that we discussed is the genre of this play. There has been an ongoing debate involving the exact genre of the play. While the First Folio of Shakespeare categorizes it as a comedy, the play hardly contains all the essential traits of the comedy. Under the Jacobean influence, the play came to be regarded as a tragicomedy because it certainly has a balanced intermingling of comedy as well as tragedy. Later on, the final four plays came to be regarded as 'romances'. *The Tempest* can indeed be called a romance because it has most of its essential characteristics like fantastical elements including magic and supernatural, a journey or a quest undertaken by the protagonist, romantic relationship between two lovers and the concept of loss and recovery.
- The use of supernatural elements is another important issue that we discussed in the unit. The supernatural elements employed by Prospero and executed through Ariel serve an integral part in the action of the play. They move the plot forward as well as cater to the Elizabethan audience's desires to watch fantastical and unnatural occurring on the stage.
- The masque presented in the first scene of Act IV also has a special significance in the play. Arranged by Prospero as a celebration of the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda, the masque features various spirits disguised as Iris, Ceres and Juno who arrive to bless the young couple. They provide a sort of comic relief to the play through their song and dance. It is generally believed that the masque was specifically written and included for the 1613 performance of *The Tempest* which was enacted in the royal court on the occasion of the marriage of Princess Elizabeth.
- A postcolonial study of *The Tempest* is very much essential in order to understand the dynamics of the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. Postcolonial readings of the play analyzed the colonial supremacy of Prospero over the exotic and savage Caliban who needed to be subordinated physically and psychologically for the advantage of the colonizer.
- Lastly, we discussed the significance of women in *The Tempest*. Unlike other Shakespearean plays the study of the female characters is much

more interesting in *The Tempest* because it apparently has only one woman who physically features in the play. While Miranda is the only female character who appears in person, there are a host of other women in the play like Sycorax, Claribel and Prospero's wife who appear only in the speeches of other characters yet have greater significance in the context of the play.

2.4 GLOSSARY

¹**Romance:** It originally signified a work written in the French language which evolved from a dialect of the Roman language, that is, Latin. Its standard plot is that of a quest undertaken by a single knight in order to gain a lady's favour and stress the ideals of chivalry- courage, loyalty and honour. It also delights in wonders and marvels and makes much use of the supernatural including magic, spells and enchantments.

²**Renaissance:** Literally meaning "rebirth", Renaissance implies the period of European history following the Middle -Ages which can be described as the birth of the modern world out of the ashes of the Dark Ages. It is usually said to have begun in Italy in the late fourteenth century and to have continued, both in Italy and other countries of Western Europe, through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Renaissance was distinguished by a renewed focus on classical studies in literature, arts, culture, etc. In religion, it brought about a new shift from theology to a scientific outlook. Important developments of the Renaissance period were the invention of printing, modern navigation, spurt in industrial and commercial activities; discovery of new worlds and the demolition of the feudal setup.

³**Marlowe's Faustus:** Refers to the play *Doctor Faustus* (1592) by Christopher Marlowe which narrates the story of Doctor Faustus, a man of knowledge, who sells his soul to Lucifer in return of learning magic and gaining absolute power and knowledge for the next twenty-four years.

2.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

Bloom, Harold. ed. *Viva Modern Critical Interpretations William Shakespeare's The Tempest*. New Delhi: Viva Books Pvt. Ltd., 2007.

Choudhury, Bibhash. *English Social and Cultural History: An Introductory Guide and Glossary*. New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India Pvt. Ltd., 2007.

McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. New York: Manchester University Press, 2000.

Vaughan, Virginia M. and Vaughan, Alden T., ed. *The Tempest: A Critical Reader*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

2.6 POSSIBLE ANSWERS TO CYP QUESTIONS

Check your progress 1:

Answer 1: (D) 1623

Answer 2: A romance is a type of narrative which generally presents a plot involving a hero in the quest of gaining a lady's favour and which stresses upon the ideals of courage, loyalty and honour. The romances also make ample use of supernatural elements.

Answer 3: The four kinds of spirits that appear in *The Tempest* are: Spirits of Fire, Spirits of Earth, Spirits of Water and Spirits of Air.

Answer 4:(C) (i) and (iv) are correct

Answer 5: The masque in *The Tempest* is presented in the first scene of the fourth act of the play.

Check your progress:2

Answer 1: Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published in the year 1978.

Answer 2: (B) (i) and (iii) are correct.

Answer 3: Octave Mannoni wrote the book *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*.

Answer 4: The name of Caliban's mother was Sycorax.

2.7 REFERENCES

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2.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. “The issue is not to force a play like *The Tempest* into a generic box...” Discuss the genre of *The Tempest* in the light of the above statement.
2. Describe the use of supernatural elements in *The Tempest*.
3. What is a ‘masque’? Discuss the masque in *The Tempest* and explain its dramatic significance in the context of the play.
4. Critically analyze *The Tempest* as a postcolonial text.
5. Critically discuss the representation of women in *The Tempest*.

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Part (III) : *Henry V*

William Shakespeare

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit covers a study of William Shakespeare's History Play *Henry V*. The objectives of the unit are,

- To introduce William Shakespeare's history plays in general, placing *Henry V* in this genre.
- To explore the specificities of Shakespeare's dealing with history in his history plays.
- To discuss the context of *Henry V* with an act-wise summary of the play.
- To concentrate on the characterisation of Shakespeare with his bulk of major and minor characters in the play.
- To critically discuss the thematic concerns of the play such as Machiavellian perspectives, role of power, politics, kingship and so on.
- To discuss the role of women in this play.
- To focus on Shakespeare's structuring of the play such as the role of chorus, comic elements and so on.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 William Shakespeare and the Elizabethan History Plays

A history play is a kind of dramatic writing dealing with certain historical events of distant and sometimes immediate times. The history play in England had a late start in comparison to the comedy and the tragedy. It started emerging as a specific discipline in England during the Renaissance period. The origin of this development can be dated back to the very emergence of English plays in the forms of the Mysteries which put forward the performance from the incidents from the Bible inside the Church premises. The religious episodes of Christianity registered in The Bible were performed on the stage. Moreover with the Miracle plays which initiated in the performances concerning the lives of the saints and martyrs of the past the spark of the history play was started in England. It is noteworthy that no history plays were written during this Middle Ages¹; however it cannot be denied that the root of history play has absolute connection with these two dramatic forms in England.

During the Tudor English Society², historical writings of England were famously and successfully attempted by Polydore Vergil, Edward

Hall and Raphael Holinshed. These writers were inspired by the increasing interest of the Tudor liking Henry VII to record the significance of the Tudor monarchs. John Skelton's *Magnyfyccence* and John Bale's *Kynge Johan* are a remarkable history of the Tudors during the sixteenth century with the difference that in the former the characters are presented as abstract personifications as done in the matter of the Morality plays while in the latter they represent the real historical figures. Moreover *Edward II* by the renowned University Wit Christopher Marlowe also contributed to the growth of the history plays during the Pre-Shakespearean period. At the hands of Marlowe, the depiction of historical events is marked by the significant storytelling technique of the playwright. The tragic representation of the historical events of the life of King Edward II is remarkably presented in his play. Although the range of the history play during the sixteenth century was limited, it enjoyed enormous popularity. As the historical writings including the plays during the Tudor monarchy intended to educate people regarding the significance of the kings of the bygone days, it received the acceptance it perhaps desired from the people of England. Moreover the victory of England against the Spanish Armada³ also increased the urge of the people of England during the sixteenth century to internalize the glorious past of the land due to which too, the historical writings easily attained public readership and admiration. The contribution of William Shakespeare in this regard is significant with his considerable range of history plays. William Shakespeare wrote successful history plays against such a knowledge-seeking backdrop of the country. In Shakespeare's history plays, the political scenarios of England during the said periods are given importance. Basically the frequent desire for power and pelf in the regimes of kingship, the claims for the crown and the consequences of such a pursuit are focused on his history plays which are brilliantly written by making recourse to successful characters. The historical narratives that Shakespeare encompasses date back to the reign of King John till that of King Henry VIII.

1.1.2 William Shakespeare's History Plays

William Shakespeare successfully produced ten history plays. They are *King John*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part I*, *Part II*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Part I*, *Part II*, *Part III*, *Richard III* and *Henry VIII*. Although the dates are not clearly specific it is often contended that it was with the history plays along with comedies that Shakespeare probably had started his literary career. His history plays are anthologized in three volumes.

The first volume is a tetralogy consisting four history plays such as *Henry VI Part I, Part II, Part III* and *Richard III*. These plays dealt with the events of the War of the Roses⁴ which took place from 1422 to 1485 between The House of Lancaster and The House of York. The second tetralogy consisted of *Richard II, Henry IV Part I, Part II* and *Henry V*. They deal with the incidents of the period starting from 1398 to 1420. *Henry V* is the last inclusion into the second tetralogy of Shakespeare's history plays. The first in those collections that is *Richard II* shows the conflict between Henry Bolingbroke and Richard II over the throne of England. The play shows the coronation of Henry Bolingbroke as the king of England with the name of Henry IV. The two succeeding plays in consecution namely *Henry IV Part I* and *Part II* revolve round the reign of King Henry IV. These plays show the problematic positions of the reign of the king with the threatening growth of his camaraderie conspiring against him and his son Prince Hall becoming a wastrel. In the last play of the tetralogy that is *Henry V*, the ascension of Prince Hall as Henry V after the death of his father and the instances in his reign are concentrated. *King John* and *Henry VIII* are the other significant history plays by Shakespeare which contextualize the reigns of the father of Henry II of England and King Henry VIII respectively.

1.1.3 Thematic Concerns of Shakespeare's History Plays

The concerns of Shakespeare's history plays are the events in the lives of rulers, warriors, and citizens. The representation of the state and its relation with the family is depicted in his history plays. On the level of the state, conflicts between various lands and the consequent wars and changes in ascension of the throne are depicted in the plays. Political dimension is a remarkable aspect of Shakespearean history play. The desire for power and pelf on the part of the humans is celebrated in the form of the chosen historical characters in his history plays. Due to this reason, the representation of the relation between father and son is striking in these plays since the son inherits from the father the responsibility of the carrying over of the glory of the crown and that of other crowns if his father wants him to have control over them. Thus the familial tradition of the Nobility is depicted in the plays. Sometimes disorder in the state is represented which rests on this desire to assert familial tradition. Moreover morality along with heroism as the key characteristic of the Nobility is also depicted by Shakespeare. However the Shakespearean history plays remain male dominated in the sense that here the roles assigned to women

inside the house is simply that of the partner to their spouses and attendant to their offspring.

Check Your Progress Questions (A)

Short Questions:

1. Find out the **True** answer:
 - (i) History writing in England started during the Restoration/ Renaissance period.
 - (ii) The contents of the Mysteries were Biblical incidents/ stories of martyrs.
 - (iii) Henry IV/ VII was interested in chronicling the glory of the Tudor monarchs.
 - (iv) During the sixteenth century in England history writing was popular/ not popular.
 - (v) William Shakespeare wrote eight/ten history plays.
2. Name two writers of the historical writings of the Tudor English society.
3. Who wrote *Edward II*?
4. Name the history plays written by William Shakespeare.
5. *Henry V* appears in which tetralogy of Shakespeare?

Broad Questions:

1. Discuss Shakespeare's specificity as a playwright of the Historical Play of the Elizabethan period.
2. How are Shakespeare's History Plays different from his tragedies and comedies? Discuss with reason.
3. What elements of the Shakespearean Historical Plays can be traceable in his *Henry V*? Discuss.

1.2 INTRODUCTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S *HENRY V*

1.2.1 Historical Background

Shakespeare's *Henry V* is the last play of the second tetralogy of history plays by the writer. The publication date of the play is not clear; however it was staged in 1599. In the first Folio version of 1623

the play got appeared. It is notable about Henry V who is also known as Henry of Monmouth that as the king of England he successfully collected huge fame due to which accounts of his life had been recorded by the chroniclers like Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed. He ascended to the throne in 1386 and successfully remained there till 1422. As an English monarch Henry V had tasted successful victories in the Hundred Years War and the Battle of Agincourt over France and the records of his military pursuits perhaps served as the source of Shakespeare's depiction of him in his History Play *Henry V*. The historical account that the play covers is King Henry's claim of the French throne and the subsequent invasion of him on the country. In 1415 the king won the Battle of Agincourt following his valorous invasion of the country, defeat of King Charles and marriage with his daughter.

1.3 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF *HENRY V*

Chorus

Henry V begins with the appearance of the Chorus on stage pronouncing the prologue. The first Chorus on stage starts by desiring for the Muse so that the stage can set itself as the kingdom of one of the greatest reigns in England that is the court of King Henry V. In a moment, the Chorus changes its tone and says to the audience to carry their imagination along while they are viewing the performance. The urge of the Chorus make the play appear as a typical Elizabethan piece of drama. It is remarkable that Shakespeare makes the Chorus appear in the beginning of each act and permits them to comment on the king and his enterprises. Before the beginning of the first Act, the chorus unfolds the intention of the play that is to present the heroism of King Henry V and his military and kingly pursuits. The Chorus also shows the conversations between two ecclesiastical personnel over taxation and attempt to divert the intentions of King Henry V.

Act I Scene I

The setting of the opening scene is an antechamber in the palace of King Henry V in London. The stage shows two priestly figures that is the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely. They discuss the passing of a bill which can hamper the church drastically. It is shown that though the bill was passed years back it was not activated due to the civil strife. And after much gap, the bill is

again considered to get passed. The dangers that the bill can carry to the Church are discussed by the priests. The bill demands for the property of the church. Although the priests are extremely tensed they show confidence in King Henry V that he will not allow the church to get hampered by any bill because he is an earnest believer in Christianity. In course of their discussion the priests talk about various virtues of the king and his close attachment with the church. They argue that King Henry V is a scholar, theologian and a polished statesman who can strategically defend the state. However they get tensed with the fact that after the death of King Henry IV Prince Hal that is King Henry V has suddenly become spiritually alienated. Through the conversation of the priests the King's forthcoming war with France is conveyed. The Archbishop of Canterbury says to The Bishop of Ely that he has offered to help the King financially in his war with France so that King can help in nullifying the bill against the church.

Act I Scene II

The setting of Scene II is the Presence chamber of the palace of King Henry V. The King is engrossed in a discussion with the bishops, seeking their suggestion regarding his decision to claim the throne of France and proposed fight with the nation. The fact that this decision of the King is not yet sent to the ambassadors of France is shown in this scene. To his query the Archbishop says that through his great grandfather's line that is King Edward III his claiming of the throne of France is justifiable. The King is reminded of his valorous royal ancestry. Ely, Exeter and Westmoreland encourage the king in his decision of war and the Archbishop even offers him financial help in the war to come. The scene reveals the King's utmost concern for England. He expresses that when he and his troops will be busy in fighting with the French army, England might become vulnerable to the attacks of the Scots. However, the King is assured by the priests of England's potency even when he is not on the crown to defy if any attack takes place and the assured King decides to start his enterprise of France victory. He meets the ambassadors from France who carry the message that the Dauphin is certain of Henry V's claim of the throne of France and his proposed war against the nation. The ambassadors offer Henry V the gift which the Dauphin has sent; he has sent tennis balls to the King with the message that he is still very tender and immature, capable of playing with those tennis balls. Henry takes it as a humiliation and retorts that the real nature of his maturity will be shown to France. He says that the tennis balls gifted to him will be returned to the Frenchmen as gun stones and in the forthcoming war many people will die. He sends the message of invading France to the Dauphin and of avenging the insult of him. After the ambassadors of France are gone, Henry is determined to turn the invasion on France to be a victory.

Chorus

Like Act I, Shakespeare begins Act II by taking recourse to the commenting role of the Chorus. Shakespeare makes the Chorus begin by commenting on the piety of King Henry V. The Chorus introduces the King as one of the most religious kings of England. The King's belief in Christianity and concern for the civilians help him collecting huge support from his countrymen in his preparation for the war. The King's army is joined by various young people who leave their respective works behind for the purpose. At the backdrop of the King's enthusiastic preparation of the war, the Chorus also comments on the mindset of the Frenchmen. They are frightened and finding alternative ways to get hold of the war preparation of England. The scene shows the moral decline of three kinsmen, Richard, the Earl of Cambridge, Henry, Lord Scroop of Masham and Sir Thomas Grey, the knight of Northumberland. The Chorus hints at the upcoming tensions in both England and France due to the forthcoming war.

Act II Scene I

The setting of Scene I is a street on London. Corporal Nym and Lieutenant Bardolph meet each other. In course of their conversation they talk about the marriage between Pistol and Nell, who was once in association with Nym and had promised to get married to him. The scene then shows a verbal conflict between Pistol and Nym soon after the couple Pistol and Nell enter. Both of them seem ferocious with their swords. The conflict is interrupted by the entrance of Boy, who takes Nell along in order to take care of Falstaff who is sick. Soon after they depart the fight resumes. It finally comes to an end when Nell comes back with the information that Falstaff is unwell. Everyone departs to see Falstaff.

Act II Scene II

The setting of Scene II is the Council Chamber of Southampton. The information that their Englishmen have morally deteriorated themselves to serve against the English King is announced in this scene through the conversation between Exeter, Bedford and Westmoreland. They discuss the traitors and their plan to murder King Henry V. However they also talk about the King's successful coming to know about this fact of the three traitors. King Henry V appears on the stage along with Scroop, Cambridge and Grey. These three are the traitors. The three traitors having no knowledge of the fact that the King has come to know about their transition, eulogize him and his preparation for the proposed war with France. King Henry V raises an issue of a person in front of the traitors.

The person is accused of railing against the King when he was drunk and the King says that he is all set to leave the person on mercy. To this, the three men starkly offend and advise the King not to pardon the man who says cruel things about him even in an intoxicated way. After this the King shows the paper which talk about his knowing of the fact that these three men have fallen for treason against the English King. Having been caught, the three men ask for mercy but talking about their own suggestion a while ago the King gives the verdict of death sentence to them. The scene comes to an end showing some relief on the face of the King.

Act II Scene III

Scene III shows the fact that Falstaff is dead. Falstaff does not appear even as a character in this play just as the earlier history plays by Shakespeare. However information about his existence, sickness and death let the audience get introduced with the sub plot of the play.

Act II Scene IV

The setting of Scene IV is France. The palace of the French King is shown. The French king seems tensed. The tension of the French king regarding the serious approach of King Henry V is opposite to the thinking of his son, the Dauphin. The Dauphin does not take Henry V as a serious and fear worthy rival. He considers him as a tender and wayward youth. Conversation regarding the potency of King Henry V takes place in which the constable's commentary on the king is opposite to that of the Dauphin's. The Constable is certain of the competence of King Henry V and suggests the French king to be really worried and prepared for his attack, while the Dauphin argues that the attempts and preparation of the English king as trivial. The conversation is interrupted by the entrance of Exeter coming as a messenger of the king Henry V. Exeter says that the French king should conform to the claim of King Henry V of the French Throne. And if they do not accept the claim England is ready for a terrible war against them. Exeter also raises the issue of the Dauphin's gifting of tennis balls to the king Henry V and says that since the King has taken it as a serious insult; he makes it sure that the Dauphin will have to pay back for such an intending humiliation of the English king. To the message of Exeter the French king takes one day to give reply.

Chorus

The third act like other acts begins with the entrance of Chorus. Here the Chorus goes back to the style of Act I and urges the spectators to employ their imaginative faculty. The chorus urges the spectators to imagine that to the offer of the King Henry V, the French king offers him back his daughter Katherine along with certain dukedoms as the dowry to the king. Henry V considering the dukedom unprofitable and the offer unreasonable rejects it. Having rejected, the King along with his troops has started to France and reaches Harfleur. Bardolph tells the King that the beauty of the public house where they are residing is more attractive to him than the upcoming fight.

Act III Scene I

The setting of Scene I is the Harfleur gate in France. The scene shows the intense preparation of Englishmen. King Henry V gives motivational lecture to his army. He talks about the glory of England and its ancestors and the prowess and potency of all Englishmen of whom the soldiers are the honest and true representatives. Talking about the glory of English people and the land, the King urges his men to fight with all their sharpness against the French people and comes with victory. The King orders his army to charge the walls of the city of Harfleur and starts capturing the lands of France.

Act III Scene II

Scene II shows the hesitation of Bardolph and Pistol to go and fight with the Frenchmen. This is linkable with Bardolph's commentary to the King about the inn in which they reside. Both of them are afraid to die in the war. Their positions are suggestive of the presence of many like them in the English army who are afraid of letting themselves die in the war. However, the scene comes to an end by the appearances of a Welsh officer Fluellen who orders both Bardolph and Pistol to take part in the breach and they leave.

Act III Scene III

The setting of Scene III is the gate of Harfleur. King Henry announces the residents to surrender themselves to his army and threatens them about the dangerous outcomes they will have to face if they do not yield to the order of the King. The King threatens the citizens to kill them and to burn the entire city and turn it into ashes. However, on the part of the Governor of the city of Harfleur, as he does not receive any help from the Dauphin he surrenders himself to King

Henry V. Having obtained the charge of Harfleur King Henry gives Exeter the authority to rule over the city in a very cordial and positive manner. After the day's rendezvous, the King prepares to go for the charge of Calais the next; this is demonstrated at the end of Scene III.

Act III Scene IV

The setting of this shorter scene is a room in the palace of the French king. The scene shows Katherine the daughter of the French king who tries to learn English from her maiden Alice.

Act III Scene V

The setting of Scene V is the palace of the French King. The king looks worried about the potency of the King Henry V as he has come to know about the hitherto successful achievements of the King in France. However the Dauphin and the Constable do not take the strength of Henry V seriously. Finally the French King orders his noblemen to prepare for the fight against the English king and suggest the Dauphin to stay back in the palace. The king sends his herald Montjoy to ask King Henry V if he intends to give any ransom for the damages his force has caused to France.

Act III Scene VI

The setting of Scene VI is the camp of English troops in Picardy. The scene shows the serious military discussions. The victory at the bridge is said about by Fluellen to Gower and Exeter and Pistol are praised in an increasing manner for their potency and bravery during the pursuit. Pistol enters the stage and asks Fluellen to save Bardolph on whom execution sentence is given by Exeter on the charge of theft. However Fluellen denies and Pistol leaves the stage in a very furious manner. The rebukes that Pistol showers on Fluellen are discussed by Gower soon after he leaves and the latter suggests Fluellen to be careful while talking to him in future because of his ill manners. Soon after the King enters the stage and Fluellen informs him about the victorious charge at the bridge and at the King's inquiry also tells about the case of Bardolph. And then King agrees with the decision of Exeter. He argues that it is only through just administration that the trust and love of the civilians can be obtained. At this moment the French herald enters delivering the message of ransom asked by the French King for the destruction in France. Henry not only refuses to give ransom but also says that he and his troops are ever ready even in their diseased and sick state to fight against France for the throne.

Act III Scene VII

The setting of Scene VII is the French camp near Agincourt. The military discussions amongst the Dauphin, the Constable, Lord Rambures, Orleans are shown in the scene. They are preparing themselves for the war. However a boastful attitude in course of their preparation can be traced in their conversation and approach. A messenger brings the information that the English troops are only fifteen hundred yards away from the French. However no sign of tension is revealed by the French men. They in fact laugh at the plight of English men that they will cause them after some time.

Chorus

Chorus once again appears before Act IV begins to take place. This time the Chorus comments on the atmosphere in both the English and French Camps night before the war. In terms of the preparation for the war both camps are vibrating with the sounds of sentinels, horses, armor and so on. In fact the camps are lit with the firelights which suggests the enthusiasm of both the parties. In the French camp they army is seen as certain of the coming victory and they are playing dice and having good time amongst themselves. While in the English camp, King Henry is aware of the limited size of his army and hence visits tents after tents to motivate the small number of people he has in his army. He also solaces his troops for the war to come.

Act IV Scene I

The scene sets in the camp of the English army at Agincourt. The night before the battle the King expresses his worry to Gloucester. In order to pacify himself Henry takes the cloak of Erpingham soon after he enters the scene, roams around the tents in disguise, meets many soldiers and talks to them. In course of his conversation the King brings in the concept of his refusal to get ransomed. To the King's astonishment and anger the soldier called William argues that the King should have agreed upon the issue of ransom. The King disguised the form of a soldier challenges William to get involved with a fight with him in future if both of them remain alive in the battle. This makes Henry ponder over the responsibilities of being a monarch. The King argues that a slave is at a much better position than a king because he can at least have peaceful slumber at night while the king is all the time grossly involved with the desire to fulfill the expectation of his subjects. The piety of the King is revealed when he prays to God to fill his soldiers with courage and moral responsibility for the war to come the next day.

Act IV Scene II

The setting of this scene is the French Camp. The scene shows the Dauphin who is finally given the consent to fight as excited and ready to fight with the English army. The Constable having come to know about the readied condition of the English army to fight with them laughs at their miserable state and says that it will be completely easy a task for them to fight and defeat the army. The overconfidence of the French army is shown in the entire scene.

Act IV Scene III

The setting of Scene III is the English Camp. Discussions on the battle are undertaken by Gloucester, Bedford, Exeter, Erpingham, Salisbury and Westmoreland. A note of worry and fear runs amongst them when they talk about the five times larger army power of the Frenchmen and the energy and enthusiasm of the French soldiers. When the King enters, Salisbury laments for having less army and longs for some more. However the King is absolutely okay with the number of the soldiers. He says that in order to fight, die or win the number that they carry is completely alright. The King gives a speech to his soldiers and his attempt to motivate them does not go in vain. The French herald Montjoy enters and asks the King to surrender before the French army begins their devastation on them. To this the King says that he and his army are ready to defeat French and die. Having let Montjoy go, Henry V orders his cousin Duke of York to charge the battle.

Act IV Scene IV

The scene shows battlefield and Pistol in it. The scene announces the deaths of Nym and Bardolph. However, the scene shows the taking of ransom from French soldier by Pistol. It adds to the subplot of the play.

Act IV Scene V

The setting of this Scene is another part of the battlefield. The tensed state of the French army is shown in this scene. The Constable, the Duke of Orleans, Bourbon, the Dauphin and Rambures admit the fact that despite having smallness in number of their force the English army is actually defeating the French in every charge. At each charge the French army is facing difficulties to shine with victory. However, they too are fighting their level best. Consequently the fight is truly vehement.

Act IV Scene VI

The setting of scene VI is also the battlefield. The English camp is filled with French prisoners. Henry V and Exeter discusses over the war matters. They talk about the deaths of the Duke of York and Earl of Suffolk and consider them to be extremely courageous. They also talk about the brave participation of the soldiers and admit that the way with the war is still longer for them. A sudden alarm breaks their talk and the King orders to murder the prisoners in his camp and fight back with the attack of the French army.

Act IV Scene VII

Like the previous scenes this Scenes is too set on the battlefield. The King's order to kill the French prisoners is discussed by Fluellen and Gower. The King is also seen discussing with his noblemen about the warfare and being surrounded by sundry prisoners of France. The situation is interrupted by the entry of Montjoy who carries the message of the acceptance of the defeat of the Frenchmen. The King announces the victory to be known as the Victory of the Battle of Agincourt. The scene adds comedy to the play as the soldier whom the King being in disguise challenges to fight after the war is over and exchanges his gloves as a marker of the identity called William enters the scene. Since the gloves actually belong to Fluellen the King smiles at the proposed fight between fluellen and William.

Act IV Scene VIII

The setting of this scene is the chamber of King Henry V. A fight between Fluellen and William starts and the King beholds it in a jolly manner. However before the fight becomes dangerous and harmful of life the King reveals the truth. An English herald comes with the report that in the war very less of the Englishmen have lost their lives. The King's piety is suggested by his response to such information. He immediately thanks the Almighty for the winning and the saving of lives as much as He could.

Chorus

The setting of Act V is conveyed by in the beginning of it by the Chorus. It says that it has been five years after the victory of the battle of Agincourt and it seeks pardon of the audience for the gap. The Chorus talks about the things that took place during these five years. It talks about the King's successful coming back to England and his warm reception as the victorious king. It also talks

about the visit of Sigismund, the Roman king to England. The Chorus disappears having suggested the audience to imagine King Henry's visits to France after five years from the Battle of Agincourt. It hints towards the treaty of Troyes which was signed by the King.

Act V Scene I

The setting of Scene I is the English camp in France. The scene adds some comic elements to the play. Fluellen, Gower and Pistol take part in the comic enterprise of the scene. Fluellen who is attiring himself in the costume of St. Davy's Day, irritates Pistol to make him eat the leek in his dress. However, Pistol, does not. After Fluellen departs, Pistol talks about the death of his wife. The scene comes to an end with Pistol taking the decision of going back to his earlier profession of stealing.

Act V Scene II

It is the last Scene of the play. The setting is the French palace. The stage shows King Henry V, Bedford, Gloucester, Warwick, Westmoreland, the French King and Queen Isabel, Princess Katherine, Alice and Duke of Burgundy. The scene carries the tone of reciprocity. The Queen of France says to King Henry V that now they should talk only of love. Then Duke of Burgundy gives a long speech on the necessity of peace in France. They sit together for the settlement of a treaty. The stage leaves King Henry, Princess Katherine and Alice and the King of France while the kinsmen go for discussion of the terms of the tract. The King impresses Katherine with his noble nature and the king of France after returning to the stage gives his consent of the marriage expecting that it will break all the enmity between France and England for good.

Chorus

At the end of the play the Chorus reappears. It asks for apology of the audience for the shortcomings in the performance. The Chorus says that the peace treaty does not last long and during the reign of Henry VI and France was again lost.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS (B)

Short Questions:

1. Find out whether **True** or **False**:
 - (i) The Chorus appears seven times in *Henry V*.
 - (ii) The battle between England and France is famously known as the Battle of Agincourt.
 - (iii) The first place that the English army takes charge of in the battle is Harfleur.
 - (iv) The Dauphin of France sent tennis balls to Henry V.
 - (v) The name of the soldier whom King Henry V challenges to fight after the war is Erpingham.
2. Name the three traitors.
3. How many Acts are there in the play?
4. What is the name of the French king?

Broad Questions:

1. Discuss the relationship between the Church and the State during the medieval period in England.
2. Sketch the dramatic significance of the opening scene of the play.
3. How is the youth of England depicted in the play? Critically enumerate.
4. What role does Shakespeare assign to the women character in the play? Discuss their significance in the context.
5. Do you think the King is actually glorified in the play? If so how? Discuss.

1.4 CHARACTERS IN *HENRY V*

Henry V contains a good number of characters. They belong both to the Royalty and the common people.

- **Chorus:** The chorus is the most significant part of Shakespeare's play. The Chorus in the play appears six times. The play begins with a prologue and ends with an epilogue by the Chorus. The Chorus comments on the eponymous character of the play. Moreover, the Chorus also communicates with the audience appealing them to imagine and preview the context of the play and asking for their pardon at the end for taking a gap of five years towards the conclusion of the context.

- **King Henry V:** He is the foremost figure in the play. This eponymous figure is also known as King Harry V or Henry of Monmouth. He is presented as a successful ruler whose piety and cordiality towards the civilians have been widely liked by his subjects. Shakespeare's play enormously celebrates the glory of this king. The battle of the play that is the Battle of Agincourt is due to the King's maternal claim over the throne of France. The play shows the physical and mental strength to fight of King Henry V. The king also appears as a speculative individual as he during the battle ponders over the responsibilities of a monarch.
- **Duke of Gloucester:** He is the brother of King Henry V. The play shows his increasing support towards the King during the battle. Gloucester is seen having been given foremost part in the King's important decision regarding warfare.
- **Duke of Exeter:** He is the uncle of King Henry V. He is one of those who has been given significant participation in the Battle of Agincourt. After the gate of Harfleur is taken over by the English troops, King Henry V assigns the responsibility of ruling over the newly attained land to Exeter.
- **Duke of York:** He also takes important part in the Battle of Agincourt. He is a cousin to King Henry V. He offers his force to the king for his fight and himself takes active part in the battle. He dies in the battle and his bravery and prowess is commemorated and praised by the King in the play.
- **Duke of Bedford:** He is a brother of King Henry V. He is also actively engaged in the Battle of Agincourt along with the king.
- **Earl of Salisbury:** He is a cleric who along with many others becomes companion to Henry V in his pursuit of the claim of the throne of France and the subsequent war.
- **Earl of Westmoreland:** He is another Earl in the play. His role in the play is significant because he is an integral part of the kingly decisions of Henry V. He too takes part in the battle.
- **Earl of Warwick:** He is another cleric who actively becomes member of the fight of King Henry V.
- **Earl of Cambridge:** His name is Richard. He along with two others gets corrupted by the French force. He becomes a traitor; however he is sentenced to death soon after the king discovers his criminality.
- **Lord Scroop:** He is another traitor in the play. He along with Richard and Grey plots to kill Henry V and finish his desire to have the throne of France. However he too is put to death by Henry.

- **Sir Thomas Grey:** He is another traitor who becomes a criminal to plan to murder Henry V so that his plan to achieve the French throne cannot get fulfilled. However he is also executed by Henry V.
- **Pistol:** Pistol is a remarkable character in the play for he appears in the earlier plays as the companion to Falstaff. His role is striking because he does not fight as he is expected to do in the war. In fact soon after his wife dies he plans to go back to his earlier profession that is stealing.
- **Nym:** He is also a companion of Falstaff. The play shows his death towards the conclusion. Nym is a lively and cheerful character.
- **Bardolph:** He is a companion to Falstaff. He dies during the war in France. However the reason of his death is not his involvement in the fight; rather his engagement in the act of stealing for which Exeter condemns him to death.
- **Boy:** He is a messenger often serving the purposes of Pistol, Nym and Bardolph. The information of the sickness and even death of Falstaff comes to them through him.
- **Nell Quickly:** She is the wife of Pistol. Because of her fake promise to Nym and eventual marriage to Pistol a conflict takes place between the suitors. The information of the death of Nell comes towards the conclusion of the play, leaving Pistol lamenting and planning to take his job of stealing once again.
- **Captain Gower:** A captain of the English force who is an active participator in the battle of Agincourt.
- **Captain Fluellen:** He is a Welsh Captain the serving the purpose of the English force during the war of Agincourt. He is very energetic and he pushes everyone who is hesitating to take active part in the battle.
- **Thomas Erpingham:** He is an old soldier in the team of King Henry V. The King makes a funny episode towards the conclusion of the play. After the king takes his cloak and roams the tents of the camp in order to comfort the soldiers and challenges one of the soldiers named William having exchanged their gloves, soon after the battle is won William considers Erpingham as the soldier who challenges him and a fight takes place between them. Though the King finally reveals the reality to both of them.
- **Williams:** Another soldier of the English troop. He is against the deaths of so many people in the name of battle. He is also disappointed to see the less number of English army in the fight. However He survives in the battle.

- **Archbishop of Canterbury:** He is a priestly figure who appears for the first time on stage in the play. His role is remarkable in the play since King Henry V is a pious individual and he has close proximity with the church professional. When the King seeks the advice of the church professional regarding his decisions to claim the throne of France it is the Archbishop of Canterbury who encourages him and even to give him subsidy for the enterprise.
- **Bishop of Ely:** He appears as a companion to the Archbishop of Canterbury in his initial decision about the approaching danger to the church. His role in the play is significant because he also takes part in the energizing of the king to claim and invade France for the throne.
- **King Charles VI of France:** He is the French King against whom King Henry V fights his battle of Agincourt. Despite his other kinsmen he does not underestimate the power of King Henry and hence offers his daughter's hand to him in order to save his throne from defeat. However his troops fight with the King considering themselves able to defeat him easily and eventually face defeat. The king finally makes Henry V his son in law and desires to break all the enmity between France and England.
- **Isabel:** She is the wife of King Charles VI of France. Though she does not appear much in the play her role in the end is remarkable since she emphasizes on the talk of love and not of war. She happily gives her daughter's hand to Henry having been impressed by the strength and strategy of the King. Like her husband she too desires for a happy alliance between France and England for the days to come.
- **Katherine:** She is the daughter of the French King Charles VI and Isabel. She like the character of Isabel does not appear much in the play. Yet the role assigned to her is important because it is through her marriage with Henry V that the relationship of England with France following the war of Agincourt is expected to develop into reciprocity and mutual kinship. However at the conclusion of the play though Henry woos her and she gets impressed yet she does not too vocally expresses her love for him.
- **The Dauphin:** he is the son of King Charles VI of France and Isabel. The play shows him as an overconfident and over ambitious individual. Right through the beginning of the play till the end he does not consider Henry V as a king of potency and prudence. His sending of tennis balls to the King brings back his defeat.

- **The Constable of France:** He is a nobleman in the court of King Charles VI. He is seen taking significant role in the battle of Agincourt. However like the Dauphin he too takes the strength of King Henry V lightly and is overconfident of defeating him which ultimately turns out to be of no avail.
- **Montjoy:** He is the herald of the French court. He frequently appears in the play as he keeps visiting King Henry V with the proposals of the French King. However his offers are all rejected by the King before and during the war. His final message to the King accepting the defeat of the French people is celebrated by King Henry V.
- **Alice:** An old gentlewoman who is in the service of Katherine. Katherine learns English from her.
- **Duke of Bourbon:** A Frenchman. He fights in the battle of Agincourt against Henry V. However he becomes a prisoner to the king.
- **Duke of Orleans:** Another nobleman who fights with the French king against England. However he too is captured by Henry.
- **Duke of Berri:** A Frenchman in favour of the French King during the war.
- **Lord Rambures:** Another nobleman who fights in favour of the French king.
- **Lord Grandpre:** Another French Nobleman in Agincourt.
- **Duke of Burgundy:** This character appears at the conclusion of the play as he serves as the mediator between the king Henry V and Charles VI during the signing of the treaty.
- **Governor of Harfleur:** He is the governor who does not get any support from the French authority during the war and eventually surrenders his place and himself to the English king.

Check Your Progress

Short Questions:

1. State whether **True or False:**

- (i) Isabel is the daughter of the French king Charles V.
- (ii) Falstaff dies in *Henry V*.
- (iii) The name of the old gentlewoman of Katherine is Frida..

(iv) The Dauphin is the son of king Charles VI.

(v) The Duke of Bedford is the uncle of King Henry V.

2. Write the name of the herald of the French court.

3. What is the name of the daughter of King Charles VI?

4. Who is given death sentence for his theft?

5. What is the relationship between Duke of Exeter and King Henry V?

Broad Questions:

1. The play has a considerable bulk of characters? Who amongst them deserves to be considered as major and who can be considered as minor characters? Discuss with insight.

2. Does the play offer any comic effect? If so can this comic effect be considered as comic relief? Give a well reasoned answer.

3. Critically discuss the character of Henry V.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF *HENRY V*

1.5.1 Role of Chorus

The Chorus frequently appears in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and keeps commenting on the events and characters of the play. The way the Chorus demonstrates the accounts of the play is a narrative style. Hence storytelling is its primary objective in Shakespeare's play. One remarkable feature of the role of Chorus in the narration of play is that it makes the audience preview certain incidents which do not actually occur in the main action of the play. Only the subsequent part of what the Chorus has said is shown in the Act of the play. The act of treason in which Richard, Grey and Scroop fall is narrated by the Chorus and the eventual sentence to death on them by the king is narrated in the following act. Thus the Chorus plays on the anticipation and imagination of the audience. In fact, in the very beginning of the play in its first appearance the Chorus appeals the audience to be keen with their imaginative faculties during the entire performance. When the Chorus encourages the audience to apply their imagination it asks for pardon for the shortcoming in the play. This suggests that Shakespeare distances his Chorus from the play though it is an inherent part of the narrative. The Chorus stands at the same rank with the audience trying to establish a dialogic relationship with them about

the events to be discussed. It is striking that in *Henry V* Shakespeare allows the Chorus to make the audience aware of their status as the viewer throughout the performance. This makes the Chorus the most undeniable part of the play. The Chorus also makes the audience aware of the fact that the play is dealing with chronicles of the past. In its description of the accounts in the military life of Henry V the Chorus praises the valour of the great king. As the Chorus directly communicates with the audience appealing them to make adequate use of their imagination it is capable of creating a sense of suspense in them. This leads to the creation of an effective dramatic sway on the spectators. This makes the Chorus successfully build a cordial relationship with the audience of the play. The desire of the audience while viewing the play is also taken into account by the Chorus. At the beginning of the concluding act it asks for excuse from the audience for taking gap of more than five years in the dramatic action after the English victory in the battle of Agincourt.

1.5.2 Comic Relief/ Elements

Although Shakespeare's *Henry V* is not a tragedy, rather a history play, the presence of comic characters contributing to comic episodes in the play can be found in it. As history play it does not encompass events in the personal life of the king Henry V rather talks about his military pursuits against France starting with his calling of the French throne through his maternal line and ending in his successful taking over the control of the land. And in his weaving of the military accounts of Henry V in this context Shakespeare introduces certain comic characters who are involved in the charge of Henry V against France. These comic characters allow the audience temporary relief from the seriousness of the plans and strategy of Henry V. They not only make the audience laugh out but also help in adding new insight into the plot of the work. Hence the comic characters in the play cannot be considered to have served the purpose of providing relief letting the episodes get isolated from the main outline. Rather they are inherent part of the main action with dual purposes—providing laughter and insight. Pistol is a significant character in terms of his addition of comic elements to it. Although he is a fighting associate of the play he is the one to fight the least in it. He even decides to go back to his theft profession after the death of his wife. Although he adds comedy he throws light on the real aspect of war—it suggests that fact that soldiers are also human beings with fear of death. Moreover the quarrelsome

nature of pistol is always the source of humour in the play. Though the end of Bardolph is tragic as he is sentenced with death for his stealth inside the Church, he often appears as a comic figure for his red nose. Apart from this Henry V also creates a comic episode with his exchange of gloves with a soldier named William on the challenge to fight if both of them remain alive in the battle. The real owner of the gloves is Erpingham from whom Henry takes the cloak and gloves on loan in order to roam the tents during the war; he comes to know about it when Henry finally discloses the fact.

Check Your Progress

Short Questions:

1. State whether **True** or **False**:
 - (i) The Chorus narrates and comments on the events of the play.
 - (ii) The Chorus directly addresses the audience while narrating.
 - (iii) King Henry V also adds to the comic elements of the play.
 - (iv) *Henry V* does not have comic elements.
2. Name two comic characters in the *Henry V*.

Broad Questions:

1. Enumerate the significance of the role of Chorus in the play. Does it have any important function towards the progress of the context?
2. Does the play have any comic elements in it? If so how are they important in reading the play as a history play?

1.6 THEMATIC CONCERNS

1.6.1 Power

Issue of power is exploreable in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, like all other history plays by the author. The gist of the play is King Henry V's claim of the throne of France through his maternal link and his successful taking over of the crown of the nation. Hence the play shows the uncertainty of the ruling power of a nation. However it is remarkable that before claiming his rule over the land and invading it King Henry V constantly thinks over the decision and seeks help from his confidants.

Looking from the perspectives of the French king it is notable that it is through the claim of King Henry V that they have to enter into the conflict and have to lose. However the sense of becoming powerful on the part of King can lead to his leaving of his moral values behind. It is the rules of kingship during the medieval period in England that in order to remain successful a king has to expand his power and self. Thus the idea of power in the context of Shakespeare's *Henry V* can be associated with that of kingship. Here power devalues the glory of kingship. The play shows that soon after the King discusses his desire to have the throne of France, he is encouraged even by the church personnel by justifying his urge against the measures of the Salic law⁵. The entire battle of Agincourt is nothing but an invasion. At each stage of the approaching of the English men, the French king tries to prevent them. Charles VI even offers the hand of his daughter to save his throne. This reflects that the victory is completely a chosen enterprise of King Henry V himself. Moreover the King during his sojourn amongst the soldiers in the camp in France in disguise meets a soldier named William who argues that the king should have stopped the battle and save the less Englishmen from impending death in the name of the war. The King despite himself being in a disappointed stage tries to solace the soldiers and ponders over the true nature of monarchy. A king at times has to live up to the expectation of his people which makes him completely a public figure and gives him sleepless nights. Shakespeare at the end of the play gives a glorious victory to King Henry V with a very less loss of life on the part of England.

1.6.2 Machiavellian strategy:

Since the play has deep political underpinning a critique of the Machiavellian strain in it is well justifiable. Unlike Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* *Henry V* does not make any direct reference to Machiavelli; however the political undertones of it leads us to search for the presence of his ideologies. Machiavelli in his *The Prince* gives insights into the ways to maintain political power in a society. He argues that a ruler in order to maintain his power in his reign has to be able to collect both love and fear from his subjects with the proportionate amount of becoming more feared than loved. Moreover Machiavelli posits that in order to remain powerful a ruler has to adopt cruelty at times in his kingdom. However the term Machiavellian refers to the unscrupulous leader in the political field. It cannot be argued that Henry V had been influenced by the ideals of Machiavelli since he was born before the

latter, what is incorporable is the ideas of the latter in his way of ruling his empire. The maintenance of friendship that Machiavelli argues to have in a king's relationship with his subjects is explored in Henry's association with his soldiers. During the disappointed days of the war he keeps visiting his soldiers residing in various tenets. He in fact goes in disguise to have intimate talks with them. One of the talks makes him realize the burden of responsibility that a king faces during his days in office. Moreover the Machiavellian advocacy for the successful application of mercy and cruelty together is evident in Henry V's ruling style. King Henry V is a believer in justice owing to which he is stern in some of his decisions. The play also hints towards another aspect of the Machiavellian ruling pattern; the king of France offers the hand of his daughter to King Henry so that he can save his territory from his eyes; this can be studied as a Machiavellian strategic decision. The idea of end being the power to justify the means can be incorporated in his offers. Moreover during his entire involvement in the war, Henry V is primarily occupied with the end which makes him comfort and energize his soldiers at the hours of disappointment and sorrow.

1.6.3 War, Nationalism and Patriotism:

As the key concern of the play is war, the issue of patriotism is also traceable in it. The play shows a bulk of characters taking active part in the battle and even losing their lives. Even king Henry V is ready to face death for the sake of the glory of England which he believes can be achieved by asserting victory over France. He is glad at the war report given to him by his herald which says that in comparison to the loss of life of the French army, England has a much lesser degree. He even thanks God for the grace on his soldiers. Since the play begins with preparation of war, process of it and concludes with peace treaty, it suggests that nationalistic feeling for the subscribed country is a dominant attribute of the play. On both sides there is the intense desire to save the glory of their respective nations. George Orwell says that Nationalism refers to the power extending pursuit; this idea is relatable with Henry V's intention behind the invasion of France. He wants the glory of England to get spread. However Shakespeare shows uniqueness in his personality when he expresses that he desires to extend his territory as a king it is his responsibility to do that. Hence it can be said that the very concept of nationalism and patriotism are critiqued in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. King Henry's consideration of the war as a 'breach' is suggestive of his belief

and dislike for the devastation it carries in its breast to the military and civilian alike of the engaged countries. Exeter talks about the tears of the widows, the cries of the orphans and the blood of the men which are indicative of the horror that war carries. All this diminishes the glory of nationalism and patriotism. The Chorus finally says that the terms in the peace treaty do not get materialized and France once again is lost announcing new tensions to England. This indicates the critique worthy condition of national sentiments of people as it can carry dangers to other groups and them as well. The governor of Harfleur leaves his nationalistic sentiment aside and joins surrenders to the power of King Henry V; this is the only way he can save his subjects and himself from the impending doom ahead.

1.6.4 Role of women:

The play celebrates courage in the shape of the performance in war. Hence the play contains more male characters than female ones. The role of women is also remarkable in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. The play contains very few of women characters. And they appear as partners and attendants to the male. In the imagination of the English France is made to appear as a female body which they desire to have as their own. Exeter in Act II considers it as having Womby voltages and says that the Englishmen are ready to invade, defeat and apply administration in it. Henry V in Act III threatens to rape the daughters of France and frighten them with his power. The play does not show the male characters as getting motivated by their female partners before or during the war. King Henry motivates his soldiers himself; in fact the play is filled with the shouts and cries of the male. The play thus appears as a completely male dominated one. The play has limited number of women characters. In the English circle Quickly is the only female character taking part in the sub plot of the marriage, sickness and eventual death of Falstaff. And in the French circle Isabel wife of the French king Charles VI, Katherine daughter of Charles and Isabel and Alice, the gentlewoman of Katharine dominate the stage. Henry says to Katherine that as France has been occupied by him, all of the land including she come under his power. And when he asks her about her consent in the marriage with him, she says that she leaves it to the decision of her father. Submissiveness of womenfolk is shown through the least women characters in the play. This also leads us to look at the condition of English society and the significance of women's status in it during the medieval period. In those times the

chief features of judging the standard and glory of a society is the power and prowess of its man and the beauty and submissiveness of its women. This can be reflected in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

Check Your Progress

Short Questions:

1. State whether **True** or **False**:
 - (i) *Henry V* has very limited amount of women characters.
 - (ii) *Henry V* shows the fluidity of kingly power.
 - (iii) Machiavellian elements of kingship can be found in the play.
2. Name the women characters in the play.

Broad Questions:

1. Do you think *Henry V* really establishes the permanence of power? Does it show power in tussle and transition? Give a reasoned answer.
2. Attempt to incorporate the Machiavellian political stance in *Henry V*.
3. Do you think the women characters in the play are insignificant? Do they throw any light on the medieval English society? Discuss.
4. Is war glorified or critiqued in Shakespeare's *Henry V*? Discuss with reason.

1.7 LET US SUM UP:

In this unit we have discussed the emergence of history plays in England and the development of the same during the Elizabethan period in the hands of William Shakespeare. We have also studied the historical background and sources behind the publication of the play *Henry V* by William Shakespeare. The play *Henry V* is a successful History play by Shakespeare. We have also discussed the ideas of Elizabethan history play and Shakespeare's dealing with the genre. Then we have explored a summarizing account of Shakespeare's *Henry V* with the introduction and role of the characters in it and critical perusal of the thematic concerns inside it along with its structure. The discussion throws light on the representation of war and politics and historical accounts in the history play *Henry V*.

1.8 KEYWORDS:

¹Middle Ages: This era is also called the Medieval Period. The period from fifth century to fifteenth century in the history of Europe is famously known as the Middle Ages.

²Tudor English Society: The period from 1485 to 1603 is known as the Tudor Period in England. The English society during this era is called the Tudor English society.

³Spanish Armada: This is part of the Anglo Spanish war of the late sixteenth century taking place in North West Europe. The armada refers to the Spanish fleet under the leadership of Duke of Medina Sidonia which invaded and fought with England. However the English fleet won the battle.

⁴The War of the Roses: Civil Wars in England fought between the House of Lancaster and the House of York. The logos of the houses were a red rose and a white rose respectively after which the war is named.

⁵Salic law: It is inheritance law of the monarchy of France which excludes females from ascending the throne.

1.9 SUGGESTED READINGS:

- (i) William Shakespeare: *Henry V*.
- (ii) Harold Bloom: *Elizabethan Drama*.
- (iii) Elihu Pearlman: *William Shakespeare: The History plays*.
- (iv) M.H. Abrams: *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.

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1.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress (A)

Short Answers:

1. (i) Renaissance; (ii) Biblical incidents; (iii) Henry VII; (iv) popular; (v) Ten.
2. Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed.
3. Christopher Marlowe.
4. *King John, Richard II, Henry IV Part I, Part II, Henry V, Henry VI Part I, Part II, Part III, Richard III and Henry VIII.*
5. Second tetralogy.

*For answers to the broad questions refer to the material and books mentioned in Suggested Readings.

Check Your Progress (B)

Short answers:

1. (i) False; (ii) True; (iii) True; (iv) True; False.
2. Richard, the Earl of Cambridge, Henry, Lord Scroop of Masham and Sir Thomas Grey, the knight of Northumberland.
3. Three Acts.
4. Charles VI.

*For answers to the broad questions refer to the material and books mentioned in Suggested Readings.

Check Your Progress (C)

Short Answers:

1. (i) False; (ii) True; (iii) False; (iv) True; (v) False.
2. Montjoy.
3. Katherine.
4. Bardolph.

5. Duke of Exeter is the uncle of King Henry V.

*For answers to the broad questions refer to the material and books mentioned in Suggested Readings.

Check Your Progress (D)

Short Answers:

1. (i) True; (ii) True; (iii) True; (iv) False.
2. Pistol and Bardolph.

*For answers to the broad questions refer to the material and books mentioned in Suggested Readings.

Check Your Progress (E)

Short Answers:

1. (i) True; (ii) True; (iii) True
2. Quickly, Isabel, Katherine, Alice.

*For answers to the broad questions refer to the material and books mentioned in Suggested Readings.

1.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how Shakespeare deals with the theme of governance in his *Henry V*.
2. Do you think Shakespeare critiques authority in his play *Henry V*? Give a reasoned answer.
3. Explore the concepts of kingship and honour in *Henry V*.
4. What political concerns can be found in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.
5. Critically assess the role of chorus in Shakespeare's *Henry V*.
6. Give a character sketch of the king Henry V as portrayed by Shakespeare.
7. Do you think war is glorified in the play *Henry V*? Give a well considered response.

Much Ado About Nothing

Contents:

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Critical Summary

1.3 Critical analysis

- The comedies
- Theme of deception
- Appearance and reality
- Language/imagery
- Women characters
- Title of the play
- Structure
- Assessment questions
- Further Reading

1.0 OBJECTIVES :

This material has been designed to enable you to:

- study *Much Ado About Nothing* as a definitive example of a Shakespearean comedy
- discuss the characters in the play, and look into the representation of the women characters
- evaluate Shakespeare's use of language, and study the symbols and images in the play
- understand how *Much Ado* reflects the social and moral concerns of the period

1.1 INTRODUCTION:

Much Ado About Nothing was written sometime in the latter part of 1598 when Shakespeare was at the high point of his reputation and midway in

his career as a dramatist. The play occupies a unique transitional status and forms a bridge between the two halves of Shakespeare's career. *Much Ado* differs from the other Romantic comedies, as the real threat in this play arises from deep seated evil firmly rooted in the society. Instead of two juxtaposed settings of the actual and more or less ideal(as in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*), in *Much Ado* we have a single setting, the inescapable world of Messina where evil arises and is subdued. The play focuses on the ineradicable problems of human society like deception, jealousy, suspicion, men women conflict and so on. As such in its portrait of the foibles and generousities of communal life *Much Ado* is the most socially and psychologically realistic of Shakespeare's comedies. The plot of the play centres around two pairs of lovers. The Beatrice – Benedick plot where the combatants engage in the “merry war” and the Hero- Claudio plot which concentrates on the darker elements in the play. There is also a sub – plot involving Dogberry and his men.

1.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

Act I

Scene i :A messenger announces to Leonato, the Governor of Messina, that Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon is passing through Messina on his return from a victorious battle against his brother Don John. The messenger also reports about Claudio, a young Florentine who bore himself very well in the war and is much favoured by the Prince. Beatrice, Leonato's niece, shows particular interest about the fate of another of Don Pedro's men Benedick whom she seems to dislike as is evident in her words. After sometime Don Pedro arrives with Claudio, Benedick and Don John. Immediately Beatrice and Benedick exchange taunts and trade witticism, professing that love is only for fools. Claudio, on the other hand is attracted by Hero's beauty and thinks that he is in love. He expresses his desire to marry Hero ignoring Benedick's railings against marriage and womankind. Don Pedro, however supports Claudio's suit and assures him that he would speak to Hero and her father during the masked revels that evening.

Scene ii :A complication arises when Leonato's brother, Antonio, erroneously reports to him that the Prince is in love with Hero and plans to woo her that evening. Leonato is pleased with the prospect and says that he will wait to see what happens and decides to acquaint Hero with the matter so that she is prepared for an answer.

Scene iii : We encounter the malicious Don John, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother. Don John feels that he has been deprived of his position and waits for the right moment to cause problems for his brother and Claudio. On receiving the news

from Borachio that Don Pedro plans to woo Hero for Claudio, Don John hopes that Claudio's desire to wed Hero would give him an occasion to cause some mischief, and break the trust between Claudio and Don Pedro

On a closer analysis of Act I we see Messina as a conventional world, where life is a matter of keeping up appearances. The people here delight in deception which also accounts for the use of language as a mask either to cover the real feelings (as in Beatrice) or as a means of evil (as in Don John). Language has two functions in the play as will be revealed in the subsequent scenes – in one usage it is a means of social intercourse as can be noted in the conversations between Hero and Claudio; and in the other language becomes a toy to be played with as is evident when Beatrice and Benedick indulge in repartee, the so called “meery war”. At the same time Messina is also a world given to rank, status and social prominence, where the Prince is the highest placed member of the society.

Stop and Think :

Pay attention to the repeated use of ‘note’ in the conversation between Claudio and Benedick (i.i. 130-164) and also throughout the play. The ‘Nothing’ of the play's title would have been pronounced as ‘noting’ so we can expect the play to deal a lot with the ideas of ‘noting’.

Check Your Progress

1. In what ways is the opening scene different from other Shakespearean comedies?
2. What happens during the first meeting of Beatrice and Benedick ?
3. What impression do you form about the character of Hero ?

Act II

Scene i: The masked ball ceremony takes place in this scene. Masking and deception is an important theme in the play. In this scene all the characters are able to fulfil their hidden desires by operating from beneath a mask. As the scene begins Leonato, Hero and Beatrice are ready for the revels to begin. Beatrice complains that there is no man who can match her spirit and she cannot find a husband till “God make men of some other metal than earth” (2.1.43). Hero, however, obediently assents to her father's advice to accept the Prince when he woos her. In the dance that begins all the characters wear mask and couple by

couple, turn by turn they encounter each other. Don Pedro talks to Hero and as instructed by her uncle Hero believes that he woos her for himself. Beatrice and Benedick indulge in a love game and exchange insults. Balthasar and Margaret and Antonio and Ursula are also seen in a flirtatious exchange. Meanwhile Don John confronts Claudio (who pretends to be Benedick) and says that Pedro plans to woo Hero for himself. Claudio feels deceived and thinks that he has lost Hero. However his belief in Pedro's treachery is easily dispelled when Pedro arrives and explains his actions announcing that he has completed the match between Claudio and Hero. Don Pedro then decides to find a husband for Beatrice, and he thinks Benedick would be the ideal match. With the assistance of Leonato, Hero and Claudio, Pedro plans to trick Beatrice and Benedick so that they fall in love with each other.

By the end of Act I and much of Act II scene i the action of the play comes to "nothing" aptly fulfilling the play's title. We see how much can be made of nothing; how mistakes can lead to confusion and how villains can pervert such mistakes. However all the hazards are resolved at the end. This gives us a pre-image of the main action to come where we see Don John's attempt to destroy the love of Hero and Claudio which is countered by Don Pedro's attempt to create love between Beatrice and Benedick.

Stop and Think

(This play is full of overheard conversations or eavesdropping- that is listening in on people without their knowledge. The danger of eavesdropping is that the person may not hear the entire conversation and therefore misunderstand what is being said. This in turn leads to confusion.)

Check Your Progress

4. While Hero is silent and obedient, Beatrice is given space and scope to speak. However, Don Pedro decides to find a husband for Beatrice. What is the significance of marriage in the play?

Scene ii: Don John and Borachio hatch a scheme to disrupt the marriage of Claudio and Hero by making Hero seem unchaste. Accordingly Borachio would meet Margaret (dressed as Hero), at Hero's window in the night before the wedding. Pedro and Claudio would thereby be fooled into believing that Hero loves Borachio. This way Don John plans to 'misuse the prince, vex Claudio, to undo Hero and kill Leonato' (25-26).

Scene iii : We witness the gulling of Benedick as planned by Don Pedro . As the scene begins Benedick ,all alone in the garden mocks at Claudio’s Love . He laments that love has transformed Claudio from a simple and honest soldier to a lover concerned about fashion, manners and poetry. Benedick reconfirms his resolves never to be fooled by love .The women he would surrender to must be fair, wise, rich and virtuous, as he says “ till all graces be in one woman , one woman shall not come in my grace”(22). Soon Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio approach and Benedick hides in an arbour to eavesdrop what they say . As already planned Don Pedro , Leonato and Claudio begin to stress Beatrice’s supposedly desperate love for Benedick , and how she fears that Benedick might tease and reject her . They lament Benedick’s hardheartedness and also allude to his good qualities , saying that beneath the hardhearted satirist lies the gentle –hearted lover in Benedick . Benedick overhears the conversation and is completely fooled by the trick into believing that Beatrice loves him . Don Pedro and the others exit and decide to send Beatrice to call Benedick for dinner . As Benedick sees Beatrice approaching he is enamoured of her and he thinks : “ by this day , she’s a fair lady , I do spy some marks of love in her “(200). Thus in Beatrice’s sharp speech Benedick no more hears any barbs but only declarations of love. Her words and remarks now mean the direct opposite of what they convey .

This scene is a carefully contrived reversal scene. It is framed by the contrasting soliloquies of Benedick. All alone in the beginning of the scene Benedick mocks at Claudio’s love , at the end he applies those very themes to himself and is love sick . The song in this scene, consoling ladies bound to hard-hearted and fickle men, becomes a means to change emotions and convert Benedick by the end of the scene .

Check Your Progress

5. What is Benedick’s attitude to marriage and women in general?

Act III

Scene i: This constitutes the gulling of Beatrice where Hero arranges for Beatrice to overhear a conversation about Benedick’s love. Margaret tells Beatrice that Hero and Ursula are talking about her in the orchard and suggests that she should overhear the conversation . Beatrice listens while Hero and Ursula praise Benedick and talk about his love for Beatrice. Hero also expresses her fear that Beatrice would only make fun of and ridicule Benedick’s love . Beatrice is completely taken in by the conversation of hero and Ursula . She resolves to

accept Benedick's love and affection which is expressed in part of a sonnet at the end of the scene .

This scene is dominated by the women characters. Hero who is silent in the presence men is pert in the company of women . This discrepancy in her behaviour shows the position of women in Shakespeare's time where silence, especially in public places , was seen as a virtue. This scene is also a complement to Act II scene iii (the gulling of Benedick). However unlike the earlier scene it is in verse and presents love as a tender, romantic emotion . Also note the use of music and imagery of dance in both these scenes. Music and love are here traps for the unwary.

Scene ii : Benedick is a changed man here . He has shaved, washed , perfumed and re-clothed himself. He feigns a toothache to hide the change in him ; Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato make fun of him saying that he doesn't look like himself . Unable to withstand their teasing anymore, Benedick says that he wants to talk to Leonato privately . When they leave Don John appears and tells Claudio and Don Pedro about Hero's disloyalty . To prove his point he asks them to accompany him to Hero's bedroom window at night and witness her infidelity before the wedding. On hearing this Claudio vows that if Hero is seen with a man he will not marry her and would shame her before the congregation. Don Pedro also promises to join Claudio in disgracing her.

Scene iii :Dogberry and Verges overhear as Borachio tells Conrade how he fooled Don Pedro and Claudio into believing that Hero is unchaste . Borachio says that he had met Margaret dressed as Hero at Hero's bedroom window. Borachio also reveals that he has been aptly rewarded by Don John for this task. The watchmen arrests Borachio and Conrade for this treachery.

Scene iv : We see Hero preparing for the wedding and also witness Beatrice who is love sick . Benedick in Act III scene ii feigns a toothache ,in this scene Beatrice also feigns illness to hide her feelings .

Scene v: Dogberry and Verges tell Leonato that the two prisoners (Borachio and Conrade) need to be examined . However Leonato is in a hurry to go to the church for the wedding. He cannot make much sense of Dogberry's and Verges's foolish speech, and asks them to examine the prisoners. He hurriedly leaves for the church with Hero.

Check Your Progress:

6. Compare and contrast the gulling scenes of Beatrice and Benedick. What impression do you form of their character ?

7. Examine the role of Dogberry and Verges . How does his fractured vocabulary create confusion and delay the discovery of Don John's plot ?

ACT IV

Scene i : this is set in the church ,where everyone convenes for the wedding of Hero and Claudio . When the Friar proceeds with the marriage ceremony and asks for Claudio's consent he refuses to marry Hero declaring that she is unchaste . He denounces her as a "rotten orange"(27) and says that " She knows the heat of a luxurious bed :/Her blush is guiltiness ,not modesty"(36-37. Don Pedro also joins in the condemnation calling her a "common stale" (59). Leonato, to an extent believes in Claudio and staggers beneath the accusations wishing that " Death is the fairest cover for her shame /That may be wished for"(108-109) . He rails at Hero while Beatrice maintains that Hero is innocent. Unable to bear the charges against her Hero faints. However ,Benedick , Beatrice and the Friar believe in Hero's innocence and try to understand what has happened . They suspect that Don John is into some foul play. The Friar, who also believes in Hero's innocence, comes up with a plan. He suggests that they hide Hero and pretend that she is dead . This will give them some time to find the truth . Everyone agrees to carry out this show of deception. After the other characters leave Beatrice and Benedick confess their love for each other , and Benedick promises to challenge Claudio for the wrong done to hero .

Scene ii : Dogberry and the Sexton prepare to interrogate the prisoners Borachio and Conrade . There is lot of confusion caused by Dogberry's fractured vocabulary and questions. After the watchman gives his witness it is established that the prisoners plotted against Hero for which they were bribed by Don John.

The scenes of Dogberry and his men constitute the sub-plot in the play. Like Leonato and the others in the main plot who plan to find out the truth behind Claudio's allegations , Dogberry with his confused vocabulary tries to interrogate and understand Borachio's crime .

Act V

scene i: Antonio tries to console Leonato who is sad at the lost reputation of his daughter . When Don Pedro and Claudio arrive , Leonato accuses Claudio of wrongly slandering and denouncing Hero , thereby causing her death. He challenges Claudio to a duel, Antonio also joins the challenge. Don Pedro refuses to fight but maintains that Hero 'was charged with nothing/But what was true, and very full proof'(103-104). Leonato and Antonio leave them in disgust .

When Benedick enters the scene Claudio and Don Pedro try to re-engage him in newer jokes about Beatrice's love for him . But Benedick is changed by his love and can no more participate in these jokes . Benedick stands by in silence while Don Pedro and Claudio try to engage his humour . Benedick accuses Claudio and Pedro of falsely charging Hero and causing her death . He challenges Claudio to a duel and moves out of the scene.

Dogberry and Verges enter the scene with Conrade and Borachio as prisoners. When Don Pedro enquires about their crime , Borachio reveals the plot of Don John . Both Don Pedro and Claudio are shocked at the revelation that Hero's infidelity was staged by Don John . They realise their folly of trusting to appearances .

Scene ii :Benedick and Beatrice meet in the garden and confess their affections and feelings. Benedick informs Beatrice of his challenge to Claudio . Ursula appears in the scene and tells them about the scheme of Don John .

Scene iii :This a short lyric scene which takes place at Leonato's family tomb. Claudio and Don Pedro recite an epitaph to Hero and mourn her death . Within the compass of this short scene night changes to day and Claudio and Don Pedro proceed to change their clothes for the approaching wedding presumably with Antonio's daughter . This scene can be seen as a parallel to the church scene of Act IV scene i . The funeral scene ends with the ritual change of Claudio's clothes and the preparation for a wedding . This is symbolic of Claudio's atonement for his past sins and movement towards the future .

Scene iv : Leonato stages the final deception as he plans to wed Claudio and Hero (Claudio is under the impression that he is going to marry Leonato's niece). Leonato instructs the ladies to go masks themselves. Meanwhile Benedick expresses his desire to marry Beatrice and ask the Friar to do the needful. Claudio and Don Pedro appear and as promised Claudio gets ready to marry Antonio's daughter . The ladies (Hero , Beatrice, Margaret and Ursula) enter masked . When Claudio declares himself husband to the woman by his side, Hero un.masks and reveals herself to which Claudio exclaims "Another Hero"(62). Hero replies "One hero died defiled, but I do live ,/ and surely as I live , I am a maid"(64-65). Thus a true and untainted Hero is reborn from the ashes of the falsely shamed Hero. When Benedick asks which of the masked ladies is Beatrice, she un.masks and enquires about his wish. Benedick and Beatrice once again begin to argue whether they love each other. But Claudio and Hero produce poems written by Benedick and Beatrice confessing their feelings. Leonato offers Beatrice's hand to Benedick saying "I will stop your mouth"(96) which means that he will silence Beatrice merely by getting her a husband . Finally all join together in a dance to celebrate the marriage . A messenger reports that Don John has been taken prisoner and is brought back to Messina.

1.3 CRITICAL DISCUSSION

The Comedies

The Romantic comedies of Shakespeare comprise ten plays written from the beginning of his career up to about 1601. *Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *As You like it*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing* to name a few .

These plays adhere to a particular set of expectations. In comedies young people, and women in particular, are commonly seeking union with a lover , often against the wishes of their fathers. The conventions of comedy include: disguise, often involving cross dressing ; thwarted love ; mistaken identity ; marital and romantic misunderstandings., multiple marriages. Humour alone does not make a comedy. It requires a happy ending after the characters overcome the obstacles. The comedies usually end in marriage. Since Shakespeare was writing in a very male dominated society, these plays can also be read as a kind of a playful rebellion by young people against the authority of their parents. At the end of the play passionate love is transformed into safe and socially sanctioned, marriage.

Though a kind of social order is imposed by the event of marriage at the end , the subversive comic energy of the rebellion by the women characters against patriarchy can also be seen as a demonstration of a more equal kind of relationship between men and women, which is not only possible and but also desirable . However all Shakespeare's romantic comedies are of no simple or consistent type. As noted above Shakespeares's comedies begin with a problem in need of a solution . The problem may be social (uncooperative fathers in *Taming of The Shrew* , *Midsummer's Nights Dream*) or psychological (threat of death in *Much Ado* , *Merchant of Venice*) .

But *Much Ado* does not begin with a problem . There is no social or paternal objection to the match of Hero and Claudio or Beatrice and Benedick. The problem in the play comes from Don John and his plot to disrupt the marriage between Claudio and Hero . Though the problem is external , in that it comes from Don John , in reality the problem arises from inside the lovers , from within their self . The obstacle in the play arise from fears about male rivalry and female perfidy "For Beauty is a witch /Against whose charms faith melteth into blood"(2.1.164-65). Claudio's rejection of Hero and Benedick's reluctance to marriage arise from the same source — male distrust of women. Like Benedick and Claudio , Beatrice's reluctance to marriage is also psychological as can be seen in her jokes about marital infidelity. Thus , unlike the other Romantic comedies the chief obstacle to harmony (social and sexual) in *Much Ado* is located inside the human heart.

Theme of deception

It may be noted that deception operates at every level of *Much Ado*. Eavesdropping, mistakes of identity, disguises and masking form a major part of the plot. You should note how Borachio deceives Claudio and Don Pedro about Hero's infidelity; even Leonato is convinced that Hero has deceived them. Hero is also deceived in her expectations of marriage. First she thinks Don Pedro woos her for himself, next she is slandered and deserted by Claudio on the wedding day. Beatrice and Benedick are also deceived in the garden-bower. The Friar plans to give out Hero as dead and deceive Claudio and the others. The theme of deception also operates at the level language.

Appearance and reality

The theme of appearance and reality operates at various levels and takes different forms in the play. The most dominant form is social. The main concern of the play is how to discover the truth in a society which believes in hiding the real. Messina is above all a self-absorbed, circumscribed society where people live in the realm of appearances. Ceremonial scenes of wedding, dance, ritual welcomes, form an integral part of this society. All the characters are self-absorbed and manipulate the appearances until they are forced to face the reality. This movement from appearance to reality can be seen in the structure of the play as well. All the scenes in Act V reflect earlier scenes of the play in that they show a new sense of reality. Thus, in contrast to Act I scene i we see a new and serious Benedick in Act V scene i. Similarly in Act II scene iii and Act III scene i Benedick and Beatrice are separately deceived in the garden; In Act V scene ii we see them together in the garden discussing their affections. Act V scene iii can be seen as a corrective to the church scene of Act I scene i. Finally in Act V scene iv reality is forced upon all the characters.

Language

The language of *Much Ado* involves debate, repartee and courtly exchange. The whole play depends very much on mistaking of words. While Beatrice and Benedick are manipulators of language, Dogberry and his companions become victims of language. In Act III scene iii, scene v, and Act IV, ii we see Dogberry's problem with language which infects all the watch. His mind is always clouded with intoxicating words and he never speaks in a plain language. He usually says the opposite of what he means. However, it may be noted that it is Dogberry's watch to whom the plot against Hero and Claudio is revealed. They are confused about the actual crime committed, but they arrest Borachio and try to communicate their feelings and get at the truth. In Act IV similar attempt is made by the characters in the main plot. Leonato, Benedick, The Friar and the others are taken aback by the charges of Claudio and try to get at

the root of the accusations . The events in the sub-plot thus run parallel to the main plot . It may also be noted that , the revelations of Dogberry and his fellows resolves the plot and brings order to the “ whole dissembly”(4.2). Their speech is clumsy but they point to the central fault in the society of Messina where social appearances are taken for reality . Borachio sums up their function when he says “ What your wisdom could not discover , these shallow fools have brought to light” (V,i,238-4

Imagery

The dominant imagery of clothing in the play is also tied to the theme of covering or cloaking the truth which also expresses the theme of disguise and deceit . The use of images related to clothes are very frequent in the play “What a pretty thing man is , when he goes in his doublet and hose ,and leaves off his wi”(V,i,179). The idea of language as a dress of thought recurs throughout the play . Clothes are also an important visual element in the play . We have disguises , masks, Hero’s wedding clothes , Claudio’s mourning clothes ,and so on. Much Ado is a play concerned with keeping up appearances and clothing is therefore of special significance.

Women characters

In the world of Much Ado men control the property and make all the rules. In this world marriage is the only career for any woman. In most Renaissance writings female loquaciousness was seen as a threat to patrilineal identity; an ideal Renaissance woman was seen but not heard. The wife’s failure to submit herself to her husband either verbally or sexually or both was seen as a chief obstacle to marital happiness . Of the two women characters in the play Hero is silent, passive, obedient and vulnerable. She is also the object of the plays misinformation and misrepresentations. She is surrounded by rumours – rumours that she is Don Pedro’s choice , that she is unchaste , that she is dead ,that she is buried.

On the other hand Beatrice is ‘sharp tongued’ , witty , intelligent and claims intellectual equality with men . Moreover, though Beatrice is endowed with verbal powers, her sexual reputation/chastity is never compromised. Benedick says “She is excellent sweet lady ,and out of suspicion, she is virtuous”(2.3.157-8). By giving Beatrice a voice the play seems to depart from and condemn the stereotypical notions of female identity prevalent during the Renaissance. But , Leonato warns her “thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of tongue”(2.1.16-17). Thus Beatrice’s verbal power is seen as problematic/unusual and is a cause of concern for the men in the play . The play also abounds in jokes about male distrust of women . The success of Don John’s scheme also speaks about male suspicion of female inconstancy which

is the chief obstacle to love. Claudio is easily deceived into believing that Hero is unchaste and Benedick contemplates a woman who is fair , wise , virtuous, noble and mild .

Title

The title of the play *Much Ado about Nothing* means a great deal of trouble or fuss about nothing that is matters of no importance like unfounded claims of Hero's sexuality or the fuss regarding the Beatrice and Benedick's attitude towards marriage. Similarly the war , death or threat to death , conspiracies in the play do not have serious consequences. In the end all are reconciled and no one (except Don John) is imprisoned or executed .Thus what is of no importance perhaps is also the obsession about female chastity which is the root cause of much problem in the play .

The nothing of the play's title would be pronounced as 'noting' in Shakespeare's time which means to eavesdrop and take note . There is lot of eavesdropping in the play and the inability of the characters to take note leads to deception . Thus all the problem in the play also arises from the inability of the characters to 'note' or pay attention to the truth and see through the appearances .

Structure

The structure and style of *Much Ado* produces different levels of awareness and emotions. At times it moves towards happiness , at times towards sadness and sometimes both . The comic and the tragic often fuse as in the grieving ceremony at Hero's tomb (5.3), or Beatrice's command to Benedick to kill Claudio (4.1.288). The play seems to acknowledge that human joys and sorrows exists and often travel together which makes *Much Ado* the most realistic of Shakespearean comedies .

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Much Ado as a Shakespearean comedy.
2. Discuss the significance of the title of the play Much Ado About Nothing.
3. Attempt a critical analysis of the women characters in the play.
4. Discuss the significance of the significance of the sub-plot involving Dogberry and his men.
5. Write a critical note on the theme of deception in the play .
6. What do we learn about the society of Messina in Much Ado Nothing ?

7. Explore the use of language and imagery in the play .
8. Critically analyse the Beatrice- Benedick plot highlighting their attitude towards love , courtship and marriage .
9. Critically analyze the character of Benedick and Claudio .

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BLOCK - III

RESTORATION AND MODERN DRAMA

CONTENTS

BLOCK – I THE RIVALS

- UNIT – 1** An Introduction to Richard Brinsley Sheridan and drama in the 18th Centuries.
- UNIT – 2** The Rivals: Introduction and Major Themes.
- UNIT - 3** The Rivals: Act – wise summary and major characters.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

English drama had its origin in the religious plays of the middle ages called the Mystery plays it has passed through various stages of development. These plays were enactments of episodes of the Bible or of the lives of saints. Then came the morality plays and Interludes as sources of entertainment for the medieval manses. During the 16th century under the influence of Renaissance English drama entered the artistic phase which was largely secular in character, that is, it came out of control of church now tragedies, comedies and history plays were written by the dramatists. Theatre houses were development to stage these dramas. During the Elizabethan period (1559-1603) drama became dominant form of literature in England. Dramatists like Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe and others wrote great plays during this period. However during the mid – seventeenth century drama declined due to the puritan rule (1649-1660) as theatres were closed down by the rulers for religious reasons. But after the restoration of monarchy the ban on theatre was lifted and the theatre began to be operative again. A new type of play came into being during this period called ‘The comedy of Manners is the glory of the Restoration period. It is founded mainly upon the native dramatic tradition which flourished before the closing of the theatres in 1642. The comedy of manners is so called because it presents the habits, manners, conventions and follies of a particular section of society – the gay, elegant and carefree aristocracy. It deals with young nobles, well-dressed and bewigged straining after wit, quick to take responds kind of people in the society. The plot of this kind of drama deals with love intrigues, clandestine love affairs Senseless prattles, Character – assassination, Scandal – mongering, drinking and gambling, all of which formed together the orbit round to develop it. The pioneer of this kind of drama was Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson and others. Hudson takes to be its real founder. Like the heroic tragedy it is also strongly influenced by continental writers.

The presence of the aristocrat class at the centre of the dramatic action distinguishes the Comedy of manners from other comedies in English. The comedy of manners has been styled ‘artificial’. It presents superficial habits and manners. There is no attempt in it to depict men and women in general in their essential and emotional sides. There is no attempt to dive deep into the human soul and present problems from the psychological print of view, as is done by Shakespeare. The artificiality makes the ‘manners’ comedy, a comedy in the true sensed of term, because comedy thrives on the artificiality of the personality.

Dryden may be regarded as the father of the comedy of manners his pairs of lovers undoubtedly influencing greatly the works of other dramatist of his age. George Etherege must be given the credit of definitely establishing this particular species of drama. Congreve attained maturity in writing comedy of manners by giving a new shape to it. The comedy of manners after Etherege was not cultivated deliberately by any individual writing until the appearance of William Wycherley. But it is Congreve that the spirit of that the spirit and atmosphere of the comedy of manners were fully exposed. This first comedy *The Old Bachelor* is a brilliant comedy of ‘manner’s’ School The world depicted in this play is free from the onslaught of pain and pitfalls. In this play pleasure and perfect freedom reign supreme. *The way of the world* is the masterpiece of Congreve and superb creation of the ‘manners’ School the interest of the play centres not so much on the story or action but brilliant dialogues. Millamant is the striking creation of the dramatist. Nicole remarks:

She sails gloriously through it all, affected and
Fascinating; servants, fools, lovers, with, all seem
To take from her something of that air of modish
Triviality which belongs to the best scenes of the comedy of manners.”

George Farquhar and Sir John Vanbrugh kept alive the spirit of the Congrevian comedy even after the violent attack on Jeremy Collier. Both of them began their dramatic career by writing immoral comedies. These comedies are fully of wits.

The Restoration drama brought a sea change in the theme and structure of the play. Now let us take up a detailed study of Sheridan’s drama *The Rivals*, prescribed for you. Sheridan opens the account of his professional and dramatic career with *The Rivals*. The play was first performed on the Covent Garden Theatre on the 17th January, 1775. The play was not a success. It was not well performed. After ten days it was again performed on the same theatre, and it became a grand success. The play heralds a return to the witty, elegant comedy of manners. *The Rivals* is a comedy of manners and like other comedies of this genre it gives a vivid picture of the age in which it was written. It mirrors the life of a particular segment of the 18th century society – the life of the rich and well – to – do people who lived the most artificial life.

The structure of this block is as under:

- UNIT –1 An Introduction to Richard Brinsley Sheridan and drama in the eighteenth century.
- UNIT –2 *The Rivals*: Introduction of the play and major themes.
- UNIT-3 *The Rivals*: Act – wise summary and major characters.

PART: I

Unit 1 : An Introduction to Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Drama in the Eighteenth Century.

STRUCTURE :

- 1.0 Objectives
 - 1.1 Introduction
 - 1.2 R.B. Sheridan's Life
 - 1.3 This Early Education
 - 1.4 Sheridan Emergence in Literary field as a dramatist
 - 1.5 Sheridan's and comedy of manners.
 - 1.6 Sheridan's Political Achievement.
 - 1.7 Sheridan's: The depiction of bath
 - 1.8 Sheridan's The Rivals: Autobiographical elements
 - 1.9 Reasons for the emergence of comedy of manners in the eighteenth century.
 - 1.10 Distinguished features of comedy of manners and major plays of R.B. Sheridan
- References
- Key Words
- Self Assessment Questions
- Suggested Readings.

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit helps you to understand the comedy of manners eighteenth century drama, of which R.B. Sheridan is one of the exponents After going through this unit you should be in a position to:

- Recognize the distinctive features of comedy of Manners.
- Distinguish the diverse cross currents and influences of comedy of Manners in English Literature
- Relate Sheridan's life and learning with his works.
- Outline Sheridan's literary life.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Richard Brinsley Sheridan was born in an Irish family of Dublin on October 30, 1751. He came of a literary stock this mother from whom he inherited literary talent was the author of the successful novel *Miss Sidney Biddulph*. She also wrote the comedy *The Discovery* which was acted by Garrick. Her comedy *The Dupe and the trip to Bath* is supposed to have inspired *The Rivals*. This grandfather, Dr. Sheridan was a clergyman and the friend of the English novelist Jonathan Swift. He was the author of *The Art of Purring* Thomas Sheridan, the father of R.B. Sheridan was an actor, theatre manager and elocutionist. He was the second son of Dr. Sheridan of him, Johnson once declared: "Sheridan is dull, naturally dull,; but it must have taken him a deal of pains to have become what we now see him" Thomas acted in 'Hamlet' at Covent Garden. He became manager of theatre Royal, Dublin, wrote *Captain O' Blunder* a popular but unprinted play. He also lectured in Oxford and Cambridge on the futility of classical Education. He was the staunch advocate of study of English language. In 1760 the Sheridan family shifted from Ireland to England. The Important events of R.B. Sheridan's life have been listed below.

4 Nov. 1751 Christened Thos. Brinsley Sheridan's at St. Mary's church, Dublin.

1762 – c. 1767 – 8 At Harrow School. Sep. 1770 – Aug. 1772. At Bath.

Aug. 1772 – March 1773. At Waltham Abbey. 13 April 1773 – married Elizabeth Linley 17 and 28 Jan. 1775 *The Rivals* acted at Covent Garden Theatre.

21 Sep. 1776 opened Drury land Theatre as Principal manages

8 May 1777. *The School for Scandal* acted at Drury Lane Theatre.

30 Oct. 1779 *The critic* acted at Drury Land Theatre 12 Sep. 1780 Elected M.P. for Staford.

1783. Became secretary to the Treasury Dec. 1783- Feb 1806. In opposition.

1806 – 07 Treasure of the Navy in the Ministry of All the Talents.

24 Feb. 1809. Drury Land Theatre destroyed by fire autumn 1812. Lost his seat in Parliament

7 July 1816. Died at saville Row. 13 July 1816. Buried in Westminster Abbey.

1.2 R.B. SHERIDAN'S LIFE

The Family of Thomas Sheridan had arrived in England in 1760 and Sheridan was sent to Harrow in 1762. He remained there for seven years. At Harrow he did not do well. While he was at Harrow, his mother died. After the demise of his mother Sheridan settled at Bath. Here Sheridan came into contact with a celebrated singer and culture lady of the time Miss Linley Miss Linley had already been admired by a Mr. Long, An Old gentlemen of sizeable wealth. Mr. Long was hust and he sued Mr. Linley, the Lady's the lady's father by claiming open her the sum of 3.000 pounds, when Miss declined to her. She came into contact with captain Matthews. He was a married man. In the meantime, Richard Sheridan entered in the life of Miss Linley to save her from this annoyance; Sheridan escorted Miss Linley to a nunnery in France. Captain Matthews challenged the disappearance of young couple. When Sheridan returned promptly from France he fought duel with Matthews in Hyde Park during their expedition to France Sheridan and Miss Linley had secretly married without the knowledge of their parents. Sheridan who was without income, Purchased a London house in Portman square out of the 3.000 pound bestowed upon his wife by Mr. Long. Although Sheridan was in deep love for his life. This love was not adequately reciprocated by his wife. Sheridan become addicted to heavy drinking and great financial losses led a rift in their relationship. Elizabeth Linley tried her best to wear him away from a social circle but she failed. In fact she herself developed a love affair with Lord Edward Fitzgerald and gave birth to a daughter by him in March 1792. The sane year Mrs. Sheridan died after her death Sheridan married for the second time to Miss Ogle. She was the daughter of the Dean of Winchester his drinking habit created hurdle in their conjugal life.

1.3 SHERIDAN'S EARLY EDUCATION

The family had arrived in England in 1760. Sheridan was sent to Harrow in 1762. He remained there for seven years. At Harrow he did well but he did not show his creative talent in the School his relation with his father was not smooth. Because of his father unusual behavior, he was without money. This clothes were frequently shabby this holidays were spent at School. The other boy's often made fun because of his father. This had a deep scan on Sheridan's personality.

1.4 SHERIDAN'S EMERGENCE IN LITERARY FIELD AS A DRAMATIST

Sheridan came to the literary field when comedy of manners dramas and dramatists were struggling to make their position. Sheridan was blessed with quickest eye. He knew that the majority of the play – going public hungered for strong and amusing situations rather than psychological analysis of the character's. And so Dryden aimed at strong situations and dramatically effective scenes. In *the Rivals* one situation succeeds another quickly. Sheridan's fondness for situation makes him negligent of construction; these drama are packed up with strong and amusing situations, but these situations are not so strongly interlinked. Mrs. Oliphant, one of the critics of Sheridan remarks that he has the quickest eyes for situation, and knows that nothing pleases the play – going public better than a strong combination and climax. This change of loose construction cannot, however be applied to his masterpiece *The School for Scandal*. The different incidents that are brought in the play are carefully and neatly woven together. The manner in which he constructs the plot of this play betrays Sheridan's classical sense of form. Hike Goldsmith Sheridan "reverted to classical comedy and chose, as the basis of his plot, the marriage conflict between parent and child which had come down from Greece through Italian and French Theatre.

Sheridan creates types rather than individuals, and in this respect he is more close to Ben Jonson than to Shakespeare; these characters are guided by some master – passion or humors and they do not grow and develop. Like Ben Jonson he seizes upon some particular trait of his characters. In *The Rivals* Sir Anthony Absolute is the type of the Headstrong Father. Captain Absolute is the type of the generous and impulsive youth, very common in classical and neo classical comedy.

Lydia languish is the type of the spicily child of fortune and ease. She languishes with her romantic and sentimental conception of love derived from her study of trash novels.

Though Sheridan revolted against the School of sentimental drama, he failed to scrap his ties with this kind of drama. In *The Rivals* the Julia – Faulkland episode smacks of sentimentality. Faulkland is out a sentimental lover.

1.5 SHERIDAN AND COMEDY OF MANNERS

The comedy of manners is the glory of the Restoration period. It is founded mainly upon the native dramatic tradition which flourished before the closing of the theatres in 1642. The comedy of manners is so called because it presents the habits, manners conventions and follies of a particular section of the society – the

gay, elegant and carefree aristocracy. It deals with young nobles, well dressed gentry and young people. Its plot is for the most part, made up of love intrigues, clandestine love affairs, senseless pretties' character – assassination scandal mongering, drinking and gambling. These elements form the core of comedy

Dryden may be regarded as the father of the comedy of manners. But it is Sir George Etherege who must be given the credit of definitely establishing this particular species of drama. This *Comical Revenge* or *Love in a Tub* was really an experimental effect. This next comedy *She world if she Cou'd* is much superior piece. The Comedy of manners after Etherege was not cultivated deliberately by any individual writer until the appearance of William Wycherley. His famous comedies are *Love in a wood* or *St. James's Park*, *The Gentleman Dancing – Master*, *The Country wife* and *The plain Dealer*. The First three of these plays are cast entirely in the style of Etherege and deal with a world of fops, fools and gallants. It is the congress that the spirit and atmosphere of the comedy of manners were fully reproduced. This first comedy *The Old Bachelor* is a Brilliant comedy of 'manners' School. The world depicted in the play is free from the onslaught of pain and pitfalls. *The way of the world* is the masterpiece of congers. George Farquhar and Sir John Vanbrugh kept alive the spirit of the Congrevian comedy after him. Farquhar's first play is *love and a Bottle*. It shows something of his ability in plot construction and characterization.

Sheridan enjoys his reputation to the perfection he brought to the comedy of manners. He replaced the crude immortality of the Restoration plays by gently and delicate humans. Though not original his plays are certainly. Some of his brilliant plays like *The School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* are well known comedy in English language. The witty dialogues, repartee and the humorous characters like Mrs. Malapoop and Bob Acres are almost memorable to current usage. *The School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* contain very witty dialogues this dramas have satirical touch. We realize that Sheridan's satire is gentle, but we find it everywhere. This satire attacks people, hypocrisy and sentimentalism.

1.6 SHERIDAN'S POLITICAL ACHIEVEMENT

Sheridan entered in political after getting success in theatre. He becomes a successful dramatist and theatre constituency in 1780. He entered the House of Commons as a Whig member and in 1782 became an under - Secretary in the short lived Rockingham of power he took his seat on the opposition bench under Fox's leadership. When coalition ministry was formed he became the secretary to the Treasury. In the general election of 1784 Pitt got a large majority, and Sheridan joined the opposition along with Burke and Fox. Sheridan's claim to parliamentary fame rests upon his oratorical power. He gave a fine and

magnificent display of oratory in his speech. This speech in connection with the impeachment of Warren Hastings in fiery condemnation of the atrocious conduct of Hastings towards the Begums of Oudh. The duration of this speech lasted for five and half hours. The speech was hailed as the finest speeches that had been delivered within the memory of man. The speech he delivered in support of the French Revolution also bears the same stamp of oratorical magnificent and wit. Sheridan's parliamentary career came to an end in 1812 when he failed to secure his election for Stafford. He was deeply involved in financial trouble this wife died in 1792 this second marriage with Miss Ogle failed miserably this love for liquor destroyed his health. In 1812 his financial condition was in so bad a state that he could not pay the expense of a re-election to parliament. In 1815 he was arrested for his debts. He died in great distress in July 1816.

1.7 SHERIDAN AND DEPICTION OF BATH

Bath is country town of Somersetshire in England. It is situated in the beautiful valley in Avon, about 107 miles away from London. It is rich in natural beauty and famous for its mineral waters which one said to possess therapeutic efficacy. Its population for its hot springs and natural beauty dates back to Roman occupation of Great Britain. After the Romans had withdrawn from England its population was eclipsed and this eclipse continued till we came to the reign of Queen Anne who revived its popularity as a health and pleasure resort in the interest of her ailing health. Moreover was in the continent of Europe prevented the aristocracy from frequenting the hot springs and watering places of Belgium and Germany. The middleclass people who dominated the socio-political arena in the eighteenth century could not afford to spend money on expensive foreign tours to satisfy the longing for sightseeing and pleasure. Ben Nash during his regime beautiful Assembly - House. The ladies and gentleman could meet and they enjoyed tea and coffee. They discussed politics and social problems. There were certain rules laid down for the ladies and the gentlemen who appeared in the assembly rooms. In Bath any form of amusement was prohibited after eleven at night the inhabitants of Bath followed a strict routine in their day to day life. There many things to be admired and recommended in the eighteenth century Bath. These baths play an important role to play in eighteenth century.

1.8 SHERIDAN'S THE RIVALS: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS.

There is no denying the fact that Sheridan has drawn some of the materials of *The Rivals* from his own life—from the experiences he had his own life. Sheridan

lived at Bath nearly for five years. He was well acquainted with the topography of the town and knew at firsthand how people lived their life there. He danced with women at bath, Wrote sonnets and verses in praise of women. He also wrote satires and lampooned them; Sheridan has drawn upon this romantic phase of his life for the background of the play. This is why the picture he presents of the eighteenth century, the depiction of Bath is vivid and life like. Apart from the background Sheridan has drawn upon his life for some other details of the play. The main incident of the play – the romantic love affair between Captain Absolute and Lydia is taken from the colorful pages of the author’s life. Captain Absolute marries Lydia after much initial difficulties. He would have eloped with Lydia, as dramatist had done with Miss Linley. The duels that Captain Absolute is to fight with Sir Lucius O’ Trigger and Bob Acres seem to have based upon the duels which Sheridan himself fought with Matthews. The cause of this duel was the rivalry for the hands of Miss Linley. This incident has been depicted by Sheridan in the *Rivals* when Captain Absolute was challenged Sir Trigger and Bob. In real life Sheridan fought with Captain Matthews to secure hand of Miss Linley Sheridan undoubtedly draws upon his own father for the character of Sir Anthony Absolute. Thomas Sheridan took an yielding attitude toward his son’s runaway marriage with Miss Linley. He could never reconcile with this marriage. Sheridan eloped with Miss Linley and married her at Calais Sheridan fought two succenrine duets and Captain Matthews and he was seriously wounded in the second duels.

1.9 REASON’S FOR THE EMERGENCE OF COMEDY OF MANNERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The Rivals throws ample light on the systems of love engagements and marriage prevalent among the fashionable of the society in the eighteenth century it was the custom among the aristocratic families that when an engagement was broken off the lovers were required to return the litters they had received from each other ladies were required not only to return the letters but also to return the presents and ornaments they might have received from their lovers. In the days of Sheridan miners could not be legally married without their guardian’s consent. So the minor couples usually eloped to Scotland and get married by any priest.

The eighteenth century was an age of elaborate formalities and these formalities were mainly observed among the aristocracy and fashionable. Thus the relation between father and son was elaborate formalities. In the eighteenth century the expression ‘your humble servant’ was the ceremonial form of introduction among the fashionable. To embrace one, and to kiss one’s hands was the ceremonious forms of greeting much in vogue in the eighteenth century

among the fashionable people. In the eighteenth century the aristocratic ladies kept lap dogs and parrots. Among the fashionable people of the eighteenth century it was almost a fashion to engage French valets. Faulkland engaged a French valet in the play *The Rivals*. In the eighteenth century fashionable ladies and gentlemen used to be carried over short distances in covered chairs. Further Duel-fighting was fairly popular to win the love of a lady in the eighteenth century among the young men of aristocratic families. Whenever a young gallant found a rival for the hand of a lady he loved he challenged him to a duel. These duels were fought sometimes in night earnest and sometimes cost lives. In the eighteenth century Bath was a health-resort. Whenever people were in need of going to change or apprehended they went to Bath insisted of going to Belgium and Germany. The eighteenth century did not accept the Sentimental comedy. It was replaced by the comedy of manners.

The origin of the sentimental comedy in England dates back to the Bloodless Revolution of 1688. This revolution tolled the death-kneel of the powers and privileges of the aristocracy and ushered the ascendancy of the middle class. The middle class people, during the profligate Stuart regime looked upon the Restoration comedy of manner with an eye of disgust and enmity. With the end of the Stuart rule there set in a sweeping reaction against the licentiousness and immoral tones of manner comedy. This reaction was spearheaded by the sober and literary section of the middle class. Hugh Kelley and Richard Cumberland are the two most representative playwrights of the sentimental School. Though Kelley's fame rests mainly on his strong and popular comedy *False Delicacy*. Sentimental comedy dominated the English stage for a time. Tears took the place of laughter, melodramatic and distressing situation that of intrigue, pathetic heroine and honest servants. But the Sentimental comedy did not last for long perish. It was Goldsmith and Sheridan who led the anti-sentimental movement. In 1759 he attacked the sentimental drama in the essay *The Present State of Polite Learning* and after the gap of nine years his comedy *The Good Natured Man* was published as a challenge to sentimental comedy. *The Good Natured Man* has however many deficiencies as a play but these deficiencies are remedied in his *she stoops to conquer*. Goldsmith wanted to go back to Elizabethan age. He wanted to write as Elizabethan Sheridan seeks to revive the spirit of an atmosphere of the comedy of manners specially those of Congreve's comedy. The comedy of manners is satiric in spirit and it shares this quality with Jonson's comedy of manners appeals to our reason and intellect rather than to our emotion and feeling. The presence of aristocracy in the drama distinguishes it from other dramas.

1.10 DISTINGUISHED FEATURES OF COMEDY OF MANNERS AND MAJOR PLAYS OF R.B. SHERIDAN

The comedy of manners is so called because it presents the habits manners, conventions and follies of a particular section of society. It deals with young nobles. These nobles are well dressed and witty. Its plot is, for the most parts deal with love intrigues. The characters are involved in clandestine love affairs and senseless prattles these things form the core of their life. The comedy of manners has been branded as licentious. While going through a 'manners' comedy we often come across licentious and vulgar suggestions and hints which oppress our sense of morality and decency. The conversations in these comedies of the Restoration period between men and women betray a freedom seen at no other period of English history moreover, in the 'manners' comedies the institution of marriage is treated with levity and free love advocated. This licentiousness is not however the product of the lack of moral sense on the part of the dramatists as some critics claimed it to be. If we observe the indecency and licentiousness of the comedies of manner in the larger perspective of the age which produced them, they appear to be. It appeals to our reason and intellect rather than our emotion and feeling. The intellectual exercise bent of the manner comedy renders its licentiousness and vulgarities comparatively harmless. The indecencies in the Restoration drama, if rarely ever produced except for the purpose of raising laugh from the wit which they are presented.

The comedy of manners has been styled 'artificial' It present superficial habits and manners. It deals with the surfaces of human existence. This artificiality makes the 'manners' comedy, a comedy in the true sense of the term, because comedy thrives on the artificiality of personality and of themes. The comedy of manners clung firmly to the circle of London. The comedy of manners is satiric in spirit and it shares this quality with Jonson's comedy of humours. Its aims its satire at the follies of those who strive to enter the elegant circle of the fashionable society One of the most characteristic features of 'manners' comedy is its gay, vivacious, sparkling wit which both delights and bores. The wit is one of the points which distinguish the comedy of manners from that of humours.

The comedy of manners is founded upon the dramatic tradition which flourished before the closing of the theatres in 1642. In particular the comedy of manners dramatists are indebted to Ben Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher. But the foreign influences did not effect the comedy of manners. They simply combined with the native tradition bequeathed to the English stage by Jonson and others. The world presented in the play is free from the onslaught of pain and pitfalls. There is no attempt in this comedy to dive deep into psychological analysis of the character's behavior. The words 'serious' and 'seriousness' are not the

characteristics of this drama. The comedy of manners playwrights mirror something which was unusual in the eighteenth century English society. The society was the focal point for these dramatists.

The Rivals:

Sheridan's *The Rivals* was first performed on the Covent Garden Theatre on the 17th January, 1775, but it proved failure its first appearance. It was not well performed, and was altogether too long. Sheridan revised the play and after ten days it was again performed on the same theatre, and met the grand success. *The Rivals* is a comedy of manners, which deals with the life of the fashionable and pleasure loving segment of the Eighteenth century aristocracy. Though runs through the pages of *The Rivals* like an undercurrent, it never assumes the offensive and savage dimension as it always mild and tender. In *The Rivals* Sheridan presents the satiric portraiture of the then society through all dramatis personae save and except Captain Absolute, the hero of the piece, and Julia, the heroine of the sub-plot. Mrs. Malaprop is the queen among the characters who are satirized in the play. Through the characters of Mrs. Malaprop Sheridan aims his satire at those vain, Self-important, hypocritical provincial women who were "desperately trying to live up to the smartness of Bath, and be not too far behind London at the same time These women were often superficially educated like Mrs. Malaprop, and in order to display their learning they often decked like their literary representative Mrs. Malaprop. Like Mrs. Malaprop these women considered themselves beautiful enough In their fairly advanced age. Sir Anthony is another character through whom Sheridan presents his satiric intention. Through Sir Anthony, the dramatist satirizes not only the parental tyranny exercised over the sons and daughters in the eighteenth century – the tyranny of which the dramatist himself was a helpless victim because Thomas Sheridan the father of the dramatist could never approve his marriage. Almost all the characters of the play lend themselves early to manners interpretation with mild touch of satire. It is never pungent, bitter and caustic.

The Rivals was followed by a short farce, *St Patrick's Day*. It was composed with no other object than to make money by amusing the public. His next play, *The Duenna* (1775) was a tremendous success. The plot of play was taken from Wycherley's *The Country Wife*. A Trip to Scarborough (1777) was next to follow. It was a sterilized version of Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*.

The School for Scandal (1777) is one of the world's best Comedies and mart apiece of Sheridan. It was produced on the 8th May, 1777 on the Drury Lane Theatre and immediately shot to success. Sheridan was at that time the manager of this theatre, and got the leading actors and actresses of the time

to play the different roles of the play. The scene of the play is the eighteenth century world of fashion. In this corrupt world lady Teazle has, faced the real world Joseph surface a cold hearted hypocrite wanted to marry Maria the word of Sir Peter Teazle. He wanted to banish his own brother Charles from the affection of his uncle. But he was exposed. He faced disgrace and left the place. The play is excellently constructed. It has several strands. *The School for Scandal* is one of the world's best comedies. It is one of the masterpiece of English dramatic art.

Sheridan's next production undertook to satirize the poetasters and intriguing critics who ranged themselves on the side of the sentimental drama. In 1798 and 1799 Sheridan adapted from German comedies of Kotzebue *The Strangers* and *Pizarro*.

Check Your Progress

Make an assessment of Sheridan as the exponent of the School of drama Comedy of manners.

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KEY WORDS

Comedy of Manners – deals with the manners of people Reaction against Sentimental comedy.

Bath –A country town in England in Somersetshire, 107 miles away from London.

Duel fighting –A fight between two lovers to win the lady's love.

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UNIT - 2

The Rivals: Introduction and Major Themes

STRUCTURE:

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 *The Rivals*: An artificial Comedy of manners.
- 1.3 *Plot Structure of The Rivals*
- 1.4 *The Rivals*: As An anti sentimental comedy
- 1.5 *The Rivals*: Farce or Comedy.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit analyses the artificiality in the comedy of manners in the eighteenth century English drama. The comedy of manners dramas written against the sentimental comedy. Sheridan was the true representative of the comedy of manners. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the element of artificiality in comedy of manners
- Assess the play as comedy of manner
- Evaluate Sheridan's view regarding love and marriage

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The genius of Sheridan was more Constructive than creative. He genially drew upon his time, and the characters and incidents of the literary works of others for the materials of his plays. Like other plays of Sheridan defends himself against the charge of plagiarism, which is commonly brought against him. Sheridan's first hand practical Knowledge of the gay, frivolous and carefree life of the fashionable people lived in the city of bath and of the topography of this pleasure resort provides the background of the drama. *The Rivals* gives a vivid picture of the kind of life people lived in the city of bath during the eighteenth century England.

Sheridan indebtedness to earlier novelists and dramatists is certainly great but we cannot say that he was a plagiarist, nor does this indebtedness detract from his originality. He may have borrowed a scene or two or the general idea of

his characters from other novelists and playwright's but he assimilated completely what he borrowed. These borrowings were melted in the crucible of his imagination and fused into a organic whole. The originality of Sheridan cannot be denied. His real originality lies in the completeness and individuality of his work. If an artist has welded his creativity into a complete organic unity in which nothing is superficial or looking, he has achieved a work of art.

On November, 1774, Sheridan wrote to his father-in-law, Mr. Linley that he had been writing a play for the last two months and that this play would be rehearsed at Covent Garden shortly. The expectation of Sheridan and his family members about the success of this play ran high. But the high expectation of the author was dashed to the ground when the play was first performed at the Covent Garden Theatre on January 17, 1775. The play proved to be a great failed. At its first performance the audience groaned and howled and treated the play very roughly. Faced with this unexpected failure of his maiden play, Sheridan immediately withdrew the play. He took a deliberate revision in the light of the criticism. After ten days the play was once again played in its revised form. The play was a hilarious success and had a run of fifteen successive nights.

2.2 ***THE RIVALS: AN ARTIFICIAL COMEDY OF MANNERS***

Before discussing whether or not *The Rivals* is a comedy of manners we have to analysis the characteristics of comedy of manners. The comedy of manners is so called because it presents the habits, manners, conventions and follies of the gay, elegant and carefree aristocracy and the upper middle class. It deals with young nobles, well-dressed and aristocrats. Its plot is for the most part made up of love intrigues, clandestine love relation, senseless prattles, character assassination, scandal-mongering, drinking and gambling.

The comedy of manners has been rightly styled 'artificial'. It presents superficial habits and manner's and deals with what lies on the surface of human existence, and that deals with what lies on the surface of human existence, and that too of a particular section of the society which lived the most superficial life. There is no attempt in it to depict men and women in general in emotional sides. There is no depiction of psychological upheaval in human soul. The comedy of manners is satiric in spirit like the comedy of Ben Jonson it strives to satirize the follies and foibles, the oddities and women with a view to purging the society of these vices. But the satire in the comedy of manners is mild not bitter. The dialogue of comedy of manners is very witty and humorous. Even the conversation on a very trivial topic sparkles with wit and human. The characters of the comedy of

manners are generally types. They are not individuals. They often appear as the personifications of some 'humors' or passion as the comedies of Jonson. The comedy of manners has been branded as licentious. While going through a 'manners' comedy we often come across licentious and vulgar suggestion. They oppress our sense of morality and decency.

The Rivals is an artificial comedy of manners. It presents the habits, manners, conversations and follies of the fashionable and aristocratic section of the eighteenth century English society. The *dramatis personae* of *The Rivals* belong to the upper strata of society. The characters visit the Bath to enjoy pleasure of life and sound health. They eat and drink together. They hunt down husbands and wives for themselves. Mrs. Malaprop wants husband for herself. She is a widow of nearly fifty years. She is the guardian of young girl Lydia. Lydia is also in love with Beverley. Mrs. Malaprop has impersonated herself as Delia a young girl to search husband for self. Captain Absolute impersonated himself as Beverley to win the heart of Lydia Languish. The servants Lucy and others work as intriguers to enhance the interest of the play. The Rivals is satirical in spirit. He treats the oddities and absurdities in the dress, behavior and speech of Bob, Sir Lucius. The satirical sentences are delivered by Sir Anthony, Lydia and Mrs. Malaprop. The dialogue of *The Rivals* is entirely free from licentiousness. In dialogue as in character portrayal Sheridan has displayed brilliant artificiality in *The Rivals*. *The Rivals* was written when Sheridan was mere twenty-three. If it fails to hold the mirror up to nature, it has none the less splendid audacity and fertility of dramatic invention and wit. It remains supreme artificial comedy.

2.3 PLOT CONSTRUCTION IN THE RIVALS

Sheridan is undisputed dramatist of the eighteenth century. He is the century's most important dramatist and judged merely by the test of continued popularity, second only to Shakespeare. He revived the decaying drama of his age. He took inspiration from the Restoration dramatist, at the same time he perfected their merits of wit and fun. He did not accept their licence and immorality. In his plays, he lived up to his cannons of true spirit of comedy. The plot of Sheridan's play is so ingenious that each character is found in every possible variety of situations. Every unit of the play is well connected and constructed. The dramatist uses all sorts of devices in his armour for the purpose. Brilliant dialogue, scintillating wit, honour and exaggeration of character are his common methods. His attempts to analyse them psychologically either. Apart from the social manners of characters it is their wit that makes them a kin to the characters in Restoration comedy. The play attempts only a superficial portraiture of characters. The play shows the social manners and behaviors of characters. The plot construction and presentation

of the characters is very much like a superficial comedy. It hinges on intrigues and tricks.

The play *The Rivals* is constructed in such a way that first there is exposition, the next development, later the beginning of action and the use of servants to complicate, the plot. Finally the resolution is reached in the play. In the first scene sudden meeting of the servant and announcement of arrival of main characters in the Bath sets the tone of the play. Farther the plot is complicated when we see Beverly and Captain Absolute is the same person. The heroine Lydia loves poor Beverly and Sir Anthony selected Lydia for Captain Absolute. Sir Lucius falls in love with Delia thinking her Lydia. This Delia is none the else but Lydia's window Aunt Mrs. Malaprop Finally with the help of the servants the problems of these character resolved. Once the situation is exposed, misunderstanding are created, subplots are balanced and play finally ends with happiness. All the characters are brought to the king's mead fields. There are explanations, confessions and reconciliations all round the play.

The story of *The Rivals* is tailor made. The artificiality runs in the play. The Rivals contains scenes in which the working together of situation and character is so effective and so ingenious that it camped us to laugh. The Rivals is that it is young man's and women's play. There is a feeling that the world is rich and varied, full of surprises with its Shane of folly and danger. The charming people of the play actively do their role. Lydia, Captain Absolute, Julia , Faulkland, Mrs. Malaprop, Lucius and Bob Acres do their respective role to make plot captivating and interesting *The Rivals* has managed to earn its author the posthumous gratitude of generations of delighted men and women who have recognized the truth of this brilliant exposure of human foibles and folly. The plot of *The Rivals* is tight and compact.

2.4 THE RIVALS: AN ANTI-SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

The Rivals is primarily an anti-sentimental comedy. In the prologue spoken on the tenth night Sheridan clearly sets forth his anti-sentimental intentions. The play is not intended to preach moral lessons or to sentimentalize after the prevalent fashion. Moralising and tearful situations have no place in a pure comedy Moral preachings are to be looked for a tragedy; the function of comedy is to provide pure mirth and fun.

The sentimental comedy dominated the English stage in the first half of the eighteenth century. So some characters of *The Rivals* behaved like the characters of sentimental comedy. Faulkland and Lydia are the representatives of sentimental comedy but Sheridan has foiled them by the sensible behavior of

Captain Absolute and Julia. The sentimental comedy is predominantly moral in tone aiming as it does at the moral edification of the audience. Thus through every sentimental comedy there runs the thread of moral preaching. The play *The Rivals* is free from lachrymose elements of the sentimental comedy. It is on the other hand, full of amusing situations. The entire plot is full of mysterious amusing scene. The comic elements are frequent in the play. Among the amusing situations the scene of the altercation between Sir Anthony and Captain Absolute. The whole action passes on a tempest of boisterous laughter. Farther more, the play introduces two highly laughter – provoking humours in Bob Acres “Oaths referential” and Mrs. Malaprop’s ‘nice derangement of epitaphs.’”

The Characters and situation of the play reveal the anti-sentimental features. The heroine of the play Lydia behaves like sentimental comedy and she has satirized too much. In one respect Lydia did not behave like sentimental character when she agreed to marry. Captain Absolute she prefers Captain Absolute than half pay Ensign Beverley. The tyrannical attitude of the guardians of the sentimental comedy is satirized in the person of Sir Anthony Absolute and Mrs. Malaprop. The characters are types. They are true to life. They are drawn from the eighteenth century life Captain Absolute, the hero of the play is a typical romantic lover of the day. Bob Acres a foolish country gentleman aspiring to be a man of fashion by imitating the manners of city beaux. Mrs. Malaprop represents the old provincial ladies of the eighteenth century who delighted in using high sounded words. These ladies show their learning to prove supremacy. This is accepted fact that *The Rivals* is an anti – sentimental comedy, it is not entirely free from sentimentalism. The sulo plot of the play – the Julia-Faulkland episode contains some of the features of the sentimental comedy. Julia is rational but Faulkland is just opposite. Julia is innocent yet she is wronged by her captious lover, Faulkland. Julia’s last speech to Faulkland seems to be a moral sermon as it were from the pulpit.

Through Sheridan attacked the sentimental comedy, yet like Goldsmith, he could not at once get rid of himself wholly of the contagion of sentimentality.

2.5 THE RIVALS: FARCE OR COMEDY

There is no denying the fact *The Rivals* presents a number of scenes and situations which are eminently farcical it is not a farce. Comedy generally incline here and there to the farcical, because comedies like farces are geared to the purpose which is to amuse and entertain the audience. In the farce the only aim of the dramatist is to make the audience laugh and with this aim he brings in situations and scenes which are charged with the elements of crude laughter. There are some situations and incidents in *The Rivals* which border on the farcical. The Act II, scene (2) in the play Captain Absolute refuses to marry the girl of his

father's choice on the ground that his vows are pledged to another girl. He declares that the girl is no less than angel. The father become angry at his son's disobedience. He threatens to disinherit and disown him. The farcical element in the scene is accentuated by the fact that the more Sir Anthony gets angry, the more he brags of being calm and cool. The moment Captain Absolute comes to know the girl is none the else but hi lady lone Lydia he immediately takes the u Turn. Captain Absolute wearing a penitential face comes to his father agrees to marry the girl of his father's choice. The old man describes the beauty of the girl to his son. He goes wild while describes her cheeks, lips and face. It is highly farcical to hear an old man say:

“If you don't come back, stark mad and rapture with impatience I'll marry the girl myself” The greatest farcical scene in the play is duel scene. (viii) In which the courage of Bob Acres dwindles to the actual vanishing print and he feels his valour 80 Zing out as it were at the palms of his hand. The duel-scene throws a flood of light on the character of Bob Acres and shows him to be a coward. The scene of altercation between Captain Absolute and Sir Anthony Absolute shows Sir Anthony Absolute as a tyrannical father. The forcial elements shows the behavior of the character. To speak truth, *The Rivals* is not a farce. It is a comedy of manner inclining on one side to farce, And on the part of Julia-Faulkland to the Sentimental.

In fact *The Rivals* is a great comedy of manners. It aims to satirize the follies and follies and foibles of its *dramatis personae* and thereby purge the society *The Rivals* not only gives the picture of intrigues-clan-destine love-affairs, but also presents a long succession of amusing and theatrically effective scene and situation.

UNIT – 3

The Rivals: Act wise Summary and Major Characters

3.0 Objectives and introduction

3.1 Style of Sheridan

3.2 Act wise summary

3.3 Characters in the play

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be in a position to:

- Relate the play to the comedy of manners
- Analyze the major characters
- Analysis of the Acts and scenes of the play

Sheridan was an eminent dramatist of his age. Sheridan's contribution to English comedy was great and vital. This place in the history of English comedy is high and secure. According to a renowned critic Sheridan holds his place because of his unique literary style. He occupied the stage at a critical hour when either gross immortality or sentimental immortality were eating into the vitals of the sacred muse of comedy. He saved the comic muse from all this illness. With wit and laughter, fun and frolic, dramatic effectiveness and ingenuity he showed his talent and revived the English drama. The depiction of characters in his plays are superb, bringing out satiric wit, flights of fancy, comic logic or warm humour with equal effect.

3.1 STYLE OF SHERIDAN

Among the causes of Sheridan's success on the stage is brilliant language. His sparkling wit makes his plays lively and delightful. His humorous and piquant style made his dramas popular among the theatre going people. Much of his inspiration to adopt such a style came from the age in which he lived. He imbibed quite early a capacity for witty repartees and verbal felicities. Sheridan's dialogues have always been respected and enjoyed by the audience. Sheridan always tried to make his plays theatrically more effective rather than dramatically artistic. This is the reason Sheridan's plays remain popular even today. His power as a humorist are to be found in a wit that is unequalled in readiness and abundance in comparison

to other play wrights. The brevity of dialogues along with a delicate humour are all an expression of Sheridan's wit. He rehabilitated wit, fun, gaiety, laughter, and mild satire to their respectable place in comedy. Sheridan accomplishment is threefold. In the beginning he attracts our attention on isolated scenes or groups of scenes. Second, epigrammatic dialogues effectively hit at the aberrations, the eccentricities of our social behavior and relations. Finally, the scenes have verbal and visual appeal. Apart from this thing, in his drama the characters and plots are derived from their literary lineage.

Sheridan depicts simple human relationship like love and marriage in his plays. His judgement of character is infalliable. There is always the Victory of benevolence, providence and compassion over malice. The satirical sting affects only the malicious characters. It establishes the sublime human values and goodness. Sheridan plays are but amendment of vices through humour. He is light hearted moralist. His play does not give the overdose of moral lessons. Sheridan ridicules the vanity, affectation, folly and malice in the man of his age.

ACT I, SCENE I

While loitering in a street of Bath, Fag, the personal servant of Captain Absolute, accidentally meets Thomas, the coachman of Captain Absolute's father, Sir Anthony Absolute. On an enquiry from Fag, Thomas informs him of Sir Anthony's arrival in the city of Bath. He says that Sir Anthony sensed the sudden attack of a fit of gout, and hence at once decided to come to Bath, at such a short notice, which was quite in-keeping with his hasty nature. While Thomas learns that Sir Anthony's son is also in Bath he tells Fag that the father will certainly be very much surprised to see the son at Bath at this time when he was actually supposed to be at the regiment. Fag explains that his master has been paying addresses to a rich heiress named Lydia Languish and it is out of his love for her that he has come to Bath.

Fag tells Thomas that his master has been paying his addresses to Lydia in the name of Ensign Beverley, a poor half-pay sub Lieutenant. He is forced to act in this way to satisfy the fancy of his lady love. She has a singular romantic whim of being courted by a poor romantic Ensign rather than by a rich general.

Analysis

This scene is a typical opening scene of a comedy done in a traditional style. It is expository like most opening scenes in the old dramas. Sheridan uses servants for the exposition of the main characters and this is a method common

to comedies of earlier periods. Although no protagonists appear in the scene, the servants manage to convey the basic information needed for the further understanding of the action and plot of the play. This introductory scene acquaints us with the love affair between Lydia and Captain Absolute, which constitutes the plot of this play. This affair, that we are introduced to it is one of its kind of virtue of its trivial complexities. Fag is seen confiding to his fellow servant, Thomas that his master was there courting, under a false name Ensign Beverley, to a lady Lydia Languish. Thomas is surprised to hear all this, and feels that if the Captain had to pass as somebody else, why did he have to choose the role of a poor Ensign and not of a rich General. Fag tells his friend about the romantic and capricious nature of his master's beloved. He told that the lady is very peculiar in taste, for she wants a poor half pay Ensign as her lover and not a General. She holds on to absurd romantic whims.

Since, Fag is considered to be superior in wit and knowledge by his fellow servant, Thomas, he asks him what kind of place Bath is, because he had been there for the first time. As an answer to this, Fag describes the routined life-style of every gentleman in the city of Bath. The routine life includes like visiting the pump-rooms in the morning, taking light morning walks, playing billiards, and having dance-parties in the night, a life-style, very much Epicurean. This scene informs a lot about the background of the play, with special emphasis on Bath life. The place seems to have been in its hey-day during Restoration period. Sheridan seems to have made full use of Bath's popularity in the drama. Fag is also seen to talk of the changing fashions of his own time, like the wearing of wig. He says, slowly seems to be getting into disrepute. Such kind of informations, besides make us aware of the interesting happenings in town in those days, also help to add to the humour of the play.

The wit and humour of this scene, is mild. It is well in keeping with the whole spirit of the play. Right at the outset, in this first scene, the main qualities of the protagonists have been admirably hinted at, by the servants. Sir Anthony is introduced as one with a hasty temperament; Lydia as one with a singular taste who holds on to her strange romantic whims, Her aunt Malaprop as a tough old lady Though nothing, in particular is said about Captain Absolute by his faithful servant, Fag. The reader gets a brief idea about his character merely from the servant's description of his actions.

Lastly, the scene succeeds in arousing our curiosity to know what follows. The affairs of the main characters in the play stand at an interesting stage and we as readers are keen to know the final outcome.

ACT I, SCENE II

Lydia Languish, the beloved of Captain Absolute (Beverley) and the niece of Mrs. Malaprop sits in her dressing room. Lydia had a book in her hand. Lucy, her maid returns from her errand of ransacking all the circulating libraries at Bath for cheap romances and worthless novels. Lucy takes out books from under her cloak and from her pockets. Lydia examines the titles one by one, enquiring about the ones that she has not brought. Her head seems to be turned by too much reading of these romances. Influenced by the ideas of these romances or novels of the licentious and sentimental type Lydia plans a romantic elopement and a secret marriage with her poor lover, Beverley, thus deliberately losing her wealth.

While Lydia scans the books brought by Lucy, suddenly Julia, her friend and cousin comes to pay her a visit. Lydia is told by her that Sir Anthony is soon going to arrive there to wait on Mrs. Malaprop. The two friends then talk about their love-affairs and confide their story and also of their respective miseries.

Lydia indicates that her aunt Mrs. Malaprop has discovered her affair with Beverley by intercepting a letters written by him. Since then she has confined her to her room, while she herself has been indulging in a secret amorous correspondence with an Irish Baronet, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, under a feigned name. Another cause of worry for her was that her aunt had been encouraging a suitor for her, named Bob Acres, who was thoroughly odious to her.

She was also worried about her quarrel with Beverley which she tells, she has deliberately picked up with him, in order to enjoy the thrill of it. Being afraid that she might never enjoy the thrills of a quarrel with her love, she writes a letter to herself under the feigned name of her friend, informing herself that Beverley has lately been unfaithful to her. Although she had wanted to continue her tiff, only for a few days, but he seems to have got annoyed and so had not turned up to see her since then. They were yet to reconcile.

On hearing Lydia's distresses, Julia consoles her by saying that if Beverley is a true lover, he would never give her up. But, Julia cannot however understand why her friend should insist upon marrying a poor half-pay Ensign. But, since Lydia's mind is made up, nothing can deter her from her foolish decisions. She tells Julia that she would marry only an Ensign since money is no attraction to her. She also wishes to marry against her aunt's decisions being highly influenced by the romances, that she has fed on. Since the education from her romances has taught her many fantastic notion, she dreams of an elopement and a runaway marriage against the will of her aunt, thus losing all her fortune. Lydia dreams of enjoying the romantic-melancholy of living with her lover in poverty.

Julia now in her turn relates her distress. She tells her friend that her capricious and sentimental lover Faulkland has been doubting her love as much as ever. She told that she has been very much devoted to him, both in terms of love and gratitude since he once saved her life. Lydia is critical of Julia for tolerating her lover Faulkland's whims. She tells her that she ought to have been imperious like her, but Julia does not agree with this. She has all praises for Faulkland and does not agree with Lydia's assessment of him. She justifies her lover's temperament by saying that his caprices arise out of his great love of her. She says that he has a rather peculiar temperament that often tortures her, but he is generous. She claims Faulkland is sincere, and not proud or jealous. His only problem is that he wants to be loved as much as he thinks he loves her. Julia expresses gratefulness to Faulkland for having saved her life but Lydia cannot understand the logic behind it.

The two friends are interrupted by Lucy's arrival. She brings the news of Sir Anthony's arrival on the scene. Since they are expected to enter the room any moment, Julia leaves her cousin in haste, and Lydia hurriedly thrusts her romances books under the pillow. She opens some religious books and sits reading them. Mrs. Malaprop enters the room with Sir Anthony and starts chiding Lydia outright, as a "deliberate simpleton" who is foolish enough to marry a poor sub-lieutenant. She asks Lydia to get rid of her romantic fancy for the worthless Beverley and come round to marry a man of her aunt's choice. With a show of vanity, Mrs. Malaprop lectures her niece on what becomes a young woman and what does not. While she speaks on, she gets all her high-flown big words wrong, but she however feels terribly proud of her vocabulary, and command over language. She is thus brought out as the epitome of malapropism.

In reply to Mrs. Malaprop's scoldings, Lydia shows a very defiant attitude and bluntly refuses to obey her. She reiterates her faithfulness to Beverley, her own choice. On hearing this, Mrs. Malaprop becomes furious and she dismisses Lydia out of the room and Lydia readily leaves.

Left to themselves, Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop cannot but discuss Lydia's behaviour and its causes. Sir Anthony expresses his views on the subject of female education. He opines that education of women is not just a waste but a positive harm too, for it is as good to teach a girl the black art as the alphabet. Since he had seen Lucy bring books for Lydia from the circulating libraries, he concludes that Lydia's whims and fancies are an after-effect of reading. Mrs. Malaprop too shares her views in the argument by emphasizing on subjects suitable for women. In her usual malapropos style, she enumerates, a long list of the subjects she would like girls to be taught. She is certainly not in favour of a young girl becoming too learned, but she wants a girl to know a little of geography,

accounts, correct spellings and pronunciation of words, besides several other things. Sir Anthony however does not seem to be convinced by Mrs. Malaprop's argument, but not wanting to prolong the discussion, he agrees to whatever she says.

Though Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop differ on the subject of girl's education, they however agree on another matter of business regarding Absolute marriage with Lydia. Sir Anthony agrees to call his son to Bath to set him up as a candidate for Lydia's hand. Mrs. Malaprop too has no objection to this and promises to dismiss another suitor Bob Acres, whom she had so far encouraged. To Mrs. Malaprop's suspicion that Captain Absolute might not agree with his father's choice, Sir Anthony replies that his son dare not disobey him in any matter, whatsoever. In the meanwhile, he asks Mrs. Malaprop

to keep a watch on Lydia, even to put her under lock and key for a couple of days in order to bring her round.

Sir Anthony leaves satisfied and Mrs. Malaprop expresses her happiness in marrying Lydia away at the earliest, because she has discovered her love-affair with Sir Lucius. She then calls Lucy to enquire if she had handed over her last letter to Sir Lucius. She also warns her not to disclose secret letters to anyone.

Although Lucy assures her faithfulness to her mistress in the most emphatic terms, she is in the very next moment seen expressing all her villainy in a soliloquy. She is happy to believe that she has successfully duped everybody into believing her. She feels nice to be treated as a simpleton, since she can then serve her interests more profitably, without the danger of being caught. She triumphantly enumerates the names of all the persons who have entrusted her with their secrets and bribed her to act as a go-between. These fools in love are—Beverley, Lydia, Mrs. Malaprop, Sir Lucius and Bob Acres. She is also happy to have convinced Sir Lucius that it was Lydia and not Mrs. Malaprop who has been writing to him as Delia.

Analysis

This long scene presents in a greater detail, what the opening scene had done in miniature as regards introducing the situation and characters of the play. The protagonists, of whom we had only heard in the earlier scene, are now introduced as live characters on the stage. Their relationships and troubles are now thoroughly described.

In this scene, we learn of Lydia's firm resolve to marry none other than Beverley with whom she wanted to elope but for her foolish quarrel foil the plan.

She tells her aunt point-blank that she is not ready to marry anyone of her aunt's choice. Lydia is so carried away by her romantic whims and fancies, that she cannot think beyond elopements, runaway marriages and secret affairs. These absurdly romantic effusions are quite a source of humour in the play.

So far we as readers knew nothing much about Julia and Faulkland except that they are betrothed. But now we know they are also not on happy terms with each other due to Faulkland's capricious and overpossessive nature. But for herself, Julia has been very much devoted to him, both by love and gratitude since he once saved her life. She even justifies his temperament by saying that her lover's caprices arise out of his great love for her. He wants to be loved as much as he thinks he loves her. She had loved him ardently even before he had saved her life, thus it was not the feeling of gratitude that formed the basis of her love for Faulkland.

Lydia informs the readers of another love-interest in the play that of Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Lucius. Lucy further informs us of the complications involved in the affair, since she is the one who has duped the Irishman into believing that his Delia is the young Lydia herself. Thus these several unsolved threads of complications in the plot makes it more intricate and keeps alive the reader's interest in the play.

The scene furnishes a fund of information regarding the main characteristics of the protagonists. Lydia's and Julia's character stands in contrast to each other. Lydia is whimsical, romantic, domineering and absurdly sentimental young lady. Julia on the other hand is a practical, sober, patient, realistic young woman. Both are shown to suffer in love with the only difference that Lydia's distresses are of her own creation. Julia's tortures are that of her lover's Faulkland. Lydia is critical of Faulkland's whims, but Julia defends her lover by replying that all her lover's caprices arise out of his great love for her. She justifies his weakness by saying that he has a rather peculiar temperament for the simple reason that he wants to be loved as much as he thinks he loves her. Julia also expresses gratefulness to Faulkland for having saved her life but Lydia cannot see the logic of it. Hence she comments, "why, a water-spaniel would have done as much ! Well, I should never think of giving my heart to a man because he could swim."

We realize that Sir Anthony does not hold a very favourable opinion about educating women. He is seen to express unhealthy views on the subject of female education. To him, it is as good to teach a girl the black art as the alphabet. He even attributes Lydia's fancy to marry a poor Ensign to her education. He is totally opposed to girls being taught to read. He says, "If I had a thousand daughters, I would see to it that none of them was taught to read".

Sir Anthony, also projects himself as a strict and domineering father, who expects his son to obey him in all matters, whatsoever.

Mrs. Malaprop, is drawn as more of a caricature than a character. Even before she makes her entry on stage, she is introduced in negative terms by other characters as the “tough old aunt who comes in the way of the love affair between Lydia and Beverley.” So, the readers are prepared to receive her on stage as a comic, villainous character. She stands in the way of an affair, though ironically she herself writes letters to a man who has caught her fancy. She is the epitome of malapropism and so, her name befits her. She is shown to be proud of her vocabulary and she uses high flown language least knowing that more than half the words that she uses is wrong and meaningless. She is, however a rich source of humour in the play.

ACT II, SCENE I

On being informed by Fag, of his father’s arrival in Bath, Captain Absolute asks him to go to his father and enquire when it will be convenient for him to see his son. Fag tells him that Sir Anthony was very much surprised to hear of his presence in Bath, and that he was hence forced to improvise lies as an explanation. Fag requests his master to keep his lie consistently that he was there in Bath to recruit. Captain Absolute is pleased with his servant’s presence of mind for having invented such a lie.

Just then Faulkland comes there in a depressed state, to share his sorrows with Captain Absolute. Faulkland is not aware of Julia’s presence in Bath and Captain Absolute withholds the information from him for the time being to tease him. Absolute regards Faulkland as a whimsical character and thus enjoys keeping him in suspense.

Faulkland asks Absolute how matters stand between him and Lydia. Absolute then informs his friend that his quarrel with his lady love has not been patched up yet. He is hoping that they will reconcile soon. Faulkland opines that it would be better for him to elope with Lydia, if she agrees to it. But the Captain is not willing to elope for the fear of losing her fortune. In that case, Faulkland suggests that he should propose to Lydia in his true character as the son and heir to a baronet. But Absolute is in no position to do this either, knowing very well Lydia’s whimsical disposition. Lydia would never accept to marry anybody with her guardian’s consent, especially if she were to know that her would-be was a rich man, a heir to a baronet. These were the reasons why Captain Absolute was forced to assume the character of a low paid army officer, because he knew that this was what Lydia would be pleased with. Faulkland is invited to dinner by

Captain Absolute, but he declines the offer saying that he is too upset to be fit company in a dinner party. Captain at first does not tell him that his beloved, Julia is in Bath, but as soon as he is told, Faulkland gets overjoyed with the news, and at once starts to see Julia. But they are interrupted by Bob Acres' arrival, who on enquiry informs Faulkland that Julia has all along been enjoying perfect health and has even been participating in dances and concerts on various occasions. When Faulkland learns that Julia has been so happy even in his absence, Faulkland gets jealous and suspicious of her. For, he would have loved to hear that separation from her lover had made her melancholy and sad. But Julia is happy. The more Faulkland complains about her, enjoying his mad flurry the more captain Absolute annoys him with his comments. Not being aware of his temperament, Acres continues to describe Julia's beauty and charm. This further annoys Faulkland, and he leaves the room.

Captain Absolute befools Acres by falsely complimenting him for his charming youth, saying that girls of Bath stand in a great danger of being ruined by him. Acres is too foolish to understand the flattery and goes on to boast that he is now the most favoured suitor of Lydia. He says that though she held a dislike for him earlier, but now she is impressed by his curly hair and fashionable dress, to be head over ears in love with him. The only thing that needs to be done to make the relationship more smooth says he, is to punish his rival, Beverley.

Fag interrupts their conversation to inform that Captain's father Sir Anthony has come to call upon him. Acres makes his exit, since he expects a letter from Mrs. Malaprop anytime and a visit from his friend Sir Lucius. Sir Anthony comes in and at once desires to know what has brought him to Bath, which shows that he is not convinced with Fag's lies. Not waiting for a reply, he informs him, the very next moment, that he has soon to marry a rich heiress of his father's choice. He, however does not tell who the girl is. Captain Absolute is perturbed to hear of this new trouble. He naturally refuses to comply with his father's proposal because he has already promised his love to a girl of his own liking. On hearing this, Sir Anthony in a state of rage, threatens to disinherit and disown his son if he does not comply with his father's choice. He is adamant on the point of marriage, and says that his son will have to accept the wife of his father's choice even if she happens to be the ugliest among women. "Damn me if ever I call you Jack again" says he and fretting and fuming, leaves the room.

Captain Absolute is somewhat puzzled at the unexpected predicament, but firmly refuses to obey his father. He thinks his father has been very Irrational all along, since he himself had married the girl whom he had loved against their guardian's wishes. Fag comes in to inform that Sir Anthony had left in a very furious state, since he was kicking whatever came in his way. But, Absolute is in

no mood to tolerate his servant's foolishness, at the moment, he pushes him aside and leaves the room angrily.

Analysis

In this scene, the development of plot can be broadly divided into four parts. Firstly, there is a mention of a brief conversation between Captain Absolute and Fag regarding his meeting Sir Anthony Absolute. Although there is not much of development in the plot here, the meeting paves the way for a confrontation between Captain Absolute and his father, which happens a little later in the scene. This is followed by a conversation between Absolute and Faulkland, the two distressed lovers. They share their sorrows with each other, and there is a hint at the crisis in the affair of Faulkland and Julia, which is drawn in contrast with Lydia—Absolute love-affair. This conversation reveals to us the difference between Captain Absolute and Faulkland's character. The arrival of Acres adds a new twist in the scene. Faulkland's reactions to the information which Acres offers about Julia throws light on his temperament. This part of the plot prepares the reader for an unhappy meeting between Julia and Faulkland. In the fourth part of the scene, we witness the confrontation between Captain Absolute and Sir Anthony Absolute. The domineering Sir Anthony demands complete obedience from his son, but when his threats fail to make his son yield, the father leaves him in anger, threatening to disown him.

The scene is interesting from the point of view of the irony involved. It is deliberately constructed in such a manner that while the audience is aware of the true facts of the situation, both father and son are ignorant of the fact they are both talking about the same girl. This irony hence lends humour to the play.

The scene brings before us the hero of the play Captain Absolute, for the first time. Although we had heard of him earlier also. His complete personality is revealed in this scene only. He is introduced as a jovial person who enjoys teasing Faulkland and keeps Acres in suspense. He also projects himself as a loyal lover who is firm on his decision of marrying the girl he likes, and does not yield to his father's wishes. We realize that he is very much in love with Lydia. For Lydia, he is even willing to stoop down to the level, of becoming a half pay Ensign, only to please her. Though, at the same time he is practical enough not to be carried away completely by Lydia's whims like eloping or forfeiting her fortune. Thus we can say that the protagonist of the story is a very balanced man.

We are informed about Faulkland's doubting nature, but we see it in full action only now. Faulkland is presented as over possessive lover. Absolute is right in saying that Faulkland carries in his head "a confounded, farrago of doubts,

fears, hopes, wishes.” We feel greatly amused on hearing his distresses, which are caused because of petty matters. His sentimental temperament is yet another source of humour in the story. It is natural to conclude that all will not go well with him and Julia. He is not happy about the reports that he gets from Acres about her.

Bob Acres, who provides a lot of entertainment in the play, makes his first appearance here, in this scene. Acres’ original oaths contributes its share in making the scene consistently entertaining. He is indeed a comic figure. He is foolish enough to get carried away by Captain Absolute’s flattery. He even claims to be a suitor of Lydia’s not knowing that he was claiming all this in front of Beverley himself. He contributes not a little in complicating and bringing the crisis in the play.

The scene is interesting from the point of view of the display of real Sir Anthony in it. His absurd commands and threats, ironical self-praise and violent anger provide a great occasion for fun and entertainment. He also stands out as a strict and dictatorial father, who is not willing to accept a negative response in any concern from his son. Above all, his description of the ugly girl whom he proposes. - for his son is very amusing which is proof for the fact that his character too is capable of lending humour to the story.

ACT II, SCENE II

Lucy, the maid servant of Mrs. Malaprop is looking after Sir Lucius to hand over to him the letter from her mistress, written under the pseudo name ‘Delia : Lucy has succeeded in duping Sir Lucius in believing that he is corresponding with young Lydia, and not the tough old aunt, Mrs. Malaprop. She thus says that there will now be three rivals for the hand of Lydia—Beverley, Acres and Sir Lucius. She is surprised to find that Sir Lucius is late in being there to receive the letter. On getting the letter, Sir Lucius reads the letter with gusto and enthusiasm and slyly comments on the inappropriate use of words in it. He makes an ironical hint in his remarks about the faithfulness of her love. He too expresses his own sincerity of love for her and lovingly calls her Delia, the ‘queen of dictionary’. On being told by Lucy that she is very fond of him, he too assures her that he will prove the most affectionate husband to her. But he is somehow resolved on marrying Lydia with her fortune. In other words, he is not ready to elope with her. Sir Lucius bribes Lucy with enough money and gives her quite a few kisses in the bargain. Lucy, like a coquette, objects to his impudence and threatens him that his Delia would be annoyed if she came to know of it. Knowing the psychology of women very well, he asks Lucy to tell her mistress that Sir Lucius kissed her fifty times. They are then interrupted by the arrival of Fag on

the scene. Fag extracts from Lucy the secret that another suitor Captain Absolute has been recommended to Lydia by her aunt. The news gives genuine pleasure to Fag, who rushes at once to convey the news to his master. Lucy, thinks that perhaps Fag is nervous to hear of this new rival and so asks him to tell his master not to lose faith. Fag however does not wait to hear her speak and leaves at once.

ANALYSIS

In this scene, the plot moves further, and the hero seems to be approaching towards his goal. There is the news that Sir Anthony's choice for his son is Lydia herself. Captain Absolute is happy beyond measure to receive the news which can hopefully resolve his crisis. But in his heart of hearts he knows that the news apparently brings a rival to Beverley, and that shall under no circumstances be acceptable to Lydia.

Captain Absolute's trouble with Bob Acres is strengthened further in this scene, since he is informed of his dismissal as a suitor to Lydia, in favour of Beverley. Thus Acres can be expected to do something to oppose Beverley. In this scene, Beverley too is brought a new rival in the person of Captain Absolute, and this complicates matters even further. We thus see the entire action of the play moving towards further complication and crisis.

ACT III, SCENE I

Captain Absolute learns from Fag that Lydia Languish, his sweetheart is the girl his father had selected for him. He desired him to marry. He decides to go to his father and present himself as the penitent son, ready unconditionally to obey his father's dictates in everything. He executes his decision at once, since he finds his father coming that way: Sir Anthony seems to be talking to himself; muttering that he will never forgive his son, nor shall he die early to relieve him of his tensions. He is sad to see that in return for all his kindness and pampering he is rewarded by his son with disobedience alone. But soon when his son offers him his apologies, promising to submit his own happiness to his father's pleasure, he is happy to his son and forgives him. He then gives out to his son the name of Lydia whom he has to marry.

On being told by Sir Anthony, that it was Lydia Languish whom he was to marry, Captain Absolute pretends ignorance. He seems neither to remember them nor to think that he has ever heard her - name. With great difficulty he tries to recall that Lydia the red-haired and squint-eyed girl, he had seen some time ago. Sir Anthony denies all this and with rapturous delight and enthusiasm describes

to his son the charms and attractions in Lydia's youth. To please his father, Captain Absolute shows little or no interest in these descriptions of Lydia too, given by his father. It comes as an anticlimax when Captain Absolute asks his father if he was to marry the aunt or the niece. Sir Anthony is now furious at his son's unfeeling, insensible nature. He remembers how he in his young age would have been maddened by such a description. He says he would at no cost have accepted an ugly woman as his wife. And this was why Sir Anthony had eloped with his beautiful beloved. Upon saying so, he is cornered by his son, who asks him that he could have even disobeyed his father in the matter. Sir Anthony is almost on the verge of answering in the positive, but he is checked in time. Captain Absolute however pretends to be least concerned with anything in the matter but to obey his father, even if it means to marry the ugliest girl. Sir Anthony is disgusted at his son's reactions and calls him an insensible log of wood. He goes so far to say that if his son was to pretend indifference, he would marry her himself. Captain Absolute is clever enough to respond that he would marry the aunt if his father so desires. Sir Anthony at last asks his son to go to Mrs. Malaprop, with a letter of introduction from him. He asks him to pay his addresses to Lydia through her, since he expects that Lydia's beautiful eyes will excite his passion. Father and son depart together, both fully satisfied.

ANALYSIS

The relevance of the scene with regards to the development of the plot is that, it brings about the solution of the earlier crisis in the protagonists' affair. Although the meeting between the father and the son was hinted at in the earlier scene, but now we see them reconciled. We realize that this redonconciliation would now compel Captain Absolute to make his presence in person, before Lydia. And, this would in turn mean, inviting another crisis.

Sir Anthony is indeed very happy with regard to his son. He is at once all forgiveness and is absolutely delighted to describe to his son, the charms and attractions in Lydia. This enthusiastic description of Lydia's beauty make him look like a farcical character. Sir Anthony is taken back to his good old days of his youth, when he would have been maddened by such descriptions of a lady. He calls Lydia the blooming love-breathing seventeen, with wild eyes, blushing cheeks, sweetly painted lips etc.—a kind of description which can be least expected from him. His satisfied instinct of parental authority dupes him to his son's clever pretensions and renders him extremely laughable.

In this scene, Captain Absolute's sense of humour is seen to be at its peak. The way he pretends ignorance is indeed very amusing. His abject

surrendering to his father's will to the tune of agreeing to marry even the aunt is very interesting. His great difficulty seen in recollecting Lydia as perhaps the red-haired, squint-eyed, girl, is also very funny. He projects himself on the whole as a very witty person.

ACT III, SCENE II

Faulkland comes to pay a visit to Julia, and sits in her dressing-room waiting for her. As always, he sits cursing his capricious and suspicious nature, which is the source of all his torments. When he had met Julia in Sir Anthony's presence, he had pretended indifference to her, for her being high-spirited in his absence. But, Julia enters the room greeting him warmly, expressing concern over his coldness to her in their last meeting. She, however shows tenderness and love but his whims soon come to the forefront, and he starts upbraiding her for being happy and gay in his absence.

Although Faulkland says that he was happy to hear of her being in good health in his absence, but in his heart of hearts he feels sad about the fact. He thinks it was unjust on her part to remain happy in his absence. He is of the opinion that the lovers when separated should rather be melancholy than happy. So, he is now in a mood to hear Julia deny all his accusations. 'When Julia tries to justify her stand, by reaffirming her faithfulness to her lover, saying that she has met more handsome men than he, and yet she loves him, Faulkland's jealousies are aroused. He lectures her on the characteristics of true love. Julia in good faith reinforces that she has been bound to him by the will of her father, but the foolish lover takes this to mean that Julia loves him not out of her own free will but only to submit to a compulsion. And, when Julia asks him to set her free so that she can prove her faithfulness, Faulkland takes this to mean that Julia wishes to be free because she wants to get rid of him. Julia is now exasperated because of her lover's tyranny. He becomes intolerable that she leaves the room with tears in her eyes. Faulkland now gets conscious of what he has done. He stays back expecting her to return but when she does not. He curses himself for torturing and doubting her loving soul. He had met her after so long but he behaved wildly. He resolves not to behave in this manner, in future.

ANALYSIS

This scene is not very important with regard to the development of the plot. We can even say that the main plot might not suffer even if the scene is entirely taken out. The scene informs us a little about Julia and Faulkland. It elaborates however on the inner crisis happening in Faulkland's mind. The scene

is valuable, only in the sense of putting the male and the female protagonist, Captain Absolute and Lydia into relief by contrasting with them with the characters of Faulkland and Julia.

This scene can in a way be interpreted as a satire on the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century. It was thought that lovers in the sentimental comedy of that period were over-emotional. They used to indulge in high-flown language to give expression to their sentiments.

This is one of the scenes that have been considered a blemish on the play. It is not in tune with the spirit of this comedy. Although Sheridan opposed sentimental comedy in very strong terms, he however fails here to keep himself away from its influence. The forced pathos and sentiments of the scene are today considered one of its main weaknesses.

It is here in this scene that we see Faulkland in his true self—the typical over-emotional sentimental hero. Faulkland is shown to be an absurdly romantic and whimsical character. While Julia on the other hand is practical, has realistic commonsense and is sober.

On the whole we can say that Julia's character is drawn in contrast to Lydia and Captain Absolute's character in contrast to Faulkland, so that a balance is maintained in either of the love affairs.

ACT III, SCENE III

Captain Absolute with a letter of introduction from his father calls on Mrs. Malaprop. He is heartily welcomed by her, and she is pleased with his ingenuousness captain. Absolute in turn flatters Mrs. Malaprop with high tributes to her learning and accomplishments so as to dupe her. She is carried away by his compliments and complains to him that there are very few people these days who value learning in women rather than beauty. She tells Absolute about Beverley. He could be his rival because Lydia was madly in love with him. The aunt also discloses that she has intercepted a letter that very day from her lover to her and shows it to him. The Captain is quick to realize that it is Lucy who must have betrayed him. But cleverly and with good humour he starts reading the letter, passing a few comments on the writer's character often and on.

Mrs. Malaprop gives to Captain Absolute a letter from Beverley addressed to her niece which was intercepted by her. In the letter, as it is read by Absolute, Mrs. Malaprop is described in the most derogatory and malicious manner as the "old, weather beaten she dragon." In the letter Beverley mentions of a plan to make her a go-between in their interviews. Mrs. Malaprop feels offended at this and laughs at the fellow's impudence. She also remarks that she

will certainly plot better to defeat his plans. Absolute persuades the old lady to allow him to meet Lydia in private.

Mrs. Malaprop, with a little hesitation allows Absolute to meet Lydia for a few moments. Lydia is surprised to see Beverley in her room. She feels romantically elated when he tells her that he has over-reached her aunt into believing that he was Captain Absolute, while he has kept away the real Captain by some trick. Lydia proposes to effect immediately their plan of elopement if he will not care losing her fortune. To this, Absolute promptly affirms that her love was the only dowry that he wanted and that he could repay

Lydia is carried away into another world, and she is terribly glad at the prospect of enjoying the charm of poverty with her lover. She is also very happy to know that Beverley had managed to deceive Mrs. Malaprop, into believing that he was Captain Absolute himself. Lydia thinks Absolute to be her Beverley and they both have a few moments of intimate conversation.

Mrs. Malaprop stands eavesdropping and overhears from Lydia that she will ever be faithful to her Beverley, whomsoever her aunt might choose for her. She sees Captain Absolute kneeling before Lydia to enforce his suit and concludes that perhaps Lydia has rejected him. So, she immediately intervenes and scolds Lydia for her impertinence and bad manners in telling Captain Absolute on his face that she would marry none other than Beverley. Lydia replies that she never told the gentleman that she loved anyone else but Beverley.

Absolute is willing to give into all the whims and fancies of Lydia. So, she is very pleased with him. In order to please Mrs. Malaprop, he says that he does not mind Lydia's behaviour at all and that he would try again in future to persuade her to accept him.

CRITICAL COMMENTS

The scene brings near the crisis, that is soon to come in the relations between Lydia and Captain Absolute. Although, Captain Absolute has for once deceived Mrs. Malaprop and claimed Lydia's vow of faithfulness, but this has been done only as Beverley. The fact that his own beloved is also the girl chosen by his father for him, has not helped him much in winning over Lydia. It will need a lot of ingenuity and good luck to convince Lydia to marry him.

Absolute flatters Mrs. Malaprop by calling her a lady of intellectual accomplishments, elegant manners and learning. He ingeniously persuades the old lady to agree to his secret meeting with Lydia. And, in Lydia's chamber, he convinces her that he has overreached her aunt into believing that he was Captain Absolute, while he has kept away the real Captain by some trick. In this way, he

manages to fool both Lydia and her aunt, Mrs. Malaprop. Lastly, he is seen to leave Lydia's room saying he does not mind anything at all and that he would try again to persuade Lydia to marry him. Only Captain Absolute knows the real position as manipulated by him, so he pretends to be the most benevolent soul in front of both Lydia and Mrs. Malaprop. He thus succeeds in deceiving them.

This scene is one of the most amusing and interesting scenes in the play. Captain Absolute's clever over-reaching of the old aunt and his satiric and ironic mockery of her are scenes to be enjoyed. Mrs. Malaprop's show of her vanity and cleverness is also a source of humour in the play. The comic irony in the scene is seen in the way Captain Absolute succeeds in deceiving both Lydia and Mrs. Malaprop. He reads his own letter loudly and mocks at Mrs. Malaprop's use of language, which is also a source of laughter for the audience. We can thus conclude that this scene is a triumph of comic irony and the success of it rests upon the presence of mind and the ready wit of Captain Absolute.

ACT III, SCENE IV

Bob Acres wears the most up-to-date and foppish dress and stands before his servant David to draw admiration. Acres thinks that his new dress has changed his personality for the better. David is overwhelmed at the foppish appearance of his master and compliments him suggesting that he will soon be taken as a famous beau of Bath and that the caricature prints of his, will be sold in the markets as 'Devon Macaroni'. Acres is pleased to hear all this. He has been practising French dances at his lodgings in order to become up-to-date. He is at present waiting for his French master, whom he finally asks David to summon. Before leaving, David pays another compliment to his master for his stylish hair-dressing. When Acres is alone, he unsuccessfully tries to rub-up a few steps practicing foreign dancing. He gives up finally on foreign dances saying, his English legs are not suited for foreign dances, it can go well with country dances alone.

Sir Lucius comes in and Acres confidentially tells him that he has been dismissed as a suitor for Lydia's hand, and that Beverley has come forward as his rival. Sir Lucius has a solution for all such troubles and advises Acres that he should take offence at Beverley's behaviour and challenge him to a duel.

Although Acres thinks this treatment to be unfair, but he actually does not want to fight. Sir Lucius in turn convinces him that this is insulting and disgraceful, and since his honour is involved in the matter, he must take Beverley's behaviour as a provocation to challenge him in a duel. Sir Lucius suggests that he should write a letter to Beverley challenging him to a duel, for the sake of his honour. Though, essentially a coward, Acres has to put up an honourable and

brave appearance, and so he pretends to be roused to anger. He starts writing a letter to this effect while Sir Lucius dictates the matter. In the letter, Beverley is asked to come to King's Mead Fields in the evening for the duel. Sir Lucius says that had he not another engagement in arranging his own duel with a Captain in the Army he would himself have delivered the letter to Beverley. To this, Acres says that he would like to see Sir Lucius fight first and kill his enemy, so that he can take lessons from it. Sir Lucius agrees to his proposal and goes out in search of his adversary.

ANALYSIS

The scene further reduces the possibility of Captain Absolute gaining Lydia. The complication, as we see, is brought about by Acres, who decides to challenge Beverley. Sir Lucius too adds to the problems for having taken deliberate offence at Captain Absolute indicating that he will challenge him in a duel. Thus Captain Absolute is caught in a two-fold danger, at the hands of Sir Lucius and Acres, as is hinted in the scene.

Sheridan seems to be as much delighted in ridiculing them, as the audience must have been in finding them behave in such a manner. Both Acres and Sir Lucius are the targets of Sheridan. This scene provides an occasion for laughter and mild satire. Sir Lucius's touchiness on points of honour and Acres's way of responding accept Captain Absolute, who is such a fine gentleman. Lydia enjoys her aunt's mistake, since she thinks her aunt is actually praising Beverley. The aunt continues to praise Absolute's breeding, language and even compares him to Hamlet's father by citing a quotation from Shakespeare, which she says wrongly. Lydia is happy to think that her aunt will soon be disappointed to discover her mistake of mistaking Beverley for Captain Absolute.

While Mrs. Malaprop is describing Captain Absolute's handsome features to Lydia, the Captain himself along with his father is announced. Before they enter, Mrs. Malaprop warns Lydia to behave properly before the guests. Lydia, however refuses to have anything to do with the new suitor. Sir Anthony comes in and tells Mrs. Malaprop of the difficulty he had in getting his son there. He optimistically asks Mrs. Malaprop if Lydia had now realized the worth of his son and the honour she will gain by getting related to Sir Anthony, a baronet.

When Sir Anthony and Captain Absolute come in, Lydia turns her face away from them, not wanting to look even once at her new suitor. Sir Anthony, says his son not to keep dumb but to address Lydia. The son is naturally very nervous and tries to avoid addressing her in everybody's presence, fearing that the truth might be revealed. He tries hard to persuade his father to leave them alone.

In the meantime, Mrs. Malaprop too tries coaxing her niece to talk to the gentleman. Lydia wonders why her aunt is not discovering her blunder in having mistaken Beverley for Captain Absolute. She thinks that Sir Anthony would be accompanied by his real son alone and not Beverley, so why is Mrs. Malaprop not able to see through the truth. Though both the guardians continue forcing their wards to speak, neither of them takes the initiative. The son is utterly at his wit. He says that he is confused and does not know what to say. Sir Anthony gets annoyed and refuses to budge an inch, saying that he shall not leave them alone, to converse.

Captain Absolute is at last compelled to speak in everybody's presence. Since he is left with no other alternative, he tries to speak in a hoarse and artificial voice for fear of being recognized. Soon, however, he comes to his own natural tone, when his father shouts at him to speak clearly. Sir Anthony requests Mrs. Malaprop to ask Lydia to favour them with something more than a side front. When Captain Absolute speaks in his normal tone, Lydia immediately turns back, recognising his voice, and addresses him in surprise as her Beverley.

On hearing Lydia address Captain Absolute as Beverley, both the guardians stand dumb-founded. They cannot figure out what all this means. The game Captain Absolute plays cannot be taken any further and the whole secret of his courting Lydia as a poor Ensign is disclosed to everybody. Lydia is mad with rage at being so mercilessly deceived by her own dear lover, and is frustrated that her dreams of elopement have come to a nought. Sir Anthony is half-happy to know that his son is not as dull and unromantic as he had pretended to be. Mrs. Malaprop in her turn is shocked to discover that it was Captain Absolute himself who had written those insulting letters to her. Absolute requests his father to come to his rescue and Sir Anthony in turn requests Mrs. Malaprop on his son's behalf to pardon him. She agrees to forgive him, and they both move out of the room leaving the young lovers to themselves. Sir Anthony is in a nice mood and he exits, humming a romantic tune and holding Mrs. Malaprop's hands.

Captain Absolute finds himself in a difficult situation not knowing how to begin the conversation with Lydia. He at first tries to humour her but when it does not seem to break the ice he even shows a bit of temper though all in vain. He requests her to be happy now that they had been united with their guardian's consent but Lydia exclaims that it was the last thing she had wanted. His request for forgetting her whims of living happily in poverty, also goes unheeded. Absolute, as a last resort tries utter submission and kneels down before her. As a result, she makes an angry protest that there was no fun in kneeling down when she was being compelled to have him. The Captain also agrees to set her free if she so wishes, thinking that his stiffness might bring her round. But, Lydia retaliates and

goes to the extremity of throwing her lover's portrait, complaining that she was deceived and humoured like a child, and how all her romantic whims of revolting and eloping have been thwarted. She declares that she is dismissing Beverley from her heart, and breaks off the engagements, for good.

Absolute admirably plays the part of a faithful lover and says that he would always love Lydia and nobody else. He takes out a picture of Lydia from his pocket and praises its beauty and charm declaring that he will never part with it. He hints that the world might laugh at Lydia, for being unfaithful and they may think that perhaps Lydia has been abandoned by her lover. On hearing this, Lydia bursts into tears since she can no longer contain her impotent rage and frustration.

Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony return to find Lydia weeping. They are unable to understand the reasons for her depression and so they conclude that Captain Absolute must have behaved a little too impatiently, thus offending her delicacy. Sir Anthony then goes out pushing his son before him. They leave it to the aunt to pacify her niece and make peace with her.

ANALYSIS

This scene is very relevant in terms of the development of the plot, since it lays bare the greatest crisis in the Lydia-Captain Absolute affair. The affair between the two protagonists happens to be the crux of the play. In the play, Sheridan expects the reader to travel through the troughs and crests of the Lydia-Beverley affair. And this scene happens to be crucial in this regard. Apparently it seemed that since the girl of his father's choice too was Lydia, everything in future will go well. But, somehow it does not, since Lydia's whims upset everything. The scene in a way masks the climax of the Lydia-Absolute love-affair, since it resolves the complication which had been building up throughout the first three Acts.

Captain Absolute had been making constant efforts to postpone the discovery of his real self, but he can do it no more. Even when he is brought to Lydia's presence by his father, he tries desperately to avoid speaking to her, but finally Beverley's true identity as Captain Absolute is revealed to Lydia, and her reaction becomes a cause of anxiety to Absolute. She dismisses him as a lover and flings off his portrait. Captain Absolute tries a lot to bring her round but to no avail.

There is a certain emphasis in the scene on certain traits of the various characters, whom we are already acquainted with. The romantic notions that Lydia holds on to are thwarted badly. Lydia is mad with rage at being so mercilessly

deceived by her own dear lover and almost breaks down with disappointment. All her dreams at last come to a nought. Her romantic plans of elopement and deceiving her aunt have been foiled. And she furiously throws away the small picture of her lover that she had kept so far as a keepsake and declares that she is dismissing Beverley from her heart, for good.

Captain Absolute tries hard to postpone the discovery of his real self, but he can do it no more. At last in this scene, it is discovered that he is Sir Anthony's son and not Beverley. We realize that all his manipulations and his disguises come to nothing. Thus he is entrapped in a situation that seems hopeless, hence pitiable.

The humour in the scene is brought about by situations cleverly managed. It is indeed the ingenious manipulation of characters that brings them to a ludicrous state. Captain Absolute is forced to face Lydia. The old guardians too press their wards to speak to each other, while they try hard to avoid it. But, once the truth is revealed, the delightful pretensions of anger by Sir Anthony, the sense of anticlimax, Lydia's frustrated fancies and Mrs. Malaprop's discomfiture in recalling that he is the one who called her a dragon, together contribute to the humour in the story. The spirit of comedy pervades the scene, because even when a serious crisis is shown happening in the affair of Captain Absolute, the situations before and after the incident are so humorous that they redeem the pathos and forebode that things may yet resolve themselves favourably.

The element of suspense reaches its highest pitch in this scene. Since we, as readers are interested in the future of the hero and the heroine, we find that they are at the moment on their lowest ebb. It seems that they have been encountered by an unresolvable crisis. The suspense is now created in the scene as to whether- the crisis would be resolved to bring about a happy ending.

ACT IV SCENE I

Sir Lucius stands on the North Parade. He is waiting to meet Captain Absolute, to challenge him in a duel for offending him. The real reason for picking up a quarrel with Absolute was that he was the real impediment in his winning over Lydia. So, he wanted to get rid of him. Sir Lucius mutters to himself the wonder that the young girls should fall such an easy prey to young army officers, He finally locates Captain Absolute coming towards him muttering something to himself; so he steps aside to listen to what he is saying. Absolute seems to be grumbling because all his planning and manoeuvring to win Lydia have failed so miserably that he is now in his worst mood. In this desperate mood, he would not mind killing himself or anyone else. Sir Lucius is happy to find his enemy in such

a mood and so, he steps forward to quarrel with him 'genteely'. In order to pick up a quarrel with him as an excuse for challenging him to a duel, he points out to him that his opinion differs from the Captain's, although the Captain in reality has given no opinion at all.

Captain Absolute cannot understand what is going on. He retorts that unless a man has expressed his thoughts how can it be called his opinion? Sir Lucius takes this as a clever chance of remarking that they differ in this very matter. That was reason enough for a quarrel, though Sir Lucius also adds that the Captain has lately offended him too. Not knowing how to avoid him honourably, the Captain agrees to take up his challenge. They then decide to meet at King's Mead Fields at six in the evening, to fight with small swords since the light will be dim then.

As Sir Lucius leaves, there comes Faulkland. He is gladly welcomed and asked by Captain Absolute to be his second in the duel. Faulkland in return informs his friend that he is worried over his own quarrel with Julia and curses himself for being responsible for the trouble. Absolute too reveals the tale of his misery in being jilted by Lydia. Faulkland suggests that he should elope with her if she too is willing.

A servant now brings a letter to Faulkland from Julia in which he has been requested to see her at the earliest, since she is no more angry with him. But, instead of feeling jubilant on receiving this letter, Faulkland again becomes suspicious and remarks that the offer for reconciliation should always come from the male counterpart. And, Julia in attempting to make it has been a little indelicate and forward.

Even when the happy initiative to a final resolution does not cheer up Faulkland, he is duly pulled up by Captain Absolute for it. When Faulkland remains as morose as ever, despite hearing the news of his reconciliation with Julia, Captain Absolute loses his patience and scolds Faulkland, saying he was incorrigible. He compares his own hard lot with his and remarks that if he had been worried over his failure with Lydia, it would have been quite reasonable, but sadness and complaints when everything was so well with him, mean nothing but absurdity. Absolute then leaves in anger, asking Faulkland to be ready at six to accompany him.

When Faulkland is alone, he reproaches himself for his folly, though he still thinks that there is some nicety in love which Julia chose to give up. Indulging in his fancies again, he finally decides to give another test to Julia's love. The idea of being Absolute's second in the duel, was a means to test the intensity of Julia's love further. He decides to give her a concocted story that he has killed someone

in a duel, in order to see how she reacts. He thinks of letting her alone for some fool to get, if she were to fail in the test.

ANALYSIS

This scene is relevant in terms of development of the plot because it furthers the action of the play in bringing it to yet another deeper crisis. The scene presents before us the stage of the worst complication and estrangements in the play. Both in the fortunes of Absolute, the hero of the main plot and Faulkland, the hero of the sub-plot. We find a crisis that threatens to undo them any moment. The scene is also relevant in terms of the Julia-Faulkland episode, since it leaves the scope for further crisis in their affair.

The scene has a bearing upon the Julia-Faulkland love-affair. On the one hand Sheridan proposes to bring Faulkland also at the place of the duel as Absolute's second, and on the other he puts in Faulkland's head an idea of testing Julia's love with a false story. And this is prone to bring further crisis in their affair. As it is, Faulkland's rejection of a reconciliation with Julia despite her attempts at it, further complicates the affair. Although Faulkland keeps reproaching himself for his folly, but he makes no efforts to correct it. This episode is actually drawn by Sheridan as a sub-plot to stand in contrast with the crisis in the main plot. The Lydia— Absolute love affair is in crisis. Captain Absolute! is shown comparing his own hard lot with Faulkland's and remarks that his own worries for Lydia were reasonable but Faulkland's were baseless and self-created. Faulkland thus acts as a foil to highlight Captain Absolute's character

In this scene, the characters and their affairs have been so cleverly manipulated than everything seems set for climax and a consequent resolution. Sir Lucius's challenge, the main happening in the scene, brings a further piquancy to Captain Absolute's miserable state. There now hangs over Captain Absolute, the danger of two duels which, as we are already aware. He will have to fight with Bob Acres (as Beverley) and Sir Lucius (as Captain Absolute). The quadrangular contest between the rivals is now seen resolved in a three cornered one. Interestingly enough, even if Captain Absolute wins his duel against Sir Lucius and Bob Acres, there is no surity that Lydia will give up her romantic whims and accept him. Her character portrayal is such that she seems to be more into her romantic whims than into the practical realities of life. Hence, the suspense is kept intact with regard to the outcome of the affair.

ACT V, SCENE I

Julia waits in her dressing room for Faulkland, who has sent her a false message that he has been involved in a dreadful accident and wishes to see her

alone. Julia stands surmising what it could be, till Faulkland comes. When he arrives, she asks him the details and Faulkland tells her a cock and bull story of having got entangled in a quarrel, the result of which is that he cannot now remain in this country without grave danger to his life. He wishes he had married Julia earlier, then he would not have minded his banishment so much.

Julia loses no time, to take her decision to accompany him wherever he decides to go, to share his troubles and sorrows, as his lawful wife. She reaffirms her faith in her lover and says that she will do all the service she can for the sake of love, and that they must hurry and leave the place immediately.

Faulkland suggests that it will not be possible to leave before it gets dark. Julia is all sacrifice and love in further assuring her lover that they will live happily with her small fortune, even in poverty, when away from home. Faulkland is still not done with his testing. He further tests Lydia by expressing apprehensions about his unstable nature which by all probability may go worse in the troubled life of an exile and may be an incessant source of torture for her. Julia promises to bear all the torments happily, taking into consideration the misfortune that has befallen him.

Faulkland is fully satisfied with the outcome of the test and frankly admits to her that he has been only testing her love and the story of the disaster was all false. He begs Julia's forgiveness for his suspicious nature and affirms that this will be his last fault. If she would agree, he was prepared to marry her the very next day. Though Julia is happy to know that Faulkland has killed no one, but the mean test to which she has been put is beyond what she can tolerate. She is thus not ready to take heed of any excuses. She says that she had given him all she had and had loved him even before her father had expressed such a desire. She finally gives up, saying she has been tested long enough and she will not like to marry him, to be tortured all her life with his incorrigibly suspicious nature. However, she promises that she would never marry any other person, and^o would always pray to God for Faulkland's health and to cure him of his infirmity. She gets into a genuine temper and vows that she will no more have anything to do with him. As she goes out completely broken, Faulkland, as usual, curses his folly and is apprehensive that he might lose such a priceless girl.

Faulkland now sits repenting and blames himself as usual for being cruel to such a gentle and good natured girl. He keeps calling her back, but she lends a deaf ear to his calls. He sits hoping against hope that she will return thinking that she does not have a pride which can keep her away from him for long. He believes that she will soon come running to him but she does not return.

Lydia now comes to pay Julia a visit. She has all along been thinking about her lover, Beverley. She comes to Julia with the hope that a lecture from

her might make her recall him. But when she sees Julia in a sad and downcast state, she guesses rightly that Faulkland is the cause of her misery. Unlike Lydia, Julia is too sensible to disclose any of her secrets, or to accuse her lover, before anyone else, even if it is her own cousin. Julia tells Lydia that she knew from the beginning that Beverley was Captain Absolute, or else she would not have encouraged Lydia to love Beverley. Lydia strongly protests that everybody has been deceiving her and now she will have to undergo the torture of an arranged marriage. She expresses utter frustration at her romantic plans being of no avail, the elopement and a secret marriage now looking almost impossible. Julia, quite sensibly advises Lydia to accept rather than reject such a faithful and handsome a lover as Captain Absolute, and replace her romance with commonsense.

Mrs. Malaprop, Fag and David rush into the room crying 'murder' and 'manslaughter'. The two girls cannot make out what they mean, and so they enquire about it in turn from Mrs. Malaprop, Fag and David. But, Mrs. Malaprop only puts things upside down, Fag is politely long winded and David has a simpleton's expressions. At last, Lydia and Julia gather that, Sir Lucius, Bob Acres, Faulkland and Capt. Absolute are meeting at King's Mead Field's to fight duels and there is the possible danger of anybody getting killed. Julia asks them all to move to the scene of the duel at once so as to be able to prevent it in time. They all leave to the scene, led by Fag while David is sent to look for Sir Anthony.

ANALYSIS

This scene is relevant in terms of the development of the plot. It presents to us the four different stage in the development, namely, the resolution. The things had certainly reached their peak point in the previous scene, but now they seem to be directly moving towards the resolution and a happy ending. Lydia who comes to visit Julia for her sound advice is already shown half-ready to receive her jilted lover whose memories have been constantly coming back to her. Julia's sincere advice to Lydia regarding Captain Absolute paves the way for the reconciliation to an extent. Lydia and Julia are also very frightened to hear of their beloved's being in danger. All this is enough to point out the resolution in the plot that is rapidly progressing into denouement.

The Julia-Faulkland episode seems to be prolonged unnecessarily in this scene. The sentimental effusions of Faulkland and Julia has already been talked about to the audience in enough measure and this scene does not inform us of anything new about them. It is simply responsible for further boredom in the play. The only crucial thing about the scene is that Julia has at last decided to sever her relations with Faulkland.

Faulkland's whimsical nature is further emphasized in this scene by his subjecting Julia to another test of her sincerity. We begin to develop a sense of hatred for this man's skeptical and over-suspicious nature. We entirely approve of Julia's decision to sever her relations with Faulkland. We realize that Julia is too good for an over-suspicious and over-possessive lover like Faulkland. She is able to prove, though a little late that she is a lady with self-respect.

This scene makes it evident that Sheridan makes clever use of servants in the play. They have been made to play a crucial role, as the confidants and advisors of their masters. The long-winded Fag and foolishly proud David also provide a lot of humour in the scene, especially when they try to delay the information by speaking in a circumlocutory manner. Mrs. Malaprop too is as much blundering and foolishly vain here as ever.

ACT V, SCENE II

Captain Absolute has hidden a sword under his big coat and is waiting on the North Parade for Faulkland to go to the place of the duel together. He suddenly finds his father coming towards him, and to avoid him, he muffles up his face. Sir Anthony is only half-sure that this gentleman is his son. And, on being addressed, Captain Absolute pretends to be some Saunderson. Despite his efforts to dupe his father, Sir Anthony recognises him frilly and pounces upon him with suspicious enquiries. Captain Absolute now admits the truth and tells his father that all that he did was as a joke, while he himself was looking for him. The father is not convinced and asks him that if he was waiting to meet him, why did he have to muffle up his face. Captain Absolute now invents another lie and says that he was going to Lydia to bring her round. He is scared that his father might propose to accompany him, so he says that it was pretty cold outside, and that such a weather could prove harmful for his gout. Sir Anthony now suddenly touches the Captain on the chest and feels the hard substance under the coat. Captain Absolute now tells yet another lie that he was carrying some little ornaments as a present to his lady-love. The father cleverly insists upon seeing the ornaments and during his attempt to open the coat, the sword falls down. The father looks at the son, but the son manages to convince his father that he was only going to Lydia to press his suit and to assert that if she refused him, he will kill himself with the same sword then and there. Sir Anthony is only half-convinced and remarks that the plan will hardly succeed with Lydia who will rather ask him to go ahead with his suicide plan. The son then leaves his father and moves ahead.

While Absolute walks away in a hurry so as to avoid his father, in the meantime, David comes running, shouting to Sir Anthony to call his son back in order to prevent murder and bloodshed. Sir Anthony is really surprised. David

now clearly explains of the duels that were going to be fought soon and that his son too was heading towards that very place. The son has, however, gone beyond their reach and Sir 'Anthony is furious at his son's impertinence in lying to him. Sir Anthony rushes towards King's Mead Fields, where the duel is to be held, along with David

ANALYSIS

This scene is relevant in terms of the plot of the play because it furthers a little more the plan of resolution started in the earlier scene. This scene provides a short episode between the witty father and son. They indulge in a show of intelligence and once again we see the father being over-reached by the son. The beauty of plot- construction is that Sheridan cleverly tries to assemble all the characters at one place for the final reconciliation.

The humour in the whole scene is of a farcical kind, which means it is slightly crude, extravagant and vociferous. The scene also provides what is known as the humour of the situation. The way Captain Absolute invents lies to escape his father and finally succeeds in his attempts is drawn hilariously by Sheridan. David's way of speaking and shouting in the same vein also add to the humour of the play.

ACT V, SCENE III

Sir Lucius and Acres have reached the place of the duel much before anyone else. They are busy deciding the preliminaries of the imminent duel. Sir Lucius measures the length from where the duellists will aim and fire and finding the distance too short Acres feels awfully scared. Acres indicates that he will like to shoot at his adversary from a distance of forty yards, thinking that then he will avoid his rival's shot better. Sir Lucius thinks this distance to be very long since the duel was going to be one with pistols and not guns. Sir Lucius asks Acres not to care about the distance which he will settle with Beverley's second.

Sir Lucius enquires about his duties, if Acres were to be killed in the duel. He asks Acres if he has any will to be executed in such an eventuality. Acres is frightened to the core, and is confused by Sir Lucius's enquiries as to how he will face his enemy's shots. Acres choose the side front as a safe posture thinking that thus he will lessen the chances of being shot. Sir Lucius scares him even more by saying that in such a case, there will be even more possibility of his being hit in some vital part. He is of the opinion that front pose will be the safest and genteel, but Acres does not agree with this. As Sir Lucius says that he can see

their adversaries coming, Acres gets nervous to the extreme and half declares his intention motto fight.

Captain Absolute and Faulkland now arrive on the scene and Sir Lucius, thinking that Faulkland is Beverley asks him to get ready to fight with Acres. Faulkland is surprised at the proposal and is then introduced to Sir Lucius, who insists, that Faulkland could represent Beverley if he wished since he had not turned up. Acres, however, has got an excuse to escape the duel and therefore refuses to fight anyone else but the real Beverley. Captain Absolute now discloses that he is the real Beverley and offers to fight. Acres in turn adamantly says that he will not dare to fight his dearest friend Absolute come what may. He finds this to be yet another golden opportunity to escape fatal consequences and he avails himself of it, remaining unaffected by all Sir Lucius's insults and insinuations. Acres now offers to act as Sir Lucius's second and says he will execute his commission if he were to be killed in the course of the duel. Sir Lucius dismisses Acres as a coward, not worth even his notice. Then he himself gets ready to fight Captain Absolute, and they both draw their swords.

As Sir Lucius and Captain Absolute prepare to go ahead with the fight, Sir Anthony and party arrive on the scene and the fight has to be stopped. Sir Anthony enquires about the cause of the duel, while Mrs. Malaprop requests them to desist from it and forget the past. She tells Captain Absolute that Lydia was really worried for him. Sir Lucius, then claims Lydia's favour, thinking that she was his 'Delia', who wrote the love-letters to him, which are still in his possession. Lydia, then frankly and unhesitatingly admits her love for Captain Absolute and sets all doubts at rest. Although unaware of the offence Captain Absolute honourably begs pardon of Sir Lucius for the unintended offence, admitting that he was still ready to fight, for the sake of Lydia. Sir Lucius gracefully accepts his apologies but produces Delia's letters, desiring to know if they were not written by her.

Mrs. Malaprop, makes the candid confession that she is the real Delia, and indirectly hints that she would like Sir Lucius to propose to her. Sir Lucius now sees through the whole thing and sarcastically proposes to offer Mrs. Malaprop to Acres and Captain Absolute while refusing her himself. It is sad to see everybody enjoy a joke at Mrs. Malaprop's cost. Sir Anthony comes to her rescue reassuring her that she was in her bloom yet. The old aunt is quite bitter and dismisses all men as barbarians.

Now, only Julia and Faulkland remain to be reconciled. To this end, Sir Anthony makes a request to the parties concerned. Julia and Faulkland come together and sensing each other's feelings, they find excuses for being reconciled. Julia first declares that she has been unkind to her lover since there was after all

some truth in his story. Faulkland is also sorry for his past conduct and begs pardon for it. Sir Anthony, speaking on behalf of Faulkland assures Julia that Faulkland's excessive love for her is the source of all his folly, and he will overcome it as soon as she marries him. They are thus loving souls again, and all soon joined by the rest of the party. Sir Lucius declares that he is happy in the happiness of other.

We see both the love affairs in the play coming to a happy end. Bob Acres congratulates the newly engaged lovers and announces his decision to hold a dance party at the New Rooms in the evening, in honour of them. Sir Anthony too joins in to congratulate and in high spirit, proposes to drink at night to the health of the young couples and a husband to Mrs. Malaprop. Captain Absolute and Faulkland congratulate each other at their fortune. Faulkland remarks that both Lydia and Julia deserve applause; the former for having checked her romantic fancies in time and the latter for mending his temper. Absolute also joins in the sentiments and the scene ends with a sentimental sermon from the sober-minded Julia on the virtues of married love—the suggestion that, let them not try to be too happy in their happiness because excess of passion will soon disappear leaving the dross behind. The crux of Julia's sermon is that try to be virtuous and only moderately happy. The play thus ends, happily.

ANALYSIS

One need not specify the relevance of this scene, because the significance of this scene is evident in itself. This last scene of the play is inevitable and it is constructed in such a manner that it brings a grand finale to the play. The scene is a fine example of Sheridan's clever handling of plot. All the characters have been dexterously brought to the place of the duel, and are soon reconciled. Sir Anthony is shown to take the initiative to reveal the mysteries. The trifling causes are disclosed, explained and settled to the satisfaction of all.

The scene is one of the best scene from the point of view of humour and revealing the truth. The humour is again of a farcical kind. Bob Acre's cowardice is disclosed to the full. Sheridan's descriptions of his courage oozing out of his plans is really hilarious, though it is gently satirical too. Mrs. Malaprop's unashamed embarrassment is also a source of satirical fun. She remains as foolish as ever, without the delicacy and decency to check her romantic fooleries. All the characters of this play, in some form or the other contribute to the humour in the play—hence making it a beautiful comic piece.

UNIT – 3

3.6.1 CAPTAIN JACK ABSOLUTE

Captain Jack Absolute is the hero of the play the rivals. He has none of the exceptionally heroic qualities. He is the son of the rich baronet Sir Anthony. He is a Captain in the English army. He is the central character of the play and the plot is woven around him. Interestingly enough he is the only normal sensible and balanced character in the play. Sheridan has portrayed him as a romantic lover. He is intriguing and fashionable; bold and manly like a true captain. He is witty, decent and well behaved. As a galeent youth he has fallen in love with a beautiful lady, Lydia. He is compelled by the peculiar temperament and inclinations of his sweet heart Lydia to pose that he is poor Ensign of a humble origin. He is too much in love with her. He didnot want to take the risk of the discovery of his impersonation. He rather enjoys courting her by impersonation. In the words of Fag, love made Jove a masquerader, so love compels this youngman to hide his real identity from his sweet heart Lydia. He pretended that is a low paid junior officer in the army without any family background.

Captain Absolute is the only balanced, practical and realistic character in the play. In general his qualities are a sound judgement of mind. While Lydia is dying to elope with him and thus lose her fortune by marrying against her aunt's wishes. The realist and practical Captain Absolute does not agree to it. He wants to keep both, the girl as well as her fortune. It is not that he wants to marry Lydia for money. If it had been so he would not have given his father the tough opposition which he gives, to thwart his plans of an arranged marriage of his own choice.

His common sense in love is clear contrast to Lydia's and Faulkland's sentimentality in love. Lydia altogether loses her head while in love with Ensign. Faulkland prepares the bitter cup of jealousies and doubts for himself. He is careful to hide his true idenity from his beloved. He throws dust into Lydia's eyes by pretending to be Ensign Beverly, and into Mrs. Malaprop's eyes by letting her believe that Ensign Bevery is a different man and that the insulting letter which she head received had been written by that man. Thus he succeeds in befooling both aunt and niece. When the revelation comes, he finds himself in a most embarrassing position, he faces the situation with a rare coolness and courage. Captain Absoute shows a unique presence of mind whenever he is in trouble. He overreaches both Mrs. Malaprop and Lydia, when to one he gives out as Captain Absolute and the other as Beverley. In order to keep Lydia– in good humour he acts as the romantic lover. He does not say to her that he is not willing to forsake her fortune. Even when Lydia behaves pettishly, Absolute is always seen to rise to the occassion

and counter her by showing himself an offended lover. Similarly, when he encounters his father on his way to the duel, he immediately muffles up his face, changes his voice and in order to escape his father, gives out his name as Saunderson. He does succeed in duping his father.

Captain Absolute has remarkable self-confidence and composure. He is seen to assure Sir Anthony that he is the son of Sir Anthony's wife and that he really believes himself to be his son also. He flatters Mrs. Malaprop in a beautiful way saying that he is her most respectful admirer and that he will feel proud to call himself her affectionate nephew, by marrying her niece. To please Lydia, he says that he is her faithful Beverley who "knowing the singular generosity of her temper, assumed that name". And, when Mrs. Malaprop tries to take him to task for having described her in such a dreadful manner in his letter, Captain Absolute immediately seeks his father's assistance to rescue him from her wrath. The only place where he fails to succeed is, in his attempt to pacify Lydia who is furious with him for having duped her and for having behaved towards her as an imposter. Captain Absolute is portrayed as one having a sound judgement of everybody's character. He understands his father's nature in and out. He is authoritative yet affectionate. Even when he sees him in a state of temper, he knows that he will be forgiven on the least pretext. When he goes to him as a pretending penitent on learning that Lydia is his father's choice also, he is forgiven. Similarly, he thoroughly knows Mrs. Malaprop, whom he describes quite correctly though a little mischievously, in his letter to Lydia. He flatters instantly on her face while he comments on the writer of the letter. He makes correct estimates of Faulkland and Acres too. He offers his sound criticism and suggestions to Faulkland to get rid of his suspicious nature but on Acres' nature he only laughs. The best judgement he has made in the play is with regard to Lydia's character, because even while he is madly in love with her he does not take her as a serious girl. He nurtures her humour knowing full well that Lydia's is full of caprice, that to undeceive her meant probably to lose her.

He is the only one who seems perfectly normal, he is also the reservoir of good humour which he spills on all occasions. He is not morbid like Faulkland and he is not absurd or ridiculous like Sir Lucius or Acres. He knows fully well the oddities of Acres and Faulkland and while he laughs at their cost, he is never malicious or revengeful. It is his cheerful, gay character, that has won him many friends and their confidence. He is also capable of being ironical and sarcastic in his conversation. He laughs at the way he has been able to befool Mrs. Malaprop. There is a soliloquy which he makes when his father leaves him after threatening to disown him for not agreeing to marry the girl of his choice.

A Captain in the King's Army as he is, he is not without a soldier's firmness and bravery. His strength of character is shown in the boldness with

which he faces all the threats of his father. Even when he is threatened to be disinherited, he decides not to give up the love-promises he has made. He is also bold enough to accept Sir Lucius' challenge readily without even knowing the reason for it. With intelligence, he corners his father, who boasts that he would not have married the girl of anybody's choice but his own. The son is witty enough and at once asks whether he would not have done it even to obey his father. The question puts Sir Anthony in a very awkward position. This is proof that that in his battle with words with his father, he never gets behind.

Throughout the play, Captain Absolute is seen to ridicule Faulkland's scepticism and apprehensiveness as a lover. The contrast between them is however emphasized at the end of the play when both have tasted the bitters as well as the sweets of love. Captain Absolute says that Faulkland always prepared the bitter cup for himself to taste in love while the bitter cup for Captain Absolute was prepared by Lydia.

Sheridan has portrayed Faulkland as a whimsical kind of lover to act as a foil to Captain Absolute. Captain Absolute as we have seen, is a practical man, one who grapples with realities.

We find Captain Absolute in a somewhat depressed state, only on two occasions. The first is when Lydia has broken off what she had with him on discovering his true identity. He bemoans his fate.

The other occasion immediately follows this previous one. It is when Sir Lucius goes out of his way to pick up a quarrel with Captain Absolute. This situation aggravates his melancholy which had previously been caused by Lydia's terminating her love affair with him.

We feel sorry for him when we see him in such a morbid mood which is so unlike him. He is most of the time shown to be a cheerful, happy-go-lucky fellow, full of a zest for life. Sheridan has portrayed the father-son relationship in such a manner that most of the interesting scenes in this play are those in which Captain Absolute confronts his father, Sir Anthony. Most of the time Captain Absolute is anxious to please his father though in his heart of hearts he is determined not to give up Lydia. In their first confrontation, Captain Absolute does not yield to his father's arguments and threats. He says point blank, "Sir, I must tell you plainly that my inclinations are fixed on another – my heart is engaged to an angel." Sir Anthony is furious to hear this while Captain Absolute maintains his cool. Later, when it is known to Captain Absolute that Lydia is the girl, his father has chosen for him, he immediately approaches his father with a feigned repentance and offers to marry any girl of his father's choice, even if it meant marrying the ugliest girl on earth. So, they share a wonderful relation, though Sir Anthony was a dictatorial autocratic kind of parent who demands implicit obedience from his son.

Captain Absolute, the protagonist, has a key role in the play. He is the hero of the play. The Lover-affairs in the play, is the cause of concern because captain absolute assumed a false identity. And ultimately Sheridan brings the story to a happy end at the scene of the duel. All the crises of the play are resolved because of the duel and because of Captain Absolute's participation in it. Thus we can say that he controls the action of the play and brings it to a happy end, after taking the reader through a river of complexities.

3.6.2 MISS LYDIA LANGUISH

Miss Lydia Languish is the heroine of the play. She is exactly what her name suggests. She is a silly romantic being, languishing in her comfortable sofa. She is longing for secret marriage and elopement with a young man of her choice. Miss Lydia Languish in this play has a distinct tendency towards what is called stupid sentimental tenderness. She is portrayed as a whimsical lady of big fortunes. She lives in her own dreamland. She has beauty and wealth, that bring a number of gallant lovers round her like a swarm of flies but she is a lady of peculiar tastes.

At the very outset, Fag describes Lydia as a lady of "a very singular taste" and as a lady who likes her lover better as a half pay Ensign than if she knew he was son and heir to Sir Anthony Absolute, a rich baronet. Her peculiar conception of love and marriage arise out of her excessive reading of cheap romances and novels.

We further get some idea about her peculiarity when we hear of the quarrel that she has had with her lover Beverley. It is a quarrel on the occasion for which she had deliberately and artificially created to know her lover's faith. She is strange enough to have written a letter to herself informing her that Beverley has been wooing another woman. She had then shown the letter to Beverley accusing him of infidelity, pretending to be violently angry with him.

Lydia's idea of love includes all thrills and sensations. It is secret love affair, the marriage without the guardian's consent, elopement and the news of in the papers, forsaking the inheritance due to non compliance of the guardian in the marriage. These are the imbecilities of a spoiled child, that Lydia is carrying in her bones. It is to gratify these whims that Captain Absolute feels compelled to assume the character of Ensign. When Beverley's true identity becomes known to Lydia, she feels terribly disappointed. This is further proof of her foolish sentimentality in love. She turns furious upon learning the truth about captain absolute and dismisses him with curses. She tells Julia that she had been planning one of the most sentimental elopements in order to get married against her aunt's wishes. But,

now she is much grieved to find herself a mere “smith field bargain of at last”. She is highly disappointed to think of a routine marriage in a church. She nostalgically recalls her secret meetings with her lover in the cold January nights when he used to kneel to her in the snow and used to squeeze and cough in such a pathetic manner. The state that she is in gives her an opportunity of sentimental self-pity. But, her description of her trouble is more amusing than pathetic. She cannot reconcile to the fact that instead of a runaway marriage, she will have to marry a man of her aunt’s choice and do it like any other common girl with bridal procession, witnesses and the priest giving a regular licence of marriage. Her dream is brought to an anti-climax.

Lydia poses a problem in her rebellious nature to Mrs. Malaprop. She is never able to reconcile herself to the ideas and views of her guardian-aunt. First of all, her foolish copy-book romances lead her to self made troubles. Her activities are neither her aunt nor Sir Anthony approves of it. Her whimsical nature is attributed to her excessive reading, and because of it, her own view on matrimony clashes with that of her aunt. The fact that Lydia is unable to see her own absurdities while she can perceive the absurdities of Faulkland and Mrs. Malaprop. It is highly contradictory. She describes Faulkland as a capricious, whimsical and jealous man to Julia. She herself was in possession of all these qualities. She does not realize her flaws and in turn makes fun of Julia’s gratitude towards that man for having saved Julia’s life from drowning with reference to that incident. Similarly, she can see the contradiction in Mrs. Malaprop’s falling in love with Sir Lucius, but is unable to see that her own romantic notions about love and marriages. She is herself whimsical and capricious. Finally, ofcourse, she is deceived by everybody, as she herself says to Julia, but later reconciles to a arranged marriage which shows that she had genuine love for Captain Absolute. The truth was that, her foolish romantic notions and light heartedness never gave an opportunity to her to find that out. It is only when she rejects him, that she starts realizing his worth and her own love for him. An indication of this lies in the fact that she half-expected to be reconciled to him by Julia’s admonitions, “I believe in lecture from my grave cousin will make me recall him.” In the end, the news of the duel and the danger to Captain Absolute’s life touches her heart and she at once fully understands her own love for him.

As we all know, Lydia is the female protagonist of the principal love story in the play and, so is indispensable to it. Beside this important role as the heroine of the love story, she also contributes her share to the comedy in the play by her absurd romantic notions. Lydia’s role was no doubt, intended by the author to be a target of satire in the play. It is through her that the author pokes fun at the silly notions which girls used to entertain as a consequence of their reading of romantic novels. It depicts a world much different from the world that

we live in. Another purpose that Lydia serves in the play is that, she offers a contrast to Julia, Sheridan, depicts two love stories in this play and in each of them he depicts one of the lovers as a practical person and the other as whimsical. So Lydia and Faulkland are made to do a similar role while Julia and Captain. Absloute are shown to be the practical ones.

3.6.3 FAUKLAND

Faulkland is the hero of the subordinate love-story in the play, the Julia-Faulkland episode as it is often called by the critics. He is the sentimental lover par excellence, a character quite common in the comedy of humours. There is something eccentric about him as a lover. He is jealous, whimsical, suspicious and over sentimental.

As a lover he is sincerely and deeply in love with Julia. He returns his love with equal faithfulness and warmth. But being oversentimental, he cannot enjoy his good fortune. Even in the smiles and gaiety of Julia, he finds an occasion for distress. Faulkland imagines himself as an ideal lover who is delicately sensitive and the store of his happiness lies in the company of only one person. He tells Captain Absolute that he has many apprehensions regarding Julia's spirits, Julia's health and her safety of life. There is an exaggerated description of his fear for her in his speech. He is afraid that if the wind is keen, some rude blast may effect her beautiful face, also that the heat of noon and the dews of evening may endanger her life. "Every little change in the weather," says Faulkland, "is a cause for an apprehension in his mind lest Julia's health should be affected." He highly speaks of "the mutual tear that steals down the cheek of parting lovers" and opines that no smile should dance on their lips till the lovers meet again. This, the exaggerated description by Faulkland himself is also an evidence of his excessive sentimentality, and it is a source of considerable mirth presented by the dramatist. It is thus evident that by such a portrayal of Faulkland. Sheridan is poking fun at the over-sentimental kind of stupid lover.

The most appropriate description of his character as a lover is given by Lydia. While talking to Julia, she mildly teases her in the following manner:

"Well Julia, you are your own mistress; yet have you, for this long year, been a slave to the caprice, the whim, the jealousy of this ungrateful Faulkland, who will ever delay assuming the right of a husband, while you suffer him to be equally imperious as a lover."

Julia does not accept this assessment of her lover, and she in her turn defends him by describing him as generous proud, and noble, and as being “unused to the fopperies of love”. But, she later admits that Faulkland’s strange temper has caused her many unhappy hurts.

Captain Absolute remarks, he carries with him everywhere “a confounded farrago of doubts, fears, hopes and wishes. His jealousy is fully roused when Bob Acres enthusiastically reports about the bloom and charm and spirits of Julia. On hearing that Julia has been dancing, singing and generally making merry, in his absence, Faulkland feels distressed. When asked by Captain Absolute why he is not happy to know that his beloved Julia has been enjoying excellent health he evaded the question. This is proof of his capriciousness that he wants his beloved to feel as miserable when away from him as he has been feeling while away from her.

His suspicious nature brings to his mind the logic that women often love fortunes and handsomeness of their lover. Even when Julia assures him that none of these causes has ever influenced her love, he does not feel quite at home, for he thinks she might have loved him only out of gratitude for having saved her life. He thus imagines troubles even when there is none. He wants to be convinced that Julia loves him for the sake of love and not for any particular reason. He goes on to explain the reasons for his suspicious and doubtful nature in the following manner;

“All my fretful doubts arise from this. Women are not used to weigh and separate the motives of their affections the cold dictates of prudence, gratitude, or filial duty, may sometimes be mistaken for the pleadings of the heart.”

He offends Julia with his suspicions until she leaves him in tears. Faulkland keeps thinking that she will come back, but when she does not come back, he feels miserable and vows never again to suspect her if she were to come back to him.

He goes to the extent of subjecting his beloved to a test. When he receives a letter from Julia informing him of having forgiven him and her desire to meet him, instead of feeling jubilant, Faulkland once again becomes suspicious because he believes that women should never sue for reconciliation. He then wishes to subject Julia to a test in order to make sure once again that she really loves him. But, she breaks with him in anger on learning that his story of having killed a man in a duel was fiction after all and was invented simply to test her faithfulness. Once again we find Faulkland reproaching himself for his shabby treatment of his beloved, This is how he speaks:

We thus realize that with his caprices he not only tortures himself but also his mistress who has all along been quite patient with him. With repeated effusions of his morbidity and jealous disposition, he often exasperates her.

As Sir Anthony rightly remarks, that all his faults proceed from his “delicacy and warmth of affection.” This is a redeeming feature indeed. Although, it seems throughout that Faulkland is very weak in his will power and is altogether—incurable. But, the fact that he is conscious of his faults and is not slow to blame himself for his suspicions, is yet another redeeming feature of his character. His problem is that, he resolves to mend himself but fails again and again. It is only when Julia once again takes the initiative for a reconciliation. With him, and Sir Anthony recommends his case to Julia, that the two lovers are reconciled and united in wedlock.

There are certain minor qualities of Faulkland which have only been hinted and not elaborated. First of all, he is described as quite a handsome young man, chivalrous enough to have saved a drowning lady’s life at personal risk. He is thought to have been quite a generous and trustworthy friend, since Captain Absolute only confides in him, apart from his servant Fag. He is also generous enough not to take offence at the ridicule which his friend Captain Absolute extracts at his cost. He readily agrees to be Captain Absolute’s proposal despite his agonies. Even Sir Anthony is aware of Faulkland’s inner worth and so finds him worthy of the hand of Julia, therefore helps them in their final reconciliation.

An examination of Faulkland’s character will show Sheridan wants to create such a character. He uses a technique that is traditional in comedy. Every scene in which Faulkland appears is designed to highlight his profound passion. Sheridan probably had a satirical intention in portraying Faulkland, but these scenes show a mingling of the satirical and the sentimental motives. Although Sheridan was believed to have a declared purpose of opposing the sentimental comedy of his time, but with his portrayal of Faulkland, we doubt his purpose. We see that Faulkland’s portrayal is wholly satirical in purpose, and we feel greatly amused by the manner in which Faulkland feels suspicious of his beloved Julia.

He is the sentimental lover. He seems thoroughly disgusting in his sentimentality except when he is excessively so and because amusing. His role in the play is that, he is valuable as a foil to the hero Captain Absolute.

3.6.4 JULIA MELVILLE

Julia is the heroine of the sub-plot of the play. She has been presented as a contrast to the sentimental Faulkland and the romantic heroine of the main plot-Lydia. She is steady and constant in her love for Faulkland. He is capricious, suspicious and sentimental. Julia serves as a foil to the romantic, whimsical and fickle Lydia. She has a feeling of intense love and gratefulness for Faulkland and so she is always patient and forgiving towards the tantrums practised by him on her. Julia's love for Faulkland is of a strange kind. She loves Faulkland with all her heart, despite his faults, and faces the ups and downs in love with a calm and sober mind. Faulkland wrongly suspects that she loves him because of her father's wish, and because of her gratitude for saving her life from being drowned. She does not deny that these factors have naturally strengthened her bond of love. She develops into a typical oppressed heroine, suffering for long the undeserved tortures at the hands of her capricious lover. But, she does not utter a word of complaint. Even when Lydia finds fault with Julia for being "a slave to the caprice, the whim, the jealousy of this ungrateful Faulkland", Julia puts up a spirited defence for her lover, saying, "He is affectionate and ardent and sincere, and as it engrosses his whole soul, he expects every thought and emotion of his mistress to move in unison with his." She is proud of Faulkland because his imperfections arise from 'the ardour of his attachment !'

This forms one of the main characteristics of her nature. She submits without grudging, under the tyranny of Faulkland, whose trials and tests of her sincerity are not only troubling and trying but are a direct and intolerable insult. She repeatedly gives proofs of her sincerity in love and is prepared to go with him anywhere under the sun if that would be of any service to him.

But when Faulkland carries his suspicions too far, even her patience comes to evaporate and she repudiates him with considerable rationality. Her sense of self respect compels her to dismiss him as a lover yet she promises never to accept any other suitor. That indeed is real-love.

She has a lot of commonsense and prudence. She rightly advises Lydia not to reject a sincere lover like Captain Absolute for the simple reason that she will not be able to fulfil her dreams of a runaway marriage in accepting him. She pretends happiness when her lover is away, in order to disguise her sorrows in smiles. She wisely dons the mask, to avoid people from pointing a finger at her lover accusing him of having betrayed her. But Faulkland misunderstands the situation, and likens her happiness in his absence as a treason to constancy.

Julia's reserve in talking about Faulkland to Lydia is further proof of her prudence. Although there is great friendship between Julia and Lydia, and they often speak to each other of their lovers, but Julia exercises a certain reserve in talking to Lydia about her Faulkland. For instance, when Lydia says that Faulkland has been tormenting Julia, Julia denies it and says, "You mistake the cause of my uneasiness. Something has flurried me a little. Nothing that you can guess at."

Julia is like the monument of patience. We have observed Julia's patience in defence of Faulkland in the presence of Lydia despite Faulkland's imperfections. When Faulkland persists in seeking more assurances from her that she loves him truly, she says to him: "O, you torture me to the heart I cannot bear it". But even then she eventually stands by him. Any normal woman, after this scene would have expected a lover to make full amends to her for his shabby conduct. But it is Julia who soon afterwards writes a letter to Faulkland forgiving him completely, expressing a desire to meet him as soon as possible. Her patience in enduring Faulkland's demanding love is often mistaken by readers for lack of self control and self-respect. Julia's patience and her willingness to submit to her lover's wishes, together throw light on her forgiving nature. The scenes in which Julia meets Faulkland fully support the impression that we form about this quality of hers. We find her overwhelmed love with the intensity and ardour of her passion for Faulkland. She often resents his suspiciousness, and feels distressed by his doubts and his skepticism. Her deep feeling rises to the surface, flooding her heart and her soul, and engulfing her whole personality. And so, she immediately forgives him for all his flaws. Even when he torments her, seeking more assurances from her regarding her love for him. She repudiates him with considerable spirit but soon afterwards, she writes a letter to him forgiving him completely and expressing a wish to meet him. Such is her loving and forgiving nature that despite having dismissed him as a lover, the moment she finds her lover involved in a duel, she relents immediately and offers her hand to Faulkland.

We have every hope that by her love and forbearance, she will be able to reform Faulkland after marriage. Julia is the heroine of one of the two love-affairs in the play. Julia-Faulkland love-affair is drawn in parallel to the main love-affair between the two protagonists Lydia and Captain Absolute. She therefore it has an important role in the plot to play. She is however more important from the point of character-portrayal. She, no doubt represents the constant woman who is deeply attached to her lover. She certainly deserves our regard and admiration for having the patience to cater to the whims and caprices of her lover. In this regard, Lydia's assessment of her is very correct for she calls her, "a slave to the caprice, the whim, the jealousy of his ungrateful Faulkland". Julia is thus to some extent, a target of satire. But if we are to look at it another way, we can say that unlike Lydia and Faulkland who are busy weaving cobwebs of doubt and distrust,

she and Capt. Absolute are characters who have not been caricatured, since they are considered to be more realistic and stable. Towards the end of the play, she gets her reward as many others do. Faulkland is at last cured of his suspicions and caprice and she is only too glad to accept the changed man again for she sincerely loves him. And quite in keeping with her grave temperament, Sheridan allows her to mouth the final word, though it is an unpalatable last speech. Her speech is meant to have a moderating effect on all people who weave extravagantly bright visions of future happiness. The impact of the speech is somehow not very strong because of its artificial diction, typical of the sentimental works of the age. But, she manages to cure Faulkland of his suspicious and capricious nature, acting as the wisest counsel and crusader against sentimental love.

3.6.5 SIR ANTHONY ABSOLUTE

Sir Anthony is a stock figure created in the classical comedy—the type of dictator father. His name ‘Absolute’ suggests, he is overbearing and self-willed in his attitude. He has absolute parental authority over his son Captain Absolute. He can never be indulgent with his son as he believes in the principle, “the father to command and the son to obey.” He expects his son to obey him blindly and not reason or argue with him. Sir Anthony tells Mrs. Malaprop about his authoritarianism that, when Captain Absolute was a boy, he was told, “Jack do this”, if he did not, he was knocked down. Even in the matter of his son’s marriage, Sir Anthony would like to impose his own choice on the young man without any regard to the latter’s preference. When the son rejects his father’s proposal, not knowing that the father has chosen the same girl for him, the father is furious at his son’s impertinence. He is enraged too much with his defiant son and threatens the Captain to disinherit and disown him. Sir Anthony gives his son six and a half hours to consider the proposal. He says, that if at the end of that period, his son still persists in his disobedience, he would disown him and never call him Jack again. The intellectual duel between father and son provides one of the most amusing scenes of the play and there is also the finest wit in it. Sir Anthony Absolute is unreasonable and illogical in his wild anger. He hurls all types of abuses and threats upon his son. The son remains calm and quiet all the while. He fumes and frets in his worst temper, not even being aware of what he speaks in his tantrums. While he is all the time shouting he tells his son to be mild, gentle, considerate, meek and cool like himself. He tells his son that he shall not tolerate his mad anger and warns him, “the patience of a saint may be overcome at last. Sir Anthony becomes fire and fury at the slightest provocations and his son’s behaviour infuriates him even further. What makes him a farcical character is the

difference between his claim and conduct. Sir Anthony's absolutism comes out into prominence equally strong in his opinions about female education. In his discourse with Mrs. Meaprop on the subject, he expresses himself in favour of girls being left illiterate : "I'd as soon have them taught the black art as their alphabet." He is of the opinion that all the evils of disobedience and impertinence In Lydia are due to her "diabolical knowledge". Sir Anthony is ironically right, for once, but the absurdity of his generalization, that all evils in women are due to their education, is too dear to be mentioned. Sir Anthony looks upon circulating library as the root of evil, and as places from where all vice is likely to originate. Since, in parental tyranny, Sir Anthony is much ahead of Mrs. Malaprop, he suggests to her a cure for Lydia, that is utterly ruthless.

Sir Anthony is a positive character accustomed to having his own way, violent in temper when crossed. Although he is worked up very soon, he is not malicious at heart. In his heart of hearts he is very much affectionate to his son and is also polite and mannerly to those with whom he comes in contact. He is in a hearty old man with a plenty of zest for life. He speaks with enthusiasm and gusto on all occasions and while he continues fretting and fuming, he says that he is cool and accuses his son of being in ill temper. He is as hot-tempered as he is kind and jolly and his temper cools as fast as it shoots. Even when he discovers his son's disguise, he readily forgets and forgives his misconduct. He asks Mrs. Malaprop also to forgive his son's conduct and unite the unhappy lovers. He is the great compromiser for the unhappy lovers in both the love affairs in the play In fact, he is the instrument of reconciliation and reproachment. He is as soft as cotton when obeyed and as hard as iron when disobeyed. He abuses his son to his heart's content, but the moment he comes before him as a obedient son, he has all sympathy, love and forgiveness for him. Since his parental pride wins, he is out to help his son in. every possible way

Right at the outset of the play, we get this first bit of information about Sir Anthony that he is an old man suffering from gout. He is a good father. His quality of his seen when he pardons his son he didnot disinherit him. In spite of his impatience and hastiness, he is a man with understanding and reason. And all the hasty decisions that he takes, even regarding his son's marriage are out of genuine concerns for his son's welfare. Despite his dictatorial nature, he stands out as an affectionate father willing to forget and forgive his erring child.

He has been shown as one of the wittiest characters of the play. He is smart and cutting in his remarks and gives kick for a kick. His witticism is seen at its best in his wordy duel with his son. When he tells his son that he shall have to marry the girl of his choice, he puts the case forward in a very amusing manner

“Zounds! Sirrah, the lady shall be as ugly as I choose. She shall have a hump on each shoulder, she shall be as crooked as the Crescent; her eye shall roll like the bull’s in Cox’s museum; she shall have a skin like a mummy and the beard of a Jew”

Another amusing speech in the play is when it is revealed to Sir Anthony that his son has been courting Lydia. He says

“Well I am glad you are not the dull, insensible

...

*you pretended to be, however. I’m glad you
have made a fool of your father, you dog Ah,
you dissembling villain ! why, you hypocritical
young rascal”*

However, with the ladies, although he is gently ironical, he never uses his caustic wit. His jokes against Mrs. Malaprop too are not very biting. He says, “Good Sir, I like your spirits, and at night we single lads will drink a health to the young couples, and a husband to Mrs. Malaprop.” After listening to Mrs. Malaprop’s discourse on female education, he comments, “you are a truly moderate and polite arguer.” At the end of the play, when everyone else besides Mrs. Malaprop is happy, he comes to her rescue saying “Come, Mrs. Malaprop, don’t be cast down, you are in your bloom yet.” So, we see that even when he is ironical and sarcastic, he is so, in a mild and gentle manner. Sir Anthony is a true country gentleman, well-bred and business like. He still retains in his old age fine appreciation of female charm and beauty. He tells his son that as a young man he was very romantic, and in order to marry the most beautiful girl he had had a love marriage. He adds that in his youth, he would not have agreed to marry an ugly girl even for a kingdom. Unlike his son, who was pretending to have no problems in marrying an ugly girl, he feels his son is not so much of an intriguer for beauty as he was. Sir Anthony’s description of Lydia’s charms show him in a funny yet sincerely romantic mood.

Sir Anthony’s role in the play is fairly important and if he were to be eliminated, the play would be much poorer. His character is important in the sense of contribution to the comic character of the play. He even lends a high spirit and zest to the two love stories besides helping in the reconciliation of the love affairs. In this regard, he plays a crucial role. He is the one who, by his intervention, prevents the duel between his son and Sir Lucius O’Trigger. He is ironical at times but there is absolutely no malice.

3.6.6 MRS. MALAPROP

She is one of the most famous characters of the stage, who has won immortality. Among all the other characters of the play, she is the most interesting and memorable. Sheridan has appropriately named her 'Malaprop' because of her silly misuse of words. In the play, she is noted for her mis-application and mis-pronunciation of words. This is what she contributes to the comedy in the play. She uses all sorts of words to impress her listeners with her learning and literary tastes. She misuses words that sound similar and yet is proud of her intellectual power and learning. 'This queen of dictionary', is an ignorant, stupid old woman who does not know how to use or pronounce words correctly. She attempts at parading her learning, as part of her inordinate pride, and she never speaks but makes herself ridiculous by a 'derangement of epitaphs'. Her mistakes are the choicest of the language and are the very life of the humour and fun in the play. In other words, *The Rivals* would really go bankrupt without her.

It should be noted that the portrayal of Mrs. Malaprop is not Sheridan's original contribution to English comedy because Mrs. Malaprop had her precursors. But, Sheridan has definitely improved upon previous portrayals of the person and in this play. She stands out as the most famous single character. Mrs. Malaprop's sense of self-importance and vanity finds sundry other expressions also. It is said, that Mrs. Malaprop is fifty already and she is still not tired of the choicest toilet and fashions in clothes, laces and frills. This unsuccessful attempt on her part to live up to the smartness of Bath is indeed very silly and diverting. This attempt at beautifying herself is to some extent excusable but to think of a romantic love affair at this age when she has one foot in the grave is really ridiculous. She is romantic like a young girl of seventeen. She loves to dress up and make herself attractive and presentable to Sir Lucius, which is indeed ludicrous. Towards the end we see that Sir Lucius bluntly ridicules her and offers her to Absolute and Acres.

Mrs. Malaprop is Lydia's aunt and her guardian too. Fag is the one who introduces her to the readers by saying that there is an old tough aunt in the way of Lydia - Beverley love affair. Later we hear Lydia talking about her as one who has been intercepting Beverley's letters written to her. She commands Lydia with unquestioned authority to forget Beverley and accept Captain Absolute in turn. The contradiction in her character lies in the fact that on the one hand she disapproves the love relationship between Beverley and Lydia, while on the other hand she herself indulges in an affair with Sir Lucius, under a false name. This is a proof that she does not practice what she preaches. She strangely criticizes and condemns Lydia for loving a man who has caught her fancy, when she has

herself given her heart to the Irishman who attracted her. A prominent quality in her character is, her stupidity in whatever thing she does or says. This stupidity of hers comes out many times in the forms of unladylike coarseness of conducts. She feels proud in her baseness and she utters her meanness with utter shamelessness to Captain Absolute. The letter in which she was abused by Beverley, she foolishly hands it over to Captain Absolute to read and discuss. Even when Sir Anthony wishes her a husband, Sir Lucius tosses her around, she is rendered an utter simpleton. She did not at all understand that she is being befooled.

It is really amusing to see that with all her coarseness of conduct, she professes the manners and dutifulness to her niece. She always keeps telling her as to what becomes a young woman and what does not. She says to Lydia, "There is nothing on earth so easy as to forget, if a person chooses to set about it," Further elaborating on the point, she says that when her husband died, she soon forgot him as completely as if he had never existed. Mrs. Malaprop holds the stupid opinion that it is best to begin a course of matrimony on a note of aversion.

Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony debate on the question of educating women. Mrs. Malaprop opposes Sir Anthony's view that girls should not be allowed to read at all. She admits that a girl need not be a "prodigy of learning" and that too much learning does not "become a young woman." She however does not quite agree with Sir Anthony and has her own theory of how a girl should be brought up and she explains- at length what kinds of books a young girl should be encouraged to read. As we have seen, she is certainly not in favour of a young girl becoming to learn but she does want a young girl to know something of accounts, geography, correct spelling of words, correct pronunciation and so on. Though Sir Anthony is not convinced by Mrs. Malaprop's arguments, not wanting to prolong the discussion, he agrees with her views.

We have already talked of the contradiction in her character. She comes out as a lady who does not practice what she preaches. She keeps preaching to Lydia to do this and not to do that. She is always busy pointing out to Lydia as to what becomes a women and what is not proper for a women to indulge in. She compartmentalises things into those which men can do and those which women can. She holds a preconceived notion of actions that, become a women and those that do not. On various occasions she tells Lydia that thought does not become a young woman : "I do not know any business you have to think at all." She says, "violent memories dont become a young woman," and "caparisons (comparisons) too don't become a young woman."

The meaning of the word 'Malapropism,' points out the main characteristic of her. Her name consists of the French 'Mal', 'a', and 'propos', which means out of place indicating her inappropriate use of words. She very often is seen to use high sounding, bombastic words, without understanding the meaning for wrong context in which she uses them, and this is what amuses us most about Mrs. Malaprop. She feels proud of what she calls her "nice derangement of epithaph" ("her nice arrangement of epithets".) She indulges in malapropism in the course of the play, as she confuses words that sound similar but have different meanings. For example she uses the word "illiterate" when she means "obliterate"; "extirpate" for "extricate"; "laconically" for "ironically"; progeny" for prodigy and several other such examples. Sheridan Satirises this lady's tendency to misuse words in her endeavour to impress her listeners, with her command of the vocabulary Sheridan becomes quite successful in his description of her. In fact, it is because of this misuse of words that Mrs. Malaprop has become so well-known a character in the history of English drama. She is a typical chaperon of a comic play, who jealously guards her ward, although in her exercise she is neither as cruel nor as strong as Sir Anthony Even when Lydia rebels against her she can at the most ask her to get out of the room. We realize that inspite of all her faults she is a good lady. She is neither malicious nor jealous or greedy of Lydia's money She behaves with Lydia in an inconsiderate manner because of her sincere interest in her welfare. She is Lydia's well-wisher, and so does not want her to marry a poor Ensign.

It is Lydia who is the mischief maker. She is the one who chooses the path of confrontation. Mrs. Malaprop can be called stupid, pretentious, and over-bearing but she is in no way wicked. Although her conduct is farcical at times, but she is not a weather-beaten she- dragon. She is actually a pathetic character—Lydia disobeys her orders, Captain Absolute outwits her in the love-game. Her romance with Sir Lucius too comes to an unpleasant end. She cuts a sorry figure at the end because she is publicly humiliated and is made the but of jokes. She is even tossed by Sir Lucius from one person to the other as if she was a commodity. Captain Absolute passes on Mrs. Malaprop to Bob Acres, who also rejects her. Sir Anthony alone comes to her rescue and assures her that she is still in her youth endowed with the charm to attract people.

Mrs. Malaprop is one of the most famous characters of the English stage, who has won immortality. Her role is significant in terms of contributing humour to the play. The widow looking for yet another husband is standard in comedy; and in the English literary tradition, she seems to be best represented in this drama.

Silt LUCIUS O' TRIGGER

Like Sir Anthony, Mrs Malaprop, Faulkland and Acres, Sir Lucius also has his own humour, caricatured to gain more effect on the stage. He is given a role in the play primarily with the aim of providing humour, since he is gifted with a sense of humour. He has a talent for making witty remarks.

As his name suggests, he is portrayed as an Irishman who gets triggered at the slightest provocation. He is not a coward and is ever willing to risk his life to make his fortune. He is the typical Irish adventurer of his times. He has lost his past glory and fortune but is still proud of his ancestry and their achievements. Although he does not have the means, but he tries to live up to the reputation of his forefathers at least in character and bravery. He also has an eye for a rich and pretty woman in order to rehabilitate himself, and make his financial position sound. And, in order to marry Lydia for her fortune, he bribes Lucy to act as a go-between, who in turn mis-manages his love-intrigue to ultimately betray him.

In everything that Sir Lucius does, he tries to be gentlemanly. He always uses polite and mannerly language and asks Acres to do the same whether it be—in writing the letter of challenge, in taking offence, and in actually inviting the adversary to fight. He uses polite and refined language even when he is face to face with his opponent. He is generous enough to accept Captain Absolute's apology at the last minute and shakes hands with him on learning that his Delia was not Lydia after all.

Sir Lucius is very punctilious about honour, and it is for this reason that he insists upon Acres's sending a challenge to Beverley, who according to Sir Lucius has offered "the greatest provocation in the world" to Acres and is hence guilty of the "most unpardonable breach of friendship". He says

Can a man commit a more heinous offence
against another than to fall in love with the same
woman ? O, by my soul, it is the most
unpardonable breach of friendship.

When Acres refuses to be convinced, he further argues the case urging Acres to send a challenge to Beverley saying

What the devil signifies right when your honour
is concerned? Do you think Achiller, or my little
Alexander the Great ever enquired where the
right lay ? No, by my soul, they drew their

broadswords, and left the lazy sons of peace to settle the justice of it.

As Sir Lucius continues to argue the case, Acres is left with no choice but to agree to Sir Lucius's suggestion. Sir Lucius is equally punctilious in his own case. Imagining that Captain Absolute had insulted him, he takes the earliest opportunity to challenge the captain to a duel. It is proof that the blood-thirsty and bold adventurer in him keeps him ever ready to pick up quarrels and light duels. He is pugnacious by nature. Acres' servant David rightly calls him bloodthirsty because the proposed duel is the result of his brain. It is he who instigates Acres to fight a duel with Ensign Beverley in order to save his and his ancestor's honour. In a similar fashion, he too picks up a quarrel with Captain Absolute. When the Captain asks him to explain his motives for the duel, he calmly replies, "We should only spoil it by trying to explain it." Lastly, even when the quarrel has been made up between Acres and Beverley and attempts are being made to pacify him, he does not readily agree to withdraw. He wants the duel to be held because he takes a morbid pleasure in fighting and seeing others fight.

Sir Lucius projects himself as a very convincing character. This is seen in the way he convinces Acres, who is a coward, to fight to save his honour. It is indeed an incredible effort on Sir Lucius' part to put fire into cowardly Acres. Often when his cowardliness springs up, even on the verge of beginning of the fight, he keeps reminding him of his honour and convinces him to stay put at the place of the duel.

Even when he picks up a quarrel with Captain Absolute, he manages to convince him to accept the challenge to the duel. When the Captain asks him to explain his motives for the duel, Sir Lucius Calmly replies, "We should only spoil it by trying to explain it." Again, when Captain Absolute expresses complete surprise, Sir Lucius persists that there is a difference of opinion between them, suggesting that they should settle the matter through a duel, thus, leaving captain Absolute no choice but to agree to fight a duel.

Sir Lucius also conducts himself in such a manner as if he were a sincere lover. He is so convincing that he can be called an expert in the art of befooling others. He kisses Lucy fifty times to impress upon her his ardent love for Lydia, and tells her that Lydia will like him more for his immodesty.

He is sarcastic in his allusions to Mrs. Malaprop, who has been instrumental in his discomfiture. He calls her the queen of dictionary and mistress of language and humorously criticizes her intellectual barrenness. He offers her to Absolute saying, "since you have taken the lady (Lydia) from me, I will give you my Delia into the bargain." Absolute in turn offers her to Acres, thus they both

dissociate themselves from her completely. He knows that she is stupid and senseless, and so he does not even show formal courtesies to her. He calls her the infatuated old woman, which wins him the curt epithet of a barbarian from Mrs. Malaprop. It is only in his behaviour towards Mrs. Malaprop that he shows some lack of polish. And this is probably because of the fact that his dreams have been thwarted owing to her.

Sir Lucius is sick of Acres' cowardliness and sarcastically asks him if there is only little service that Sir Lucius can render to him, in case he were to be killed. Sir Lucius however goes on to ask whether Acres would like his body to be picked and sent home or whether he would like it to be buried in the graveyard nearby. This entire episode is very amusing, because of the intended sarcasm.

In spite of his cunning, Sir Lucius is a lovable character. He has a fairly substantial role to play. Firstly, he plays the role of a suitor of Lydia, although the latter is not even aware of it. As a character playing this role, he feels it necessary to challenge Captain Absolute to a duel who is his competitor for Lydia's hand. Secondly, he plays the role of a clever instigator. He instigates Acres to Challenge Beverley to a duel, and in the course of it Acres's cowardice is exposed to the readers. Thirdly, he is involved in a complication which develops as a consequence of Mrs. Malaprop's seeking a husband for herself. Since she is the one who has been writing love-letters to him under the feigned name of Delia, she is attracted by this man, although he is not even aware of the affair. Lastly, Sir Lucius plays an important role as a comic character who makes us laugh at each appearance.

Sheridan probably intended a satire on Irishmen by such a portrayal of Sir Lucius, although there is no malice behind this satiric portrayal.

BOB ACRES

Acres is among the funniest characters of the play almost verging on the farcical. As the name implies, he is a variation on the bumpkin trying to become a city beau. He is essentially a foolish but honest and innocent country squire who aspires for being a man of fashion. He is awkward and good-natured. In his attempt to appear dandy, he has developed "an odd kind of a new method of swearing." He has taken dancing lessons but somehow his country feet do not lend themselves to eighteenth century dances. He is the type of character that had graced since long the classical comedies.

Till Captain Absolute is officially brought as a suitor for Lydia, it is Acres' trial to win Lydia's love. In spite of Mrs. Malaprop's favour, he fails in his attempt to woo and win Lydia. He foolishly attributes this failure of his to his backwardness

in fashion as he is most of the time dressed in his country dress of a fox-hunting squire. So, in order to make himself presentable, he at once gives up his country dress and dresses himself in the latest fashions of Bath. He gets his hair curled and engages a tutor to teach him French dances, though he is not able to cope up with it because his feet are immune to country dances alone and cannot adapt to other foreign dances. Like the other eighteenth century fashionable gentleman who swore with zeal all sorts of oaths, Acres too copies them most originally and abundantly. Also, since his oaths are always appropriate to the context and occasion, he calls them sentimental swearing or oaths referential. Now, his oaths and swaggering go together. He realizes that if he has to maintain the standard of a gentleman, he must keep up their code of honour. So, when he is dismissed, he is instigated by Sir Lucius to take an offence at Beverley's conduct and challenge him to a duel. This poor country squire burns his boats all for love, but does not win his dreams girl in return. It is he who fancies himself to be in love with Lydia while she all the time looks at him with disgust. So, his attempts to please her are all in vain.

For the readers and audience, Acres is thoroughly interesting, and boisterously amusing. With his oaths and swaggerings he provides a feast of fun. There is in Acres an odd combination of vanity and extreme simplicity, of self-conceit and extreme modesty, of a witty manner of speaking and a certain stupidity. These qualities of his, together contribute to the humour in the play. He gives evidence of a ready wit when he says in the context of dressing up fashionably : "I shall straightaway cashier the hunting- frock and render my leather breaches incapable. My hair has been in training some time." He again appears as a comic figure in the two scenes between Acres and his servant David. Acres amuses the readers by boasting of his courage and valour. David tries his best to dissuade him from fighting a duel, but Acres swears by "God's crowns and laurels" that his honour demands that he must fight. In the light of what happens later at the place of the duel where, Acres betrays these profession .of courage and bravery, these declarations of his brave spirit are truly comic. The way he challenges Beverley also adds to the humour in the play. When Sir Lucius advises him to challenge his rival to a fight, Acres replies that there has neither been any provocation nor any breach of friendship. On being inspired by Sir Lucius, he says : "Your words are a grenadier's march to my heart I certainly do feel a kind of valour rising as it were—a kind of courage, as I may say" He amuses us still further when Sir Lucius tries to instruct him in the rules of fighting a duel. On seeing people coming near him, he confesses to Sir Lucius that his valour is "sneaking off" and "oozing out from the palms of his hands." The effect created by the use of such words is indeed comic. And he is the one who had asked Captain Absolute to scare his rival by saying that he was "a determined dog" and "fighting Bob", who killed a

man every week, so that the opponent would not come to fight. On the whole we can say that the character of Acres is introduced in the play mainly to amuse the readers, and we laugh at his very appearance.

Acres is essentially a coward and he would not have found the insult of dismissal by Lydia enough offence for a duel if he could have exercised his independent judgement. He is instigated by Sir Lucius to agree to challenge Beverley for the sake of his honour. But, he is scared to hear of his death and his last wishes being talked about by Sir Lucius. It is at the King's Mead Fields, that he is revealed in his true colours. As the time for the duel draws nearer, he gets more and more nervous. Learning that Beverley is none other than his friend Captain Absolute, he heaves a sigh of relief, for getting a chance to extricate himself from the trying situation. He wittily remarks that he is prepared to remain a bachelor rather than be killed in the game to get a wife. The height of his cowardice is seen in his proud declaration that he would have happily fought Beverley had he been, someone else than his friend Captain Absolute. His empty boasts not only throw light on his cowardice but provide amusement too.

Acres' role in the play is important in so far as, being a suitor of Lydia's, he adds to the complication that has been created by Captain Absolute's having assumed a different role and personality. A new interest is added to the play by his decision to fight a duel with Beverley. Above all, his portrayal is such that he stands out as the most interesting character in the play. He is essentially a fool and has not the capacity to understand that he is being befooled and overreached. He is shown to be too poor a judge of character. In fact, he is nose-led by others. He is befooled by Captain Absolute who enjoys much laughter at his expense.

LUCY

Lucy is a cunning and She is the feminine counterpart of Fag. She is the maid servant in Mrs. Malaprop's household where she serves both Mrs. Malaprop and Lydia. She is the confidante of her mistress' secrets like Fag, but unlike him she can not be trusted with them nor does she care whether they flourish or are thwarted. She believes in exploiting her employers, and others too, to the utmost, her motive being to extract as much money from them as possible even if it requires adoption of unfair means. She is expert in the art of deceiving others and betrays lovers' confidence without being suspected. Unlike Fag, she cares little for her mistress or other lovers, and her own interest is the uppermost in her mind. In a word she can be described as unreliable.

Lucy is actually a wolf in sheep's clothing. She plays false to those who rely upon her, and laughs heartily at the fact that the so-called superiors believe her to be a simpleton. Mrs. Malaprop lives under an illusion and "sure, Lucy can't have betrayed me! —No, the girl is such simpleton. Had she been one of your artificial over; I should never have trusted her."

Lucy is really proud of herself for having deceived each and every one (Who had confided in her) without ever letting anyone discover herself. She receives money from Lydia and Captain Absolute to keep silent over their secret romance and from Mrs. Malaprop to do the same as well as to tell her the secrets of others. Even from the cunning, old Sir Lucius, she manages to squeeze money by duping him into the belief that the 'Delia' who is writing letters to him is Lydia—the niece and not her aunt. And from Mr. Acres, she gets money and gifts for carrying some letters which were to be delivered to Lydia but she never delivered them to her.

As far as Lucy's services are concerned, she gets books for Lydia from the circulating libraries without the knowledge of Mrs. Malaprop who would never approve the books that Lydia was fond of reading. And Lucy's services to Mrs. Malaprop include carrying love-letters from her to Sir Lucius O'Trigger, the Irish baronet. She draws money from Lydia promising her assistance in her elopement with Beverley, and at the same time, she betrays this plan of elopement of Mrs. Malaprop and extracts money from her too.

Her encounter with Sir Lucius projects another quality of her character. While she delivers the letter from Mrs. Malaprop to Sir Lucius, convincing him that it was from Lydia, she shows herself to be quite a sprightly woman who would not mind being kissed by Sir Lucius. She probably must have encouraged Sir Lucius to kiss her but shows apparent displeasure at being kissed by him. And immediately after the encounter; she meets Fag to whom she reveals the fact that it was not Lydia but Mrs. Malaprop who had written the letter to Sir Lucius. She also gives him the information that there is a new rival for Beverley since Sir Anthony had proposed his son, Captain Absolute, as a would-be husband for Lydia.

Lucy is important to the play for she entangles the plot by her lies and by acting as a go-between among lovers. It is she who informs Fag about Sir Anthony's proposal for Lydia. Captain Absolute is overwhelmed to hear this and prepares to offer apologies to his father for his past mis-conduct. Thus it is Lucy's information that brings about a reconciliation between the father and the son. It is also because of her that Mrs. Malaprop intercepts Beverley's letters written to Lydia, thus she is also the one responsible for the confrontation between the niece and the aunt. The duel also takes place, partly because of her because she

makes Acres believe that Ensign Beverley is responsible for his failure in love, and so Bob Acres vows to take revenge upon his rival. Her role is important in the sense of complicating the situation and she is made to quit the scene quite early in the play depriving her readers of her pranks and tricks.

FAG

In the very first scene, we are introduced to Fag, Captain Absolute's confidant. He presents himself as a fairly intelligent fellow endowed with the ability to talk copiously and persuasively. He is the stock figure of comedy since Plautus, the faithful servant trying to serve his master's interests in every possible way. He is a little roguish and does indulge in lies at times, but it is excusable since he means no harm at least to his master. He knows everything about Absolute-Lydia love-affair-the fact that his master is courting her under a feigned name and personality. Although he lets this secret out to Thomas, the coachmen, but he requests him not to pass the informations further to anyone else. Fag stands but as a trusted servant and a faithful friend.

Fag provides quite a bit of humour in the play. He attempts to copy his master's elegance, smartness, fashions and wit, and imitates him in season and out of season. He describes Bath to Thomas in such a manner as if he were himself the Lord of Bath. He talks of the entertainments, pleasures and concert of Bath as if he himself had been a part of these festivities. He goes on to boast his superiority before Thomas, who in turn is completely overwhelmed by him. Fag does not shake hands with Thomas with his gloves on, and does not even wear the wig any more because he is polished and up-to-date with fashions.

Later in the play, Fag gives an amusing account to his master:

Upon my credit, Sir, were I in your place and found my father such very bad company, I should certainly drop his acquaintance.

And when Captain Absolute scolds him for making such statements, he rightly, says :

When one is vexed by one person, to revenge one's self on another, who happens to come in the way, is the vilest injustice

And interestingly enough, the truth of this statement is justified in what he says the very next moment to the errand boy who comes to inform him that he is wanted by his master. Fag scolds the boy saying

Well, you little dirty puppy, you need not bawl so you impudent

Jackanapes! Am I to be commanded by you too ?

You little, impertinent, insolent, kitchen-bred.

Towards the end, he is shown to amuse his audience by his circumlocutory manner of talking. While professing to give, Mrs. Malaprop the desired information of where the duel was to take place, without any delay, he considerably delays giving the information. He does not know how tediously impatient he has made them. He does so unintentionally, because he cannot change his style of speaking, which has become a habit of his. And as regards the place of the duel, he tells Mrs. Malaprop that he can find the spot of the duel by hearing the shot of the pistols. What we realize in the course of the play is that he is a gay and merry character, very much like his master, who is capable of contributing to the humour the play.

Fag is Captain Absolute's selfless well-wisher. He gives evidence of his intelligence and ingenuity, when he invents a convincing lie to save the Captain from his impatient father. He informs Sir Anthony that the Captain has come to Bath 'to recruit' and supports this lie with some concrete facts which are also of his invention. He also entreats his master to keep up his lie in case. Sir Anthony cross-verified with him, the purpose of his visit to Bath. Not wanting his lie to be discovered, he tells his master, "Though I never scruple a lie to serve my master, yet it hurts one's conscience to be found out." This is proof that he serves his master's interests in every possible way. He is the one who ingeniously extracts the relevant information regarding Lydia from Lucy and passes it to his master. Lucy informs Fag that Sir Anthony had proposed his son for Lydia, and when this information is passed to Captain Absolute, he sees him delighted beyond measure. Fag keeps a constant watch on the interests of his master and alongwith David. It becomes instrumental in saving him from the dire consequences of the duel.

Fag plays an important role as a source of amusement and partly as a source of information to us. He is the one who introduces the characters to the audience by way of conversing with Thomas, the coachman of Sir Anthony Absolute. In the opening scene, he informs us that Captain absolute is masquerading as Ensign Beverley to win Lydia's hand in marriage. He familiarises us with Lydia's peculiar temperament as well. He plays an important role as an informant. He informs Captain Absolute of his father's arrival, and vice-versa. Later in the story, he is one who informs the ladies of the scheduled duel, in which their lovers were participating. In all these cases, the manner in which he conveys the information is really very amusing. So, his main role is to add to the comic effect of the play.

BLOCK-III (Restoration and Modern Drama)
PART-II (*Pygmalion*)

**Unit 1: Introduction to Contemporary Drama with
reference to George Bernard Shaw :**

Contents:

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction: A brief survey on the main trends of Contemporary English Drama
- 1.2 Introduction to George Bernard Shaw as a playwright
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- 1.4 George Bernard Shaw as a propagandist and social reformer
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- 1.5 Let us sum up
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1.0 OBJECTIVES:

These are the main objectives of this unit that will help you to

- Analyse the nature of contemporary English drama and the transition that have taken place in the genre of drama till the modern period.
- Discuss George Bernard Shaw as a playwright, his literary works with special reference to his play *Pygmalion*.
- Explain Shaw as a propagandist and social reformer.

**1.1 INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF SURVEY ON THE
MAIN TRENDS OF CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH
DRAMA**

From the dramatic point of view, the first half of the nineteenth century was almost completely barren. Many of the major poets had tried drama, but none of them had achieved any success. The professional theatre of the period was in a low state. Among the respectable middle classes, it was despised as a

place of vice. Audiences did nothing to raise the standard, which remained deplorably low. Toward the middle of the century, we can trace the development of Realistic drama¹. This movement towards realism received considerable impetus from the work of T. W. Robertson, a writer of comedies, who introduced in his plays the idea of a serious theme underlying the humour, and characters and dialogue of a more natural kind. Robertson's chief plays were *Society*, *Caste* and *School*. Then there was Henry Arthur Jones and Arthur Wing Pinero who did much to introduce realism into English drama. Their names are also associated with the rise of new Comedy of Manners, a genre which had fallen to decay since the days of Sheridan.

It was not until the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the influence of Ibsen was making itself strongly felt, and Shaw produced his first plays, that the necessary impetus was there to use the serious drama for a consideration of social, domestic, or personal problems. A period so keenly aware of social problems was an admirable time for the rise of the drama of ideas. In the history of the realistic prose-drama, Ibsen and then Shaw, Galsworthy, and Granville-Barker were of paramount importance, and they did much to create a tradition of natural dialogue. But it was mostly Ibsen's influence which established drama of ideas as the popular drama of the early twentieth century. Ibsen had taught men that drama, if it was to live a true life of its own must deal with human emotions, with things near and dear to ordinary men and women. Hence melodramatic romanticism and the treatment of remote historic themes alike disappeared in favour of a treatment of actual English life, first of aristocratic life, then of middle class lives, and finally of labouring conditions. So far as choice of subject matter is concerned, the break between the drama of the romantic period and the naturalistic drama of the twentieth century is complete.

With the treatment of actual life, the drama became more and more a drama of ideas, which are sometimes veiled in the main action, and are sometimes didactically set forth. These ideas were for the most part revolutionary, so that the drama came to form an advanced battleground for a rising school of young thinkers. Revolt took the form of reaction to past literary models, to current social conventions, and to the prevailing morality of Victorian England. Romantic love, too came in sharp attacks. New investigations into the meaning of sex, which gave to the nineteenth century the philosophy of Schopenhauer² and to the twentieth that of Freud, brought men to believe no more in love as it was expressed by their forefathers, but in what Bernard Shaw has styled the Life Force³.

Increasingly, the dramatists loved to make Life and Nature play their great parts on the stage. The desire for liberty in domestic and in moral circles

was paralleled by the desire for liberty in social life. Suddenly the playwrights became aware of the depressing circumstances in which the poor are fated to dwell; they viewed the squalor and the misery of the cities; they looked around and saw the terror of modern civilisation. The class-war, which had found its expression in actual life, was freely dealt with by the newer school, cynically, yet profoundly by men such as Mr. Bernard Shaw and by Mr. Galsworthy.

There is a tendency among the dramatists of this age to make their protagonists not men, but unseen forces. Social forces are used as dramatic personages for the purpose of making wider and larger the sphere of drama. This tendency is most pronounced in the plays of Mr. Galsworthy. It is one of the chief tendencies which separated the earlier romantic theatre from the later naturalistic play. Moreover, another demand of the age is that the plays should be satiric. Satire will always flourish in a society which has become over-civilised, where the artificial life has driven men emotionally and morally, and as a result they are cut off from the elemental conditions and primitive impulses. All signs indicate that the form of satire will continue to be a marked feature of modern drama.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AS A PLAYWRIGHT

The name of George Bernard Shaw ranked as one of the most famous dramatists in English literature. He was the greatest of many Irishmen who had written fine plays in the English language. He was born in Dublin on 26 July 1856. His father George Carr Shaw's family had been small landowners in Ireland since the late seventeenth century, yet G. B. Shaw's father later on managed to become a minor official in Dublin law courts. But after a few years, he retired on a small pension and went into business unsuccessfully as a corn merchant. George Carr Shaw married the daughter of an Irish landowner, who soon found out that her husband was a drunkard and no longer capable of supporting the family and his three children, George Bernard Shaw and his two sisters.

As a boy, Shaw loved to acquaint himself with the Irish National Gallery to study the pictures. He also learned much good operatic music from his mother who had a remarkably good singing voice. When he was sixteen, his mother and sisters left Dublin and went to live permanently in London, where Mrs Shaw supported herself and her daughters by giving music lessons and singing at concerts. Shaw's mother having gone to London, he was left alone with his father and he worked as clerk in a Dublin estate agent's office. There his efficiency soon got him promotion to the position of a cashier. Four years of employment were enough for him. Therefore Shaw who was much determined to be a writer resigned the

post and in 1876 followed his mother to London. There he developed an extraordinary independence of mind and spirit which enabled him to look upon mankind and its affairs without being swayed either by custom or by other people's conventional ideas of right and wrong.

The important events for Shaw in his years of struggle were his meetings with people and his discovery of ideas. When Shaw himself turned to the writing of plays, he heard with the inner ear of a musician the words that he set down to be spoken by the actors, and his sentences consequently run with a rhythmical ease that makes them easy and pleasant to speak and hear. It is for this reason that the many very long speeches in Shaw's plays are able to hold our attention. But very soon Shaw found it very difficult to live by writing, and for the first ten years he had to rely mainly upon his mother for food and lodging. Yet during those years he was laying the foundations of his career, joining political societies and addressing public meetings. One day in September 1884 he went to a hall in the City of London to hear a lecture by the American economist Henry George (author of a well-known book *Progress and Poverty*, published in 1879), of whose speech he later declared to have changed the whole current of his life. Henry George advocated that national revenue should be raised by single tax on land values, instead by numerous taxes on a variety of things. George's lecture converted Shaw to Socialism, which later on inspired him to join the newly founded Fabian Society. The Fabians wanted to bring about a gradual evolutionary change, not a sudden and violent revolutionary one, from capitalism to socialism, and they had a powerful influence on British political life during the next forty or fifty years. Round about the time Shaw joined the Fabian society he also met Mrs. Annie Besant, whose ardent support of independence for India did much to make the British public aware that the Indian peoples' desire for political freedom could not be ignored. Mrs. Besant was a great admirer of Shaw, and she soon joined him as a member of the Fabian society, until her enthusiasm and energies were diverted to support Theosophy. She made herself the English leader of the theosophists and strengthened her ties with India through the theosophists there.

In his early years as a socialist Bernard Shaw believed that if the condition of civilised societies was to be improved, it must be done by legislation aiming at equality reducing in various ways the fortunes of the rich in order to help and uplift the poor. Though he continued to preach equality for the remainder of his long life, as he grew older he trusted less in the power of Acts of Parliament to increase human welfare and happiness. Shaw believed that the first thing required in the making of a good society is not so much good laws as good men and women—men and women, that is, who are righteous in spirit and not merely well-intentioned and kind hearted. Good people will make good laws, but good laws passed by a few do not necessarily make a good society.

While Shaw was still a boy, he had abandoned the Christian religion as it was practised by the Churches, which he believed had strayed far from the teachings of Christ. But though he would not call himself a Christian, many of his strongest convictions and most of his personal conduct were those of a religious man. His sense of the sacredness of life, animal as well as human; his purity of living—he ate no flesh, drank no alcohol, smoked no tobacco; his kindness and generosity to his fellows (though he opposed charity on the ground that it was usually only a cheap substitute for social justice); his insistence that it is the duty of all men to strive to leave the world a better place than they found it, to hand on to future generations the torch of life burning more brightly—all these beliefs, though Shaw would have claimed that they were based on reason not on faith, were so powerful in him as a guide to conduct that they had the force of a religion. Moreover, he became a vegetarian when he was twenty-five. His reading of the works of the English poet Shelley had some influence in leading him to refrain from eating meat, but the stronger motive was his deep feeling that ‘animals are our fellow creatures’, not to be slain for human food.

By 1890, his knowledge of contemporary economic matters was considerable, and it was controlled by a comprehensive philosophic outlook. Like his friends he envisaged a better world to be brought into being by the cooperative efforts of realistic thinkers activated by a selfless love of humanity. This lofty moral idealism had, at first, no religious basis, but it was not long before he found a belief which lent it a strong support. In the writings of Samuel Butler, he saw an escape from the Darwin’s⁴ theory of evolution which made chance, not purpose, the determining factor, and when in 1891, he came to know the thought of Nietzsche⁵, he realised that he had already been thinking in terms of a purposive Life Force behind the working of the universe.

Politics and journalism occupied Shaw until 1898, when he reached the age of forty-two. His first attempts at creative literary work produced five unsuccessful novels between 1879 and 1883, and in 1885 he made his first attempt to write a play, but left it unfinished. Seven years later he completed it and on 9 December 1892 it was performed in London. The play is *Widowers’ Houses*, dealt with the evils of London slums, in which at that time many filthy and decaying houses were owned by land-lords who lived at ease elsewhere on the rents squeezed from poor and wretched tenants. That Shaw chose the drama as the means to criticise and educate society was due to a most happy combination of experience, coincidence and chance. His own experience had taught him that he had no promising career in novel writing. It may well seem now a destined coincidence that, just when Shaw was approaching the time when he must find a channel for his enormous vitality, the plays of Ibsen became known to him. It was more or less a result of chance that, when he had finished his *Quintessence of*

Ibsenism (1891), he had ready with him the first draft of a play, which had been laid aside since 1885. The dramatic critic William Archer had then asked him to write the dialogue for an adaptation of a French play, but had rejected Shaw's unfinished attempt. Yet perhaps the predominating influence in determining him to turn to the drama was the example of Ibsen; perhaps his love of debating influenced him towards choosing the kind of play in which the characters undertake this dual task of proposer and opposer. At any rate, taking up this early effort in 1892, he made it into *Widower's Houses*, and thereafter, for nearly sixty years, with unflagging energy, he made the drama peculiarly his own province.

In 1898, Shaw published his first collection of plays, entitled as *Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant* in two volumes. These plays are significant as they brought into the literary world a new and powerful genius whose main purpose was to shake people out of their social complacencies and beliefs. This is so because Shaw has been successful in exploiting with the unusual effect the medium of drama for shattering a number of social, economic and political doctrines.

With the publication of *Man and Superman* in 1903, Shaw attained his full stature as a dramatist. In the character of Henry Straker, the chauffeur, it introduced a new type of working man who understood and delighted in modern machinery, and was destined to be more important in the technological age than approaching than the landed aristocracy who had for centuries been the ruling class. This play was a tremendous success especially in New York, and later in England. This was the first full dress exposition of his philosophy of life. In 1904, he came with another of his well known plays, *John Bull's Other Island*, which portrays how Irishman looks at England. From this onwards, Shaw came to be recognised as a veteran dramatist of the highest calibre, a great force in the literature of the day. Plays flowed from his pen endlessly and very soon he became almost a literary institution.

In characterisation, Shaw first seemed to use merely conventional methods. He studied the conventional conception of a character as it appeared on the stage and in the minds of the public, and then inverted it for the purpose of awakening the people out of their lethargy in thought. Moreover, the satiric effect of his characterisation was tremendously significant. Shaw also departed from the contemporary scene to portray historical figures. The nineties had almost worshipped a romantic conception of Napoleon, and so in his *The Man of Destiny* Shaw presented a satiric portrait of the young Bonaparte which mocks at grandeur and idealisation.

It is often said that the characters in his plays are merely mouthpieces for Shaw's personal opinions, but this cannot be true, because in each of his plays the various characters put forward opinions which conflict with each other, and

Shaw leaves the reader to decide what is right. In the play *Man and Superman*, the glance at Act III introduces the readers to the kind of dream that happening to some of the characters who appear in the first two acts. Act III introduces three persons from the old Spanish legend of Don Juan—Juan himself; Donna Anna, one of the many women he loved and betrayed; and the ghost of Anna's father, whom Don Juan had killed in a duel. They meet and converse with the Devil in hell. In the "Don Juan in Hell" scene, the Devil tries to convince the others that human beings are so stupid and bad that nothing can save them from destruction. Don Juan claims that on the contrary that there is in Man a spirit that inspires him to struggle upward towards the evolution of the Superman, who will be far wiser and better than Man is now. That spirit is named as 'the Life Force' in Bernard Shaw's plays.

Shaw was always deeply interested in the *sound* of words as well as in their sense and meaning. As a young man he learned shorthand and always wrote his plays in it for his secretary to type out in longhand. This choice of shorthand as a working language was due both to its time-saving advantages and to its being based on phonetics, which always uses the same symbol for the same spoken sound. Ordinary written English is extremely illogical in spelling, a confusing variety of different sounds being represented by the same letters, e.g., cough=kof, plough= plow, dough= doh etc. This makes English harder to learn and use than it might be if a separate letter or symbol were used for every sound. Shaw spent a good deal of time trying to persuade English people to adopt an enlarged alphabet. He in this context wrote one of his most popular plays *Pygmalion* (1912), on the subject of correct pronunciation, and he directed that after he died a considerable part of the large fortune he left should be used to finance any genuine scheme for bringing into common use his enlarged alphabet and reformed spelling. But the British have so far shown no inclination to adopt Bernard Shaw's system.

Glimpses of the religious side of Shaw's nature appear in the majority of his plays, and very clearly in *Saint Joan*, where he took Joan of Arc both as a heroine of history and as a heroine of faith. She helped to free the land of France from the English armies in the fifteenth century, and she would obey only the voice of God which, she declared, spoke to her privately. She therefore refused to submit to the authority of priests and princes when they wanted her to behave contrary to what she believed God had told her, and she was burned as a heretic, as Shaw himself probably would have been if he had lived in Joan of Arc's century, for he had the same stubborn belief in the right of individual judgement based on the voice of conscience.

Shaw had a great interest in political affairs. His name therefore certainly be remembered in the future much more by his plays than by his ideas on

government and public affairs. He wrote fifty plays, both long and short, but his other writings (which include *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* and *Everybody's Political What's What*) are of much greater total length. The Prefaces which he add to most of his plays when they came to be printed are among the best prose essays that can be found anywhere in English literature, but their connection with the plays to which they are attached is often slight.

Shaw died in 1950, in his ninety-fifth year, having produced his last important play, *The Apple Cart*, some twenty years before, in 1929. The height of his fame was reached with *Saint Joan* in 1923, and it is most probable that this and several other of his plays will always be more highly thought of than *Back to Methuselah* (1922), which he himself regarded as his masterpiece.

1.2 Table of Important Dates in the life of Bernard Shaw

1856	Born year of Bernard Shaw. His birth place is Dublin
1876	His departure to London to live with his mother
1879-83	During this period, he wrote five novels. They are <i>Immaturity</i> (1879), <i>Irrational Knot</i> (1880), <i>Love Among the Artists</i> (1881), <i>Cashel Byron's Profession</i> (1882), and <i>An Unsocial Socialist</i> (1883)
1884	Fabian society formed and Shaw was elected as its member
1890	Quintessence of Ibsenism
1892	Shaw's first play <i>Widowers' Houses</i> produced
1894	Shaw's famous plays <i>Arms and the Man</i> and <i>Candida</i> were produced
1895	Shaw's another play <i>Mrs. Warren Profession</i> come into forefront but it was banned. Then again it was produced in 1902
1895	<i>The Sanity of Art</i>
1897	<i>You Never Can Tell</i> , Shaw's most underrated comedy
1898	Shaw married Charlotte Payne-Townshend
1901-03	<i>Man and Superman</i> produced with which began Shaw's greatest period. This is the first play to have a full scale Shavian preface

1904-07	Vedrenne and Granville-Barker Court Theatre productions of Shaw, Shakespeare and Euripides which established Shaw's permanent theatrical reputation
1904	<i>John Bull's Other Island</i>
1905	<i>Major Barbara</i>
1911	<i>Androcles and the Lion</i>
1912	<i>Pygmalion</i>
1914	<i>Commonsense About the War</i>
1921	<i>Back to Methuselah</i>
1923	<i>Saint Joan</i>
1925	Awarded Nobel Prize for Literature
1928	<i>The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism</i>
1929	<i>The Apple Cart</i>
1943	Mrs. Shaw died
1947	Wrote his last complete play at the age of 91: <i>Buoyant Billions</i>
1950	Shaw died at his home in Ayot, St. Lawrence, November 2 nd .

1.3 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AS A PROPAGANDIST AND SOCIAL REFORMER

Shaw's fundamental aim in his plays is the bettering of the lot of humanity by subjecting accepted conventions and institutions to the cold, searching light of his penetrating intellect. All his plays are about some important aspect of contemporary social life or some important social evil or social institution which he considers an evil, and which is scrutinised with courage and determination. Shaw's play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is designed to draw the attention of the public to its own responsibility for prostitution; *Widowers' Houses* is directed towards slum landlordism. He calls *Arms and the Man* an "anti-romantic comedy" and uses it to expose the hollowness of romantic love and the glorification of war and soldiering. Candida, the heroine of his play *Candida* is an answer to the pessimists as well as to the "majorful man". In such plays as *The Man of Destiny* and *Caesar and Cleopatra*, he subjects our heroes to the test of commonsense and shows that they are enjoying a place in history disproportionate to the value of their contribution. His famous play *Pygmalion* embodies the criticism of the hollowness of social and class distinctions. *Getting Married* embodies his criticism

of the marriage system and in *Major Barbara*, we find his criticism of the capitalist economic and social system.

The most important element in a Shawian drama is its discussion of some important social problem. His dramas are drama of ideas. The materials of his plays is the mental substance in which modern life is lived. Since Shaw writes plays in order to propagate his views, in order to convert and convince, he uses all the tools of argument and weapons of assertion which can produce conviction. His directness, his resourcefulness in illustration, his command over metaphor and simile, his power of marshalling facts and ordering argument, his exaggeration, his paradox, his shocks and surprises, his aphorism, his sarcasm and irony etc., are all intended to drive his point home.

Check Your Progress Questions-I

1. Find the group of contemporary dramatists of Bernard Shaw from the following list:
 - (a) Congreve, Wycherley, Etherege, Aphra Behn
 - (b) Galsworthy, Henry Granville Barker, John Masefield, Oscar Wilde
 - (c) Shakespeare, Marlowe, Dryden, Ben Jonson
 - (d) T. S. Eliot, Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Harold Pinter
2. Under whose influence, the Drama of Ideas as the popular drama of the early twentieth century has been established.
 - (a) Shaw (b) Yeats (c) Ibsen (d) Galsworthy
3. Who among these is associated with Fabian society?
 - (a) Lady Gregory (b) John Osborne (c) Harold Pinter (d) Shaw
4. Who propounded of the Theory of Life Force?
 - (a) Shaw (b) H. G. Wells (c) Sydney Olivier (d) Graham Wallas
5. Who wrote *Quintessence of Ibsenism*?
 - (a) Annie Besant (b) Bernard Shaw (c) Ibsen (d) H. G. Wells
6. Find out the correct statements with regard to the play *Pygmalion*:
 - (i) *Pygmalion* is a Problem play and published in 1912
 - (ii) In *Pygmalion*, the female protagonist speaks 'Cockney' dialect
 - (iii) Bernard Shaw dedicated *Pygmalion* to his wife Charlotte Payne-Townshend

- (iv) Alison Porter is a character that appears that appears towards the end of the play *Pygmalion*

Options:

- (a) (i) and (iv) are correct
- (b) (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) are correct
- (c) (i) and (ii) are correct
- (d) Only (ii) is correct
7. Given a list of Shaw's plays. Find the correct pair of plays.
- (a) *Saint Joan, Candida, Mrs Warren's Profession, Androcles and the Lion*
- (b) *Waiting for Godot, Endgame, Krapp's Last Tape, Happy Days*
- (c) *The Silver Box, Strife, Justice, Loyalties*
- (d) *The Birthday Party, The Caretaker, The Homecoming, The Dumb Waiter*
8. Find the correct statement from the followings:
- (a) Shaw's plays are the finest examples of existential philosophy.
- (b) Shaw's plays are clubbed together in the genre of absurd drama.
- (c) Shaw's plays are social satires against the social problems and the hollowness of class distinctions.
- (d) Shaw's last play is *John Bull's Other Island*.

1.4 LET US SUM UP:

In Unit 1, a detail and comprehensive summary of the main trends of contemporary drama has been given that will help you to contextualise George Bernard Shaw and the other playwrights of his time. As Shaw's works are always directed towards society, an analysis of Shaw as a social propagandist has also been included that will help you to identify the major social aspects of Shaw's plays.

1.5 KEYWORDS

¹ Realistic drama: Realism in the theatre was a general movement that began in the nineteenth century theatre, around the 1870s, and remained present through

much of the twentieth century. It developed a set of dramatic and theatrical conventions with the aim of bringing a greater fidelity of real life to texts and performances.

² Schopenhauer: Arthur Schopenhauer was a German philosopher. He is best known for his 1818 work *The World as Will and Representation*, wherein he characterises the phenomenal world as the product of a blind and insatiable metaphysical will.

³ Life Force: The Life Force concept of G. B. Shaw contains the central idea that Life is a vital force or impulse that strives to attain a greater power of contemplation and self-realisation.

⁴ Darwin: Charles Darwin is famous for his Theory of Evolution in his *Origin of Species* and formulates ideas relating the origin of living beings that was contrary to the popular view of other naturalists at the time.

⁵ Nietzsche: Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was a German philosopher, cultural critic and most importantly a philologist whose work has exerted a profound influence on Western philosophy and modern intellectual history.

1.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

- (a) A Nicoll: *British Drama*
- (b) A. C. Ward: *Bernard Shaw*
- (c) H. Pearson: *Bernard Shaw: His Life and Opinions*

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Unit 2:

Pygmalion: An Introduction

Contents:

- 2.0 Objectives
 - 2.1 Introductory Reading of the play *Pygmalion*
 - 2.2 Introduction to the major characters of the play *Pygmalion*
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 - 2.3.1 Act I
 - 2.3.2 Act II
 - 2.3.3 Act III
 - 2.3.4 Act IV
 - 2.3.5 Act V
- Check Your Progress*
- 2.4 Let us sum up
 - 2.5 Key words
 - 2.6 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES:

After a brief introduction of George Bernard Shaw as a playwright in Unit 1, the reading of Unit 2 will help you to

- Examine the significance of title of the play *Pygmalion* and its relevance to Greek Legend.
- Form opinions on each act of the play and the play as a whole.

2.1 INTRODUCTORY READING OF THE PLAY *PYGMALION*

George Bernard Shaw extracted the title of this play from an ancient Greek legend which has been told and retold by several writers differently. In Greek mythology, Pygmalion was a king of Cyprus who fell in love with a statue of Aphrodite. But Ovid, the Roman poet in his *Metamorphoses*⁶ invents a more

sophisticated version of the same myth. According to him, Pygmalion was a sculptor, a worker in marble, bronze, and ivory. He was exclusively devoted to his art. He had an image of beauty in his mind and no woman could come up to it in the world. He therefore worked over his statue in search of a beauty beyond his powers of expression. Finally in his quest for ideal beauty, he began to work an ivory statue of a girl. While carving it, Pygmalion would lay the chisel and stare at his work for an hour or so, tracing in his mind the beauty that had as yet only partly unfolded itself. By the time the ivory statue was completed, Pygmalion could think of nothing else. In his dreams, the girl in the statue haunted him and seemed to wake up for him and come alive. He would sit gazing at the maiden, whom he had given the name Galatea. Then came the day of the festival of Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty to whom Pygmalion felt a special devotion because he, by his very nature, was a seeker after beauty. He had therefore never failed to give Aphrodite the honour that was due to her. Certainly by the animating grace of Aphrodite, the statute was found to be really moving. He felt the hard ivory grow soft and warm like wax in his clasp. He saw the lips grow red and the cheeks blush faintly pink. Then Galatea opened her eyes and looked at Pygmalion. Pygmalion's dream became a perfect reality, when Galatea stepped down from her pedestal into his arms as a flesh and blood girl. In course of time, the two were happily married.

In Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, Henry Higgins, a professor of Phonetics⁷, stands for Pygmalion, and Elizabeth Doolittle, an uneducated girl who sells flowers in a London street stands for Galatea. By teaching her to speak refined English just like other educated people do (like using correct grammar, proper vowel sounds, careful pronunciation, and a pleasing tone of voice) Higgins makes it possible for the poor ignorant flower-girl after a few months to go among cultured and aristocratic people without anyone suspecting that she was born into a different social class. This is no more than a professional experiment to Higgins, who takes no interest in Eliza as a living woman but is concerned with her only as a human talking-machine.

When the experiment has been successfully carried out, Higgins thinks she can go back to her old way of life. He will not admit that by teaching her to speak properly has lifted her to another plane, given her a desire for a better life, and created a bond between the two of them. When he first met the girl, her mind and emotions were so undeveloped that she was little more than a statue, but even though Higgins ignored her feelings, he nevertheless made the statue live.

Shaw was the greatest modern master of paradox⁸. He delighted to take familiar situations and ideas and turn them upside down or back to front, so that they might be seen from a different angle. That is what he does in the present

play, for when Eliza-Galatea comes alive as a new woman, Higgins-Pygmalion is not in love with her as the sculptor was in the old legend; and though she cries “What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What’s to become of me?” her sense of belonging neither to her old life nor to any new way of life only makes Eliza the more determined not to become dependent upon Higgins, and the play ends with her leaving his house. What happens to her afterwards is told in the story which Shaw added to the printed play.

With intentional irony Shaw called it *Pygmalion: A Romance*. All his life he was an anti-Romantic—in his attitude towards war, which to him was beastly and cruel and wasteful, not heroic as we can find in *Arms and the Man*; in his attitude towards science, which he regarded as having introduced a new set of superstitions in place of older religious ones as depicted in *The Doctor’s Dilemma*; in his attitude towards love and marriage, which he believed to be the most important as means of improving humanity through the birth of children who should be better, mentally and physically, than their parents.

Many critics argued regarding *Pygmalion* as not a romance, as it would rightly have been called if Higgins and Eliza had fallen in love and married. It is a problem play, and the problem goes much deeper than the bare story told in *Pygmalion*. Every teacher who sets out to fight ignorance is in similar position with regard to his pupils as Higgins was with regard to Eliza. He leads them towards a new way of life and is compelled to leave them at its threshold to go by themselves.

The problem in *Pygmalion*, therefore, is like the world problem of Education. To educate is to give new life to those who receive the education, and that new life produces discontent with existing circumstances and creates the desire for a different kind of world. In places where the spread of education has led to personal and social unrest, any teacher might be told, as Eliza tells Higgins, “You never thought of the trouble it would make for me”, to which Higgins replies: “Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble” (Shaw 100).

Shaw in his *PREFACE TO PYGMALION: A PROFESSOR OF PHONETICS*, Shaw starts out telling his readers that the English do not value their language and do not teach their children to speak it properly. Part of the problem is that the language is not spelled the way it is pronounced. As an Irishman with a sensitive ear which had been trained to value musical sounds, and with a naturally beautiful speaking voice of his own, Bernard Shaw was disgusted by the harsh and slovenly speech of many people in England. He blamed this onto English spelling, and, therefore left most of his large fortune to pay the expenses

of starting a new English alphabet based on phonetic principles which would provide a separate symbol or sign for each spoken sound, thus enlarging the alphabet considerably. Shaw believed that this exact representation of sounds, in writing and in print, would bring about correct pronunciation by everyone, and break down class distinctions, for the English are very sensitive to the way others speak, and are inclined to despise those who talk differently from themselves. An aristocrat in the West End of London may think an East-End Londoner ignorant and low class because his accent is different; while the East-End Londoner may laugh at and mock the West-End Londoner's accent because to him it sounds unnatural and conceited.

There has never been a nation-wide acceptance of a single standard of English accent and pronunciation. Not only do differently educated people talk differently, but there are also variations from region to region throughout England: difference between northern countries and Western, between Eastern and Southern, and so on. Radio broadcasting has encouraged a 'standard' pronunciation, but no native of Lancashire or Devon or Suffolk, or of most other English countries, would wish to make the same sounds as a B. B. C. London announcer.

Although Shaw complained about 'English' pronunciation generally, his particular quarrel was with 'cockney', a rather vague word used to denote a London dialect⁹, of which Eliza Doolittle's is an example.

'Cockney' is not usually regarded as a proper dialect, but is more often condemned as a defect or disease of speech, rising from ignorance or vulgarity or carelessness, or all of these. To a refined ear, 'cockney' is certainly extremely ugly—though whether it is thought less respectable than some county dialects may depend upon local prejudices. The 'cockney' accent is not perhaps worse than the Glasgow accent or the accent of people who live in other large industrial cities. It is due partly to physical causes, and partly to psychological ones. Cockneys speak without opening their mouths sufficiently; their jaws do not move freely; their vowels are not 'pure' and their words run together and are sometimes unintelligible to non-cockneys. The psychological causes can usually be traced back to the cockney's early life. At school most boys and girls dislike being in any way different from the majority, and the bad speakers make fun of those who try to speak well. This is due to what is known as 'the herd instinct', the same instinct that causes some animals to drive out of the herd any one of their number who does not conform to the rule of the herd.

If everyone in England leaned to speak 'good English', Shaw believed, there would be much less friction in society, which is the name for the human herd. But it was not only the social consequences of good and bad speech that

he felt strongly about. English was to him a beautiful language, and the human voice a beautiful instrument, and he could not bear to have beautiful things made ugly.

The author's most impressive achievement in *Pygmalion* was that he made an interesting, amusing, and popular play out of what is largely a lecture on phonetics, a subject which most people find difficult and dull. Shaw's success here in transforming the science of speech into entertaining drama comes from the human interest of the characters and from Shaw's sparkling fun. Professor Higgins is a good teacher and he is also a social rebel: he hates the shallow politeness of smart society and will not practise its small hypocrisies. He therefore interests us as a rebel, even though his rebellion makes him rude and heartless. Eliza Doolittle is a character we cannot quickly forget, because Shaw makes us see that inside the rough flower-girl as we meet her at the beginning of the play is the fine and sensitive woman who emerges later as a result of Higgins's teaching and Colonel Pickering's kindness and courtesy.

Whenever the play is performed, Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, is a favourite with the audiences. Through him, Shaw laughs at the conventional morality of the English, making Doolittle turn it upside down and inside out, and finding real humour in his plight when he becomes an uncomfortable conventional rich man after having been a poor but happy dustman.

The account of Eliza's marriage to Freddy Eynsford Hill after the play ends is one of Bernard Shaw's least successful pieces of writing. He was anxious not to give *Pygmalion* the kind of 'happy ending' that audiences would expect, and he therefore refused to have Eliza marry Higgins. But it often happens in plays and novels that the characters come alive on their own account and want to behave differently from what the author intended. Although Higgins and Eliza might not have 'lived happily ever after' as the heroes and heroines of fairy tales usually do, they would certainly have been better matched than Eliza and the feeble Freddy could be. In his determination to make his Romance unromantic, Shaw twisted *Pygmalion* from what would have been, by the requirements of drama, its natural end.

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE MAJOR CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY PYGMALION

Eliza Doolittle: Eliza is the female protagonist of the play *Pygmalion*. She is the daughter of a poor dustman called Alfred Doolittle who is living at the time with her sixth step mother. Eliza earns her living by selling flowers. She is poor and illiterate. She speaks Cockney, i.e., a London dialect, so difficult to understand

that often it seems that she is merely making incoherent noises. But her transformation is brought about by Professor Henry Higgins, a professor of Phonetics.

Professor Henry Higgins: Henry Higgins is a professor of Phonetics. Higgins is a short tempered man who gets annoyed over little things. He is a confirmed old bachelor and his attitude to women is somewhat cynical. No doubt, he is attached to his mother and regards her as an ideal woman, but his attitude to women in general is one of contempt. As a teacher, Higgins is efficient and this aspect of his character is fully brought out by the way in which he is engrossed in the teaching of Eliza and making his experiment a success.

Colonel Pickering: Colonel Pickering's role in the play is a crucial one. He takes keen interest in the education of Eliza along with Professor Higgins. Like Higgins too, he is interested in study of Phonetics. He studied Indian dialects and written a book called *Spoken Sanskrit*. Moreover Pickering acts as a foil to Higgins throughout the play. The two men are contrasted so far as their wit is concerned. Both of them are scholars, but Pickering is a refined one while Higgins is boorish.

Mrs Pearce: Mrs Pearce is the housekeeper of Professor Higgins. She is an elderly lady, and has been in the service of Higgins for a number of years. She is critical of her master, but all the same she has great affection and respect for him and sincere to her work. Her role is an important one as Higgins assigned her the responsibility to take care of Eliza and make her decent, well-mannered and well-dressed when she is in the company of gentlemen.

Alfred Doolittle: He is Eliza's father and one of the major characters of the play. His character acts as a mouthpiece of Shaw in order to represent his unconventional ideas. He is a good-for-nothing fellow but an original moralist, exposes the injustice of conventional standards.

Mrs Higgins: Mrs Higgins is the mother of Henry Higgins. She is an affectionate mother and exercises considerable influence over her son and the credit of making her son a noted scholar in the field of Phonetics. But Mrs Higgins is not blind to her son's faults. She knows that her son has a dreadful habit of swearing and lacks social manners. She openly admits that her son does not care for social etiquette and is shabby and untidy in his habits.

2.3 ACT-WISE DETAILSUMMARIES OF THE PLAY *PYGMALION*

2.3.1 ACT I

The setting of the first scene takes place in London on a rainy night. It is about 11:15 p.m. and a number of people have taken shelter in St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden. Among them is a young girl who sells flowers, a mother with her daughter and son, a note taker, and one Colonel whose name is Pickering. They are all huddled together, anxiously waiting for a cab as it is rather getting late. The daughter Clara Hill is feeling impatient as her brother Freddy went in search of a cab, but has not returned yet. The mother, too, is tired of waiting but she waits patiently.

Freddy, a young man of twenty joins his family and informs them that it is impossible to find a cab. His sister questions how much effort he actually gave in the search; then the mother too insults her son and orders him to search again. Freddy darts into the rain again and collides with a flower girl. The flower girl tells Freddy to watch where he is going, calling him by name. The mother is very much surprised to find that the flower girl knows the name of her son. However, the girl explains that she does not know his name. She called him Freddy as it is a common English name like Charlie and many others. The girl then picks up the flowers knocked down. She is about eighteen with dirty, unkempt hair and a hat soiled from London. Her coat is of knee length and fitted at the waist. Under it, she has on a brown skirt and an apron. Her appearance reflects her life on the street, neglected and dirtied. Her teeth show the lack of care. The flower girl asks the mother to pay for the strewn flowers caused by the son. She asks her daughter Clara for any pennies, but Clara only has a sixpence. The flower girl promises change, and the mother orders Clara to give her the money. The mother hands it to the poor girl and tells her to keep the change.

A military looking gentleman soon joins the waiting family. The mother commiserates with the gentleman regarding the weather, and the flower girl approaches him to buy some flowers. The gentleman does not have any change but manages to give the girl three halfpence. She is grateful, but a bystander warns her to give the man flowers because there is someone nearby taking down every note of the word that is being said. The flower girl panics and defends herself as "a respectable girl" creating a scene in her elevated tones.

The attention is now focussed on the note taker. Different opinions are expressed about him. Some take him to be a policeman and others merely consider him to be a busybody. They are much surprised to find that he can correctly tell the exact London locality to which various people

belong. He can do so by noting the difference in the dialect which they speak. It soon transpires that he is Professor Henry Higgins, Professor of Phonetics, and he has come there to study the various dialects spoken by the people and take note on the difference between one dialect and another.

As the rain stops, people begin to leave slowly one after another. But Freddy has not returned yet and as no cab arrives, the mother and the daughter leave for the bus stand. Only now the flower girl, the note taker and the military looking gentleman are left in the portico. The military looking gentleman asks the note taker as to how he could tell the different London localities to which various people belonged, and the note taker confidently replies:

Simply phonetics. The science of speech. Thats my profession: also my hobby. Happy is the man who can make a living by his hobby! You can spot an Irishman or a Yorkshireman by his brogue. *I can place any man within six miles. I can place him within two miles in London. Sometimes within two streets.* (Shaw 15)

The military looking gentleman questions him further but the flower-girl persists in her angry accusations and the note-taker, who has also lost all patience by this time, rebukes her angrily:

THE NOTE TAKER [*explosively*]. Woman: cease this detestable boohooing instantly; or else seek the shelter of some other place of worship.

THE FLOWER GIRL [*with feeble defiance*]. Ive a right to be here if I like, same as you.

THE NOTE TAKER. A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere—no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech: that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and The Bible; and don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon.(Shaw 16)

He tells the military looking gentleman that he speaks the English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. "Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English" (Shaw 16). The flower-girl hears his words and ask him to explain his meaning and the note-taker rudely replies:

THE NOTE TAKER. Yes, you squashed cabbage leaf, you disgrace to be noble architecture of these columns, you incarnate insult to the English language: I could pass you off as the Queen of Sheba. [*To the Gentleman*] Can you believe that? (Shaw 16)

When the note-taker asks him if he believes what he has just said, he replies that he believes him for he himself is a student of Indian dialects. It soon transpires that he is Colonel Pickering, author of the book *Spoken Sanskrit*, and that he has come from India particularly to meet Henry Higgins, the eminent Professor of Phonetics, the author of Higgins's *Universal Alphabet*. Thus the two meet by chance. This accidental meeting leads to close friendship within a few days.

Colonel Pickering invites Higgins to come with him to Carlton Hotel where he is staying and have supper with him and he would visit him at his residence at 27 A, Wimpole Street the next day. As they get ready to leave, the flower girl again begs him to buy some flowers. Irritated, Higgins throws some money into her basket and then goes away. The flower girl is much pleased to have such a large amount for nothing.

Immediately now Freddy appears in the scene arriving with a cab. As his mother and sister have already left, the flower girl proudly enters the taxi with her flower basket, and drives off to her residence in Angel Court, Drury Lane. Then action of the play immediately shifts into Eliza's home where we are given a peep into her poorly equipped apartment. There is,

. . . a small room with very old wall paper hanging loose in the damp places. A broken pane in the window is mended with paper. A portrait of a popular actor and a fashion plate of ladies' dresses, all wildly beyond poor Eliza's means, both torn from newspapers, are pinned up on the wall. A birdcage hangs in the window; but its tenants died long ago: it remains as a memorial only.

These are the only visible luxuries: the rest is the irreducible minimum of poverty's needs: a wretched bed heaped with all sorts of coverings that have any warmth in them, a draped packing case with a basin and jug on it and a little looking glass over it, a chair and table, the refuse of some suburban kitchen, and an American alarm clock on the shelf above the unused fireplace; the whole lighted with a gas lamp with a penny in the slot meter. Rent: four shillings a week. (Shaw 19)

Act I constitutes the exposition of the play and Shaw's expositions are masterpieces. In the beginning of the play's action, the theme of class issues has been set in as we can find in two contrast juxtaposition of women characters: mother and daughter on the one hand, and Eliza on the other. Eliza as a flower girl contrasts the appearance of both the mother as well as the daughter as the stage directions say "She is no doubt as clean as she can afford to be, but compared to the ladies she is very dirty. Her features are no worse than theirs; but their condition leaves something to be desired" (Shaw 9) indicating the superficial differences between the two classes.

The flower girl also represents an important lesson the playwright wanted to make in his writing. Her language is spelled phonetically and through language as a tool, Shaw wanted to convey to his readers, in particular, that language breaks down the barriers of class, and proper speech should be taught. By refusing to continue spelling the flower girl's speech phonetically, Shaw is making the point that if it cannot be spelled phonetically and understood, it is no language at all. He stops spelling her crude speech that way and uses traditional phonetics to record her speech from this point on in the play.

It is in dealing with the flower girl that Shaw makes his view about crowds. They quickly shift from sympathizing with the flower girl to admiring the note taker for his entertainment provided. He is able to identify where people are from by listening to their speech.

The development of Bernard Shaw's characters begins from the first act itself. For instance, in case of the flower girl, we find that she has poor language skills, is dressed commonly and is unkempt. Her character introduces a theme. She and her description convey that she is no different from others around her other than her language and appearance. She makes the point that no one has rights to take away her identity. The theme of language being a barrier to social acceptance is seen in the flower girl's character, in particular her speech patterns. Her moral character is never in question nor is her attire, but it is her pronunciation of words that classifies her as poor and uneducated. In a time of post-industrialization in England where the old order of class still holds archaic values and perceptions, Eliza represents a re-educated and trained element into that order. Her soon-to-be-acquired language skills guarantee her entrance into any social circle even though she continues to be penniless. The emerging industrialized middle class could benefit from formal speech instruction, such as Eliza received from Higgins.

2.3.2 ACT II

Act II takes place in Higgins's laboratory in Wimpole Street at 11 a.m. Colonel Pickering is with him at the time, and he has come to stay with him at least during the period he is in England. Pickering is proud of the fact that he can pronounce as many as twenty-four distinct vowel sounds but he is much surprised to find that Professor Higgins has as many as one hundred and thirty distinct vowel sounds. Taking lessons in these sounds has been a heavy strain on him and he does not want to undergo the ordeal any further.

Mrs. Pearce, the house-keeper of Professor Higgins, now ushers in Eliza, the flower girl from the previous night. She has come to take lessons from him in phonetics, so that she may speak English like a lady and get a job in the shop of some florist. She offers to pay him his fee at the rate of one shilling per lesson. Professor Higgins realises that it is too large an offer, if one keeps in mind her average daily earning. If he succeeds, he would pay the expenses towards her teaching and also the other expenses incurred in her upkeep—dress, board and lodging etc. Higgins accepts the challenge and proceeds at once with the task.

Professor Higgins is rude and speaks to the girl like a bully and Eliza is frightened, weeps frequently, and is ultimately ready to leave the house, for she cannot endure his bullying any longer. Pickering persuades Higgins to have some care for the girl's feeling and speaks to her more gently. Higgins relents and gently explains to her:

Eliza: you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist's shop. If you're good and do whatever you're told, you shall sleep in a proper bedroom, and have lots to eat, and money to buy chocolates and take rides in taxis. If you're naughty and idle you will sleep in the back kitchen among the black beetles, and be walloped by Mrs Pearce with a broomstick. At the end of six months you shall go to Buckingham Palace in a carriage, beautifully dressed. If the King finds out you're not a lady, you will be taken by the police to the Tower of London, where your head will be cut off as a warning to other presumptuous flower girls. If you are not found out, you shall have present of seven-and-sixpence to start life with as a lady in a shop. If you refuse this offer you will be a most ungrateful wicked girl; and the angels will weep for you (Shaw 31).

During the time Eliza is having her bath, Pickering has a serious conversation with Professor Higgins. He asks Higgins: "Are you a man

of good character where women are concerned?” (Shaw 35), Higgins misunderstands the question and so cynically replies that he has never been able to pull off well with women. They both try to go their own different ways in opposite directions and so he says, he finds,

that the moment I let a woman make friends with me, she becomes jealous, exacting, suspicious, and a damned nuisance. I find that the moment I let myself make friends with a woman, I become selfish and tyrannical. Women upset everything. When you let them into your life, you find that the woman is driving at one thing and you're driving at another. (Shaw 35)

Pickering is thus obliged to explain himself more explicitly and seeks an assurance that no undue advantage would be taken of the girls' stay with them. The Professor now understands the point and assures him that he has never fallen a victim to the seductions even of the most charming women. He says:

You see, she'll be a pupil; and teaching would be impossible unless pupils were sacred. I've taught scores of American millionairesses how to speak English: the best looking women in the world. I'm seasoned. They might as well be blocks of wood. I might as well be a block of wood. (Shaw 36)

This act introduces Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father who confesses to Higgins that he has come there neither to take away the girl nor to extort money from him but merely to beg him to give him five pounds, as he knows that his intentions towards his daughter are honourable. As Higgins still hesitates, Doolittle tries to convince him by telling him that he is one of the 'undeserving poor'; 'middle class morality' is up against people like him, and tries to crush him. When he is gone, Eliza gives a detailed account of the life and conduct of her father. He is a thorough blackguard and must have come there to beg for money which he needs for drinking. He and his mistress constantly quarrel and bully each other. Eliza says further to Higgins and Pickering that her father will never again come back to him until and unless he again stands in need for money for drinking. His business in life is, "Taking money out of other people's pockets into his own" (Shaw 48).

We are now given a detailed account of Prof. Higgins' method of teaching phonetics to his pupils. She is made to repeat her alphabet and pronounce it correctly. After the class, Higgins dismisses her, with the advice to practise her lesson by herself and he would give her another lesson at half past four the same afternoon. In this way, she is taught for

months till she becomes a lady and makes her appearance in high class London society and takes it by storm, so to say. Her education and transformation is the measure of Professor Higgins' success.

This act is of crucial importance. The action of the play develops and the characters of the various dramatis personages are unfolded. It is a "drama of ideas" and the conflict in it is not the clash of personalities, but the clash between the ideas, views, attitudes and convictions of the different personages.

There is also plenty of wit and humour in the act and humour arises largely from the incongruity between the words and actions of different characters or from the incongruity between what they are and what we expect them to be. For example, Higgins swears dreadfully, is slovenly and shabby in his habit, while as a teacher we expect him to behave more like a gentleman and set a good example to his pupils. It is this incongruity in his character that is pointed out by his house-keeper.

Eliza's habit of constantly repeating the words "I am a good girl, I am" is very funny, so is her prudery when she goes to the extent of throwing a towel on the mirror so that she may not see her own naked body. Even though they may make a lady of her, she is determined never to adopt the free and easy ways of upper class society. Thus the clash of cultural values is suggested.

2.3.3 ACT III

The scene is laid in the drawing room of Mrs. Higgins in a flat in Chelsea Embankment (a London locality). It is afternoon between four and five and Mrs. Higgins, an old lady of sixty years and the mother of Prof. Higgins, is shown writing letters. It is her "at-home day", *i.e.*, the day on which she is at home and receives her friends. She is expecting her visitors to arrive every moment.

Prof. Higgins is the first to arrive. Though the mother and the son love each other and are devoted to each other, Mrs. Higgins had forbidden her son to call on her, on her at-home days. He is ill-mannered, he swears dreadfully, and thus gives offence to her friends of the 'genteel' society. She has, therefore, advised her son to keep away on these days. She orders him to go home at once but he says that he has come to her on an important business. He picked up a common flower-girl, has taught her to pronounce English correctly and also to dress elegantly and cultivate fine manners. He has done all this over a long period of time, and the girl

has caused him a lot of trouble. It has been an ordeal for him. Now he has invited her on her (his mother's) behalf to her place on her "at-home day" to see how she conducts herself and what impression she leaves on her friends from the fashionable society.

The scene marks further character-development. Mother-son relationship throws further light on the character of Higgins. Higgins swears so dreadfully and is so ill-mannered that his mother, despite all her affection for her only son, has forbidden him to come to her house on her at-home days, for he gives offence to her friends by his ill-manners. We also meet again Mrs. Eynsford Hill and her daughter Clara, and her son Freddy. Freddy is attracted towards Eliza and thus a hint is thrown regarding the possibility of their marriage in times to come.

This act also introduces Eliza to be in much transformed form yet her manners need a little more polishing. She is fashionably dressed, looks beautiful and self-confident. Freddy is sure that he has met her before, but is unable to place her. Then they indulge in small talk and Eliza is quite at her ease but she swears now and then which a lady must never do. Clara is charmed by this new kind of small talk and proposes in future to talk like that herself and to use strong language every now and then.

The second part of this act shows Eliza after the completion of her education. She creates quite a sensation at the reception of an ambassador to which she is taken. Even Nepommuck, an old pupil of Higgins who claims to know thirty-two languages is too deceived by Eliza and assumed her to be some Hungarian princess.

The humour is further heightened when Higgins in so many words says that Eliza is an ordinary London girl out of the gutter but taught to speak English by a specialist, and when Nepommuck bursts into laughter and says that Higgins is completely mistaken. But apart from all this, this act shows two phases of Eliza's education. The first phase is seen in her appearance at the residence of Mrs. Higgins. She is much transformed but her transformation is not yet complete. The second phase is seen at the reception given by an ambassador. By now the process of her education is complete and everybody is deceived by her transformation. She is taken to be a Hungarian princess even by specialists like Nepommuck. From this, it is clear that Higgins has won the bet to transform Eliza into a fine lady "ten times over." Her education has been a perfect success. She has been taken not merely to be duchess, but to be a princess and one old lady has remarked that she speaks "exactly like Queen Victoria". Her transformation has been complete.

2.3.4ACT IV

The scene is laid in the residence of Prof. Higgins in Wimpole Street. It is about mid-night Higgins, Pickering and Eliza return home after having dined at a restaurant. It has been a tiring day for them, for they have attended three parties, and a reception that day. No doubt, Eliza has been a grand success, but she is peevisish and ill-tempered owing to the strain. Prof. Higgins, too, is in a bad shape. He announces that he would never make an experiment of that sort again.

The doors are locked. Mrs. Pearce is allowed to go to bed, as they need nothing more. As they change their dresses, Prof. Higgins and Pickering indulge in light talk, entirely ignoring Eliza and her sentiments. Higgins regards it all as a, “silly tomfoolery”. His experiment has been a perfect success, but it has been a terrible strain on him. He says, “It’s the strain of putting the job through all these months that has told on me. It was interesting enough at first, while we were at phonetics; but after that I got deadly sick of it. If I hadn’t backed myself to do it, I should have chucked the whole thing up two months ago. It was a silly notion: the whole thing has been a bore” (Shaw 73).

When Pickering remarks that the garden party was “frightfully exciting”, he replies, “Yes, for the first three minutes. But when I saw we were going to win hands down, I felt like a bear in a cage, hanging about doing nothing. The dinner was worse: sitting gorging there for over an hour, with nobody but a damned fool of a fashionable woman to talk to! I tell you, Pickering, never again for me. No more artificial duchesses. The whole thing has been simple purgatory” (Shaw 74).

This irritates Eliza and she is practically mad with anger. So when the Professor asks for his slippers, she brings them and throws them at his face. Higgins is simply amazed and shocked by this action of Eliza’s. When he asks her indignantly why she has behaved in this manner, she calls him a “selfish brute”, and asks what is to become of her and what she is to do now that his experiment has come to an end. Higgins has never thought over the problem and so carelessly replies that in due course, she would marry somebody and settle down. Alternatively, she could set up a flower shop of her own and that it would not be difficult for Pickering to help her financially for the purpose.

Eliza now decides not to stay in Higgins’ house even a moment longer. She takes off her fine clothes and puts on a walking dress. She then steps out of the house in the street. She thus leaves the house at

once, for Professor Higgins has completed his experiment and she is no longer of any use to him. As soon as she comes out of the house in the street, she meets Freddy. He usually passes his night standing there outside her window, eager to have a look at her as she moves about in her room. He loves her and Eliza, who is much in need of comfort and solace, embraces him and showers kisses on his face. It is in this context, Shaw has called the play 'a romance' and this element of romance is provided by the love of Freddy and Eliza. Thus, Eliza is no doubt the creation of Prof. Higgins (Pygmalion), but she would not marry her creator as we can find in the classical legend, rather she unites with Freddy.

2.3.5 ACT V

The scene is laid in Mrs. Higgins' drawing room, the next day. Early in the morning, Eliza came to her, and is now in her room on the upper storey. Mrs Higgins knew that her son would soon come to her in pursuit of Eliza. Mrs Higgins was right. The parlour-maid soon came to tell her that her son Professor Higgins and Colonel Pickering had both arrived, and at the time they were telephoning the police; but would soon come to her. Mrs. Higgins instructs the maid to let them come up and also that Eliza should not come down, till she is called for.

Higgins soon bursts in and even without the customary greetings, tells his mother that "Eliza bolted." She did not go to bed last night, called at his residence early in the morning with a cab, collected her things and drove away. Pickering now enters the room and, after exchanging greetings with Mrs Higgins, tells Higgins that the police created a lot of difficulty and they seem to suspect them of some wrongful designs. Mrs Higgins tells them that they both are like little children who are treating Eliza as if she were some property that had been lost. Infact she has complete right to go where she likes and they should not have gone to the police about it.

Then the arrival of Alfred Doolittle is announced and all are quite amazed to see him fashionably dressed like a gentleman. Infact, he is the bridegroom who is now going to marry his mistress for the "middle class morality" has intimidated him into being honourable and deserving. He is ruined, he has lost the happiness of his life, and it was all the doing of Professor Higgins. It was he who wrote a letter to some millionaire friend of his in America who wanted to found Moral Reform Societies all over the world, and he also wanted Higgins to invent a universal language.

In his reply to that American he had written that Alfred Doolittle was the most original moralist at present in England and this joke of his landed him in trouble. He says, "Them words is in his blooming will, in which, Henry Higgins, thanks to your silly joking, he leaves me a share in his Pre-digested Cheese Trust worth three thousand a year on condition that I lecture for his Wannafeller Moral Reform World League as often as they ask me upto six times a year" (Shaw 86). He is not afraid of lecturing for he can lecture more than what they want, and adds,

It's making a gentleman of me that I object to. Who asked him to make a gentleman of me? I was happy. I was free. I touched pretty nigh everybody for money when I wanted it, same as I touched you, Enry Iggins. Now I am worried; tied neck and heels; and everybody touches me for money. It's a fine thing for you, says my solicitor, Is it? Says I. You mean it's a good thing for you, I says. When I was a poor man and had a solicitor once when they found a pram in the dust cart, he got me off, and got shut of me and got me shut of him as quick as he could. Same with the doctors: used to shove me out of the hospital before I could hardly stand on my legs, and nothing to pay. Now they finds out that i am not a healthy man and cant live unless they looks after me twice a day. In the house I'm not let do a hand's turn for myself: somebody else must do it and touch me for it. A year ago I hadnt a relative in the world except two or three that wouldnt speak to me. Now Ive fifty, and not a decent week's wages among the lot of them. I have to live for others and not for myself: thats middle class morality. You talk of losing Eliza. Dont you be anxious: I bet she's on my doorstep by this: she that could support herself easy by selling flowers if I wasnt respectable. And the next one to touch me will be you, Enry Iggins. I'll have to learn to speak middle class language from you, instead of speaking proper English. Thats where youll come in: and I daresay thats what you done it for. (Shaw 87)

Of course there is much truth in what he has told and Higgins is considerably softened. However, Mrs Higgins ask him why he did not refuse to accept the legacy. He ought to have declined to accept the money, since he feels so strongly about it. Here Doolittle's reply is quite convincing. He says:

What is there for me if I chuck it but the workhouse in my old age? I have to dye my hair already to keep my job as a dustman.

If I was one of the deserving poor, and had put by a bit, I could chuck it; but then why should I, because the deserving poor might as well be millionaires for all the happiness they ever has. They don't know what happiness is. But I, as one of the undeserving poor, have nothing between me and the pauper's uniform but this here blasted three thousand a year that shoves me into the middle class. They've got you every way you turn: it's a choice between the Skilly of the work-house and the Char Bydis of the middle class; and I haven't the nerve for the workhouse. Intimidated: that's what I am. Broke. Brought up. Happier men than me will call for my dust, and touch me for their tip; and I'll look on helpless, and envy them. And that's what your son has brought me to. (Shaw 88)

In this way, the problem of Alfred Doolittle and others like him, has been clearly and forcefully presented, and it is for us to decide as to the solution of the problem thus stated. Then Higgins is told by his mother that Eliza was upstairs. She came there in the morning with her luggage and she told her that she was treated most brutally by both Higgins and Pickering. Therefore Higgins is first made to promise that he would behave properly. Eliza soon arrives well-dressed and showing perfect ease of manners. She greets both Higgins and Pickering in quite a familiar way as if there were nothing wrong. Higgins is furious and he tells his mother, "I tell you I have created this thing out of the squashed cabbage leaves of Covent Garden: and now she pretends to play the fine lady with me" (Shaw 92). Pickering on the other hand is kind and considerate, and so she expresses her gratitude to him. Eliza is grateful to him because she says:

It's not because you paid for my dresses. I know you are generous to everybody with money. But it was from you that I learnt really nice manners; and this is what makes one a lady, isn't it? (Shaw 92)

In this context, it can be said that whatever Eliza says is perfectly true. She argues that undoubtedly Professor Higgins taught her but that is his profession. He always treated her as a flower girl, while from the very beginning Pickering treated her like a lady and it is from him she learned the manners and conduct of being a lady. Pickering admires her courage to speak up for her own self. She says:

You told me, you know, that when a child is brought to a foreign country, it picks up the language in a few weeks, and forgets its

own. Well, I am a child in your country. I have forgotten my own language, and can speak nothing but yours. That's the real break-off with the corner of Tottenham Court Road. Leaving Wimpole Street finishes it. (Shaw 94)

Then Alfred Doolittle appears in the scene and Eliza is much amazed to see her father so well dressed. He explains that he has come to a large fortune from an American Millionaire, thanks to Professor Higgins. He is at present dressed like a bridegroom, for that very day he is going to marry his mistress. She has been intimidated into marriage by 'middle class morality' lie him. Their happiness is now over, but they cannot help it. They must come up to the expectations of 'middle class' and become 'deserving' members of society. They have both become victims of 'middle class morality'.

Immediately next to this, Professor Higgins and Eliza are left alone and there is much heated discussion and exchange of views between them. Shaw's plays are 'plays of ideas' and in them considerable light is thrown on certain chosen problems. This is so with the present play also. The scene between Eliza and Higgins is a great 'irritant to thought', though as usual, no solution has been provided. The readers must think for themselves and work out their own solution.

On the very first note, Eliza suggests to Higgins that perhaps he wants her to come back to him so that she may pick up his slippers, go on errands for him and put up with his temper. Higgins replies that if she comes back, he will treat her as he has always treated her. As a matter of fact, there is no difference between his manners and those of Pickering. If he treats a flower girl like a Duchess, he himself would treat even a Duchess like a flower-girl. Explaining his point, he says, "The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another" (Shaw 98)

In a moment of surprising tenderness, Henry says to Eliza that she never asked herself whether she could do without him. Eliza is afraid now that Higgins is manipulating her because Mrs. Pearce told her that she wanted to leave several times, but the professor worked his charm on her. The Professor now speaks more gently, "I shall miss you, Eliza. I have learnt something from your idiotic notions: I confess that humbly and gratefully. And I have grown accustomed to your voice and appearance. I like them, rather" (Shaw 98). To this Eliza suggests that

when he feels lonely, he can look at her photographs or listen to the records of her voice on the gramophone. Professor Higgins retorts that the photograph and the machines have no soul and no feelings and so they cannot take her place. He cares for humanity and for life, and Eliza and her soul and her life have been created by him and that is why he cares for her and wants her back. When Eliza retorts that she is not going to care for anybody that does not care for her. To this Professor Higgins says sharply that these are the 'commercial principles' of flower girl, and he has a contempt for commercialism and does not want to trade in affection and adds:

You call me a brute because you could not buy a claim on me by fetching my slippers and finding my spectacles. You were a fool: I think a woman fetching a man's slippers is a disgusting sight: did I ever fetch your slippers? I think a good deal more of you for throwing them in my face. No use slaving for me and then saying you one to be cared for: who cares for a slave? If you come back for the sake of good fellowship; for you'll get nothing else. You've had a thousand times as much out of me as I have out of you; and if you dare to set up your little dog's tricks of fetching and carrying slippers against my creation of a Duchess Eliza, I'll slam the door in your silly face. (Shaw 99)

When Eliza asks why he did take all the trouble of creating her if he does not care for her, Professor Higgins rightly asks, "Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble. There's only one way of escaping trouble; and that's killing things. Cowards, you notice, are always shrieking to have troublesome people killed" (Shaw 100). If Higgins wants her to come back, it is for the sheer fun of it. If they don't enjoy the fun of it, they can part any day. As regards her being dependent on anybody, he will adopt her as his daughter and settle a sufficient income on her for life, so that she may feel entirely independent and choose her own way of life. Marriage with him or with Pickering is out of the question, for they are both 'confirmed old bachelors'.

Eliza replies that she has never thought of them in that way. Professor Higgins is much amused when she reveals that she loves Freddy, regularly receives letter from him, and it is him she is going to marry. As she cannot be a flower-girl again, she will take to teaching. She will teach phonetics to her pupils and charge one thousand guineas from each of them. At this, Professor Higgins is almost mad with rage and Eliza now

understands his weak point. So she calmly adds, "I'll advertise it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower-girl that you taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself" (Shaw 103)

The rest of the story of Eliza is not depicted on the stage, but it has been given in the form of an Epilogue in prose. Thus to this play, Shaw has added a prologue in the form of a prose preface and a prose Epilogue which gives finishing touches to the story of Eliza already depicted on the stage. The Epilogue to this play provides analysis of the various ideas in the course of the play. The Epilogue gives us the complete story of Eliza by discussing in detail the motives behind her marrying Freddy. We also find how the idea of Life Force we can associate with Eliza that worked within her and helped her in making decision to marry Freddy as she believes that he was likely to make a better father for her children.

It is believed by some critics that Shaw wrote the part of Eliza's character for a particular woman he was seeing. Another interesting aspect to this play is also that how stylistically the playwright has put his denouement in an epilogue. The Epilogue of *Pygmalion* not only settles any unknown outcome for protagonist and antagonist but also shares outcomes for two secondary characters, Freddy and his sister, Clara. After so many acts, Clara Hill, Freddy's sister also becomes important in the Epilogue. She is the one who paves the way for Eliza and Freddy in their commercial enterprise. Mrs. Eynsford Hill might not have been accepted the relationship of her son and daughter-in-law as merchants if her daughter had not gone through a tremendous transformation to end up in a furniture shop. Clara starts the play as an arrogant child living off the reputation of an era gone and a family name long impoverished. In fact, it is in the final words of this Epilogue that Shaw informs his readers that the name of status, Eynsford Hill, is not the Freddy's christened name at all; it is, in fact, Freddy Cholloner. When Clara tries to catch a man of wealth, she keeps up appearances of something she is not. This brings to the forefront another of Shaw's themes, appearance versus reality. Eliza is someone she is not; her father is someone at the play's end he is not; and Clara and her brother have both posed as people of another social class of which they are no longer a part.

Check Your Progress Questions -2

1. In the play *Pygmalion*, who among the following can be considered as a foil to the character of Professor Henry Higgins?
(a) Freddy (b) Nepommuck (c) Doolittle (d) Colonel Pickering
2. George Bernard Shaw derived the title for his play *Pygmalion* from an ancient Greek legend. But this myth was more renovated by one of the greatest Roman poets. Identify the poet and his work.
(a) Lucretius—*De rerum natura*
(b) Horace—*Ars Poetica*
(c) Virgil—*Aeneid*
(d) Ovid—*Metamorphoses*
3. Comment on the relevance of Pygmalion-Galatea myth with reference to Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion*. (250 words)
4. Comment on the idea of ‘middle class morality’ with reference to Alfred Doolittle in the play *Pygmalion*. (250 words)
5. Discuss the scene of ambassador’s garden Party in which Eliza pass off as a duchess from an ordinary flower selling girl. (250 words)

2.4 LET US SUM UP

In Unit 2, all the five acts of the play are discussed critically that will help you to get a brief outline of the play as a whole. An additional introduction to the play has also been provided along with short summaries on the nature and role of the major characters of the play.

2.5 KEYWORDS

⁶*Metamorphoses*: *Metamorphoses* is a Latin narrative poem by Ovid.

⁷Phonetics: Phonetics is a branch of linguistics that comprises the study of the sounds of human speech.

⁸Paradox: A paradox is a statement that may seem absurd or contradictory but yet can be true, or at least makes sense.

⁹Dialect: A particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group.

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

- (a) George Bernard Shaw: *Pygmalion*
- (b) G. B. Shaw: *Prefaces*
- (c) A. c. Ward: *Pygmalion*

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Unit 3:

Important textual issues and themes of the play *Pygmalion*

Contents:

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 The theme of Education in *Pygmalion*
- 3.2 The elements of Satire in *Pygmalion*
- 3.3 Development of Problem Play as a form of drama with reference to *Pygmalion*
- 3.4 George Bernard Shaw's famous theory on The Life Force
- 3.5 The theme of Language as a marker of social status in *Pygmalion*
- 3.6 Comparative character analysis of Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering
- 3.7 Let us sum up
- 3.8 Suggested Readings
 - Possible Answers to Check Your Progress
 - References
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

In unit 2, you got acquainted with act-wise summaries of the play *Pygmalion*. Now this unit has been designed to

- Discuss the major issues and themes of the play *Pygmalion*.

3.1 THE THEME OF EDUCATION

George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* presents the journey of an impoverished flower girl in the London society of early twentieth century. Shaw through the character of Eliza marks the significant transformation and progress of her soul from spiritual darkness to light. In other words, her quest for identity and ultimate self-realisation as well as spiritual regeneration constitutes one of the major themes of the play. We throughout the reading of the play saw how Eliza had to undergo her transformation in three different phases. To begin with, Eliza started as a flower girl, then she transformed into a lady with noble accent and

good manners, then as an independent woman with self-respect and dignity. But before underscoring how the theme of education empowered Eliza's sudden transformation, it is quintessential to understand well the bond of Henry Higgins and Eliza in relation to its original myth of Pygmalion.

As Shaw named this play after the Greek legend, he reminded us of the ancient Pygmalion myth. Pygmalion, a sculptor made a beautiful statue and fell in love with his own creation. It is in the same context, we can bring in again the reference of Aphrodite, the Goddess of beauty for whom Pygmalion felt a special devotion. He had therefore never failed to give Aphrodite the honour that was due to her. Pygmalion prayed to Aphrodite that life may be granted to the statue that he had sculpted and accordingly his wish too got fulfilled. The statue transformed into a living girl named Galatea. Similarly, in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Henry Higgins is Pygmalion and Eliza Doolittle is Galatea. Eliza initially was just a flower girl but it was Professor Henry Higgins who decided to keep her for six months in his laboratory and then transform her into a Duchess who would walk at Ambassadors garden party. This experiment of Higgins has succeeded and he became the creator of new Eliza. But unlike the Greek legend where both Pygmalion and Galatea were united, in the play there is no chance of their union. Professor Henry Higgins does not marry his creation as Pygmalion does in the Greek myth.

As we read the play, we find that under the tutelage of Henry Higgins, Eliza's accent, dress and manners changed from a Cockney woman into an upper class English lady. When we first meet Eliza, we find that she is poor, illiterate and an ignorant girl who earns her bread by selling flowers. She speaks Cockney dialect which only the native Londoners can understand. Yet her ways to defy and her courage to speak up in a defiant manner to every situation shows her indomitable spirit. For instance, in Act I, Eliza's going home in a taxi that she can hardly afford shows a spirit of defiance in her and also her pride and ambition. Eliza herself believes that she is not an ordinary girl, but a one who can hold her own against any problem.

Eliza's transformation and her education in phonetics is a severe ordeal yet her courage to accomplish an identity for her own proves her unconquerable spirit. To substantiate this argument, we can refer to Eliza's words with Professor Higgins in Act II. When Professor Higgins denied Eliza to take tuitions in Phonetics, she for the first time is seen voicing her emotions, expressing her desire to have her own identity. She says:

I want to be a lady in a flower shop stead of sellin at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they wont take me unless I can talk more genteel. (Shaw 23)

As Eliza's education proceeds, she realises that the difference between a flower girl and a duchess is not how she behaves but how she is treated. In Act III of the play, Eliza's progress in her education is tested. It was in Mrs. Higgins' "at-home day" Eliza first shows her transformation from the flower girl of Act I.

Eliza, who is exquisitely dressed, produces an impression of such remarkable distinction and beauty as she enters that they all rise, quite fluttered. Guided by Higgins's signals, she comes to Mrs Higgins with studied grace. (Shaw 57)

But her education is not yet complete, for her 'small talk' betrays her social background. She still does not know what a lady should talk about at a social gathering. When a reference is made to the outbreak of Influenza, Eliza remarked that her aunt was supposed to have died of Influenza, but that actually her aunt had been murdered by some of her own relatives who had killed her only to take possession from the old woman's new straw hat. Then Eliza goes on to speak of the habitual drunkenness of her father. In short, Eliza stated talking about matters which easily showed her low origin, even though the language she speaks is almost flawless and the manner in which she speaks is worthy of a highly educated person. The upshot of this test is that Eliza projected and found wanting and in need of some further instruction. But three months still remain to complete the process of her education. Accordingly Higgins gave his instruction and lesson in phonetics and after the conclusion of six months of training, she is again subjected to another test. This time she is taken to the party of an ambassador where she is able to pass off not merely as a Duchess, but as a princess with royal blood in her veins. In Act III, we are introduced to one of Higgins's student whose name is Nepommuck and he claims to speak thirty two languages, then there is a hostess whom we find expressing their opinions upon Eliza at the party:

HOSTESS. Ah, here you are at last, Nepommuck. Have you found out all about the Doolittle lady?

NEPOMMUCK. I have found out all about her. She is a fraud.

HOSTESS. A fraud! Oh no.

NEPOMMUCK. YES, yes. She cannot deceive me. Her name cannot be Doolittle.

HIGGINS. Why?

NEPOMMUCK. Because Doolittle is an English name. And she is not English.

HOSTESS. Oh, nonsense! She speaks English perfectly.

NEPOMMUCK. Too perfectly. Can you shew me any English woman who speaks English as it should be spoken? Only foreigners who have been taught to speak it speak it well.

HOSTESS. Certainly she terrified me by the way she said How d'ye do. I had a schoolmistress who talked like that; and I was mortally afraid of her. but if she is not English what is she?

NEPOMMUCK. Hungarian.

ALL THE REST. Hungarian!

NEPOMMUCK. Hungarian. And of royal blood. I am Hungarian. My blood is royal.

HIGGINS. Did you speak to her in Hungarian?

NEPOMMUCK. I did. She was very clever. She said "Please speak to me in English: I do not understand French." French! She pretend not to know the difference between Hungarian and French. Impossible: she knows both.

HIGGINS. And the blood royal? How did you find that out?

NEPOMMUCK. Instinct, maestro, instinct. Only the Magyar races can produce that air of the divine right, those resolute eyes. She is a princess. (Shaw 70-71)

So from this instance, we can make out that all at the ambassador's party were deceived by Eliza's lady like manners and deportment, and it is said that she speaks like Queen Victoria herself. So it has all been a grand success.

During the course of her education in Phonetics, Eliza's soul too has been seen awakened. She has transformed herself quite spiritually, and that is her real education. But now as her education is complete, she becomes aware of the problem that faces her. Eliza now becomes conscious and therefore she seeks social identity. She understands that she had been lifted out of her social environment and now she cannot return to it. But she also does not belong to the middle class to which her education has raised her. Thus her quest for social identity, and the loss of her previous identity filled her with despair.

From this we can make an observation that Eliza Doolittle's education undoubtedly made her a lady, but now she cannot go back to her former environment and sell flowers as she used to do. Eliza is confronted with the problem of loss of identity and alienation. In case of Higgins and Pickering, they have lost interest in her as soon as their experiment is over. They ignore her completely, and her despair and frustration is forcefully expressed, when she throws the slippers of Higgins into his face. She says to Higgins:

I'd like to kill you, you selfish brute. Why didn't you leave me where you picked me out of—in the gutter? You thank God it's all over, and that now you can throw me back again there, do you? [*She crimps her fingers frantically*] . . . [*puling herself together in desperation*] What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me? (Shaw 75-76)

So it can be said that Eliza feels alienated from her earlier social environment and now her quest is for identity and belongingness in the higher social environment to which she has been raised. But her soul has not been crushed. As she comes out of Higgins's house at midnight, she meets Freddy, who is passionately in love with her. Soon they are happily married and Eliza sets up a flower shop with the help of Colonel Pickering. They work hard, learn book-keeping, accountancy and type-writing. Soon their business flourished and there are clear indications that they would live happily together ever afterwards.

Eliza's education is complete as she has not only been made a lady, but her soul has also been awakened and transformed that enabled her to acquire her lost self confidence after Higgins's experiment. Thus, it can be concluded that Eliza's metamorphosis marks the growth of her spirituality, but more of her individuality. Her learning as well as her desire to grow independent made her successful in her quest of identity and belongingness which completes her process of education.

3.2 THE ELEMENTS OF SATIRE IN *PYGMALION*

Satire can be described as the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it more ridiculous and evoking towards it the attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. Satire differs from the comic in the sense that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire derides, in other words, satire uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual as we can find in personal satires, or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation or even the entire human race. But the writing of satire has usually been justified by those who practice it as a corrective of human vice and folly. In this context, we can refer to G. B. Shaw as a satirist who through his play *Pygmalion* has put forward the assumptions of social superiority and inferiority that underlie the problem of caste system. Shaw in this play demonstrates how speech and etiquette preserve class differences. Shaw further satirise the middle class morality and the shallowness of the society in this play.

As a socialist, G. B. Shaw was actually displeased with what he perceived as the flaws of British class system of his time. He wrote in his *Preface to Pygmalion*,

The English have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. They cannot spell it because they have nothing to spell it with but an old foreign alphabet of which only the consonants—and not all of them—have any agreed speech value. Consequently no man can teach himself what it should sound like from reading it; and it is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman despise him. (Shaw 1)

Shaw's didacticism is seen in the very beginning of this play. He has stressed upon the fact that environment is the most important factor in order to shape and mould one's character. The education of Eliza in Phonetics, her new environment, and her training in the middle class manners and morality transform her from a flower girl to a duchess which Professor Higgins intended to make her. Thus through Higgins, Shaw illustrates the truth that speech which differs from one context to another context is a great barrier between social classes.

The major didactic achievement of the play is its pointed objectification of the hollowness of social distinctions, and its assertion of the importance of the individual personality which such class distinction obscure. If a flower girl can be transformed into a duchess in six months, but the only things which distinguish a duchess are inherited social prestige and money, neither of which she has earned. So we can emphasise the whole play *Pygmalion* as a satire in order to indicate the flaws in social classes. Shaw takes the stereotypical poor citizen of British society and uses her as a mouth piece for his message. Her transformation and easy acceptance into the wealthy class displays nothing but the vanity of society. All it took was not a change in personality and morals but of accent and appearance to create what society perceives as a "lady".

Shaw uses satire to ridicule the shortcomings of people or institutions in an attempt to bring about change. The tone of the satire in *Pygmalion* is somewhere between savage and gentle. Its target is society itself, the class structure; the attitudes of the upper, middle and working classes; and the ways in which the language they use affect the members of these classes. Shaw attacks the false values and the posturing of the upper classes but also the "middle class morality" which is as hypocritical as its upper class counterpart. Among his main targets are the Eynsford Hills, who at least initially, prefer the pretension of "genteel poverty" to the not so harsh realities of a middle class existence. At the ambassador's party, the brief scene at the end of Act III displays the mockery at

the upper class suggesting that its fatuous members are easily duped by the superficial through Eliza's dress, deportment and accent. All are deceived by the transformed Eliza and none for a single time suspected her original roots.

In Shaw's view "middle class morality" is every bit as hypocritical as its upper class counterpart. Thus the middle class does not escape Shaw's satire. When the playwright successfully catapults into the middle class a man of such questionable character as Alfred

Doolittle, he demonstrates his disdain for hypocrisy no matter what class the hypocrite belongs to. Through Alfred Doolittle, Eliza's father, Shaw has exposed the hollowness of conventional morality, and has also shown his wretchedness and misery at his suddenly being lifted out of his social environment by the sudden acquisition of wealth. There is no doubt that Doolittle is a dissolute person given to immoderate drinking and debauchery. He has hardly any concept of what is right and wrong and wants to enjoy life without caring for generally accepted morals. Doolittle is a spokesman of Shaw's unconventional views. Shaw exposes the injustice and folly of conventional standards of morality. Doolittle laughs at the conventional morality of the English and turns it upside down. He ridicules the claim that society should distribute its wealth among its members as they deserve. Alfred Doolittle in Act II says:

I'm one of the undeserving poor: that's what I am. Think of what that means to a man. It means that he's up agen middle class morality all the time. If theres anything going, and I put in for a bit of it, it's always the same story: "you're undeserving; so you can't have it." But my needs is as great as the most deserving widow's that ever got money out of six different charities in one week for the death of the same husband. I don't need less than a deserving man: I need more. I don't eat less hearty than him; and I drink a lot more. I want a bit of amusement, cause I'm a thinking man. I want cheerfulness and a song and a band when I feel low. Well, they charge me just the same for everything as they charge the deserving. (Shaw 40-41)

There is much truth in the argument put forwarded by Alfred Doolittle. He may be 'undeserving' but true morality means that he should be made deserving by society which should provide him with suitable work and make him deserving, honest and a useful member of society. But this is not done and so the 'undeserving poor' becomes more dishonest, dissolute and so even more undeserving than before. Further Doolittle loses his social identity, by the sudden acquisition of wealth and his consequent suffering and misery is pathetic in the extreme. Like his daughter, Alfred Doolittle is also suddenly lifted out of

slumdom by the caprice of Pygmalion-Higgins. Higgins once mentioned him in a letter as the most original moralist at present in England to Ezra D. Wannafeller, who was giving five millions to found Moral Reform Societies all over the world and who wanted Higgins to invent a universal language for him. Wannafeller is dead and has left Doolittle three thousand pounds a year on condition that he delivers six lectures to his moral reform society. Higgins, thus is responsible for the transformation of Doolittle from undeserving dustman to a gentleman.

Finally Shaw uses satire to point out the irrationality of the conventional view of romantic love and marriage. This is especially evident in the Epilogue where the playwright discusses the folly of a stock happy ending, gently ridicules each of the play's characters. Where Pygmalion sculpts a wife that fits his needs, Higgins virtually recreates Eliza, turning her into an upper class member of society. The vanity and superficiality of British society is further depicted as Eliza is so easily accepted into the upper echelon of society, because she was considered upper class not for her character or personality, but rather for her appearance and manner of speech.

With its ending too Shaw clearly satirizes the British society particularly the role of women in society as his very independent character leaves Higgins, who has virtually recreated her. She explains this rejection by saying to Higgins that she will always be a flower girl. But Eliza contends, being a lady depends more upon internal behavior and goodness than upon speech and social class.

The purpose of a satire in *Pygmalion* is to convey and criticize the stupidity of the human race. Bernard Shaw criticizes the upper class. For instance, Higgins acts as if he is the most proper man, with the correct grace; however, Mrs. Pearce exposes the truth and vanity of her master. Mrs. Pearce tells Eliza that Higgins will often come to breakfast in his nightgown and will use the table cloth as a napkin. This is obviously not respectful and it criticizes the hypocrisy of the upper class. Thus in conclusion, it can be said that Shaw's goal of satirizing *Pygmalion* was to portray the shallowness of society, which based a person's merit or worth simply on their social graces, how they dressed or how they acted.

3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF PROBLEM PLAY AS A FORM OF DRAMA WITH REFERENCE TO *PYGMALION*

The Problem Play is a form of drama that emerged during the nineteenth century as part of the wider movement of realism in the arts, especially following the innovations of Henrik Ibsen in Problem plays, the situation faced by the protagonist is put forward by the author as a representative instance of a contemporary social problem; often the dramatist manages –by the use of a

character who speaks for the author, or by the evolution of plot, or both—to propose a solution to the problem which is at odds with prevailing opinion. The issue may be the inadequate autonomy, scope and dignity allotted to women in the middle class nineteenth century family as we can find in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879); or the morality of prostitution, regarded as a typical product of the economic system in a capitalist society as we can find in G. B. Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1898); or the crisis in racial and ethnic relations in present-day America.

Problem play has its sub-category, often identified as the discussion play, in which the social issue is not incorporated into a plot but expounded in the give and take of a sustained debate among the characters. In a specialised application, the term Problem play is sometimes applied to a group of Shakespeare's plays, also called "bitter comedies". Shakespeare's plays like *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, and *All's Well That Ends Well* can be grouped as Problem plays which explore the ignoble aspects of human nature, and in which the resolution of the plot seems to many readers to be problematic, in that it does not settle or solve, except superficially, the moral problem raised in the play. By extension, the term came to be applied also to other Shakespearean plays which explore the dark side of human nature, or which seem to leave unresolved the issues that arise in the course of action.

As mentioned earlier, a Problem play is characterised by a series of problems but no solutions to these problems are provided by the dramatist. Such a play serves as a great irritant to thought. It is thought provoking as the readers are provoked to think over the problem presented in the play and work out their own solutions to those problems. G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion* is a problem play in this sense. A number of problems have been presented and discussed, and the readers are expected to think for themselves, and work out their own solutions. Among the pressing social themes that Shaw addresses in *Pygmalion* is the idea of an individual's place in society as dictated by externals of speech and manners. The other social problems Shaw tackles are sex, gender roles, wealth, poverty, language, meaning of language, appearances and beauty, reality, transformation, human dignity and human responsibility.

The most important problem presented in *Pygmalion* is the problem of education. Eliza Doolittle's education in Phonetics is a difficult problem, but Higgins successfully overcomes the difficulties so much so that within six months Eliza can easily pass off as a foreign princess at an ambassador's garden party. But her education creates problems for Eliza. Education has empowered her to become a lady, but now she cannot go back to her former environment and sell flowers as she used to do. Eliza in Act IV poignantly puts her own problems in the following

words: “What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What’s to become of me?” (Shaw 76). So it can be said that the problem in *Pygmalion* is like the world-problem of education. To educate is to give new life to those who receive the education, and that new life produces discontent with existing circumstances and creates the desire for a different kind of world. In places where the spread of education has led to personal and social unrest, any teacher might be told as Eliza tells Higgins, “You never thought of the trouble it would make for me”, to which Higgins replies: “Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble” (Shaw 100).

This world problem is presented in *Pygmalion* through the medium of a lesser theme which is a national one confined to the English people who have no respect for their language, and will not teach their children to speak it. Shaw was disgusted by the harsh and slovenly speech of many people in England. He blamed this onto English spelling, and he left most of his large fortune to pay the expenses of starting a new English alphabet based on phonetic principles which would provide a separate symbol and sign for each spoken word. Shaw believed that this exact representation of sound, in writing and in print, would bring about correct pronunciation by everyone, and break down class-distinctions. But the class distinctions are not so broken in the present play, and so Eliza’s predicament remains. As Higgins takes no further interest in her, she has to work out her own solution. Indications in the play are given that the problem would be solved by marrying Freddy but he has been brought to no occupation. Eliza herself would have to support him, if she marries him. Their marriage and after life has not been depicted in the play itself but the account of their marriage and of their success as florists and green grocers has been given in the appendix which Shaw has added to the play. The natural solution to Eliza’s problems would have been a marriage with Professor Higgins or Colonel Pickering. But they are both “confirmed old bachelors.” But this does not happen and so her problem remains unsolved. Yet the dramatist has provided no solution, but he has certainly focused on the problem, and compelled his readers to sit up and think.

In a Problem play, it is neither the fate nor the flaw in the character that causes tragedy, but it is the society and its rigid institutions and organisations. The individual is crushed under social machinery. Even when the conflict arises from the narrowness or the selfishness of individuals, the dramatist is generally inclined to blame the social set up which is responsible for breeding such outlooks. For instance, another problem presented in the play is the predicament of Alfred Doolittle. He was considered ‘undeserving poor’, and so nothing was done for him by society. Still he was happy in his poverty and contented with his life as a poor dustman. But as soon as he was raised to the status of a middle class man,

he could no longer be a happy dustman. It became imperative for him to conform to the middle class morality and social code. He had lost his former identity. He was alienated from his former class and must now acquire a new identity and a new sense of belonging to a higher class. Alfred Doolittle expresses his problem thus:

Who asked him to make a gentleman of me? I was happy. I was free. I touched pretty nigh everybody for money when I wanted it, same as I touched you, Enry Iggins. Now I am worried; tied neck and heels; and everybody touches me for money. (Shaw 87)

In these lines, the predicament of Doolittle is shown at its peak. Shaw has highlighted Doolittle's problem and many of the other characters, yet no solution has been provided. Thus in conclusion it can be stated that Problem is a new drama that emerged in modern age that throws light on various aspects of society, the miserable inequality between the rich and the poor, the troubles of lower and working classes, prostitution, marital relations and sexual morality as a whole. With reference to *Pygmalion*, we find that most of the problems arise out of the social maladjustment, involving the clash of one social group against another or of the individual against the social machinery, which is pitiless, inhuman and almost inexorable, so that once it has been set in motion it will roll on to its destination, crushing the poor and innocent under its heavy wheels. Thus a Problem play is essentially "a play of ideas." To quote G. B. Shaw, it is "a factory of thought". Even Galsworthy says, "The perfect dramatist rounds up his characters and facts within the ring-fence of a dominant idea". The Problem playwrights regard drama as a tool to disseminate their ideas. To some, it is the most delightful and effective source of propaganda and social reform.

3.4 GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S FAMOUS THEORY ON THE LIFE FORCE

Shaw is not less than a philosopher in the sense that he has tried to present a coherent and comprehensive view of human nature and of human life, and also to show the way in which human life should be best lived. He propagated his ideas on The Life Force which he considers to be the essence, the ultimate reality behind the world of senses. Shaw's theory of Life Force was considerably influenced by the scientific theories of the nineteenth century. Shaw is of the view that even in the very beginning universe contained both life and matter. Matter was there to begin with as also there was life. Matter, as a matter of fact is often spoken of as Life's enemy. Regarding matter in the light of an enemy, life seeks to

dominate and subdue it. It is for this reason that life enters into matter and animates it. The result of this animation is a living organism; it is life expressed in matter. Shaw suggests that Life uses matter as an instrument, because life cannot evolve or develop unless it enters into matter and creates living organisms. Life has two purposes: (1) the immediate purpose of life is to acquire new faculties and higher intelligence. This is done by creating living organisms. But matter limits the operation of the Life Force thus forcing it to make efforts to overcome these limitations and thus acquire new powers and new faculties. (2) The ultimate object of Life Force is to pass beyond matter, i.e., the necessity of incarnating itself in matter, of depending upon matter for its evolution. When this is achieved, Life's individualised expressions will become permanently individualised i.e., immortal. Thus in *Back to Methuselah*, the Ancient tells the Newly Born that their ultimate destiny is to become immortal, which is conceived of as a state of pure thought. From a study of this series of plays we learn'

- (i) That life was originally a whirlpool of pure force.
- (ii) That it entered into matter, and used it for its own purposes.
- (iii) That by doing so it became a matter's slave.
- (iv) The object of Life Force is to put an end to this slavery by winning free from or conquering matter. But it is not clear whether matter will still persist or it will be eliminated by life.
- (v) That redemption from flesh having been achieved, life will become pure thought.

Since man is the instrument of the Life Force for the evolution of higher forms, he must act in a way which is likely to further the evolutionary process. It is by the maximum expenditure of effort and energy in working and thinking that a man will develop his existing faculties and thus contribute his might to a process of evolution, according to Shaw's philosophy, the Life Force works in two ways. In the woman, its purpose is to multiply life, and so instinctively the woman pursues and marries the man who is likely to make the best possible father to her children. Man succumbs to her romantic charms and sex appeal and she is to have her own way. but there are certain rare men—men of genius—who do not succumb to the women. such men of genius are also subject to the working of the Life Force, but through them the purpose of the Life Force is not to multiply life, but to raise it to a higher level. In the genius, life's purpose is to carry life itself to heights of consciousness not previously achieved: in the woman, to safeguard and maintain the level which has already been attained. Thus as in the genius, too, Life Force is extra-ordinarily intense, he is ready to sacrifice woman to his higher purposes, just as woman sacrifices the ordinary man to her own. The mind of the

genius is in advance of the age in which he is born; the world is not ready to pay for the work which the genius does. Woman may sometimes win him over by making him devote his energies to her own glorification. In this way is born romantic art, i.e., art devoted to the glorification of woman. But in most cases, the genius has visions of beauty and devotes his time and energy to make others see it. Such a man of genius, therefore, are impervious to the charms of women. They are devoted scientists, scholars, artists, professors etc. In Shaw's plays, there is ever a conflict between the woman and the man of genius, and *Pygmalion* is exception in this respect.

In *Pygmalion*, Higgins is the genius who has acquired name and fame as professor of Phonetics, and his fame as a scholar has spread to far countries so much so that Colonel Pickering comes all the way from India to meet him, and exchange views with him. He had such a command over language that within six months he is able to transform Eliza, the flower girl into a lady who can pass off as a foreign princess at an ambassador's garden party. But he does not marry her as the *Pygmalion-Galatea* legend leads us to presume. His interest in her ceases as soon as his experiment is over, even though her soul is his own creation.

Eliza, too instinctively feels that he would remain impervious to her charms, and she would always be to him a humble and shabby flower girl. She makes no effort to use her charms on him for she realises that he would not make a proper father and bread-winner for her children. So, she throws his slippers into his face, leaves his house and marries Freddy for he is young and so is likely to be a better father for her children. Higgins wants her to live with him and Pickering. He does so because she can manage his household, and leave him free to devote more time to his intellectual pursuits. But such a life is not acceptable to the spirited and dynamic Eliza. The result is "the conflict of wills", between the two—the woman and the man of genius—and in this conflict the woman is able to have her own way as we can find in Eliza's case.

The play centres round the conflict of will between the two. According to many critics, if one puts aside momentarily all of the witty social criticisms which Shaw's drama contains, it becomes a portrayal of life in which the key to human relationship is, in one degree of intensity or another, conflict of wills. Since *Pygmalion* as its title indicates, is concerned with the creation of a human being, the clues which it offers to Shaw's conception of basic human nature and of human relationship are especially significant. Essentially Eliza Doolittle is transformed from a sub-human flower girl into a truly human being because she shakes off her fears, develops a will of her own and is able to meet Higgins as an equal in the strife of wills which is the human condition.

But Eliza's final transformation takes place only when she asserts purposes of her own which are not born of intimidation, knocking Higgins off the god-like perch from which he has viewed her only as an object, awakening for the first time, his anger and his genuine human concern for her. The "squashed cabbage leaf" becomes, as Higgins puts it, "consort battleship". The military metaphor is significant. Eliza is fully human because she is now prepared to engage on equal terms with Higgins in a warfare of wills ultimately the worst thing which can happen to an individual in the strife at the psychological level, as the example of Eliza Doolittle suggests, is to be "intimidated" or "discouraged" by another human will. It is in this way that one experiences the humiliation of becoming merely an object in another's world, merely a means to another's personal ends. Thus, in her intimidated state Eliza knows the wretchedness of being nothing more than an experimental object in Higgins' scheme, to demonstrate the power of speech-training to bridge the gap between classes. But she rises above such intimidation, and is able to hold her own in the conflict of wills with Higgins, the genius, works out her own destiny and marries Freddy because the Life Force tells her that he would make a better father to her children. In the conflict of wills as usual the victory goes to the woman and the man, the genius, is left alone to carry on his work to raise life to a higher level.

3.5 THE THEME OF LANGUAGE AS A MARKER OF SOCIAL STATUS IN *PYGMALION*

In G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the theme of language can be conceived as an efficacious identifier of social status of human beings. Language is exposed to a large scale of extrinsic influences which catalyse the production of variations in speech properties that indicate the various circumstances in which language is spoken. *Pygmalion* is the depository of Cockney dialect through which Shaw endeavours to provide a bonafide portrait of the language of London's lower-class, during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century's, embodied in his memorable character Eliza Doolittle. So it is significant to contextualise the language used by the main character so as to manifest how language can be the reflection of one's social status.

Language and society are interdependently correlated because the linguistic features contribute to provide a realistic account of the speaker's social background. Language usage varies according to miscellaneous criteria; for instance, language is distinctly used from one region to another in the same speech community, and thus, one's regional location is determinant of the way language is used. Moreover, people's level of education together with speakers belonging to various social strata utter divergent speech features in as much as a language

used by the genteel classes varies from that used by the middle and even by the lower classes. In this context, we can remember famous semiotician Bakhtin who observes that the way people speak can reflect heterogeneous social classes and personal traits. Dialects are the products of the improper way of using language, dialects are often regarded as some kind of deviation from a norm—as aberrations of a correct or standard form of language. In Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Eliza speaks Cockney dialect. Cockney is a term now used exclusively for a person born in London, though it was at one time applied contemptuously by country people to those living in towns, whom they regarded as 'cockered' (i.e., coddled, or pampered). It is usually the uneducated Londoner who is now called 'a cockney', and Cockney is the language he or she uses. But as we find in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, there is a meticulous experiment on Eliza's discourse to authenticate how language contributes in marking her social status. Eliza is a poor flower selling girl who speaks unintelligible language, reporting the dialect of lower-class Londoners; receives language lessons from a phonetic professor named Henry Higgins so as to ameliorate her social status through maintaining a good language that entitles her to obtain a job in a flower shop as well as to present herself as a lady in her society.

In Shaw's *Pygmalion*, there is a meticulous experiment on Eliza's discourse to authenticate how language contributes in marking her social status. Bloom draws on the fact that "Pygmalion had received considerable scholarly attention because it demonstrates Shaw's interest in the role of language in the English class system" (70). Features of Eliza's lower-class cockney dialect combine to make her language reflect her uneducated and low social background. In fact, Eliza's first discourse informs the readers at first impression that she is a poor girl who sells flowers in London's streets. She uses her dialect, or the only language that she knows, to do her work "Theres mennersf'yer! TÝ-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad" (Shaw 8). Eliza is unable to speak intelligibly due to her poor educational level, incorrect pronunciation, grammar mistakes and bad choice of words feature her language. This we can find in Act I when she speaks to Mrs Eynsford Hill about her son :

The Flower girl: Ow, eez yÝ-ooa san, is e? Wal, fewd dan y' de-ooty bawmz a mather should, eed now bettern tospawl a pore gel's flahrzn then ran awy athaht pyin. Will ye-oo py me f'them?.
(Shaw 9)

Eliza is disdained because of her speech patterns as when The Note Taker reproduced her sounds "Cheer ap, Keptin; n'baw ya flahr orf a pore gel" (Shaw 12) and he adds later that "a woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere — no right to live" (Shaw 16).

However, Eliza gains the opportunity to be taught to speak a good language which will enable her to form a new social identity. This advantage provides Eliza with the opportunity to socialize with people above her level as Colonel Pickering and thus recognizes sociolinguistic differences:

The Note Taker: You see this creature with her kerbstone English: The English that will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days. Well, sir, in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English . . . (Shaw 16)

Eliza's non-standard spelling stresses her social inferiority in contrast to the prosperous life of her scholarly uppermiddle class tutor Henry Higgins who criticizes her language as being inaccurate "There! That's all you get out of Eliza. Ah-oh-ow-oo! No use explaining . . ." (Shaw 31). When trained by Professor Higgins, Eliza's speech improves and her language metamorphoses her into a respectable lady which is apparent in her use of proper language in Act III:

Liza: [*Speaking with pedantic correctness of pronunciation and great beauty of tone*] How do you do, Mrs. Higgins? [*She grasps slightly in making sure of the H in Higgins, but is quite successful*]. Mr. Higgins told me I might come (Shaw 57).

Education gives Eliza the chance to climb up the social ladder and present herself very properly and language training increased Eliza's potential as she is able to look for new prospects. She now understands herself that better education is connected with social progress. As she claims that she can teach phonetics:

Liza: [. . .] I'll go and be a teacher

Higgins: What'll you teach, in heaven's name?

Liza: what you taught me. I'll teach phonetics (Shaw 103).

Eliza recognizes the value of maintaining a refined accent that enables her to perpetuate a sense of dignity and self-possession as when she rebels against the bullying of her tutor "You think I must go back to Wimpole Street because I have nowhere else to go but father's. But don't you be too sure that you have me under your feet to be trampled on and talked down" (Shaw 103). Eliza as an independent woman rises in Act V. We find that her language helped her to achieve autonomy, strive and live honourably in her society as when she asserts:

Liza: [. . .] I'll advertise it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas" (Shaw 103).

So it can be said that Eliza rises from ignorance and darkness to spiritual light through successive stages of despair, self-realization, illumination and social identity. Higgins's recognition of Eliza as a tower of strength at the end of the play is a direct reference that language can turn low outcast people in society into highly valued individuals with noble potentialities. Eliza's dialect in *Pygmalion* exemplified the role of language in delineating people's social status as it provides an incarnate portrait of the plight of London's low-ranking classes. Thus it can be concluded that language can be a powerful medium that manifests a variety of authentic social contexts.

3.6 COMPARATIVE CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF HENRY HIGGINS AND COLONEL PICKERING

The character of Henry Higgins is first introduced in Act I as a note taker who takes notes of the words people say in order to study the different dialects spoken in different localities of London. He is a celebrated Professor of Phonetics and his command over his subject is seen in the fact that he can promptly and accurately place a person in the locality to which he or she belongs merely by listening to the few words spoken by the person concerned. Higgins is a bundle of contradictions and it is this aspect of his character stresses him as a paradoxical being. He is at once a tyrannical bully and a charmer, an impish schoolboy and a flamboyant wooer of souls, a scientist with an extravagant imagination and a man so blind to the nature of his own personality that he thinks of himself as timid, modest, diffident. Again and again he bullies and dominates, but when he is charged with "passing over people", he says that he is not a motor bus and must not be spoken off as if he were one. He does bully Eliza Doolittle and does not care for her feelings. He again and again refers to her as a "squashed cabbage leaf", or as a "gutter-snipe". In fact when Eliza won the bet for him by passing successfully at the ambassador's garden party, he does not even utter a single word of gratitude to her.

Along with Professor Henry Higgins, there is another character called Colonel Pickering, who like the former is interested in the study of Phonetics. Pickering has studied Indian dialects. But in contrast to Higgins, Pickering takes keen interest in Eliza's education. He is a man of high moral principles who will not allow a poor helpless girl like Eliza to be exploited under any circumstances. When Eliza comes to them and the experiment begins, he asks Higgins, "Are you a man of good character where women are concerned?" (Shaw 35). In this regard, Higgins make some cynical comments on the relations between men and women. Pickering then says: "Come, Higgins! You know what I mean. If I'm to be in this business I shall feel responsible for that girl. I hope it's understood that

no advantage is to be taken of her position.” (Shaw 36). From this, it can be said that Pickering’s role in the education of Eliza is a crucial one. He assumes the role of a guardian to protect her from any possible harm or sexual exploitation. Further, he is conceived as a foil to Higgins, and serves to throw into sharp relief the character, habits, manners of the central figure of the play, i.e., Henry Higgins. Pickering is gentle and self-controlled man who does not lose his temper at trifles, but Higgins has a stormy temper. Both of them are scholars, but Pickering is a refined scholar, while Higgins is somewhat boorish. For instance, at the party of Higgins’s mother, Higgins speak to the Hill family not only bluntly but rudely, making it necessary for his mother to admit that her celebrated son has no manners. But Pickering is considerate and gentle, and behaves as a gentleman.

The greatest contrast between the two men is emphasised in the final act of the play, i.e., in Act V when Eliza pays glowing tributes to Pickering. She says:

It’s not because you paid for my dresses. I know you are generous to everybody with money. But it was from you that I learnt really nice manners; and this is what makes a lady, isn’t it? You see it was so very difficult for me with the example of Professor Higgins always before me. I was brought up to be just like him, unable to control myself, and using bad language on the slightest provocation. And I should never have known that ladies and gentlemen didn’t behave like that if you hadn’t been there. (Shaw 92)

Eliza further says that, “Your calling me Miss Doolittle that day when I first came to Wimpole Street. That was the beginning of self-respect for me . . . I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will” (Shaw 93-94).

Further while Pickering enjoys social visits, Higgins has scholarly contempt for them. He regards light talk usual at such gatherings as nothing but tomfoolery. The two men are also contrasted so far as their intelligence is concerned. As a scholar, Higgins is a towering figure towers and shoulders above Pickering. Higgins is a fertile source of fun and humour in the play owing to his wit which is paradoxical and at the same time sarcastic. But Pickering lacks these qualities. Higgins is much more vital and vigorous than Pickering. Pickering too has also nothing of the power of eloquence and persuasion through which to quote the words of Eliza, he “can twist the heart of a girl” and persuade her to accept the course of action he wants her to follow.

In conclusion, it can be said that Higgins on his own would not be very funny, so Bernard Shaw has to provide characters who act as the respectable norm beside which he can be judged. Mrs Pearce with her common sense is one of these characters, but it is necessary for the play's success that there be another man contrasted with Higgins. Colonel Pickering is that man and his part in the play is vital. Thus, Pickering can be seen as a foil to Higgins and perhaps throughout the play he causes us to sympathise with him more than we should do otherwise in comparison to Higgins.

3.7 LET US SUM UP:

In this unit, the major issues of the play have been highlighted that will help you to form new more ideas regarding the play. The themes that are incorporated here like the transformation of Eliza from a flower girl to a duchess with the help of education, then the significance of language as a sign of one's social identity, the theory of The life Force constitutes the pertinent themes of the play.

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS:

- (a) Christopher Innes: *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*.
- (b) Harold Bloom: *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: George Bernard Shaw*.

Possible Answers to CYP-1

Answers:

1. (b) 2. (c) 3. (d) 4. (a) 5. (b) 6. (c) 7. (a) 8. (c)

Possible Answers to CYP-2

1. (d), 2. (d), 3. Find in section 2.1,
4. Find in sub-section 2.3.5 (Act V),
5. Find in sub-section 2.3.3 (Act III)

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MODEL QUESTIONS

- (a) Explain with detail analysis the elements of Satire in G. B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*.
- (b) Critically examine the theme of language as a marker of social status in *Pygmalion*.
- (c) Write a critical note on the development of Problem play as a new form of drama with reference to the play *Pygmalion*.
- (d) How the theme of Education in *Pygmalion* contributed to the transformation of Eliza Doolittle? Illustrate with relevant examples from the text.
- (e) Point out the suitability of the title *Pygmalion* and its mingling of Pygmalion legend with reference to the suitable examples from the text.
- (f) Critically examine Shaw's famous theory of The Life Force with reference to his play *Pygmalion*.
- (g) Compare and contrast the character of Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering with reference to the text prescribed in your syllabus.
- (h) Enumerate with examples Eliza's quest for identity and her self-realisation in the play *Pygmalion*.

PART III: WAITING FOR GODOT

UNIT I: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Contents:

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives
- 1.3 Theatre of the Absurd
- 1.4 Waiting for Godot: An overview
- 1.5 Samuel Beckett as a dramatist

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Initially written in French in 1948 as *En Attendant Godot*, Beckett's play was published in French in October of 1952 before its first stage production in Paris in January of 1953. Later translated into English by Beckett himself as *Waiting for Godot*, the play was produced in London in 1955 and in the United States in 1956 and has been produced worldwide. Beckett's play came to be considered an essential example of what Martin Esslin later called "Theatre of the Absurd," a term that Beckett disavowed but which remains a handy description for one of the most important theatre movements of the twentieth century.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

- To study the term 'Theatre of the Absurd' – Origin and Definition
- To study Samuel Beckett as a dramatist
- To provide an overview of the play

1.3 THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The "Theatre of the Absurd" is a term derived from Albert Camus' essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" and a clear analysis on the subject of the Absurd Drama is to be found in Martin Esslin's book *The Theatre of the Absurd*. It is a term applied to a group of dramatists in the 1950's who seem to share a common attitude towards the predicament of human beings in this universe, essentially those summarised by Camus who first realized the absurdity of existence during

the Second World War and gave a bold expression to the meaninglessness of life in his novels and drama. Camus defined the “absurd” as the tension which emerges from man’s determination to discover purpose and order in a world which refuses to evidence either. Awareness of a lack of purpose in all we do produces a metaphysical anguish which is a central theme for the writers of the theatre of the Absurd. The most notable dramatists of the Absurd Theatre are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter. These dramatists commonly believed that life is essentially meaningless and therefore miserable. There is no hope because of the inevitable futility of man’s effort. Reality is unbearable, unless relieved by dreams and illusions.

In the Absurd drama, there is no conventional plot or action. There is no characterization, no tragic hero, no logical sequence and no culmination. In such plays very little happens as nothing meaningful can happen. The playwrights of the Absurd blend the qualities of farce and comedy and are in the best sense ironic. There is just the complete denial of conventional values.

The theatre of the Absurd owes much to movements like Existentialism, Expressionism and Surrealism. These plays disown the traditional approach that man is a rational being who lives in an intelligible universe. It also disowns heroism and dignity of man. The dramatists of the Absurd insist upon the nothingness and absurdity of life. Samuel Beckett aptly expresses this in ‘Waiting for Godot’— ‘Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it is awful’. In course of a few decades the world has witnessed two global wars. Life has lost its sanctity, man is thoroughly disillusioned which was once invested with glory and romance. The playwrights of the Absurd had represented man’s sufferings from metaphysical anguish, totally avoiding all conventional norms of play, have created a dramaturgy that reflected their anguish vision of universal reality. This has been done through apparently meaningless, illogical unrelated dialogue and action. The world of the Absurd drama is a vast vacuum without hope or light where man is an outsider, a stranger in exile. He is divorced from the purpose of life and has no promised land.

Check Your Progress

1. Where is the term “Theatre of the Absurd” derived from?
2. What is the central theme of absurd drama?
3. Name some of the dramatists of the absurd theatre.

1.4 SAMUEL BECKETT'S WAITING FOR GODOT: AN OVERVIEW

Beckett came to drama in a round-about way. Some of the themes of his drama are forecasted in his short stories and novels. The idea of waiting in waiting is more emphasised than who is being awaited. The French version emphasised this. The English version emphasised on Godot. Beckett completely refuses to state who is Godot. The entire theme shifts when the emphasis is on waiting. The English version gives emphasis on a different word- Godot. Beckett's idea is not only emphasize what is being said but also how it is being said. He also tried to achieve a synthesis of content and form. We are not only looking at what *Waiting For Godot* is about in a whole. We can't separate its form from its content. The characters are supposed to symbolise some kind of nationality. Any attempt to locate in a geographical or time position is negated in the very beginning of the play. The first gesture of the play is symbolic of the play itself. Not successful in taking out the boot – a synecdoche. Vladimir's response is of a philosophical kind – his struggle is that of life, of existence. Each and every physical gesture in the play would have a meaning. Any kind of speech or statement in the play would have a meaning outside it but also within it. The coupling of Vladimir and Estragon is seen as complementing each other – splitting of the self, splitting of the soul. Vladimir and Estragon represents the two sides of the soul – one positive and the other negative, except that there is no consistency of separation of the two characters. How much to trust Vladimir according to his memory? The audience is in a dilemma. Refusal to give a time period is an attempt to reach to a wider framework of a universal time frame also parallel represented by a universality of characters, universality of human race. The specific reference to the Bible through the reference to thieves made many critics to rush to the idea that it has a theme of the Christian theme of damnation. If existentialism said that human existence is absurd then as thin as the religious framework of human existence is sinful. What shaped the nineties no longer shaped the world in which Vladimir or Estragon lived. The statement is ironical which says – Estragon does not even remember his saviour. The play emphasizes the lack of a saviour in a world in which Vladimir and Estragon live to redeem them from their State. How to calculate the possibilities of salvation? While Vladimir calculates his chances of salvation Estragon breaks that by saying that "People are bloody ignorant apes". The building of hope by Vladimir is completely undermined by Estragon. The act of waiting itself is absurd for nothing is certain. Many people thought that the play is nothing but obscene jokes by the two tramps. But critics pointed out that to do away with the heavy intellectual philosophical nature of the play, it is necessary to puncture it with some physical obscenities. Earlier the understanding was that they were waiting for Godot. But their waiting is almost an inescapable

fate, no getting away from Godot. What Beckett does is to raise a question, give an answer to that thereby only arousing the audience to a completely different answer. The answer does not adequately represent the situation for the audience. There is a possibility of the reaction of the audience outside the text. The ambiguity is continued not only in the nature of the play, but also in the dialogue of the play. They are not sure even of the person Godot. Each and every reference to the character only heightens the ambiguity of the character called Godot. The plays refusal to divulge anything about Godot is also a subversion of the idea of characterization. Subverting certain norms inherent to define comes from Beckett's world view that nothing can be defined with certitude. What they communicate is a failure to communicate through performances. Lack of a coherent structure of meaning is the failure of meaning. Outside the play, Lucky's incoherent meaningless gesture is an attempt to convey to the audience the lack of meaning and failure of communication. Hence, it is a meta-theatre, a theatre within a theatre.

Beckett's simple text is not so simple by the explicit references. So many attempts at laughter to provide comic relief can also be seen as simplistic. The play is not celebrating laughter but the dark side of comedy. The arousing of laughter is parallel to the grim side of reality. The end is not for celebration. The arousal of laughter is because of the funny and absurd nature or side of human existence. Lucky's gestures are funny doesn't mean that it is leading towards a celebration of life which is a hallmark of comedy.

Since Lucky has already put down his bags there is no question in asking why he doesn't put down his bags. Lucky cannot think without his hat off. As Lucky think aloud, the reactions of the three people is important. Using the religious vocabulary but subverting that, the Existentialist idea is conveyed through a philosophical jargon. Lack of strength of the vocabulary is conveyed through the use of that vocabulary thus affecting a parody. Ansel Atkins "The Structure of Lucky's Speech"(1966) divides Lucky's speech into 3 sections where he says Lucky's think is a "carefully wrought poetic structure" where the first section ends with "is bitter than nothing". Atkins tries to omit certain words, emphasis certain words and thus offer a coherent structure. After the insensitivity of divine grace, the second section is mocking at the educational system. Mocking the concept that sports is good for education as an education for the body, he is parodying the idea of the progress of man in a continual state of civilization. The third section –the entire "think" ends with the word "unfinished". It seems that there is no syntax. The attempt to divide it into sections is itself a self-effecting attempt. The division of the 'think' into three sections is a negation of the very lack of coherent structure of the 'think'. What we gather from the speech is that it is a mockery of the entire 19th century philosophy and that language is a means of communication is futile. The breakdown of language is the central theme of the

think. A violent disruption at the end of Lucky's speech challenges all familiar roads to knowledge. They deny or rather want to deny the truth that is embedded in Lucky's speech, accepting it would almost lead to acceptance of meaninglessness. They embody meaninglessness, but they refuse to acknowledge it. They still wait for Godot which is completely devastated by Lucky's speech. It is one thing to embody that nothingness and it is another thing to acknowledge that. For the moment they acknowledge it their waiting for Godot does not have any meaning. They avoid accepting it through the games, laughter, rhetoric speech etc. The indication is that the boy hasn't come for the first time. How is Vladimir convinced that the boy has come earlier and what does his conviction mean in the context of the play? That they are not waiting for Godot for the first time but it is a cyclical movement. There is no change or break from it. Before the first act ends we already have a cyclical movement and the second act only reinforces that. The question of damnation and salvation is repeated from the references to the two thieves—Lucky and Pozzo. Their static nature is reinforced by their not going at the end of the play. As if they are caught in the external chain of waiting for Godot. But Pozzo and Lucky are externally moving and Vladimir and Estragon are externally static.

1.5 SAMUEL BECKETT AS A DRAMATIST

‘Samuel Beckett has been waiting for the theatre just as the theatre has been waiting for Samuel Beckett’—this observation of a certain critic suggests the radical influence exerted upon the modern stage by Beckett's theoretical output, more specifically his ‘Waiting for Godot’ which still remains the most widely discussed of all his work.

In terms of plot, the story-line of ‘Waiting for Godot’ is essentially simple, to say at least. Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, wait on a country road, which has just a barren tree for someone called Godot. During their wait, they encounter another couple called Pozzo and Lucky and a boy who brings messages of the non-arrival of Godot. These encounters, however, in no way edify or spiritually enhance any other's existence. Besides, Godot never comes. Thus the two tramps are permanently trapped within their ‘prison of waiting’. ‘Waiting for Godot’, therefore emerges as a situational play, aborted of a beginning and a neatly rounded end. In this, the departure from the conventional well-made play becomes obvious enough.

It is important to realize that Beckett makes us confront total theatre in ‘Waiting for Godot’. In other words, every face inherent is intensified to cohere with every other facet of the genre to ultimately explode in the experience dramatized. Language, gesture, costume, scenery, light and sound-effects, so on

and so forth, are all blended into a total and complex unity. The effect of all these cannot always be experienced when one merely reads 'Waiting for Godot' thumbing the pages in one's study. Beckett, thus energizes the stage by giving us pure theatre—an experience which is possible and true only within the theatre and not outside. For instance, the innumerable silences in 'Waiting for Godot' can become dramatically real only within the fever of a performance. Extracted from the theatre, the silences in the play become still-born. Perhaps this illustrates our meaning when we term 'Waiting for Godot' to be total theatre.

Beckett's radicalism, however, does not suggest that he was a dramatist, untouched by tradition. In fact, many features in 'Waiting for Godot' have their origins in traditional theatre. But in Beckett's hands, these are transmuted to enhance the serious, contemporary, metaphysical concerns which are burdens of modern man. In the characterization of Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo and Lucky, Beckett surely must have been influenced by the tradition of miming and clowning that goes back to the 'mimes' of Greece and Rome, while the use of props like boots and hats recall the antics of Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy. But Beckett's characters' lack of dignity transcends the comic to achieve the tragic. His characters' 'actions' in short, are the consequences of the metaphysical universe that they inhabit. Whereas the crowning in traditional drama is witnessed by the audience from a position of superiority, in Beckett, and especially in 'Waiting for Godot', the actor-audience distance is minimised if not totally dispensed with. Thus the anguish of the tramps also simultaneously imposes upon the audience without the latter being allowed the luxury of detachment.

Besides plot and character, some observations on the style of 'Waiting for Godot' will be pertinent to the scope of our discussion. There is surely this quality of pristine purity in Beckett's prose. In fact the simplicity of the language gives it a poetic decadence, if not poetical exuberance. The language is bare and essential as the living of the characters. In fact the burden and the boredom as well as the meaninglessness of their lives are suggested by the language. For instance, the repetition of the line 'Nothing to be done' indicates not merely the tramps' predicament but imposes, as it were, their consciousness, and their experience upon the audience. The repetition, in other words, encapsulates and nullifies all that occur during the interim, just as the act of waiting nullifies all that happen because of the non-arrival of Godot.

Having said all these, it must also be emphasized that despite the brilliance of Beckett's prose, 'Waiting for Godot' demonstrates or enacts the futility of language (the root essential equipment in the well-made play) as a worthwhile means of communication. This is done through various means such as the use of telegraphic style, silences, repetitions and so on, and is most effectively dramatized in Lucky's famous discharge. Through the brakes, pauses, and the elimination of

punctuation marks, Beckett pushes the sense of the inadequacy of language to its maximum philosophical limits which ultimately culminate in the silences of the play. The dramatization of the silences take on profound connotations as these annihilates the little dialogue in the play. 'Waiting for Godot' therefore can be read, at one level, as a critic of language itself.

The instances announced so far should suffice to affirm Beckett's contribution to modern theatre. He is one of those dramatists who has made conspicuous innovations in all the major aspects which encapsulates a play, such as theme, characterization, plot, language and structure and yet succeeds in preserving the traditional essentials of the genre like suspense and pleasure. Beckett has surely enlarged the scope of drama for it is to be able to fulfil the needs of modern sensibility.

Check Your Progress

4. Who brings news about the non-arrival of Godot?
5. Where do Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot?
6. What kind of a play is *Waiting for Godot*?

LET US SUM UP

The realism of absurd plays is psychological. These plays explore the human subconscious in depth rather than trying to describe the outward appearances of human existence. Such plays cannot be called deeply pessimistic but an expression of utter despair. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the hard facts of human situation as writer sees. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, responsibly and precisely because there are no easy solutions to the mystery of existence. The shedding of easy solutions of comforting illusions may be painful but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief. In the last resort, Theatre of Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation.

GLOSSARY

Absurd, metaphysical, futility, pessimism,

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A Bilingual Edition*. New York: Grove, 2009. Print.

Brater, Enoch. *The Essential Samuel Beckett: An Illustrated Biography*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2003. Print.

POSSIBLE ANSWERS:

- The “Theatre of the Absurd” is a term derived from Albert Camus’ essay “The Myth of Sisyphus”.
- Awareness of a lack of purpose in all we do produces a metaphysical anguish which is a central theme for the writers of the theatre of the Absurd.
- The most notable dramatists of the Absurd Theatre are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter.
- Pozzo brings news of the non arrival of Godot.
- Vladimir and Estragon wait for Godot on a country side under a tree.
- *Waiting for Godot* is a situational play, aborted of a beginning and a neatly rounded end.

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MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Define the term “Theatre of the Absurd”.
2. Write a note on Beckett as a playwright.
3. What is the dramatic importance of Godot in Beckett’s play?

—xxx—

UNIT II

THEMES AND SYMBOLS IN *WAITING FOR GODOT*

Contents:

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives
- 2.3 Theme of 'waiting'
- 2.4 Theme of 'nothingness'
- 2.5 Theme of 'suffering and death'
- 2.6 Symbolism

2.1 OBJECTIVES

Waiting for Godot qualifies as one of Samuel Beckett's most famous works. The play's reputation spread slowly through word of mouth and it soon became quite famous. It incorporates many of the themes and ideas that Beckett had previously discussed in his other writings. The use of the play format allowed Beckett to dramatize his ideas more forcefully than before, and is one of the reasons that the play is so intense. Beckett often focused on the idea of "the suffering of being." Most of the play deals with the fact that Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for something to alleviate their boredom. Godot can be understood as one of the many things in life that people wait for. The major themes and symbols in the play are discussed below.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the various themes in the play
- To analyze the symbolical aspects of the play

2.1 THEME OF 'WAITING' IN 'WAITING FOR GODOT'

The meaning of 'Waiting for Godot' has defied analysis. Some critics saw the play as a statement in dramatic terms of the rigidness of man without God while some insisted that it is a general expression of the futility of human

existence. As Beckett's title indicates, the central act of the play is waiting, and one of the most salient aspects of the play is that nothing really seems to happen.

Waiting is what really matters in this play. Godot does not appear on the stage even for a brief moment. To Vladimir and Estragon, he is a mysterious figure. They had been told that Godot would come, but the time and the date are unknown. They receive a message from time to time but there is none to conform it. The tramps have to while away their time in idle talks. They are bored and their dialogue is an expression of their boredom. These two tramps have travelled far towards total nothingness but they have not fully achieved it. They still retain enough reminiscence of hope to be tormented by despair. This hope, this mood of expectancy is the main motive of the play spelt out in the title. The waiting of the two for the mysterious Godot may be called a moral obligation as it involves the possibility of punishment and reward. Godot's appearance might open a new vista to the static existence of the two tramps.

Moreover, it is in the act of waiting that people experience the flow of time in its purest and most evident form. In passive waiting people are confronted with the passage of time itself. Being subject to the flux of time, human beings at no moment are identical with themselves. For example we may refer to the boy who acts as go between. The boy of Act II is the same boy of Act I, yet he denies that he has ever seen the two tramps before. When Pozzo and Lucky first appear, neither Vladimir nor Estragon takes Pozzo for Godot but after they have gone, Vladimir comments that they have changed since their last appearance. In Act II, Pozzo and Lucky reappear deformed by the flow of time. Vladimir again has doubts regarding his identity.

To wait means to experience the action of time that is constantly changing. But as nothing really ever happens, the change in itself is an illusion. The two tramps wait for Godot whose arrival will bring the flow of time to a stop. Godot represents the tramps peace, rest and a sense of fulfilment. They constantly hope to be set free from the futility and instability of the illusion of time and to find peace and permanence outside it.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the central act of the play *Waiting for Godot*?
2. Does Godot appear in the two acts of the play?
3. What does Vladimir comment when Lucky and Pozzo are gone?

2.3 THEME OF 'NOTHINGNESS' IN THE PLAY

Jean-Paul Sartre published his seminal existentialist work *Being and Nothingness* in 1943 in which he asserts that at the root of our being there is nothingness. Samuel Becket, who was inspired by the existentialist philosophy of Albert Camus and Sartre in his early 20s, published his trend setting play *Waiting for Godot* in 1952. He also asserts in the play that nothingness is at the root of our existence, especially in the life of the modern people.

Whereas in the tradition play we see a concentrated single action motivates the whole play, here in the case of *Waiting for Godot*, everything is fuelled by the sense of 'nothingness'. In fact, here nothing creates everything.

Whether we look at or look into the play, the sense of nothingness determines the course of the whole play. As a playwright, Samuel Becket believes that form and content should be complementary and should not be separate from each other. Here in the play both the form and the content are structured by an encircling sense of nothingness. Apart from form and content every outer and inner component of the play serves complementary role to establish the idea of 'nothingness'. Every aspect of the play - structure, theme, setting, character, dialogue or some other behavioral silent activities - is motivated by one thing that is nothingness—the nothingness of the human life. But here 'nothingness' points its finger toward 'everything'—everything that modern people face physically and psychologically after two World Wars.

In order to understand how nothingness is able to create everything in the play *Waiting for Godot* we must look back to the events that took place during the first half of the 20th century in the worlds of politics, literature, philosophy and religion. The early 20th century witnessed two World Wars. In literature it gave birth to two recognizable literary styles: modernism and post-modernism and all these happenings paved the way for the theatrical tradition the absurd drama which in fact was a reflection the age. In fact, almost all literary activities were predetermined by a sense of nothingness in the early 20th century. The theatre of the absurd describes a mood, a tone towards life, where man's existence is a dilemma of purposeless, meaningless, and pointless activity. It is complete denial of age-old values. It has no plot, no characterization, no logical sequence, and no culmination. Samuel Becket introduced the concept of absurdity, nothingness and meaninglessness of life in his play *Waiting for Godot*.

The setting of the play is influenced by a mode of nothingness. A desolate country road, a ditch, and a leafless tree make up the barren, otherworldly landscape, which bears a surplus of symbolism. The landscape is a symbol of a barren and fruitless civilization or life. There is nothing to be done and there

appears to be no place better to depart. The tree, usually a symbol of life with its blossoms and fruit or its suggestion of spring, is apparently dead and lifeless. But it is also the place to which they believe this Godot has asked them to come. The setting of the play reminds us the post-war condition of the world which brought about uncertainties, despair, and new challenges to the all of mankind.

Next comes the plot. The beginning and the end of *Waiting for Godot*, in which “*Nothing happens, nobody comes ... nobody goes*, “ are also determined by a sense of nothingness. The play is without the traditional, Aristotelian structure where there is a beginning, middle and a perfect ending. *Waiting for Godot* does not tell a story; it explores a static situation. On a country road, by a tree, two old tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting. That is the opening situation at the beginning of Act I. At the end of Act I they are informed that Mr. Godot, with whom they believe they have an appointment, cannot come, but that he will surely come tomorrow. Act-II repeats precisely the same pattern. The same boy arrives and delivers the same message. So, the play ends exactly where it started. In this way, a sense of nothingness or purposelessness acts as a driving force in the play.

As per as the portrayal of characters is concerned the play also uplifts the sense of nothingness. A well-made play is expected to present characters that are well-observed and convincingly motivated. But in the play we find five characters who are not very recognizable human beings and don't engage themselves in a motivated action. Two tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, are waiting by a tree on a country road for Godot, whom they have never met and who may not even exist. They argue, make up, contemplate suicide, and discuss passages from the Bible.

A play is expected to entertain the audience with logically built, witty dialogue. But in this play, like any other absurd play, the dialogue seems to have degenerated into meaningless babble. ‘Nothing to be done’ is the words that are repeated frequently. The dialogues, the characters exchange are meaningless banalities. They use language to feel the emptiness between them, to conceal the fact that they have ‘nothing’ to talk about to each other.

In the play, we come across some behavioral attitudes that are more important than dialogues as they reflect the frustration, hesitation and psychological complexities of modern people. The opening lines of play are the superb example of it. When the curtain opens we find Estragon is engaging in his another vain attempt to take off his boots. His repeated failure attempt symbolizes the meaninglessness of everyday life activities and more symbolically the meaninglessness of life itself. Throughout the play there are so many behavioral attitudes that reflect the nothingness of human life.

Check Your Progress

4. How is *Waiting for Godot* different from a traditional play?
5. Which historical event has an influence over the absurd drama?
6. What seems more important than the dialogues in the play?

2.4 THEME OF SUFFERING AND DEATH

The socio-political times of *Waiting for Godot* are in the midst of suffering. It was a time where the nuclear holocaust was still rife and people were depressed and hopeless. We can see this hopelessness in *Waiting for Godot* with Vladimir and Estragon. What they are doing is actually hopeless because of the facts that are supporting them waiting, they not even sure if they are at the right place. The characters are depressed with not much to say and hardly anything to do. The actions in the play are a representation of this hopelessness. On numerous occasions we see that the characters say “Let’s go,” but they end up doing nothing. This is also related to the futility. Their worlds are futile, and so is the whole play. Nothing is being achieved. In the beginning the characters are waiting for Godot to arrive, and at the end of the play nothing has changed. We can also see the futility in Lucky in the second half; he is the slave of a man who is incapable of punishing him. Lucky is perfectly able to run away but he never does, because he is despair in his situation.

Beckett’s intention was to show the hopelessness and futility of the world. In the play, the theme of suffering is being explored. The expectation isn’t being fulfilled. We see this blatantly in *Waiting for Godot*. It is known to us that Vladimir and Estragon idea’s of how things ought to be are common to ours. In that sense we can relate to them as humans as well, which kept the realistic quality of Beckett’s intention. We can see the ‘attachment’ between Estragon and Vladimir, and Lucky and Pozzo. They are dependent upon each other and are therefore attached; this is where the suffering comes in. To find the lasting relationships and opportunities which might result in lasting life, but in actual fact, there isn’t any. Beckett achieved his intention through Lucky and Pozzo of futility and hopelessness by showing us their relationship. Lucky is Pozzo’s slave and they are heading to the market where they can sell him. Lucky’s life here is hopeless. We see that Lucky ought not to be Pozzo’s slave in the second half, where he actually holds the power, yet he still is.

In *Waiting for Godot* the major themes being explored are death and time. Death is a way of escape. If you die you escape of life and all the suffering and negatives of life, clearly highlighted in the play. Death is the perfect escape.

In life there is only one thing we know and that is death. It can also be analyzed that possible reasons for suffering can include relationships. It is the desire of the people to replace relationships with material things that can cause this pain. We also suffer because our whole life is spent by looking for some sort of meaning. When our expectations of the world in which we live, aren't fulfilled there is no meaning.

The theme of time is also a major theme as we can see in the title of the play: *Waiting for Godot*. Time can be seen as a test of their ability to endure throughout the days, because there is nothing to do and the challenge is to fill the time. The time is cyclical and often so much of the action is repeated, which leads to the characters suffering inside. There is nothing new to be done or nothing exciting happening in their lives. That's why the idea of hanging themselves to get an erection is so appealing because it will pass the time and add some excitement to their dull and miserable lives.

Check Your Progress

7. What does death signify in the play?
8. What is the nature of 'time' in the play?
9. What does Beckett achieve through Lucky- Pozzo relationship?

2.5 SYMBOLISM IN *WAITING FOR GODOT*

A symbol, by definition, refers to an object or situation which is used to represent an idea or belief in a non-literal sense. The author utilises literal scenarios or objects to evoke a deeper understanding of, or insight into an idea which he/she may believe has universal application and relevance. Obviously, there would be different interpretations in this regard since it is natural for us to perceive the author's supposed message within different contexts.

And so it is with Samuel Beckett's, *Waiting for Godot*. The author had consistently claimed that he had not written the play with any particular purpose in mind and was frustrated by the fact that so many interpretations unnecessarily complicated something so simple. Beckett repeatedly rejected any appeals for clarification on characterisation, plot or purpose of his remarkable play. That therefore leaves us with the task of finding meaning in the work.

Symbols

Lucky's Baggage

Lucky never puts down the items he carries, except when it is necessary to fulfill one of Pozzo's orders. Then he immediately picks them up again, even when he has not been told to do so and there is no purpose in it. This action echoes the human tendency of enslavement to burdens, holding onto them even when doing so is unnecessary. The baggage Lucky carries seems to consist mostly of items for Pozzo's comfort. In Act 2, however, one of the bags, which is never opened in Act 1, is revealed to contain only sand. Other than his hat, none of what Lucky carries is for himself and may not even be useful. Yet he takes it up again and again—another example of a character “deadened” by habit, fulfilling the task mindlessly and without purpose.

Pozzo's Rope

Pozzo's rope is the only rope that physically appears in the play, and it represents the balance of power in the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky. In Act 1, Pozzo dominates Lucky with a rope half the length of the stage: “Pozzo drives Lucky by means of a rope passed around his neck,” and Lucky is often the recipient of Pozzo's whip. Yet Lucky accepts this balance of power without question, as if he cannot envision any other state for himself. By Act 2, however, the rope is shortened, and the balance of power in Pozzo and Lucky's relationship is less clear. Pozzo, now blind, depends on Lucky for direction, and Lucky, still slavish, depends psychologically on Pozzo.

By extension, there are a number of figurative ropes in the play. Vladimir and Estragon, like Pozzo and Lucky, are similarly tied to each other in a relationship based on domination and submission. The pair is also tied to Godot and the dominating belief that his arrival will provide a meaning for their lives. Vladimir and Estragon also entertain the idea of hanging themselves with a rope. While suicide is never a real option, its discussion provides the pair a diversion from the act of waiting for Godot. The rope here becomes a symbol of submission to an illogical belief.

Leafless Tree

The tree, near which Estragon and Vladimir meet, is completely bare of leaves at the beginning of the play. It represents the only organic element in the setting, and it is dead or dormant. This tree portrays the world as barren and lifeless, emphasizing the lack of purpose and meaning the characters must contend with.

The apparent growth of leaves on the tree in Act II does nothing to ease the sense of meaninglessness; it only adds to the characters' uncertainty about the place and the passage of time. The staging is telling in this regard: despite Vladimir's description of the tree as "covered with leaves," the stage directions specify only "four or five" leaves, leaving it mostly barren.

Some point out that the cross on which Christ was crucified is sometimes called a tree. Vladimir and Estragon do discuss the tree and hanging themselves in Act 1 shortly after talking about the two thieves crucified along with Christ. This could support the interpretation that hanging from the tree draws a parallel between them and the thieves. Beckett, however, said he was puzzled by people trying to take away "a broader, loftier meaning" from the play, making it unlikely that he intended any broader religious symbolism.

Check Your Progress

10. What is meant by a symbol?
11. What are some of the symbols used in the play?
12. What does the rope signify?

LET US SUM UP

In the play, the tramps hope against all odds that Godot will come and rescue them from their circumstances, from themselves. In spite of their circumstances they never lose hope, they do not give up or descend into depression. They are the ultimate existential heroes - continuing in a chaotic, meaningless universe. A central theme running through the play is the idea that all activities, either pleasurable or agonized, are designed to distract us from the one reality which we know with absolute certainty - our mortality. An important theme is that of waiting. Man has lost all sense of value in this irrational, cruel, pointless universe. If there is no Godot, then there is only waiting, which in itself is meaningless. Man seems to be waiting simply for the release from life which death brings.

Glossary

Futility, illusion, permanence existentialism, nothingness, meaninglessness

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POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- The waiting of the two tramps for Godot is the central act of the play.
- Godot does not for even once appear in the scene of the play.
- Vladimir comments that Lucky and Pozzo have changed since their last experience.
- In a traditional play a concentrated single action motivates the whole play. In *Waiting for Godot*, everything is fuelled by a sense of nothingness.
- The two World Wars have greatly influenced the absurd theatre.
- The behavioural attitude is more important than the language of the play.
- Death signifies a way of escape.
- Time in the play is cyclical in nature.
- The Lucky- Pozzo relationship is symbolical of the futility and hopelessness of human relationships.
- A symbol, by definition, refers to an object or situation which is used to represent an idea or belief in a non-literal sense.
- Some of the symbols used in the play are Lucky's baggage, the tree and the rope.
- The rope becomes a symbol of submission to an illogical belief of Vladimir and Estragon to hang themselves.

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MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Define symbolism. What are the various symbols used in the play?
2. Explain the significance of the title *Waiting for Godot*.
3. Who is Godot? What picture of him have you formed from your reading of Beckett's play?
4. Analyze some of the important themes of the play.

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UNIT III: ANALYSIS

Contents:

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives
- 3.3 *Waiting for Godot* as a tragic-comedy
- 3.4 *Waiting for Godot* as a nihilistic play
- 3.5 *Waiting for Godot* as an absurd drama
- 3.6 Vladimir and Estragon
- 3.7 The Lucky –Pozzo episode

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It is tempting to view Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' as a play of nothingness, with no value or meaning but that of two men waiting for something or someone to arrive. However, the companionship that the two protagonist characters portray underneath the humour and bleakness of Beckett's two part tragi-comedy, clearly offers us something elevating amongst the emptiness of the bleak world that the characters are staged within.

Beckett uses the bleak setting to reflect the meaninglessness of life. In most productions of the play, the staging is spare, and the central set piece is a tree from which Vladimir and Estragon decide to hang themselves at the end of the play. This emptiness reflects the poverty and misery in which Vladimir and Estragon live.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the play as a tragic-comedy
- To analyse the element of nihilism in the play
- Character analysis of Vladimir and Estragon
- To study *Waiting for Godot* as an absurd drama
- The Lucky-Pozzo Relationship

3.2 WAITING FOR GODOT AS A TRAGI-COMEDY

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is basically a drama of despair and pessimism. It is therefore paradoxical to say that it has humour and comic elements. The special feature of 'Waiting for Godot' according to a critic is its manner of presentation. Giving a brief review of the play once, the England press declared that *Waiting for Godot* is the saddest play, yet the funniest. Beckett wrote an overdrawn music hall comedy with its comics and a cross-talk dialogue, with its mimicry and fooling. When the clowns of Beckett think, they press their foreheads. They say 'good-bye' but do not move. We laugh at their actions, cross-talks, their contradictions and yet weep at them and that is the essence of humour which is a blending of laughter and tears. Wit has an intellectual appeal, while the appeal of humour is to the heart. In *Waiting for Godot*, laughter is initiated by comic situations, dialogues and cross-talks.

The play opens with Estragon's futile effort to pull off one of his boots. Exhausted, he says "nothing to be done". This amuses us but at the same time we painfully realise that his futile attempt is the depiction of his life and the life of each individual as well. Estragon provides amusement by his struggle with his boots, Vladimir amuses us by taking off his hat, shaking it frantically and putting it on again. Most of the characters in *Waiting for Godot* stagger and fall down for no reason. While trying to sustain the injury Estragon has sustained Lucky's kick and he falls down. Even their attempt to commit suicide is highly comical.

Vladimir and Estragon are locked in affectionate embraces and the latter instead of indulging in substantial talks, remarks sharply, "you smell of garlic". The hero of Samuel Beckett is a sort of clown who uses words and performs gestures that are intended to be comic. There is no doubt that occasional silver linings of comicality and laughter are present in the play but they serve to intensify the harsh realities of life. We are faced with the ultimate truth that we are doomed to solitude, alienated from the universe. The characters remind us of robots automata who have no passion, no conflict and no emotion.

The atmosphere of *Waiting for Godot* is tragic and yet the play is not a tragedy in conventional trends. The Aristotelian canons of tragedy have not been observed in the play. Even Shakespearean norms are conspicuously lacking but the tragic atmosphere pervades through it.

Vladimir and Estragon are the representatives of the suffering humanity, travelling in a hostile universe. Lucky and Pozzo presents a similar picture of despair. They heighten the tragedy of man suggesting that helplessness is not the destiny of the two tramps alone but of all beings. One tragic refrain of the two tramps "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it is awful" and this strikes the

keynote of the play. *Waiting for Godot* is a tragedy of the modern man, the hero is not one man but the entire humanity, suffering and groaning with hope and redress.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. How is laughter initiated in the play?
2. What is the opening scene of the play?
3. What are the characters Vladimir and Estragon representative of?

3.3 WAITING FOR GODOT AS A NIHILISTIC PLAY

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is one of the best plays of the decade 1950-60. Its two tramps Vladimir and Estragon, with their boredom, fear, pain and shreds of love and hate, are surprisingly effective vision of the whole human condition, a condition for which action is no answer, chiefly because there is no obvious action to be taken as "nothing is to be done"—this statement strikes the keynote of the play and Beckett here seems to come to a nihilistic conclusion.

Nihilism is an extreme form of scepticism, denying all real existence. It means 'nothingness' or 'non-existence'. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is nihilistic as it conveys to us a sense of pointlessness of our existence. The play is a parable; here Godot may stand for God or a mythical being or for the meaning of life or for death. To the two tramps, Godot represents respite from waiting, a sense of having arrived in a place and a relief from stagnancy. Vladimir and Estragon are representative figures; they are clearly men in general. They have been pulled out of the world and they no longer have anything to do with it. For them the world has become empty. In the fruitless and futile waiting of the two tramps, Beckett presents before us a hopeless picture of stagnant life. The play does not relate an action; it offers no story because it describes men eliminated from history. The two tramps are merely alive but no longer living in a familiar world. They, in spite of their inaction and pointlessness of their existence decide to continue with their act of waiting. The tramps are actually waiting for nothing in particular—they even have to remind each other of the very fact that they are waiting for someone called Godot. It is futile to ask who or what this expected Godot is. What appears to be a positive attitude of the two tramps is that they are incapable of recognising the meaninglessness of their existence. They wait, because ruined by their habit of inaction or of acting without their own initiatives; they have lost their will power to decide not to wait. They go on living merely because they happen to exist.

In the waiting of the two tramps, there is however a note of optimism which the play perhaps wants to convey. The two tramps are champions of the view that life must have a meaning even in an evidently meaningless situation. Therefore, we cannot entirely agree on the fact on they are nihilists. Since they do not lose hope they may be taken as incurable optimists. What Beckett presents is not nihilism but the ability of man to move forward even in a situation of utter futility and hopelessness.

Check Your Progress

4. Define nihilism.
5. What is the optimistic note that the act of 'waiting' of the two tramps convey?

3.4 VLADIMIR AND ESTRAGON

Samuel Beckett's theatre has always startled and impressed us by its bareness and 'void' effect, but the final impression that the plays have is not bare but rich as they spark off such sort of associations, images, and echoes that it seems one would never come to the end of them. According to a critic, Catherine Worth, Beckett strides from Dublin into France like the modern man of syngé to take Ireland into Europe. In order to understand *Waiting for Godot*, it would be necessary to study the two characters around which the play revolves.

Vladimir and Estragon have complex roles in the play and not only need to be considered two individuals, but should also be studied as a couple. It may be suggested that they form a couple that embodies a universal symbol which Nicholas Zurbrugg calls "the imitation and comic potential of man's efforts" to communicate and offer an important alternative to the fate of the second couple Pozzo and Lucky. These two figures are not heroes of the drama by any classical definition. They are not tragic heroes but pathetic clowns. Getting by is their major preoccupation and salvation for them means simply food, sleep, shelter and relief from pain and fear. Like the tramps in whose guise they are often portrayed, they are shabby survivors "permanently poised, squirming tottering on the edge of disaster." Yet in their own context they seem heroic and even admirable, just like Chaplin and other clowns in modern dress.

Vladimir and Estragon says Martin Esslin "have complementary personalities". They are precisely the heroes and the anti-heroes of the play. Far unlike the heroes of Greek or Shakespearean tragedy, they do not command our respect or admiration but at best they evoke our compassion. They both are same as they share identical conclusions about life. They both state that there is

‘nothing to be done’ and at the end claim that they ‘can’t go on’. In this respect they are symbolic of all men. On the other hand, the critic John Pilling has given us another interpretation. He says that as a couple, he sees their mental and physical personalities representing the ‘entirety of men’ as mind and body. In other words, they have a universal role both in terms of identical conclusions and complementary personalities.

Knowing well that ‘habit is a great deadener’, Vladimir wants to meet the challenge of time by taking recourse to idle talks and hangs around playfully abusing each other. But almost throughout the play they retain their distinctiveness. Estragon is physically conscious, always thinking about his pinching feet while Vladimir is spiritually and intellectually conscious, always thinking about Godot and salvation. When considered as a couple Vladimir and Estragon also illustrate the limitations of man’s attempt to communicate through language. Looking at the same tree, Vladimir calls it a ‘shrub’ while Estragon a ‘tree’. In addition to their comic roles, their actions occasionally suggest gestures that may offer the communication that language fails to afford. Considered together, Vladimir and Estragon are contradictory, habitual, comic and tender forms of communication that combine to suggest the quality of their relationship as ambiguous.

An interesting insight into the Vladimir Estragon relationship has been given by Ruby Cohn who feels ‘they present what western philosophy has believed to be the two opposite but complementary science of the individual human matter and spirit—body and mind. We see that Estragon is almost completely dependent on the activity of the mind for his nourishment and guidance. He takes his lead from Vladimir—not all of whose ideas are good ones. Both Vladimir and Estragon offer a strong contrast to the other couple, Pozzo and Lucky while their situations don’t really change. Pozzo and Lucky undergo radical changes, become blind and dumb respectively. Vladimir and Estragon thus suggest that life remains the same forever, repeating itself, whereas Pozzo and Lucky seem to show that though life may seem calm and peaceful, it is subject to sudden changes.

In conclusion, it would appeal that Vladimir and Estragon play a number of roles in *Waiting for Godot* and that all these roles serve to reinforce the play’s ambiguous vision.

Check Your Progress

6. How does Vladimir want to meet the challenge of time?
7. What do the actions of the two tramps occasionally suggest?
8. How do Pozzo and Lucky differ from Vladimir and Estragon?

3.5 WAITING FOR GODOT AS AN ABSURD DRAMA

Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' belongs to the tradition of the Theatre of Absurd. It is unconventional in not depicting any dramatic conflicts. In the play, practically nothing happens, no development is to be found, there is no beginning and no end. The entire action boils down in an absurd setting of a country side road with two tramps Vladimir and Estragon who simply idle away their time waiting for Godot, about whom they have only vague ideas. They have nothing substantial to tell each other and yet they must spend the time, for they cannot stop waiting. Two other characters, a cruel master called Pozzo and his half-crazy slave called Lucky appear. Eventually a boy arrives with a message that Godot will arrive the next day. The two tramps decide to go away, but they do not move and the curtain falls, eventually nothing happens. The second act is the replica of the first act, but Pozzo is now blind and Lucky is dumb. The wait of Vladimir and Estragon continues but in despair. This monotony characterized the world after the wars and this condition was captured and depicted in the Theatre of Absurd. The Absurd theatre dealt with a deeper layer of absurdity—the absurdity of the human condition itself in a world where the decline of religious belief has deprived man of certainties. Like the waiting between birth and death in Gelber's plays, Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot', is also about an absurd wait. According to Martin Esslin, the Theatre of Absurd projected a situation where it was "no longer possible to accept simple and complete systems of values and revelations of divine purpose." Life was projected to face its "ultimate stark reality." What the existential philosopher Kierkegaard believed that "we are thrown into existence here and there", is reflected in the theatre of absurd. And Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' reveals this stark reality of human existence through the characters of the two tramps. Beckett's deliberate efforts result in displaying the presence of Vladimir and Estragon on the bare stage stripped of any social position or historical context. The barren stage stands symbolic to the universe where the two tramps are thrown to confront with the basic situations of their existence and undergo through the dilemma of choices and expectations. And this situation ultimately makes Vladimir and Estragon passive and impotent before time. Thus they surrender themselves to the 'absurd waiting' for Godot. Often they grow tedious of the wait and decide to go but they fail as they say:

Estragon: - I'm tired! Let's go.

Vladimir: - We can't

Estragon: - why not

Vladimir: - We are waiting for Godot. (Act 1)

The theatre of Absurd is a post world war creation. It is a creation and a search for a way of relief after the two terrible wars. This provided a dignified way for the people to confront the universe deprived of what were once its centre and its living purpose—the God and faith. Beckett also unfolded “Waiting for Godot” with similar view. The title itself is suggestive that the play deals with a prolong wait and the waiting of the two tramps is for Godot. Beckett proves to completely abide by the views of the theatre of Absurd while constructing his monumental play ‘Waiting for Godot’.

The theatre of Absurd is concerned with projecting the author’s personal world and so the plays lack objectivity and valid characters. Unlike the communicable social and moral lessons Brecht’s narrative epic theatre, Beckett’s ‘Waiting for Godot’ being an Absurd play, does not intend to narrate a story. Rather, ‘Waiting for Godot’ communicates in a pattern of poetic images. Beckett unfolds the play with a nihilistic approach.

The hovering of pessimism in the play comes to the very fore. The tramps suffer a state of vagueness and uncertainty. Although they wait for Godot, they are uncertain of his identity, they are neither sure whether they are waiting in the right place and on the right day, nor do they know what would happen if Godot came. Their ignorance reaches the highest peak as they have no watches, no time-tables and to add to the worse, there is none to fetch them information. Theatre of Absurd captures the stasis in which the world had fallen after the wars. ‘Waiting for Godot’ reflects this stasis through the act of endless waiting of the two tramps. The ignorance leads the tramps in a state of impotence. A sense of baffled helplessness is produced as the tramps are forced to remain in a situation which is beyond their control. They indulge in trifles merely as stop-gaps to help pass the time. The waiting is the outcome of ignorance and impotence. And the trifles are the only source to realize and prove their existence.

Check Your Progress

9. How does the first act end?
10. What happens to Pozzo and Lucky in the second act?
11. What is the waiting outcome of?

3.6 THE LUCKY-POZZO EPISODE

Waiting for Godot is a dramatic re-enactment of the unrecognized absurdity of the world that is lived and perceived by Beckett’s contemporaries. It is a play structured upon the contrast of two races of man—Vladimir and

Estragon, the fraternal pair, though not a voluntary one. In contrast, Pozzo and Lucky share a master-slave relationship joined artificially by force with a rope. A cursory inquest into the Beckettian art of characterization reveals that Estragon and Vladimir are complementary personalities while the Lucky-Pozzo relationship serves as an interlude between the periods of waiting by the tramps. Of course, the appearance of Pozzo and Lucky suggest the passing of time, that otherwise would pass slowly indeed.

The Pozzo- Lucky episode has been introduced into the play for crucial reasons. It is as John Pilling remarks, “a device of the theatre of cruelty representing the master slave relationship” placed as a foil to the still living religious instinct of man, represented by Estragon and Vladimir. Pozzo is an English gentleman farmer, always carrying his wine, wears a beautiful necktie, and possesses a commanding nature exemplified by his first utterances: the orders “Out”, “Back!”, “Be Careful!” spoken in a terrifying voice. His first communication to Vladimir and Estragon is his proud assertion— “I am Pozzo” while Lucky’s first utterance is “a terrible cry”. Lucky has long white hair and is capable of thinking once his hat is on his head. His incoherent trade not only exemplifies the difficulties that all the characters experience when attempting to experience themselves but also presents three of the play’s central themes, indifference of heaven, the dwindling of mankind and the cold quality of existence. Dressed in a brief little authority, Pozzo looks upon Lucky as a dog or as an ass tied to a leach. In Act II, Pozzo becomes blind, stumbles and falls only to be raised to his feet by Estragon and Vladimir. The two tramps are therefore contrasted with Pozzo and Lucky who represents autocracy and tyranny. While Pozzo is the symbolic representation of feudalism and capitalism, Lucky becomes the personification of the exploited, of the lowly and the lost. This contrast between the two couples is brought in only to emphasize the relation between Estragon and Vladimir which is essential a cordial one between man and man, between two fellow sufferers in a state of helplessness.

Check Your Progress

12. What is the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky?
13. When is Lucky capable of thinking?
14. What are Pozzo and Lucky symbolic representations of?

LET US SUM UP

The play is a symbol for the purposeless nature of man's existence. Vladimir, Estragon, Pozzo, Lucky and the boy, all represent mankind whilst Godot, it appears, represents the ethereal, the unknown. There is no meaning or purpose in what the characters say or do - it is all a futile exercise. The implication is that trying to find any meaning becomes an exercise in absurdity. The situation in which the characters find themselves alludes to mankind's self-indulgent nature. In order for us to support our belief in our self-importance, we need to be seen to be investing our time in finding answers and being productive, in some way or another. The play brilliantly depicts the folly of this notion, since none of the characters actually resolve any of their issues and they become victims of the march of time: they become older whilst waiting, Pozzo goes blind, Lucky becomes mute. In the end, they are stuck at exactly the point at which they were at the beginning of the play.

Glossary:

Nihilism, futility, ambiguity, personification, impotence, helplessness

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POSSIBLE ANSWERS

- In waiting for Godot, laughter is initiated by comic situation, dialogues and cross-talks.
- The play opens with Estragon's futile effort to pull off one of his boots.
- Vladimir and Estragon are the representatives of suffering humanity, travelling in a hostile universe.
- Nihilism is an extreme form of scepticism, denying all real existence.
- The two tramps are the champions of the view that life must have a meaning even in an evidently meaningless situation.

- Vladimir wants to meet the challenge of time by taking recourse to idle talks and hangs around playfully abusing each other.
- The actions of the tramps occasionally suggest gestures that may offer the communication that language fails to afford.
- Vladimir and Estragon are different from Pozzo and Lucky in the sense that they do not change throughout the course of the play.
- The two tramps at the end of the first act decide to go away but do not move.
- In the second act, Pozzo is blind and Lucky is deaf.
- The act of waiting is the outcome of ignorance and impotence.
- Pozzo and Lucky share a master-slave relationship joined artificially by force.
- Lucky is capable of thinking once his hat is on his head.
- Pozzo is symbolical of feudalism and capitalism whereas Lucky is the personification of the exploited, the lowly and the lost.

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PART IV
THE BIRTHDAY PARTY
HAROLD PINTER

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit encompasses a detailed study of Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party. The objectives of the unit are:

- to introduce Harold Pinter as a dramatist and the genre of Comedy of Menace
- to explore Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party as a Comedy of Menace
- to briefly summarise the acts of the play
- to analyse the characters of the play
- to examine the thematic concerns of the play
- to examine the structure of the play
- to discuss the significance of the title of the play
- to discuss how Harold Pinter represents life and society in the play

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Harold Pinter and the Comedy of Menace

Harold Pinter was born to Hyman and Frances Mann on October 10, 1930. His family has seen extreme days of poverty when he was a child. He began his career as a writer when he wrote non-dramatic works under the pseudonym Harold Pinter. His foray as a dramatist began in

1957 when he wrote *The Room*, an one-act play, for a friend which garnered him as a playwright and it revealed Pinter's unique talent and technique. *The Birthday Party* opened and floundered in 1958. He earned his first success with *The Caretaker*, which, in 1960, began a run in London's West End and won the playwright *The Evening Standard Award*. Along with *The Birthday Party* and *The Homecoming* (1965), *The Caretaking* also established Pinter's reputation as a major absurdist playwright. He adapted the play into a film and also wrote many scripts for the television and film. Critics believe that the best theatrical works of Pinter were his earliest pieces in the absurdist mode. The playwright has remained a major voice in the British theatre since the early 1960s. He eventually won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005. He died of cancer three years later, shortly after acting in a production of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*.

Comedy of Menace is that body of plays written by David Campton, Nigel Dennis, N. F. Simpson and Harold Pinter. The term was first coined by the critic Irving Wardle, who borrowed it from the subtitle of Campton's play *The Lunatic View: A Comedy of Menace*. In such plays the laughter of the audience is immediately followed by a feeling of some impending disaster. The audience is made aware of some menace in the very midst of its laughter. The menace is produced throughout the play from potential or actual violence or from an underline sense of violence throughout the play. The actual sense of menace is difficult to define: it may be because the audience feels an uncertainty and insecurity throughout the play. Modern drama attempts to draw the picture of modern man, who is lost and alienated, as a hopeless creature in a destructed community. Writers like Harold Pinter and his other contemporaries take up these issues as a subject matter to dig deep into the uprooted problems of such society and diagnose the sickness caused by the collapse of spiritual values and the failures of science and materialism to give any satisfying solutions to the dilemmas of modern life. Comedy of menace, as a genre, thus, deals with such fears and dilemmas that every modern man goes through in this age.

1.1.2 Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* as a Comedy of Menace

As a playwright, Harold Pinter is an innovator of a new kind of drama which became famous as the Comedy of Menace. Harold Pinter begins his plays in a known, familiar world but gradually makes us move

into the trajectory of a world which is beyond our comprehension. In Pinter's *Comedy of Menace*, the laughter and elation of the audience in the same or all situations are immediately followed by a feeling of some impending disaster. An audience is, therefore, made aware, in the very midst of his laughter of some menace. The feelings of insecurity and uncertainty throughout the play also enhance the menacing atmosphere of Pinter's *The Birthday Party*. The menace in Pinterian drama is also produced by potential or actual violence or from an underlined sense of violence throughout the play. Pinter makes the audiences feel that the security of the principal character (Stanley) and even the audiences' own security are threatened by some sort of impending danger or disaster.

Pinter's *The Birthday Party* is a perfect example of *Comedy of Menace*. Throughout the play, we find that the hint of menace is inflected upon the individual freedom of a person and it juxtaposes the comic element. Pinter shows his state in the existential view that danger prevails everywhere and life can't escape from it. Pinter thinks that Stanley, the protagonist, might have committed a serious crime and is on the run for escaping the consequence and legal implications of his life. This is precisely comprehended while he almost never leaves his room and becomes furiously apprehensive when Meg informs him that two gentlemen are coming to stay in this boarding house. Stanley soon tactfully tries to conceal his apprehension by mentioning his successful concert and about a favourable job proposal of a pianist. But we can realize his innate apprehension for imminent interrogation or arrest by the two new guests at the boarding house.

In his attempt to percolate his fear upon Meg, Stanley informs her ironically that some people would come to the boarding house in a van along with a wheelbarrow and take away Meg permanently along with them. Pinter often shows an apparent fearful apprehension, but actually gives occasion to amusement. Lulu's arrival and knocking at their boarding's door fulfill the purpose. Similarly, Meg's funny answer to Goldberg's question about Stanley also sustains the suspense of Stanley's immediate arrest. Thus the dramatist gives a comic relief to his audience.

When Goldberg continuously refers to the "job" which he has to execute, it makes the audience conscious about their unknown job, so as to say, by enhancing menace. Again the conversations between Goldberg and McCann are often comical but the possibility of danger and violence always pervade above the comedy. The interrogation of

Stanley by the two gentlemen is sometimes funny or comical but has threatening impact both upon Stanley and the audience. Even the birthday party which begins in a light and jovial manner ends with Stanley's attempt to strangle Meg and rape Lulu. Similarly, the birthday party also becomes the excuse of Goldberg's seduction and deflowering Lulu. Again the arrangement of the birthday party acts as a plan to prove Stanley lunatic and takes him away from the boarding.

At the end of the play, audiences are given an unsolved riddle about what has been of Stanley which is of paramount significance in Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* - a perfect example of Comedy of Menace. However, in one way or another, the main character of *The Birthday Party* represents the creator himself. Stanley is an artist who looks for ideal society. He wants to escape because of futility of modern life. It reveals the individual and the social problems and shows how Great Britain was moving through in the post war era.

Check Your Progress (A)

Answer in Short

1. Name two plays written by Harold Pinter
2. What was the pseudonym of Harold Pinter?
3. When did Harold Pinter receive the Nobel Prize?
4. Who coined the term The Comedy of Menace?
5. To which genre does Harold Pinter's play The Birthday Party fall into?

Answer in detail

1. Discuss Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party as a Comedy of Menace
2. Describe how Comedy of Menace developed as a genre. Briefly explore into Pinter's contribution into the same.

1.2 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Act 1

The play begins in the living room of a seaside boardinghouse in 1950s England. Petey, the boardinghouse owner, and his wife Meg, both in their sixties,

sit at the living room table and engage in tepid conversation while eating breakfast. Meg is an inquisitive character who peppers Petey with repeated questions concerning his food, his job, etc. Petey informs his wife that two gentlemen will soon arrive to stay at the boardinghouse: he met them the night before. Meg is flustered by the news at first, but quickly recovers to promise she will have a room ready for them.

She then calls out to Stanley Webber, their boarder who is asleep upstairs. When he doesn't answer, she goes upstairs to fetch him, and then returns a bit disheveled but amused. Stanley, a bespectacled, unkempt, surly man in his thirties, soon follows. Petey and Stanley speak of mundane topics while Meg prepares cornflakes and fried bread for Stanley's breakfast. After Petey leave for work, the atmosphere changes. Meg flirts with Stanley, who jokingly calls her "succulent" while criticizing her housework. When Meg becomes affectionate, he rudely pushes her away and insults her. Meg then informs him that two gentlemen are coming. The news unsettles Stanley, who has been the only boarder for years. He accuses Meg of lying, but she insists that she speaks the truth.

Before Meg leaves to shop, Lulu, a young girl in her twenties, arrives with a package. Meg instructs Lulu to keep the package from Stanley, and then she leaves. Lulu and Stanley chat for a little while, mostly about Stanley's lack of enthusiasm and his appearance. Lulu calls him a "wash out" and then quickly exits. Stanley washes his face in the kitchen, and then leaves by the kitchen door. In the meantime, Goldberg and McCann enter the living room. They are the two gentlemen who had requested rooms for the evening.

It becomes immediately apparent that Goldberg and McCann have come under mysterious circumstances to "finish a job." The job in question seems to be Stanley, though details are scarce. Goldberg reassures McCann that they are at the right house, and that this job will cause no more stress than their jobs usually cause them. Goldberg rambles on about his uncle until Meg arrives, and introductions are made.

Goldberg's sweet temperament and suave demeanor soon set Meg at ease. Goldberg asks after Stanley, and Meg tells him that Stanley was once a successful pianist but had to give it up. Meg also reveals that it is Stanley's birthday, and Goldberg suggests they have a party. Thrilled with the idea, Meg shows the gentlemen to their room. Later, Stanley returns to the living room as Meg arrives to put the groceries away. She tells him about the two gentlemen, and Stanley is visibly upset to learn Goldberg's name. To cheer him up, Meg suggests he open his birthday present, even though Stanley insists that it is not his birthday. To humor Meg, he opens the package and finds a toy drum with drumsticks. He hangs the drum around his neck and parades around the table beating the drum

merrily until his rhythm becomes erratic and chaotic. He beats the drum possessively and looms over Meg with a crazed expression on his face.

Act 2

It is evening of the same day. McCann, at the living room table, methodically tears Petey's newspaper into strips. Stanley enters and begins a polite conversation. When McCann mentions the birthday party, Stanley insists that he wants to celebrate alone, but McCann says that, as the guest of honor, Stanley cannot skip out on it. When Stanley tries to leave, McCann blocks his path. Stanley angers him by picking up one of the strips of paper. McCann, now even more intimidating, contradicts Stanley's claim that they had met before. Unnerved, Stanley starts speaking of his plans to return home, asserting that he is the same man he was, despite his heavy drinking. Frustrated in his attempts to find out why McCann and Goldberg have intruded, he grows almost frantic. He finally grabs McCann by the arm, saying that what he has told him was a mistake. McCann observes that Stanley is in a bad state and that he is "flabbergasted" by Stanley's behavior. Stanley then speaks of his admiration for the Irish. Goldberg enters with Petey, prompting a new round of introductions. Goldberg talks about his youth, confessing that he was then called "Simey," while Petey explains that it is his chess night and that he will miss the party. When he and McCann exit, Stanley tries to convince Goldberg to pack up and leave, but Goldberg simply talks about celebrating life, implying that late risers, like Stanley, miss out on a lot. Stanley cuts him off and orders him to get out, but Goldberg does not budge. McCann re-enters, and he and Goldberg order Stanley to sit down. Stanley repeatedly refuses until McCann threatens physical violence. The two intruders then begin interrogating Stanley with rapid-fire questions that range from the accusatory to the ridiculous. When they tell Stanley that he is dead, he screams and tries to fight back by kicking Goldberg in the stomach and threatening McCann with a chair, but they all suddenly revert to civility when Meg enters beating on the toy drum. She is dressed for the party, and preens under Goldberg's complements about her looks. She fetches glasses for toasting Stanley, and, prompted by Goldberg, McCann turns out the lights and shines his flashlight on Stanley's face while Meg toasts "the birthday boy." With the lights back on, Lulu arrives and the celebration begins in earnest. Goldberg insists that Stanley sit down and then begins a meandering, sentimental speech. McCann turns out the lights and once more shines his flashlight in Stanley's face. When the lights are on again, Goldberg entices Lulu to sit on his lap while Meg tries to get Stanley to dance. Rejected, Meg settles for dancing by herself. While Lulu flirts with Goldberg, Meg breaks into a nostalgic reverie about her girlhood room, after which McCann talks of his heritage and sings an Irish ballad. The characters then

start playing blind man's bluff. When it is Stanley's turn to be the blind man, McCann takes his glasses from him and deliberately breaks them. He also makes Stanley trip over the toy drum, which catches on Stanley's foot. Stanley drags the drum around, then finds Meg and begins choking her. As McCann and Goldberg rush to interfere, the lights go out again. In the confusion, McCann once more shines his flashlight, but Goldberg knocks it to the floor. In the dark, Stanley picks up Lulu and deposits her, spread eagle, on the table. McCann finds the flashlight and shines it at Stanley, who appears on verge of sexually assaulting Lulu. Stanley backs away, giggling uncontrollably, and as the others advance towards him, the curtain falls.

Act 3

It is early the next morning. As before, Petey sits at the table reading the newspaper. Through the hatch, Meg explains that Goldberg and McCann had eaten all the breakfast food. She enters to pour Petey some tea and spots Stanley's present, broken and discarded in the fireplace. She plans to fetch Stanley down, observing that she had gone up earlier and found him talking to McCann. Meg asks Petey about Goldberg's car and the suspicious wheelbarrow, which, he tells her, does not exist. As Meg prepares to go shopping, Goldberg enters. She asks after Stanley and then about Goldberg's car, which he praises for its ample room. She leaves, and Petey inquires about Stanley's health. Goldberg tells him that Stanley had suffered a sudden, unexpected mental breakdown. Petey, growing suspicious, says that if Stanley does not improve, he will fetch a doctor, but Goldberg assures him that things are under control. McCann arrives with two suitcases and tells Goldberg that he gave Stanley back his broken glasses. Petey suggests that they repair the busted frames with tape, then asks again about a doctor. Goldberg says that they will be taking Stanley to "Monty," and that the doctor is not needed. Petey goes out, and McCann begins tearing the morning paper into strips again, annoying Goldberg. The two men try to decide whether to bring Stanley down, but the matter seems to depress Goldberg. When McCann, trying to console him, calls him Simey, he explodes with anger. McCann then decides to get Stanley, but before he leaves, Goldberg makes the younger man peer into his mouth. After talking of his excellent health as the secret to his success, he instructs McCann to blow in his mouth two times.

Check Your Progress (B)

Answer in Short

1. Who are the owners of the boarding house?

2. Who are the two gentlemen that Meg and Petey were talking about?
3. Who is Stanley Weber?
4. Why do McCann and Goldberg come to stay in the boardinghouse?
5. Who goes through a mental breakdown?
6. Who accuses Goldberg of sexual harassment?
7. Where was Lulu found after she fainted?

Answer in detail

1. Discuss the relationship between Stanley and Meg
2. How does the boardinghouse leave an influence in the lives of the characters?
3. Discuss the relationship between Stanley and Lulu
4. Show how Stanley descent into mental breakdown
5. How far, do you believe, is Meg the victim of other character's aggression?

1.3 CHARACTERS IN THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

The following characters, both major and minor, appear in Harold Pinter's play, *The Birthday Party*:

1.3.1 Petey Boles

Like his wife, Petey Boles is in his sixties. He is a deck"chair attendant at the unidentified seaside resort where he and Meg own their boarding house, which, although it is "on the list," has seen much better days. Petey is dull and ambitionless, no more inclined than his wife to find challenges beyond the confines of their rooming house. The pair has simply settled into a humdrum existence appropriate to their mundane minds. Because it is his chess night, Petey is not present during the birthday party. He leaves before it begins, then appears the following morning, when he makes a feeble attempt to prevent Goldberg and McCan from taking Stanley away, though he backs down when the two men suggest that they might take him as well. Petey's decency is finally as ineffectual as Meg's. At the play's conclusion, he can do nothing but slip back into vapid conversation with his wife, who reveals that she was not even aware that he had completely missed the party.

1.3.2 Meg Boles

Petey's wife, Meg Boles is a good-natured woman in her sixties. If only from a lack of any reference to offspring of her own, it is implied that she and Petey are childless, thus she fills a void in her life by turning the Boles's boarding-house tenant, Stanley Webber, into a kind of surrogate child. She insists on calling him "boy" and mothering him. She even takes liberties appropriate to a parent-though not to the landlady of an adult roomer-by invading his privacy to fetch him down to breakfast. At the same time, Meg flirts with Stanley, trying to fill a second void in her life. Her marriage to Petey has settled into mechanical routine, as their listless and inane dialogue that opens the play reveals. Meg tries to win Stanley's approval of her as a woman, shamelessly fishing for compliments. Stanley, in his mildly perverse manner, responds by teasing her, knowing that she is both vulnerable and gullible. As the play progresses, it becomes clear that Meg, though a mental lightweight, is a decent woman. She is also rather sentimental. Although it is probably not even Stanley's real birthday, she insists that it is, determined to help Stanley weather his self-destructive despondency. She also seems to be his last hope, and her absence, when he is taken away near the end of the play, intensifies his final wretchedness

1.3.3 Stanley Webber

Until his nemeses Goldberg and McCann appear, Stanley is the only lodger at the Boles' run-down seaside boarding house. The basis of his relationship to Goldberg and McCann, at best hinted at, is never fully revealed, but their coming finally destroys Stanley's last vestiges of self-control. Near the play's end, when they have reduced him to idiocy, they haul him off in Goldberg's car to face the "Monty," some vague, ominous fate. Stanley, in his late-thirties, is an unemployed musician, reluctant to leave the boarding house, which has become a kind of refuge from "them," the nebulous persecutors who, in the past, destroyed his career as a concert pianist. He has grown both slovenly and desultory, and although he fantasizes about playing in great cities on a world tour, he has no real hope. Lacking a piano, he cannot even practice. As he confides in an honest moment, his only success in concert was in Lower Edmonton, a pathetic contrast to the cities he names as venues on his dream tour. Stanley's dread of what lies beyond the boarding house traps him in a trying relationship with Meg, for whom he must act as both wayward child and surrogate husband. He is not always able to mask his

disgust with this relationship and is prone to express his contempt for her in cruel verbal jibes and petty behavior. He also teases her. For example, he tells her that “they” are coming in a van with a wheelbarrow, looking for someone to haul off, presumably Meg. His hostility finally takes a more violent form, when, during the birthday party, he tries to strangle her but is stopped by McCann and Goldberg. Stanley, the nominal protagonist of *The Birthday Party*, barely struggles against his persecutors, quickly succumbing as if before some inevitable and implacable doom. Although he never evidences any guilt for his betrayal of the unspecified cause, he responds to his inquisitors as if he knows that there is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. At the end, although unable to voice his feelings, he seems resigned to his unknown fate.

1.3.4 Nat Goldberg

Nat Goldberg, also called “Simey” and “Benny,” is a Jewish gentleman who works for an unnamed “organization” that has employed him to take Stanley away from the boardinghouse. He is defined by his outwardly polite and suave demeanor, which stands in stark contrast to that of his associate McCann. However, he ultimately reveals an angry, violent streak beneath this suave demeanor. Goldberg’s problems seem to be connected to his past - he is nostalgic about family, and waxes poetic about the old days. To what extent these delusions explain and/or feed his anger and violence are left to the reader’s imagination.

1.1.5 Dermot McCann

McCann, in his thirties, is Goldberg’s younger associate. Unlike Goldberg, who reveals a Jewish heritage, McCann is an immoral Irish Catholic, possibly a defrocked priest. Like Goldberg, he exercises careful self control, a quality which contributes to the sinister impression of both men. He is also methodical and compulsive, as is revealed in his ritual habit of carefully tearing Petey’s newspaper into strips. He differs from Goldberg in important respects, however. More reticent, he is not as superficially warm or outgoing, and when he does speak he seems more inclined to echo Goldberg than to offer new observations. He is also physically more intimidating than Goldberg, who deliberately covers his viciousness with a mask of fatherly interest in the others and disarms everyone with his nostalgia. It is McCann who shoves Stanley at the party and snaps and breaks his glasses when he does talk, McCann

usually just adapts to the mood set by Goldberg. Usually, too, he defers to Goldberg's age and authority, even obeying the older man's peculiar request that McCann blow into his mouth. However, at times he seems more Goldberg's equal partner, especially during the interrogations of Stanley, when, just as voluble, he becomes Goldberg's co-inquisitor

1.3.6 Lulu

Described as a "girl in her twenties," Lulu is a neighbor who first appears carrying Stanley's birthday present, the toy drum and drum sticks that Meg had bought for him. On the flirtatious side, she is self-conscious about her sexual appeal and cannot sit still for long without taking out a compact to powder her face. To her, looks are obviously important, and she sees Stanley as a "washout" because he seems to care nothing about his unkempt appearance. Behind her glamour, there is some youthful innocence to Lulu. She is blind to Goldberg's predatory nature and is drawn into his charm. She sits on his lap and flirts with him, a foreshadowing of what occurs between them later that night. That she is some sort of sexual sacrifice is also suggested in the conclusion to the bizarre events that take place when the lights go out during the party. When they are restored, she is revealed "lying spread-eagle on the table," with Stanley hunched over her giggling insanely. In the last act, Lulu seems broken by the night's experiences, but she is also angry. Goldberg, who baldly claims that he shares some of her innocence, had entered her room with a mysterious briefcase and begun sexually abusing her, using her, she complains, as "a passing fancy." She leaves angry and frightened when McCann and Goldberg threaten to exact a confession from her.

Check Your Progress (C)

Answer in Short

1. Who is the husband of Meg?
2. How old is Petey Boles?
3. Who is the tenant of Meg and Petey Boles?
4. Who is the protagonist of the play?
5. What are the pet names of Goldberg?
6. Who is Dermot McCann?
7. Who is the neighbor of Mr and Mrs Boles?

8. Who flirts with Goldberg?

Answer in details

1. Draw a character sketch of the protagonist of the play
2. Describe the woman characters of the play
3. Discuss the character of Nat Goldberg.

1.4 THEMATIC CONCERNS IN THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

1.4.1 Absurdity

As in many absurdist works, *The Birthday Party* is full of disjointed information that defies efforts to distinguish between reality and illusion. For example, despite the presentation of personal information on Stanley and his two persecutors, who or what they really are remains a mystery. Goldberg, in particular, provides all sorts of information about his background, but he offers only oblique clues as to why he has intruded upon Stanley's life. What has Stanley done to deserve persecution? The facts of his past are so unclear that his claim to be a pianist may even be false. *The Birthday Party* influences the audience to doubt anything with certainty, which as it does in Kafka's work, intensifies the dreadful angst experienced by the protagonist. This effect is achieved through truncated dialogue, by Pinter's deliberate failure to provide conclusive or consistent information, and by his use of ambiguity and nonsense.

1.4.2 Complacency

Perhaps the most pessimistic aspect of *The Birthday Party* is that the only alternative Pinter gives to chaos and confusion is a life of apathy and complacency. The play's opening sets this up - Petey and Meg reveal a comfortable but bland life in which they talk in pleasantries and ignore anything of substance. Stanley might be more aggressive than they are, but he too has clearly chosen the safety of complacency, as he makes no effort to change his life. His lethargic lifestyle reflects the attraction comfort has for him. When Goldberg and McCann arrive, they challenge this complacent lifestyle until the whole place falls into chaos. Ultimately, Petey chooses to refortify the complacency of the boarding house over bravely fighting for Stanley; neither choice is truly attractive.

1.4.3 Apathy and Passivity

Although anger and even violence break through Stanley's apathy at key moments, he generally appears to have given up on life. His apathy is apparent in his slovenliness. He remains unshaven, unwashed, and half-dressed. He is unwilling to venture out, although he talks about dreams. He is, as Lulu says, "a bit of a washout." In mood shifts that turn him suddenly aggressive, Stanley resists his tormentors, Goldberg and McCann, just as he sporadically lashes out at Meg. After the first interrogation conducted by his inquisitors, he kicks Goldberg in the stomach and threatens to hit McCann with a chair, and during the party he tries to choke Meg and, possibly, to rape Lulu. But at the end he is passive and docile, no longer able to resist, no longer even able to voice objections to his fate.

1.4.4 Doubt and Ambiguity

In the sense that it conveys doubt and ambiguity, *The Birthday Party* is built on words that confuse more often than they clarify. Things that the audience or reader thinks are revealed by one snatch of dialogue may be contradicted or rendered illogical in the next, making it impossible to separate allegations from truth and fact from fiction. Even the most mundane issues are cloaked in doubt—questions for which there should be simple yes or no answers. Is it really Stanley's birthday, as Meg claims, or is it not, as Stanley insists? Has Meg really heard Stanley play the piano, as she claims, or has Stanley's situation made that an impossibility? Is he, in fact, even a pianist? Although there are many details in the play, it is almost maddeningly free of facts that confirm anything or sufficiently explain the behavior of characters. For brief moments, some key things seem to be known, but soon they slip away like water down the drain. Most importantly, the cause that Stanley has allegedly betrayed is never really identified, and it remains as mysterious as Goldberg's sexual implements carried in his briefcase, the literalness of the Monty, or the exact nature of Stanley's approaching fate.

1.4.5 Language and Meaning

A concern of absurdists is their belief that language, rather than facilitate, may prevent genuine human communication. Meaning is more likely to be conveyed not by what is being said but by its subtext, what is left unsaid or the manner in which it is said. With Pinter's work in particular,

words tend to mask the authentic self, while silence threatens to expose it and make it vulnerable. Pinter's characters seem to dread silence. In *The Birthday Party* words are used in non-communicative ways. For example, there are the inane exchanges between Meg and Petey, who, when they are alone, really have little or nothing to say to each other. They live in the ashes of their marriage, a condition they will not face. They evade the truth by mouthing empty and routine phrases that confirm only self-evident and insignificant facts. Their small talk both begins and ends the play. Language for others is a tool of deceit, especially for Goldberg, who uses his insincere friendliness to torment Stanley. Using disingenuous flattery on Meg, Goldberg pushes for the birthday party, an ironic contrast to his more sinister purpose, which may well be to take Stanley off to be executed. In *The Birthday Party*, as in many of Ionesco's plays, words are often used like physical objects. They are as palpable as clubs in Goldberg and McCann's interrogations of Stanley. In their inquisitions, their alternating lines even establish a rhythm that mimics striking blows. In general, language is treated as an unreliable tool of human expression, which is of focal concern for Pinter. At the end of the play, it seems to fail altogether, at least for Stanley. About to be taken off by McCann and Goldberg, he is incapable of uttering anything but nonsensical syllables. It is only then that his terror is fully exposed.

1.4.6 Atonement

One of the great ironies in this play is that it uses what appears to be a fairly undramatic, realistic setting which nevertheless hides a surplus of guilt. The theme of atonement runs throughout the play. Stanley's past is never detailed, but he is clearly a guilty man. He is vague about his past, and does anything to distract Goldberg and McCann. He does not wish to atone for whatever he did, but is forced to do so through torture. Goldberg, too, wishes to avoid whatever sins torture him but cannot fully escape them; his mood in Act III shows that he is plagued by feelings he does not wish to have. In the end, all of the characters are like Lulu, who flees when McCann offers her a chance to confess - everyone has sins to atone for, but nobody wants to face them.

1.4.7 Sex

The death of love is a common theme or condition in much absurdist drama. Aberrant behavior, violent aggression and sexual

repression are likely to play important roles, as they do in *The Birthday Party*. In his listlessness, Stanley seems largely indifferent to Lulu, who, obviously on the prowl, tries to encourage his interest. Although momentarily hopeful at the prospect of going off with Lulu, Stanley falls back into his fatalistic despair, killing any hope of a “normal” relationship. His sexual repression finally gives way to his aborted rape of her at the end of Act II. In the seedy rooming house, love seems either ineffectually sad or depraved. Meg, even in the face of his abuse, flirts with Stanley, though she is twice his age; and Lulu flirts with Goldberg, who introduces her to unspecified (though presumably horrible) sexual experiences. With Goldberg, sex is an empowering experience, a violent way to control or destroy and a terrible mockery of its function in a loving relationship. In Pinter’s world, such a healthy relationship seems impossible

1.4.8 Violence

The Birthday Party is full of violence, both physical and emotional, overall suggesting that violence is a fact of life. The violence is doubly affecting because the setting seems so pleasant and ordinary. Most of the men show their potential for violence, especially when provoked. Stanley is cruel and vicious towards Meg, but much more cowardly against other men. Both McCann and Goldberg have violent outbursts no matter how hard they try to contain themselves. Their entire operation, which boasts an outward civility, has an insidious purpose, most violent for the way it tortures Stanley slowly to force him to nervous breakdown. In both Acts II and III, they reveal how language itself can be violent in the interrogation scenes. Much of the violence in the play concerns women. Stanley not only intimidates Meg verbally, but he also prepares to assault Lulu. Goldberg in fact does assault Lulu. Finally, the threat of violence is ever-present in the play. Even before we realize that disaster might come, we can feel the potential through the many silences and tense atmosphere.

Check Your Progress (D)

Answer in Short

1. What does Stanley claim to work professionally?
2. Which is the most pessimistic aspect in *The Birthday Party*?
3. Who is the ‘bit of a washout’ according to Lulu?

4. Do healthy relationships exist in Pinter's play?

5. How does Stanley behave with Meg?

Answer in details

1. Discuss how Pinter deals with relationship in the play.

2. Can the play *The Birthday Party* be called an Absurd Drama? If yes, why?

3. Describe how pessimism features in the play.

4. How does language play a role in miscommunication in the play?

5. How does Pinter create a sense of doubt while reading the play?

6. Does the play *The Birthday Party* give us a dramatic setting? How do you think Pinter sets the plot of the play?

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Despite its absurdist elements, *The Birthday Party* has a conventional, three-act structure and follows a straightforward chronology. The play begins the morning of Stanley's alleged birthday and concludes the following morning, after Goldberg and McCann cart him off. The first and second acts both end with strong, even manic moments: the frantic beating of the drum in Act I and the near-rape of Lulu in Act II. However, the last act, like the opening of the first, is understated in its emotional force, returning as it does to the shallow conversation of Meg and Petey. Meg, not even aware that Stanley has been removed, makes small talk about the party while Petey tries to read. Working through some sort of causal necessity, such a structure traditionally imposes predictable patterns of behavior on character, but Pinter breaks through such strictures, at times letting his characters go amok. For example, at the birthday party in the second act, for no discernable reason, Stanley becomes very violent. There are also strange bits of stage business that border on the bizarre, as when, for example, in the last act Goldberg has McCann blow in his mouth. Such odd behavior offers a very unsettling contrast to the more predictable events that usually evolve within such a traditional structure.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

In his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", Derrida demonstrated how a written text lacks structural coherence

and organic unity and how the text undermines its own assumptions and is thus divided against itself. We come across almost an artistic demonstration of the theory in *The Birthday Party*, which revolves round a central event, namely “the birthday party” of the protagonist. But keeping in mind Derrida’s theorisation, we can say in the context of Pinter’s play that the characters cannot locate any structure in reference to which they can justify their actions and, of course, existence. The reason is that everything is decentred.

From very beginning of the play we are introduced to the peripheries of life. First of all, the setting is not at home, but at a boarding house, which also faces the crisis of identity and recognition. Then at the query of Meg, the landlady of house, the birth of a baby is reported in the newspaper by her husband Petey who does not pay much attention to it. But on the contrary, his wife-possibly because of having no offspring, gets interested to the point of passing her judgement on the incident. In this way the concept of birthday is itself seen to be deconstructed at the very outset. Here the audience note an unconscious longing in Meg for possessing a son, and in the absence of any actual one she uses her husband and Staley later as surrogates who must behave as she wishes. In fact, she exploits her position as a food-provider. This ordinary activity from daily life gathers a ritualistic flavour if we relate her offering of fried bake to the birth of a baby somewhere in the town and to her blackmailing of Stanley with the threat of not giving him the breakfast in the case of his not following her command. Furthermore, excessive repeated emphasis on food may lead the reader to look for meaning in the Christian iconography.

With the arrival of two strangers, the play hinges on uneasy uncertainties and with the proposal of the strangers for holding a birthday party, it runs towards the central theme in a way which defies the structure of a traditional drama. The audience suspect, just like Stanley, the intention and feel the menace lurking somewhere in the corners still not visible. A birthday party is basically a communal activity intended for a gathering of individuals who come closer; but in Pinter’s play when the party begins, we find individuals not only being isolated from one another but also being disintegrated within themselves. The hollowness of Stanley’s existence is emphasized in Meg’s birthday gift of a drum for him, which he beats wildly in a desperate attempt perhaps to announce his existence, an act which fails utterly because sounds connect nothing and signify nothing. Under the impact of liquor the characters forget their roles in society and engage themselves in activities which may be called the explosion of their desires from id. Stanley also undergoes a total transformation or dehumanization. He is physically assaulted for his alleged attempt at raping Lulu by Goldberg and McCann ironically enough as Goldberg rapes Lulu later and McCann usurps Staley’s place while flirting with Meg. In other words, he loses both Lulu and Meg to the strangers whose persecution of Staley does not stop here and goes beyond the curtain.

Towards the end of the drama, a new man is born out of Stanley's old self, which was purely a construct of loosely gathered memories. We find Stanley in new appearance, well dressed and clean shaven; but he has undergone such inhuman torture (which may amount to anything) that he is no more the person he had been. In fact, he may be called dead-man-walking.

1.7 REPRESENTATION OF LIFE AND SOCIETY IN THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Harold Pinter's interests have always involved discourse regarding the blandest lives of the most common people. He opposed any endeavour to explain the past or define the future, it all begins very abruptly and concludes in the same way without any moral tag following it or any hint of the consequences that would follow the sudden turn out of events. In *The Birthday Party* he describes the lives of few individuals in a particular situation and their attempt to cope with it. The idea that lies behind his plays is to present it with all the absurdities of life, where certain things remain inexplicable and people eventually settle for the most common of explanations that all may have happened for the best and pretend as if it never happened, like Petey and Meg's concluding conversation in *The Birthday Party* which is very similar to their conversation in the beginning of the play, except that Stanley is no longer a part of it since he had been kidnapped for better or for worse and no longer a part of their lives. These inexplicabilities bring the play closer to reality and at the same time render the readers with opportunities to bring in their imagination to interpret the numerous allegories and metaphors and to justify and contemplate the absurd events occurring in the play in accordance to their perspectives, experiences and their stand in life at that moment. His plays by all means were not intended to satisfy their quest to find meaning behind every action but to raise ambiguities that simply have to be accepted and thought upon. In a program brochure for *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*, he said: "*The desire for verification is understandable but cannot always be satisfied. There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false. The assumption that to verify what has happened and what is happening presents few problems I take to be inaccurate.*" The most frightening characteristics of life is that a person's past may well be concealed but there's no guarantee that it won't show up again and renew one's scars and fears, denial cannot undo one's actions in the past. Stanley's repetitive unwillingness to confront McCann and Goldberg shows his familiarity with them and assumes the consequences that may follow their sudden appearances. They talk about a sinister organisation with which Stanley was

possibly involved in his past, which he had betrayed and now they have tracked Stanley down to avenge themselves. In spite of all attempts of Stanley to leave behind his past and start a new life he is eventually dragged to an unknown possibility emblematising the uncertainties of life and all human anxieties and fears experienced by every individual in the modern world. Harold Pinter's plays communicate these numerous possibilities in life which have the capacity to subjugate the banalities of life and portray its enigmatic, uncertain nature.

Stanley, in *The Birthday Party*, is portrayed as a grown up child who refuses to step outside the protected world of Meg's maternal affection, but truth be told childhood has to go in order to make way for the vicious adult world to mould the person and inflict him with societal norms and ideas. Goldberg and McCann are the agents of society representing its values, well dressed yet a frightening motive concealed within, who seems to be there to perform a Bar Mitzvah ceremony where all kinds of arcane knowledge will be imbedded into Stanley and make him appropriate for the society. McCann and Goldberg's endeavour to manipulate Stanley, further isolating and humiliating him, substantiates society's outlook and its treatment towards the person who refuses to abide by its rules. In the end of the play where we see Stanley for the first time dressed in accordance to the societal norms of respectability, in a black suit, we interpret it as Stanley's surrender to society. We all are victims of social malaise but eventually learn to accept it and find our respective paths but there those like Stanley who are forced into it without considering its consequences, either are found dead within this process of transformation trying to cope with the system or this proves to be the new beginning for them.

Check Your Progress (E)

Answer the following in Short

1. Who wrote the essay *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of Human Sciences*?
2. How many acts are there in the play?
3. In which act does the rape of Lulu appear?

Answer in detail

1. Discuss the significance of the title of the play.
2. How does Pinter represent life and society in the play *The Birthday Party*?
3. Describe the importance of the structure of the play.

1.8 SUMMING UP

In this unit we have discussed Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* as a Comedy of Menace. We have also discussed about the idea of The Comedy of Menace, its evolution and its application by the writers of the modern age like Pinter. We have then summarised the acts which divide the play into three halves. Following that we have analysed the major and minor characters of the play and their importance in the plot. We have then looked into the thematic concerns of the play, the significance of the title and the structure of the play. The unit also shows how Pinter represents life and society in the play.

1.9 KEYWORDS

¹ pinterian: of Pinter

² boardinghouse: a private home where tenants live in exchange for payment

³ living room: a common room in a house for family gathering

⁴ surrogate: relating to the birth of a child or children by means of surrogacy

⁵ Jewish: relating to, associated with the Jews or Judaism

⁶ pianist: one who plays the piano

⁷ Derrida: Algerian born French philosopher

1.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

- (i) Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*
- (ii) Martin Esslin's *Pinter the Playwright*
- (iii) Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd*
- (iv) Bamber Gascoigne's *Twentieth Century Drama*

1.11 REFERENCES

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Gaskell, Ronald. *Drama and Reality : The European Theatre Since Ibsen*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972. Print

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1.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress(A)

Short Questions

1. The Room, The Caretaker
2. Harold Pinter
3. 2005
4. Irving Wardle
5. The Comedy of Menace

*For the detailed answers refer to the books in references and suggested readings.

Check Your Progress (B)

Short Answers

1. Meg and Petey
2. Goldberg and McCann
3. A tenant in the boardinghouse of Meg and Petey
4. To finish a job which is almost not revealed till the end of the play
5. Stanley
6. Lulu
7. On the Table

*For the detailed answers refer to the books in references and suggested readings.

Check Your Progress (C)

Short answers

1. Petey
2. 60
3. Stanley
4. Stanley
5. Simey/ Benny
6. A man in 30s, an immoral Irish Catholic, the younger associate of Goldberg and who comes to stay in the boardinghouse of Meg and Petey.
7. Lulu
8. Lulu

*For the detailed answers refer to the books in references and suggested readings.

Check Your Progress (D)

Short Answers

1. Pianist
2. Complacency
3. Stanley
4. No
5. Cruelly

*For the detailed answers refer to the books in references and suggested readings.

Check Your Progress (E)

Short Answers

1. Derrida.
2. 3
3. Act 2

*For the detailed answers refer to the books in references and suggested readings.

1.13 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Briefly discuss the plot of the play *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter.
2. Discuss the character of Nat Goldberg
3. Briefly elucidate on the theme of absurdity in the play *The Birthday Party*.
4. How does Pinter show the prevalence of violence in the play *The Birthday Party*?
5. Critically comment on the title of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*.

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