

## UNIT-1

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### GEOFFREY CHAUCER: PROLOGUE TO CANTERBURY TALES-I

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#### Structure

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- 1.3 Summary of the *Prologue To The Canterbury Tales*
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#### 1.0 Objectives

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

- Understand the age of the writer
- The main features of the contemporary scenario, to which the writer belongs
- Refer to the history of the development of the literature and the language
- Develop a critical analysis about the prologue and its surface meaning

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#### 1.1 Introduction

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The age of Chaucer covers the period from 1340 to 1400. Chaucer is the true representative of his age as Pope is of the eighteenth century and Tennyson is of the Victorian era. His works breathe the political, social, economic and religious tendencies of his time. The middle of the fourteenth century was the transitional period in which Chaucer was born. The elements of Renaissance were breeding. "He stands on the threshold of the new age, but still hedged in a backward gazing world."

The fourteenth century in England was the most important of the mediaeval centuries. It covered the period of the Black Death and the Peasant's Revolt, the Hundred Years War with France and the great economic and social changes which we associate with the decay of villeinage. During its years, two kings were deposed and murdered, and dynasties began to rise and fall. The antagonism to the church and the demand for the freedom of thought, which was to culminate in the Renaissance and the Reformation were beginning to be manifested in this pregnant century. It was of supreme importance for the understanding of English history that we should have a dramatic, piquant and all embracing

picture of real mediaeval life before the great changes should arrive and Chaucer has given us this picture in his *Canterbury Tales*.

During the English Period, Chaucer appears to us as a great original poet. He had learnt almost to perfection the arts of description, narrativisation and characterization. Chaucer is known for his technique of versification like that of a fine craftsman and a supreme writer because of his humour and personal talk. This period includes his remarkable work, *The Canterbury Tales*. In this poem he truly represented the comedy of life in its all forms. *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* gives us the background of the actions and movements of the pilgrims who make up the company of the members of the troop who undertook this pilgrimage. All these pilgrims represent the whole of “English society” of the fourteenth century. The pilgrims are persons of all ranks and classes of society; and in the inimitable description of their manners, dresses, person, horses etc, with which the poet has introduced them, we behold a vast and minute portrait gallery of the social state of England in the fourteenth century. They are – a knight, a squire, a yeoman or military retainer of the class of the three peasants, who in the quality of the archer was bound to accompany his feudal lord to war, a prioress, a lady of monk, superior of a nunnery, a nun and three priests in attendance upon this lady; a Monk, a person represented as handsomely dressed and equipped and passionately fond of hunting and good cheer; a friar, or monk, a merchant, a clerk or student of the University of Oxford; a sergeant of the law; a franklin or rich country-gentlemen, five wealthy burgesses or trademen, described in general but vigorous and characteristic terms; they are Haberdasher or dealer in silk and cloth, a carpenter, a weaver, a dyer and a tappisser or maker of carpets and hangings, a cook or rather what in old French is called Rotisseur i.e. the keeper of a cook’s shop; a shipman, the master of a trading vessel; a doctor of Physic; a wife of Bath, a rich cloth manufacturer, a Parson, or Secular Parish priest; a ploughman, the brother of the preceding personage; a miller; a manciple or steward of a lawyer’s hostel or inn of court; a Reeve, bailiff or interdant of the estates of some wealthy landowner; a summoner, an officer in the then formidable ecclesiastical courts, whose duty was to summon or cite before the spiritual tribunal those who had offended against the cannon laws; a Pardoner, or vendor of the Indulgences from Rome. To these thirty persons must be added Chaucer himself and the Host of the Tabard, making in all thirty two. The Canterbury Pilgrims are described so realistically and graphically that one gets a great enjoyment in reading *The Prologue*.

Chaucer was regarded as the greatest writer of his age, (the fourteenth century), for he was widely read, imitated, and quoted; even some of his success in the material world was probably a reward for his skill with his pen. Three qualities are outstanding in his writings; a humor which is sometimes gentle, sometimes sly, often satiric, but never vicious quite frequently he is the butt of his own jokes; an understanding of human beings which is warm and compassionate but never sentimental; and an acuteness of observation which is unfailing in its ability to discern the most significant detail. Chaucer’s fame, unlike that of many writers, was great in his own lifetime and has remained consistently so for over 550 years.

The general prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, in some respects the most remarkable product of Chaucer’s genius, is an extended “dramatis personae” for the collection of tales. In it, Chaucer presents his characters, one by one, in a series of vivid, detailed, and lifelike portraits, and also sets forth his plan: to have each of his characters tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two more on the way back, to while away the time. The result is a continuous drama, for the tales give rise to altercations and other byplays and also further characterize their tellers. Chaucer did not live to com-

plete his ambitious project. *The Prologue*, however shows how fully he grasped it in his own mind. It would be a mistake to consider the *Prologue* as merely an introduction. It is a mature and highly finished work in its own right – the liveliest, most convincing picture of life in the middle Ages which has come down to us. The language used by Chaucer comes from the Middle English rather different from the modern English we know.

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## 1.2 Chaucer's World

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Chaucer's public experience of life was as a government servant and diplomat: not a courtier but a king's man. His friends were knights and London merchants. England passed through profound changes during his lifetime. In his childhood, England had great prestige, having beaten the Scots and the French in the victories of Greycy (1346) and Poitiers (1356). In 1360 French ceded much territory to England. In 1349 Edward III had founded the Order of the Garter, the first Order of Western chivalry.

But the Black Death of 1349 had killed a third of the people of England, and it returned in the 1360s. The resultant labour shortage disrupted the feudal economy. Edward III's costly war policy began to fail, and in old age the king became unpopular. Richard II came to the throne as a child in 1377 in a time of social unrest which in 1381 broke out in the Peasants' Revolt, in which John of Gaunt's palace was sacked and Archbishop Sudbury murdered in the street. There was also religious controversy: the Popes had been in captivity at Avignon since 1309, and in 1378 the Great Schism began, between rival claimants to the Papacy. The Oxford reformer, Wyclif, attacked Church abuses in the 1370s, and criticised Church dogma. Next to nothing of this gets into Chaucer's work. He shows us the greed of the new bourgeoisie and abuses in the Church, but his religious and social values seem those usual in his day. He was certainly discreet, as befits a diplomat and a royal servant. He flourished quietly at Richard II's court, and Henry IV, John of Gaunt's son, did not reject his father's old follower when he took the throne from Richard in 1399. The history plays of Shakespeare show Richard, murdered in 1400, as the last medieval king.

Medieval society was vertically organised like a pyramid, with King and Pope at the heads of State and Church. The social hierarchy was in theory quite clear, and its ranks had legal force. People of a lower rank could be punished for wearing the dress of a higher rank. But the old feudal system, where social standing was determined by the amount of land a man held from the king, was giving way to a more open and mercantile economic pattern, especially in London, where Chaucer came from the merchant class. He was not a man of the people, but his origins were equally remote from the nobility; there are no barons among his pilgrims. His career gave him a wide experience of English life, and especially the life of London, many of whose 30000 inhabitants he must have known. Medieval society, in spite or because of its vertical distinctions, was communal: each of Chaucer's Pilgrims, however individual, is conceived of as typical of his craft or profession, and as having a rank and a role in society.

The Christian Church was never far away from anything in Chaucer's England. A theological understanding of life had since the thirteenth century governed the interpretation put upon every physical and moral event, however material or secular its nature - whether meteorological, psychological or personal. Christian Europe was a Catholic community whose language was Latin. The Church was the same in every country, offering the same Christian social and spiritual ideal - however incompletely realised and with whatever local differences. Despite the strains which showed in the fourteenth century,

with the failure of the Crusades, a weakened papacy, the Black Death, and the beginnings of less collective and more personal attitudes, there was no alternative, secular vision of life. The culture of Christendom had long offered an integration of social and religious ideals. It was a culture which gave an underlying unity, simplicity and breadth to the work of this sophisticated, adventurous and experimental writer.

**Religious Life:** Two aspects of Catholicism may need a word of introduction:

1. Categories are either *secular* clergy, like the Parson, who live in the world (either in major orders-bishop, priest, deacon - or 'clerks' in minor orders) or *regular* clergy. Regulars-monks, nuns and friars - bound themselves by a Rule and lived as a community. A regular can also be a priest - like Chaucer's Friar and perhaps his Monk. Friars, though regulars in a community, went out into the world to preach. The Summoner is not a cleric but a lay employee. The Pardoner may not have the clerical status he claims. The Knight may have been a member of a religious military order, such as the Templars or Hospitallers, or the Teutonic Knights.
2. Penance. In the New Testament, Christ says to St. Peter and the apostles: 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven.' The Church claims that priests, as successors to the apostles, have this power to offer God's forgiveness to the sinner who truly repents and performs the penance imposed. Repentance or penitence is one aim of the pilgrimage. The Pardoner has no power to absolve the guilt of sin. He deals only in certificates of remission of penance or punishment, a crucial distinction.

### **Middle English**

Historians divide English into Old, Middle and Modern English. Old English came to an end with the Norman Conquest of Anglo - Saxon England in 1066. The rulers of England then spoke Norman French, and scholars wrote in Latin. English was spoken by most people, and gradually became a public and literary medium in the fourteenth century. Middle English was, however, an unstable mixture of dialects, infused with thousands of words from French. It was not standardised by central usage, nor by print, and changed continuously until a more stable stage was reached about 1500, when the early Modern stage of English is taken to begin. Chaucer wrote in the London dialect, from a later version of which Modern English descends.

There is no room here for an introduction to Middle English, but here are some hints:

1. Read aloud to ascertain metre and rhyme. This also helps with meaning and with tone.
2. Pronounce all consonants fully: for example the *K* and *h* in *Knight*.
3. Consult glossaries and grammatical introductions when in doubt as to sense or grammatical function.
4. Do not assume that a word means what it means today. Appearances can deceive. The *verry parfit gentil Knight* is 'true, complete and noble', not 'very perfect and soft-hearted'; the *Person of a Toun* is a village parson, not an urban individual. Other examples are: *lustful* zestful; *coy* quiet; *lewed* ignorant; *girl* young of either sex; *catel* property; *smal* slender, *wife* woman; *wood* mad. Some words are loyal old friends but others are *faux amis*, treacherous friends who have changed their meanings. Words such as charity, truth, chivalry also had complex and far-reaching senses in the Middle ages.

5. Note common words which are used in more than one sense, such as worthy or gentil, and decide on the exact sense in each instance.
6. Write your own accurate prose translation of parts of the Prologue (see Textual Analysis, Text 3 above).

### **Chaucer's Own English**

The best advice that can be given to a student is to make sure that he or she understands as accurately as possible exactly what Chaucer's words mean. Without an informed response to sense, there can be no sensitivity to qualities of language, nor to the poet's tone of voice. Chaucer's fresh, apt and elegant English made him a model of style. Attention to his tone of voice also gives a clue to his sense of humour. The Prologue was composed to be read aloud, and an attempt should be made to read it aloud in an approximation to the pronunciation, which can be imitated from one of the several modern recordings that have been made.

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### **1.3 Summary of *The Prologue To The Canterbury Tales***

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Going through *The Prologue To The Canterbury Tales* is like visiting a portrait-gallery. In a portrait-gallery we see portraits of a large number of persons on display. These portraits impress us by a variety of dresses, and they impress us also with their vividness. Each portrait creates an impression that a real human being sits or stands before us. This precisely is the impression that the Prologue produces on us. We are greatly struck by the large variety for which the Prologue is remarkable. A large number of human beings, who are both types and individuals, have been delineated by Chaucer, and these human beings possess certain universal qualities also. At the same time, these characters are by no means puppets; they are not wooden figures. On the contrary, they appear before us as living and believable characters.

The vitality and the realistic qualities of the various characters are undeniable. Their apparel too is, in most cases, described and that lends additional realism to the portraits.

There are, first of all, the Knight, the Squire, and the Yeoman, all of whom conform to certain known types of human beings in the fourteenth century but all of whom also have certain distinctive features. The Knight represents the code of behavior prevailing in those days among members of this class of society. As for his individual characteristics, he is depicted as modest like a maiden and wearing a doublet of coarse cloth. The Squire has distinguished himself in battles as he was expected to, but he can also compose songs and he can dance and draw and write well. The Yeoman is described as a true forester, but he also wears the medal of Christopher.

From these characters who are associated with the medieval code of chivalry, we pass to the Prioress whom, however, we shall consider along, with the Wife of Bath. The next character is "the hunting Monk" who, ignoring the rules of monastic discipline, neither labours with his hands nor pours over a book in the cloister, and who "loves a fat swan the best of any roast". Such, indeed, were a large majority of the monks of the priory.

The Monk is individualized too. He wears an intricate pin of wrought gold in the shape of a love-knot. He is fat and has a bald head which shines like glass. His eyes are sharp and roll in his head. We do certainly get the feeling that we are standing face to face with this man, so vividly is he represented to us by Chaucer. The Monk's sleeves are trimmed with the finest gray fur. The portrait

of the Friar is no less realistic or vivid. This Friar misuses his authority to hear confessions and he sells absolutions. Like most friars of the time, he carries ornamental knives and pins to be given to pretty women. He associates only with the rich people, keeping the beggars and the lepers at arm's length. He is capable of extracting some money, however little, even from a destitute widow, and he settles disputes of a worldly nature on love-days, obtaining substantial fees for his pains. The Friar wears a half-cape of double worsted. After a perusal of this description, we begin to feel that we have really met this man such is Chaucer's skill in characterization.

Going through the character-sketches of the Lawyer and the Doctor, we find it possible to identify them with certain professional men of our own acquaintance. We have all dealt with lawyers and doctors, and we find Chaucer's characterisation of these two men to be most realistic and life-like. This Lawyer has enriched himself with fraudulent transactions in land, and he always tries to pretend to be busier than he really is. The Doctor allows the apothecaries to send him sub-standard drugs and medicines, so that both he and they can make profits out of the sales. The Doctor specially loves gold, and he has not missed the opportunity to make money during the pestilence. Indeed, these features of the Lawyer and the Doctor are universal and have been valid through the centuries. As for their clothes the Lawyer wears a motleycoat belted with a girdle of silk with small stripes, while the Doctor is clad in blood-red and blue-gray-lined with taffeta and fine silk.

The Miller, the Manciple, and the Reeve may be considered next. The Miller is described as a man of a robust physique, as a ribald joker, as stealing his customer's corn and over-charging them, as having a thumb of gold, as having a wart on the tip of his nose, and so on. He too is a mixture of typical and individual characteristics, and a perfectly convincing person. The Manciple is shrewd enough to be able to outwit fifty law-students, while the Reeve goes one step further in the direction of fraud. The Reeve is a very skilful manipulator of accounts and no auditor can find fault with him. He gives and lends to his lord the lord's own goods in such a way as to make the lord believe that the Reeve had done him a favour. The Reeve has accumulated sufficient private wealth and has built himself a house in a fair part of the countryside. Physically he offers a contrast to the Miller, as his legs are very long and lean while the Miller is a stout fellow. We can easily visualize all these three characters, but the Miller and the Reeve are more vividly drawn than the Manciple.

The Summoner and the Pardoner are memorable figures. The treatment of the Summoner begins with a visual description, but there is more to it than simple visualization. His physical disorders are described in such a way as to suggest inner or spiritual corruption. He has incurable pimples on his face. He is fond of garlic, onions, and strong wine; when drunk, he makes a show of his meager knowledge of Latin; for a quart of wine, he will allow a fellow to keep a mistress for twelve months; he teaches people not to stand in awe of arch-deacon's curse because the curse can be rendered ineffectual by paying money; he knows the secrets of the young people of his district; and so on. The Summoner indeed vibrates with life and vitality. The Pardoner is a fitting companion for him. They both join in singing a love-song. The Pardoner has thin hair, and shining eyes like a hare's. He carries fake pardons and bogus relics in order to make money. But he is able to read out a passage from the Bible or the life-story of a saint eloquently, thus creating an impression of piety in the church. He too is fully alive. Both the Summoner and the Pardoner represent certain well-known types of the Middle Ages, and clearly convey to us the abuses that were prevalent in the church in those days. But both of them have their individual characteristics to mark them off from the others. The Summoner has, besides the pimples, scabby black brows and a shaggy beard, while the Pardoner has a voice tiny as a goat's and

a face without a beard.

There are women too among Chaucer's pilgrims. The Wife of Bath is an unforgettable character. Like many other members of this band, she is both a type and an individual. She is skilful at cloth-making; she is quite aggressive in claiming her right to go to the collection box before anybody else; she wears scarlet stockings and carries a heavy weight of kerchiefs on her head on a Sunday. But she is somewhat deaf; she has visited many shrines in the past; she has had lovers in her youth, and has married five husbands; she is gap-toothed and has large hips. And she can laugh and joke in company, besides having completed knowledge of "the remedies of love". It is true that the character of the Wife of Bath is developed further later in *The Canterbury Tales*, but even the brief sketch of her in the *Prologue* conveys to us an impression of an energetic, full blooded, highly sociable, and self-assertive woman. The Prioress is easily distinguished from her. In the case of the Prioress, her femininity and womanly charm are emphasized more. The Prioress has sweet features, knows aristocratic manners, is fashionable in her dress, gets sentimental over her pet dogs and so on. But alive though she is, she is a shadow beside the Wife of Bath. The wives of the Guildsmen are merely mentioned in the *Prologue*, but a universal trait of all women is indicated when we are told of these wives' desire to the socially recognized and respected.

There is a Merchant in this company. He speaks mainly of the increase in his profits and is worried about the sea route being kept open to ensure the flow of trade on which business depends. He is in debt, but he takes care not to set this secret leak out. The Franklin is a recognizable type also. His chief interest in life is exquisite food and drink and by virtue of this interest, he may be regarded as "Epicurus's own son". He is very hospitable and may therefore be called "the Saint Julian of his country": his bread and his ale are always uniformly good, and a man with a better wine-cellar does not exist. Surely have known such persons in the course of our lives though their number has greatly dwindled and is further dwindling on account of inflation. Nor should we ignore the Cook who has an ulcer on his shin, or the Shipman, the master of the *Madelaine*, who is certainly, "a good fellow", being well-experienced in stealing his clients' wine.

The parson and the Plowman represent, like the Knight and the Squire, some of the finest aspects of human nature. The Parson is benign, patient, and helpful to his parishioners. He sets a noble example to his "flock". He actually practices what he preaches. He is not in the least mercenary and does not hire out his benefice in order to become a chantry priest in London. Chaucer says about him: "A better preest I trowe ther nowher noon ys". The Plowman, sketched in a much briefer compass, lives in peace and charity loving God and then his neighbour exactly as himself. These are idealized portraits, but approximations to these ideals to exist in this world.

Thus the variety and range of Chaucer's characterization is amazing. The poet has selected characters from various classes of contemporary society and given them an eternal life. We are given the impression that we have actually met and known them. We get the feeling that we have called on them and talked to them. We carry both pleasant and unpleasant memories of them. The mention of any one of them stirs certain responsive chords in us. Here is God's plenty, indeed. And Chaucer takes us to a marvelous portrait-gallery without doubt.

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#### 1.4 Extracts from *The Prologue To the Canterbury Tales*

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LINES - 43 - 78

A KNYGHT ther was and that a worthy man,

That fro the tyme that he first bigan  
To ridden out, he loved chivalrie,  
Trouthe and honour, freedom and curteisie.  
Ful worthy was he in his lordes were,  
And therto hadde heriden, no man ferre  
As wel in cristendom as in helhenesse,  
And ever honoured for his worthynesse.  
At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne;  
Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne  
Aboven alle nacions in Pruce  
In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,-  
No christen man so ofte of his degree.  
In Gernade at the seege eek hadde he be  
Of Algezir, and ridden in Belmarye,  
At Lyeys was he, and at Satalye,  
Whan they were wonne; and in the Grete See  
At many a noble armee hadde he be.  
At mortal batailles hadde he been fifteen,  
And foughten for oure faith at Tramysene  
In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo  
This ilke worthy knight hadde been also  
Somtyme with the lord of Palatye  
Agayn another hethen in Turkye  
And evermore he hadde a sovereyn pry  
And of his port as meeke as is a mayde  
He never yet no vileynye ne sayde,  
In al his lyf, unto no maner wight.  
He was a verray parfit, gentil knight,  
But for to tellen you of his array,  
His hors was goode, but he ne was nat gay;  
Of futian he wered a gypon



Al bismotered with his habergeon

For he was late y-come from his viage,

And wente for to doon his pilgrimage.

LINES - 79 – 100

With hym ther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,

A lovyere and a lusty bachelor,

With lokkes cruller s they were leyd in presse.

Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse,

Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,

And wonderly delyvere and greet of strengthe,

And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie,

In Flaundres, in Artoys and Pycardie;

And born hym weel, as of so litel space,

In hope to stonden in his lady grace

Embrouded was he, as it were a meede,

Al ful of fresshe floures white and reede;

Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al the day;

He was as fresh as is the monthe of May,

Short was his gowne, with sleves longe and wyde;

Wel koude he sitte on horse and faire ryde;

He koude songes made and well endite,

Juste and eek daunce and weel purtreye and write.

So hoot he lovede that by nyghterale

He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.

Curteis he was, lowely and sevysable,

And carf biforn his fader at the table.

LINES - 165-187

A Monk ther was, a fair for the *maistrie*.

An outridere, that lovede *venerie*;

A manly man, to been an abbot able.

Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he is stable;  
And whan he rood men myghte his brydel heere  
Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere,  
And eek as loude, as dooth the chapel belle  
Ther as this lord was kepere of the celle.  
The reule of seint Maure or of seint Beneit  
By-cause that it was old and some-del streit,  
This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,  
And heeld after the newe world the space.  
He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen  
That seith that hunters beth nat hooly men,  
Ne that a Monk whan he is cloysterles  
Is linked til a fissh that is waterles;  
This is to seyn, a Monk out of his cloystre.  
But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre;  
And I seyde his opinioun was good.  
What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood,  
Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,  
Or swynken with his handes and laboure,  
As Austyn bit ? how shal the world be served?

LINES - 285-308

A CLERK ther was of Oxenford also,  
That unto logyk hadde longe y-go.  
As leene was his hors as is a rake,  
And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,  
But looked holwe, and ther-to sobrelly,  
Ful thredbare was his overeste courtepy,  
For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice,  
Ne was so wordly for to have office;  
For hym was levere have at his beddes heed,  
Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,

Of Aristotle and his philosophie,  
Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrie,  
But al be that he was a philosopher,  
Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre,  
But al that he myghte of his freendes hente  
On bookes and his lernynge he it spente,  
And bisily gan for the soules prey  
Of hem that yaf hym wher-with to scoleye,  
Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede,  
Noght o word spak he moore than was neede,  
And that was seyde in forme and reverence  
And short and quyke and ful of hy sentence  
Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche  
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.

LINES - 331-360

A FRANKLEYN was in his compaignye,  
Whit was his berd as is a dayesye,  
Of his complexioun he was sanywyn,  
Wel loved he by the morwe a scope in wyn.  
To liven in delit was ever his wone,  
For he was Epicurus owene sone,  
That heeld opinioun that pleyne delit  
Was verrailly felicitie parfit  
An householdere, and that a greet, was he:  
Seint Julian was he in his contree;  
His breed, his ale, was alwey after oon,  
A better envyned man was nowher noon.  
Withoute bake mete was never his hous,  
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteuous,  
It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke,  
Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke.

After the sundry sesons of the yeer,  
So changed he his mete and his soper  
Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe,  
And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe.  
Wo was his cook but if his sauce were  
Poynaunt and sharpe, and redy al his geere.  
His table dormant in his halle always,  
Stood redy covered al the longe day.  
At sessiouns ther was he lord and sire;  
Ful ofte tyme was he lord and sire;  
Ful ofte tyme he was knight of the shire,  
An anlaas, and a gypser al of sild,  
Heeng at his girdle, whit as morne milk.  
A shirreve hadde he been, and a countour;  
Was nowher such a worthy vavasour

LINES - 379-387

A COOK they hadde with hem for the nones,  
To biolle the chiknes with the marybones  
And poudre-marchant tart and galingale,  
Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale;  
He koude rooste and seethe and boille and frye,  
Maken mostreux and wel bake a pye.  
But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,  
That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.  
For blankmanager, that made he with the beste.

LINES - 445-476

A GOODE WIFE was ther of biside BATHE,  
But she was som-del deaf, and that was scathe.  
Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt  
One passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.  
In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon

That to the offrynge before hire sholde goon;  
And if ther dide, certeyn so wroth was she,  
That she was out of alle charitee,  
Hir coverchiefs ful fine weren of ground,-  
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound,-  
That on a Sonday weren upon hir heed.  
Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet, reed,  
Ful streite y-teyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.  
Bcold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe  
She was a worthy woman al hir lyve,  
Housbonders at chirche dore she hadde five,  
Withouten oother compaignye in youthe,-  
And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem;  
She hadde passed many a straunge strem  
At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,  
In Galice at Seint Jame, and at Coloigne.  
She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye,  
Gat-tothed ws she, smoothly for to seys  
Upon an amblere esily she sat,  
Y-wympled wel, and on hir heed an hat  
As brood as is a bokler or a targe;  
A foot mantel aboute hir hipes large,  
And on hire feet a paire of spores sharpe.  
In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe;  
Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,  
For she koude of that art the olde daunce.

LINES - 623-636

A Somonour was ther with us in that place,  
That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,  
For sawcefleem he was, with even narwe.  
As hoot he was, and lecherous, as a sparwe,

With scaled browes blake and piled berd, -  
Of his visage children were aferd.  
Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,  
Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre non,  
Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,  
That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white,  
Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.  
Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,  
And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood;  
Thanne wolde he speke, and crie as he were wood.

LINES - 669-679

With hym ther rood a g entil Pardoner  
Of Rouncivale, his freend and his compeer,  
That streight was comen fro the court of Rome.  
Ful loude he soong Com hider, love, to me!  
This Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun,  
Was never trompe of half so greet a soun.  
This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,  
But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;  
By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,  
And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;  
But thynne it lay, by colpons, oon and oon;

LINES - 751-768

A Semely man Oure Hooste was with-alle  
For to han been a marchal in an halle.  
A large man he was, with eyen stepe,  
A fairer burgeys is ther noon in Chepe;  
Boold of his speche, and wys and well y-taught,  
And of manhod hym lakkede right naught.

Eek therto he was right a myrie man,  
 And after soper pleyen he bigan,  
 And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynges,  
 Whan that we hadde maad our rekenynges;  
 And seyde thus: Now, lordynges, trewely,  
 Ye been to me right welcome, hertely;  
 For by my trouthe, if that I shall nat lye,  
 I ne saugh this yeer so myrie a compaignye  
 At ones in this herberwe as is now  
 Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how;  
 And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght,  
 To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.

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## 1.5 Explanations

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Lines - 43-78

There was a Knight among them, and he was a worthy (or brave) man. From the time that he first began to ride out to take part in military campaigns, he loved chivalry, truth, honour, generosity, and courtesy. He proved his bravery in war in the service of his feudal superior (King Edward III). In order to fight he had ridden very far (in fact, no man had travelled further than he) in both Christian and non-Christian countries, and he had been always honoured for his bravery. He fought at Alexandria when it was captured (by King Peter of Cyprus in 1365). Many times he had taken the head of the table in Prussia as the most honoured person among those of all nations. He had fought in Lithuania and Russia, more than any other Christian of his rank. In Grenada also he had been at the siege of Algezir (near Gibraltar), and had ridden in Benmarin. He had been at Ayas (in Armenia) and at Adalia (in Asia Minor) when these were captured (by Peter of Cyprus). He had been with many noble expeditions on the Great Sea (that is, the eastern portion of the Mediterranean). He had fought in fifteen deadly battles, and he had also fought for the Christian faith at Tramysene (in Alegeria) three times in the tournaments, and had each time killed his adversary.

This same brave Knight had also once been with the ruler of Palatia to fight against another heathen in Turkey, and he had since then always enjoyed a noble reputation. And even though he was brave, he was wise; and in his behaviour he was as modest as a maiden. He had never uttered any foul words in all his life to any kind of person. He was truly a perfect, gentle Knight. But to tell you of his clothes and equipment, he had fine horses, though he did not wear showy garments. He wore a doublet of coarse cloth which was all soiled by his coat of mail, for he had recently returned from his voyage and was now going to make his pilgrimage (to Canterbury).

Lines - 79-100

With him was his son, a young Squire, who was a lover and a strong aspirant for attaining knighthood. He had curly hair which seemed to have been pressed in a curling iron. I think that he was

about twenty years old. In stature, he was a man of average height. He was wonderfully agile and possessed great strength. And he had once been in the cavalry in Flanders, in Artois, and in Picardy where he had given a good account of himself, considering the fact that he had been in the army for only a short period yet. (Because of his good record of fighting in the wars) he hoped to win his lady's favour. His garments were embroidered like a meadow all full of fresh flowers, white and red. He would sing or flute all day. He was as fresh as is the month of May. He wore a short gown with long and wide sleeves. He could sit on his horse well and could ride fairly. He could compose songs and compose them well. He could engage in combat, and also dance, draw, and write well. He loved so hotly that at night-time he slept as little as does a nightingale. He was courteous, humble and useful, and he carved before his father at the table.

Lines - 165-187

There was a Monk, a dominating kind of man, an outrider (whose duty it was to supervise the monastery's estates), one who loved hunting. the monk had manly qualities, and was competent to be the head of an abbey. He had quite a large number of valuable horses in his stable, and when he rode, people could hear his bridle jingling in a whistling wind as clearly and also as loudly as they could hear the ringing of the chapel bell. There, at the place where this lordly Monk was head of the cell, he disregarded such old things as the rules of monastic discipline established by St. Maurus and St. Benedict because these rules were (in his opinion) out of date and somewhat strict. And he followed the practices introduced by the new order of things. He did not give a plucked hen for that text which tells us that hunters are not holy men or for the text according to which, a monk, when he disobeys the regulations, is like a fish without water, or that such a monk is a monk without a cloister. But such a text he held to be worthless. And I said that this Monk's opinions were commendable. Why should he study and drive himself mad by always poring over a book in the cloister? Or, why should he work with his hands and toil, as St. Augustine bids? How shall the world be served (either by hard study or by hard labour)?

Lines - 285-308

There was also a Clerk of Oxford, who had studied logic for a long time. He had a horse which was thin like a rake and, I might add, he himself could not be called fat because he always looked hollow-cheeked, and was in addition self-restrained (or sober). His outer cloak was absolutely worn-out, because he had not yet been able to obtain the rectorship of any parish church, and because he was not worldly enough to seek a job. He would rather have at his bed's head twenty books, bound in black and red, of Aristotle and his philosophy than acquire rich garments, or a fiddle, or a gay harp. But, although he was a philosopher, he had hardly any gold in his possession. On the contrary, he spent on books and learning all the money that he might get from his friends, and he devotedly prayed for the welfare of the souls of those who provided him with the resources for his studies. He was most careful and most diligent in the pursuit of his studies. He did not speak even a word more than was necessary, and what little he spoke was spoken in a most appropriate and modest manner. He spoke briefly and animatedly. What he spoke was pregnant with noble thought. His speech was eloquent with moral virtue, and he took pleasure in both learning and teaching.

Lines - 331-360

There was a Franklin in his company. The Franklin's beard was white like a daisy, and he had a ruddy complexion. He was very fond of taking a sop of wine in the morning. It was always his



practice to live a life of pleasure, because he was a great follower of the philosophy of Epicurus who used to recommend a life of luxury and who held the theory that complete pleasure was truly the source of perfect happiness. He was a house-holder, and he kept a grand house. He was as hospitable as Saint Julian himself. The bread and the ale in his house were always uniformly good. A man with a better wine-cellar did not exist. His house was never without meat-pie. There was such a plenty of fish and meat in his house that one would think that food and drink and all conceivable delicious eatables rained there. He varied his meat and his meals according to the changing seasons of the year. He had a large number of fat partridges in the basket in his house, and he cultivated plenty of fish of different kinds in his pond. His cook would have come to grief if he could not make available sauces, pungent and sharp, and if he did not keep cups and plates ready for the table. The dinner-table in his house was fixed to the floor of the hall and was thus always ready for use throughout the day. At court sessions he was a lord and a benefactor, and often he was the representative of his county in Parliament. A dagger and a silk bag hung at his girdle which was white in colour like morning milk. He had been a sheriff and an auditor. There was nowhere such a worthy servant of the King.

Lines - 379-387

They had a Cook with them for the occasion (that is, to accompany them on the journey) in order to boil the chickens with the marrow bones, and to prepare sharp-tasting spices and flavours. This Cook could well appreciate a drink of the famous London ale. He could roast and boil and broil and fry, and make a stew, and properly bake a pie. But it was a great pity, as I thought, that on the lower part of his leg he had an ulcer. As for spiced chicken, he was such an expert in preparing it that he could equal the performance of the best of cooks.

Lines - 445-476

There was a good house-wife who came from a place close to Bath. But it was a pity that she was somewhat deaf. She was such an expert in weaving cloth that she excelled the workmen of the Flemish town of Ypres and Gaunt. In the whole parish, there was no woman who dared to go to the collection-box in the church before this Wife of Bath. And if any woman preceded the Wife of Bath on such an occasion, she certainly became so angry that she lost all pity or consideration. Her kerchiefs were finely woven. I am absolutely certain, and I can therefore affirm on oath, that the kerchiefs she wore on her head on a Sunday must have been ten pounds in weight. The colour of her stockings was a fine scarlet red, and they were tightly tied. Her shoes were very soft and new. Her face was bold and fair, red in complexion. She was a worthy woman throughout her life. She had married five husbands at the church door, besides other lovers she had in her youth: but there is no need to discuss that now. And thrice she had been to Jerusalem. She had crossed many oceans to go to foreign lands. She had been to Rome, to Boulogne, to the shrine of St. James in Galicia, to Cologne. She had a lot of experience of travelling. She was gap-toothed, to tell the truth. She sat upon an ambling horse with ease, neatly veiled. On her head she had a hat which was as wide as a buckler or a shield. About her large hips she wore an outer skirt, and on her feet she wore a pair of sharp spurs. In company she could laugh and joke a good deal. Undoubtedly she knew the remedies of love, because she had learnt this art as it existed in olden times.

Lines - 623-636

There was a Summoner with us in that place. His face was red like fire, as an angel's face is, and he had pimples all over his face. He had narrow eyes, and he was a passionate fellow, constantly

desiring sexual indulgence like a sparrow. He had black brows, which were infected with mange (or itch), and he had a shaggy beard. Children felt afraid on seeing his face. There was no quicksilver, lead oxide, brimstone, borax, white lead, cream of tartar, or any cleaning and disinfectant ointment that could cure him of his white pimples or of the lumps of flesh in his cheeks. He was very fond of garlic, onions, and also leeks. He loved to drink strong wine, redcoloured like blood. After drinking he would talk and shout as if he had gone mad.

Lines - 669-679

With him there rode a gentle Pardoner (that is, a trafficker in papal) pardons or indulgences). The Pardoner, who was the Summoner's friend and comrade, belonged to Rouncival (a convent near Charing Cross in London). He had come, according to his own version, directly from the Pope's court at Rome. In a very loud voice he sang the song: "Come hither, Love, to me!:" The Summoner joined him in singing this song with his strong, deep-sounding voice. Never was there a trumpet, the sound of which was even half as loud as the singing of the Summoner. The Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax, but it hung smooth as does a coil of flax. The few locks he had, hung down thinly and covered his shoulders. But his locks were very thin and lay on his shoulders, in small bunches, here and there.

Lines - 751-768

Our Host was a man altogether fit to perform the duties of a marshal in a dining-hal. He was a large man, with bright eyes. There was no finger citizen in Cheapside than our Host. He was bold of speech, and sensible, and well-educated. And he was not wanting in any quality of real manhood. In addition to all this, he had a jovial temper, and after supper he began to indulge in jokes and he talked, among other subjects, of the pleasures of life. After we had settled our bills, he spoke to us in the following manner: "Now, gentlemen, I say truly that you are heartily welcome here for I swear that, if I am to speak the truth, I have not seen this year such a merry company assembled in this inn at any one time as you on this occasion. I would like to provide entertainment for you if I knew how. And a pastime has just occurred to me to entertain you, which will cost nothing."

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## 1.6 Textual Analysis

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Text-1: The Opening Sentence

(A rough rule for the pronunciation of final *-e* is to pronounce it only when it is required by the rhyme or metre. It is not pronounced when the next word begins with a vowel. Pronounce '*e*' when italicised.)

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veryne in swich licour  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour,  
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth  
Inspired hath in very holt and heeth  
The tendre croppes, and the younge sonne

Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,  
 A smale foweles maken melodye,  
 That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
 (So priketh hem nature in hir corages),  
 Thanne longen folke to goon on pilgrimages,  
 And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,  
 To feme halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
 And specially from every shires ende  
 Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,  
 The hooly blisful martir for to seke,  
 That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. (lines 1-18)

The Prologue has a fresh and joyful beginning: the spring urges the natural world into growth, birds into song and human beings to go on pilgrimage. These signs of spring are conveyed in a sentence of four clauses. The clauses are concerned with time (*Whan* in lines 1 and 5, *Thanne* in line 12), and then with place: And specially in line 15. The clauses address in turn the meteorological, vegetable, animal and human. This rhetorical device is called a **chronographia**, a literary setting in time and place; Chaucer had read such elevated opening to many of the antos of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and he is imitating them. This sentence is far more formal than the rest of the Prologue, not only in its length and complex structure and phrasing (*in swich licour / Of which vertu engendred is....*), but also in its initial vocabulary which is scientific, mythological and astronomical. The references are explained in the Detailed Commentaries. The sentence opens slowly and grandly, becomes lively with the *tendre croppes*, *the yonge sonne* and *the smale foweles* that cannot sleep, and finally comes home to human beings, and to Chaucer's home country of Kent. It is Nature that makes people *long* to go on pilgrimages, a natural instinct directed to a supernatural end: gratitude for the saint's intercession in heaven for those who have been sick but are now whole and healthy.

#### Text-2 : The Prioress

Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,  
 That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;  
 Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy;  
 And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.  
 Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne,  
 Entuned in hir nose ful semely;  
 And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,  
 After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,  
 For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.

At mete wel ytaught was she with alle,  
 She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,  
 Ne wette hir fynghres in hir sauce depe,  
 Wel koude she carie a morsel and we kepe  
 That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.  
 In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.  
 Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene  
 That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene  
 Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.  
 Ful semely after hir mete she raughte.  
 And sikerly she was of greet desport,  
 And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port,  
 And peyned hire to countrefete cheere  
 Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,  
 And to ben holden digne of reverence.  
 But for to speken of hire conscience,  
 She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous  
 Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.  
 Of smale houndes hadde she that she feede  
 with rosted flessch, or milk and wastel-breed.  
 But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,  
 Or if men smoot if with a yerde smerte,  
 And al was conscience and tendre herte.  
 Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was,  
 Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,  
 Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed.  
 But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;  
 It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe,  
 For, hardily, she was not undergrowe.  
 Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.  
 Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar

A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,  
And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,  
On which ther was first write a crowned A,  
And after *Amor vincit omnia*. (Lines 118-62)

This portrait is selected as a sample of Chaucer's art and of the problems of interpretation and tone set by his habit of praise. It is hard to assess the degree of criticism in the portrait, an assessment complicated by changes in the meaning of words and by modern unfamiliarity with the ideals and historical realities of the life of nuns. Such factors - ironical praise, changes in sense, and historical ignorance - play a part in interpreting almost all the portraits.

Deficiency of knowledge may be remedied more easily than prejudice. Religious orders were suppressed at the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, and many people of today, even among Christians, may have little understanding or experience of the ideal of the celibate single life dedicated to Christ. Since Prioresses often came from aristocratic families or gentry, ladylike bearing and courtly table manners are no surprise. Most *gentil* families had members in religious orders; Chaucer has a sister or a daughter who was a nun.) Madame Eglentyne's name, nose, eyes, mouth and forehead are well bred. Little dogs and gold brooches were not in the Benedictine Rule; yet the Rule had been modified over the centuries; the Prioress's little weaknesses do not in themselves indicate personal laxity. Key words which have changed sense are coy, which means 'quiet' not 'archly inviting'; countrefete means 'imitate' not 'fake'. These considerations make the portrait less broadly satiric and more ironic.

But ambiguity is systematic. We have to recognise the ambiguities rather than hope to resolve them all. The motto on the brooch could be either religious or secular (see Detailed Commentaries). We are to smile at the nun's French accent, too-perfect manner and pity for very small animals, but whether her nasal singing, her height and her large forehead deserve a smile is not so clear (large foreheads, for example, were fashionably beautiful in the late fourteenth century). The question is complicated by the recurrent use in the portraits of hyperbole and the superlative. Chaucer's work often shows amusement at human vanity generally, not just feminine vanity. But how gentle is this satire, and how serve? Madame Eglentyne is certainly too concerned with manner, and seems to care more for mice than for men. The society lady's devotion to pets is an enduring comic stereotype. Older critical reaction is summed up in a phrase of the critic John Livingstone Lowes: 'the engagingly imperfect submergence of the feminine in the ecclesiastical'. Recent views of this portrait have been affected by outrage at the antisemitism of the Tale the Prioress later tells. But to see this nun and everything about her as ridiculous or worse would be a serious mistake. Chaucer is judgemental only in extreme cases. He does not here repudiate the celibate ideal, nor does he condemn the nun's softness. He carefully leaves plenty of room for interpretation. We too have to listen carefully - and we do not have to make up our minds.

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## 1.7 Critical Approaches

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### Literary Genres and Modes

Literary General Prologue draws on several different genres or kinds of writing. It is a prologue in which the author speaks to his audience, introducing a larger work. A medieval prologue aimed to

capture the good will of its auditors and readers, to lay out what is to follow, and to apologise for any inadequacies. This prologue consists of a formal opening (lines 1-18); the introduction of the pilgrimage and of the narrator (lines 19-41); a catalogue of portraits of his companions (lines 42-714); the apology (lines 725-46); the setting-up of the tale-telling game (lines 747-821); the riding out, and the drawing of lots for who shall tell the first tale (lines 822-58).

The catalogue of portraits takes up almost four-fifths of the Prologue. Detailed description can become static, and catalogues can become repetitious. But Chaucer varies his approach and is unpredictable. His prologue is also a narrative: each pilgrim is described not only in terms of how they strike their fellow-pilgrim, Chaucer. He half dramatises many of them, conveying the impression that they have spoken to him and that he is passing on what they say. This relationship between the narrator and his creations keeps the descriptions alive. The narrative quickens in the final section as the Host chivvies and persuades the pilgrims, leads them out of Southwark, and arranges the cut so that the Knight should tell the first tale.

As well as prologue, description and narrative, the General Prologue also draws on the materials of **satire**. Satire is the holding up to ridicule of folly and vice, and medieval satire attacked its victims harshly. Satire of the three estates of medieval society caricatured the typical faults of the members of the military, clerical and lay estates, as in *Piers Plowman*, which has a hunting monk, a flattering friar and some venal laymen who also appear in Chaucer. But Chaucer uses a different approach, partly drawn from the thirteenth-century French *Roman de la Rose*, an encyclopaedic narrative work, the beginning of which he had translated as *The Romaunt of Rose*. The French poem is a **dreamvision**, in which a dreamer meets and describes various personages, who talk and interact with him. The *Roman* does not attack the targets of its satire but allows them to speak. Chaucer does likewise, and he develops a technique of **ironical** praise, examined below. Thus the Prologue uses a number of genres, modes and approaches. It is not a work of naive realism or of straightforward social observation, although it contains elements which allow modern readers accustomed to realism to read much of it in that way.

Something must be said of the work which the Prologue introduces. *The Canterbury Tales* is very varied miscellany of tales such as might be told by a mixed group of pilgrims on the road to Canterbury. The work is united by the framework of the tale-telling competition, and though the pilgrims do not even reach Canterbury, the pattern is clear. At its simplest it is a complication of various stories set inside two **framestories**, the pilgrimage and the tale-telling game. The Prologue sets up the game, and it also sets up the human skittles at the beginning of its own game. The Host's game nearly comes to a halt as soon as the Knight finishes the first tale. The Host's authority is flouted by the drunken Miller, who insults him and the Knight and the Reeve. Pilgrims quarrel and fall out of charity. The Knight later stops the Host attacking the Pardoner. Chaucer's talk a lot, notably the Wife of Bath. Tales are interrupted or stopped by the Host or other pilgrims. A runaway servant rides up and joins the pilgrimage. Finally the Cook falls off his horse, and the Parson tells the last tale. The frame-story is social comedy, not without a hint of the more serious purpose of a pilgrimage. Some tales are very serious indeed.

The General Prologue is an expository introduction and overture to the *Tales*, hinting at some of the themes as well as introducing the tellers of the tales. Because it is varied and self-contained, and as vivid as medieval manuscript illuminations, it is often read on its own. Thus detached, it becomes a picture of the society of the time, especially as the gallery of portraits of the pilgrims is a cross-section

of those who were free to go on a pilgrimage. It is also written in a lively and realistic style, so that we can imagine that Chaucer did meet actual people resembling his fellow-pilgrims. Chaucer's story-telling art allows us to combine with the interest of understanding something of medieval society the pleasure of becoming involved with a 'real' set of people.

The Prologue was, however, intended as a prologue, something 'spoken before'. Chaucer probably read it aloud to friends and at court, and wrote it so that we should imagine him doing so. Audiences who knew Chaucer would have enjoyed the idea of his accidentally falling in with a ready-made group of pilgrims and of their fictional adventures. They would have certainly been amused at the figure Chaucer cuts later on in the *Tales*. The Host addresses him as a fat little man, too shy to tell a story. When pressed, the pilgrim Chaucer begins on a feeble romance, a **parody** of bad popular romance: it rhymes so wretchedly that the Host cannot endure it and rudely prevents his own author from continuing. Like the original audience, we know that this supposedly autobiographical story is not true. Chaucer may have gone on such a pilgrimage, but it is not likely that its members spoke in verse, nor that their tales would have been audible from horseback. The appearance of **verisimilitude** is brilliant and at times intense, but it is a deliberate illusion. Chaucer often dispenses with this verisimilitude: many of the tales are fantastic, whether adventurous, miraculous, indecent or farcical. Some tales are doctrinal; the Parson's is not a story but a treatise on penance. The verisimilitude of the Prologue is only one of his literary modes.

Chaucer has an eye for social realities, but it would not have occurred to him to write social history or a naturalistic novel. The pilgrims were dreamed up because the tales which are to follow had to have tellers to tell them. On examination, each of the portraits proves to be formal and self-contained, as they are not in novels. Also each pilgrim belongs to a different profession, except for the Second Nun and five Guildsmen. This suggests that Chaucer meant to show a representative cross-section of society, as in estates satire, in which the faults of the three estates were held up for correction. He includes only those who were likely to go on such a pilgrimage. Pilgrimages would not include serfs or poor peasants not free to travel. A nobleman would travel with his own retinue. Thus the base and apex of the feudal pyramid are not here. There are twenty-six men and three women: women would normally stay at home unless, like the Prioress and her opposite number the Wife of Bath, they were independent.

Chaucer could not guess that readers six centuries later would think of him and his pilgrims as typically medieval. His purposes differed from those of, for example, George Eliot, who certainly meant the characters of her novel *Middlemarch* (published in 1872) to represent the historical life of a Midlands town in the early nineteenth century. So long as we bear this difference in mind, there is no harm in seeing the pilgrims as English men and women of the later Middle Ages. They are presented as typical human beings, and have social and economic as well as moral and spiritual dimensions. Many of them are types who would have been familiar to lettered and unlettered people in the audience: the hunting monk, the venal friar, the dedicated knight, the gay young squire, the ladylike prioress, the good parson. All these were figures known to popular as well as literary tradition, as caricatures or as ideals. The central figure of the slightly earlier poem *Piers Plowman* is an idealised ploughman, like Chaucer's ploughman.

The portraits belong in the Prologue as part of a developing fictional action. To use a theatrical analogy, it is as if *The Canterbury Tales* were a play which opened with the cast assembled on the stage at the beginning instead of at the end. A true historical sense involves us in seeing these characters as living: when we see the Merchant, we see a pompous businessman, not just a typical representative

of an emerging class in the City of London in the late fourteenth century. Later on he turns out to be unhappily married, and becomes a typical human being as well as a typical merchant.

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## 1.8 Let Us Sum Up

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By the study of Chaucer's Prologue and the characters of his contemporary scene you will see:

- the vast variety of professions in 14th century.
- the literary power and originality of Chaucer's characterisation.
- the hint of satire in his writing.
- Chaucer's attitude towards the church.

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## 1.9 Review Questions

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1. Discuss "*The Prologue*" as a portrait gallery.
2. How does Chaucer present the women among the pilgrims.

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## 1.10 Bibliography

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## UNIT-2

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### GEOFFREY CHAUCER:PROLOGUE TO CANTERBURY TALES-II

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#### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Critical Essays
  - 2.2.1 In addressing “The General Prologue to The *Canterbury Tales*”
  - 2.2.2 A Note on the Term Middle Ages
  - 2.2.3 Medieval Christianity
  - 2.2.4 The Renaissance
  - 2.2.5 The Narrator
- 2.3 Some Thematic considerations
  - 2.3.1 The Opening Sentence
- 2.4 The General Prologue as an Epic Poem
- 2.5 Chaucer’s Irony
  - 2.5.1 Interpreting Irony
- 2.6 Satire
- 2.7 More Considerations
  - 2.7.1 The Pervasiveness of Courtly Love
  - 2.7.2 The Importance of Company
  - 2.7.3 The Corruption of the Church
  - 2.7.4 Motifs
  - 2.7.5 Symbols
- 2.8 Self Assessment Questions
- 2.9 Answers to SAQs
- 2.10 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.11 Review Questions
- 2.12 Bibliography

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#### 2.0 Objectives

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This unit will help you to :

- Understand Chaucer's prologue better.
- Be able to answer questions on the text.
- Be able to do an indepth analysis of the text.

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## 2.1 Introduction

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The General Prologue makes it clear that the overall plan for the work called for four stories from each character, two on the way there and two on the way back. That intention was clearly not met. The manuscripts contain work on twenty-four tales, with two of these unfinished. Putting these tales together into what seems to be the most coherent form is a major editorial challenge.

The basic structure of the work, as established in the General Prologue, is simple enough and relatively conventional. A group of travelers are thrown together and, to pass the time, they determine to tell each other stories (in a manner common to all sorts of narratives like the *Thousand all one Nights*, *The Decameron* of Boccaccio, and so on.) Chaucer chooses one of the oldest narrative devices, a journey, in this case a pilgrimage which includes a wide variety of social types. On this familiar narrative framework, he then hangs a series of tales in which includes a wide variety of social display a number of different literary forms (fairy stories, prose sermons, romance narratives, bawdy tales, animal fables, and so on). In this way, he has ready-made recipe for a wide variety of personalities and stories. And one of the greatest achievements of *The Canterbury Tales* is the richness of it characters and its literary styles.

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## 2.2 Critical Essays

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### 2.2.1 In addressing "The General Prologue to The *Canterbury Tales*"

we are dealing with what has long been recognized as one of the greatest masterpieces of English literature, certainly the finest and most influential work of fiction to emerge in England from that period we call the Middle Ages. For most literary historians, English literature begins well before Chaucer's greatest poem, but this particular work marks the start of the trading which is still readily accessible in the original language even though Chaucer's Middle English requires the constant help of a glossary.

Let us discuss some important interpretative feature of "The General Prologue," largely with a view to raisin some points which will not only help us to understand Chaucer's poem a little better but also to hone our literary critical skills. Chaucer's' poem is a particularly useful place to carry out the latter task, because, if we take the time to get familiar enough with his language to read the poem with some case, it raises interesting critical problems for those learning about literary criticism of ancient works.

Before turning directly to the text of the poem however let us consider the historical term commonly associated with this poem, the Middle Ages. By common agreement, this work is the finest poem to emerge in English during the Middle Ages, in part because it provides us such a vivid unforgettable look at a wide social canvas from that time. But what does that term mean?

### 2.2.2 A Note on the Term Middle Ages

One might well begin by asking "Why the *Middle Ages*?" Clearly people at the time did not

think of themselves as living between two different time periods (they thought of themselves, as every age does, as the most recent arrivals), so where does the term come from? Well, the term Middle Ages was applied by later Renaissance writers and historians to refer to the period falling very roughly between the fall of the Roman Empire in 410 AD (when Alaric sacked Rome) and the Renaissance. The arrival of the latter has no clear date and tends to be dated earlier in southern Europe than in the north. A convenient (but somewhat misleadingly precise) date for the arrival of the Renaissance in England might be 1485, the date of the battle of Bosworth Field, when Richard III, the last of the Plantagenet kings, was defeated and killed by Henry Tudor, thus initiating the reign of the Tudors, which lasted in England until the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603.

The term Middle Ages, like so many historical terms applied to an earlier period, was deliberately pejorative. There had been the great Classical Period of Greece and Rome, and now there was the wonderful revival of classical learning, the Renaissance. In between was a period viewed by many Renaissance thinkers as a time of relatively little achievement (with some exceptions here and there), a time of ignorance, an absence of the invaluable classical inheritance, feudal oppression, and the widespread power of the church. With deliberate contempt, some writers applied the term The Dark Ages to the earlier part of this period (up to about the eleventh century.)

In fact, the Middle Ages was a time of extraordinary vitality. In the first five hundred years of this period, Christianity established itself throughout Europe, developed a complex institutionalized religion capable of governing society at all levels, ministering to the sick, and dealing with judicial disputes; the Church hammered out compromises with secular rules, an aristocracy derived from the Germanic tribal customs, and placed Europe's economy on a firm agricultural foundation (the work of the monasteries in clearing the land is one of the greatest successes of western world). During this period there were many fierce disputes about Christian doctrine, about the relative distribution of power between Church and State, and about the relationship between the Church's immense economic power and its ministry to the poor. Nevertheless, for much of the Middle Ages, life was calm, orderly, stable, and relatively prosperous. If we tend to remember the excesses, like the Black Death and the persecution of heretics and witches (which is more a Renaissance phenomenon), we should not therefore forget that this period established the basis from which were to develop the institutions, customs, and power which fuelled the amazing expansion of Europe in the Renaissance and afterwards.

### **2.2.3 Medieval Christianity**

It is particularly important for modern readers of medieval works not to make the common but fatal error of thinking about the Middle Ages, especially about the Christian Church in the Middle Ages, as something monolithic, homogenous, and backward. Within the Church, as within the ranks of modern liberal capitalism, there were all sorts of tensions between traditional authoritarian conservatives, radical free thinkers, communitarians insisting on limiting individual freedom, individualists insisting on more individual freedom, reformers wanting a better deal for the poor and less money for the top bureaucrats, and so on. The major work of the Church was to maintain, in the midst of all these tensions, a workable social community in the thousands of very small agricultural communities throughout Europe, and in this attempt it was for a long time astonishingly successful. If many of the popes and bishops, like the imperial Caesars, left behind scandalous records of personal misconduct, nevertheless many were efficient and caring administrators, and the bureaucracy of the Church could often work extremely well with corruption at the top, because it was staffed by educated and diligent human beings at lower levels.

### 2.2.4 The Renaissance

The term Renaissance is applied to the period of intellectual and cultural history which succeeded the Middle Ages. Literally the term refers to the rebirth of classical learning which swept across Italy in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century, as old classical manuscripts were rediscovered, edited, translated, and distributed throughout southern Europe, moving slowly northward throughout the fifteenth century. The immediate impetus which launched this revival was the serious threat posed to Eastern Europe by the Turkish Muslim forces moving up towards Constantinople and Vienna throughout the early part of this period (Constantinople was captured by the Turks in 1453). The flight of Greek scholars with the manuscripts towards the West brought into the West, and especially into Italy, what had been lost long ago. Greek language and literature. The diffusion of such learning accelerated rapidly after the invention of printing in the 1450's.

But there was more to the Renaissance than just this scholarly revival. There was a renewed emphasis on classical humanism, on the view that the good life did not have to be lived under the constant supervision of the Church within the often limited restrictions of the rising interest in speculating about the nature of the earth and the heavens (often supported by ambitious central monarchs growing in power) all put pressure on the static, traditional, communal model which had been the social reality of Europe for eight centuries.

Chaucer's poem was written late in the fourteenth century, in the late Middle Ages or early Renaissance, depending on how one wishes to consider the time. And a few things about the social conditions of the period are clear from the picture of society he gives us there.

First, the Church is still clearly a major part of society. About of the pilgrims going to Canterbury are church officials, and the entire group is celebrating spring by taking part in a traditional Christian ritual, the pilgrimage to an important holy shrine. In doing so they are giving public testimony to things that are valued in their society and their lives, just as we would reveal a great deal about our social and personal values, if we were to write this poem today.

Secondly, while none of the pilgrims comes from the tope classes of society, the aristocracy, many of them are quite rich and sophisticated. In examining them, we are, for the most part, looking at members of the middle-class (although the concept of class did not exist at the time). Some of them have money, a few have traveled extensively. They know about clothes and books and food. Some ordinary folk have horses. What we would call the trading and service industries are well represented by people who would not be out of place in a Nanaimo mall. And yet we are reminded, too, that traditional roles of the Middle Ages have not yet disappeared.

Finally, there is a sense of rising individualism, among them. While the ideals of the dedication to a traditional Christian communal society are still clearly there, it is equally evident that for many of these pilgrims, including the Church officials, the sense of a communal duty is being eroded by a personal desire for money and the fine things money can buy. In fact, there is a strong sense throughout *The Canterbury Tales* that this money is somehow a threat to something older and more valuable.

All of these details suggest a society in transition. We are not here dealing with the vision of the Middle Ages of a few hundred years before, a time when books were very scarce, traveling much more difficult, and money (and the good things it purchases) in much shorter supply.

Chaucer, incidentally, lived before the invention of printing and the widespread diffusion of

classical literature into Northern Europe. Thus, although he was well read in French and Italian literature and drew heavily upon certain Continental works and traditions, he did not have access to Greek literature. When he wrote about Troilus and Cressida and the Trojan Wars he was drawing on medieval traditions of this famous story, without direct knowledge about Greek versions in Homer or the tragedians.

The age of Chaucer covers the period from 1340 to 1400. Chaucer is the true representative of his age as Pope is of the eighteenth century and Tennyson is of the Victorian era. His works breathe the political, social, economic and religious tendencies of his time. The middle of the fourteenth century was the transitional period in which Chaucer was born. The elements of Renaissance were breeding. "He stands on the threshold of the new age, but still hedged in a backward gazing world."

The fourteenth century in England was the most important of the mediaeval centuries. It covered the period of the Black Death and the Peasant's Revolt, the Hundred Years War with France and the great economic and social changes which we associate with the decay of villeinage. During its years, two kings were deposed and murdered, and dynasties began to rise and fall. The antagonism to the church and the demand for the freedom of thought, which was to culminate in the Renaissance and the Reformation were beginning to be manifested in this pregnant century. It was of supreme importance for the understanding of English history that we should have a dramatic, piquant and all embracing picture of real mediaeval life before the great changes should arrive and Chaucer has given us this picture in his *Canterbury Tales*.

During the English Period, Chaucer appears to us as a great original poet. He had learnt almost to perfection the arts of description, narrative and characterization. Chaucer is known for his technique of versification like that of a fine craftsman and a supreme writer because of his humour and personal talk. This period includes his remarkable work, *The Canterbury Tales*. In this poem he truly represented the comedy of life in its all forms. *The Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* gives us the background of the actions and movements of the pilgrims who make up the company of the members of the troop who undertook this pilgrimage. All these pilgrims represent the whole of "English society" of the fourteenth century. The pilgrims are persons of all ranks and classes of society; and in the inimitable description of their manners, dresses, person, horses etc, with which the poet has introduced them, we behold a vast and minute portrait gallery of the social state of England in the fourteenth century. They are – a knight, a squire, a yeoman or military retainer of the class of the three peasants, who in the quality of the archer was bound to accompany his feudal lord to war, a prioress, a lady of monk, superior of a nunnery, a nun and three priests in attendance upon this lady; a Monk, a person represented as handsomely dressed and equipped and passionately fond of hunting and good cheer; a friar, or monk, a merchant, a clerk or student of the University of Oxford; a sergeant of the law; a franklin or rich country-gentlemen, five wealthy burgesses or trademen, described in general but vigorous and characteristic terms; they are Haberdasher or dealer in silk and cloth, a carpenter, a weaver, a dyer and a tappisser or maker of carpets and hangings, a cook or rather what in old French is called *Rotisseur* i.e. the keeper of a cook's shop; a shipman, the master of a trading vessel; a doctor of Physic; a wife of Bath, a rich cloth manufacturer, a Parson, or Secular Parish priest; a ploughman, the brother of the preceding personage; a miller; a manciple or steward of a lawyer's hostel or inn of court; a Reeve, bailiff or interdant of the estates of some wealthy landowner; a summoner, an officer in the then formidable ecclesiastical courts, whose duty was to summon or cite before the spiritual tribunal those who had offended against the cannon laws; a Pardoner, or vendor of the Indulgences from Rome. To

these thirty persons must be added Chaucer himself and the Host of the Tabard, making in all thirty two. The Canterbury Pilgrims are described so realistically and graphically that one gets a great enjoyment in reading *The Prologue*.

Chaucer was regarded as the greatest writer of his age, (the fourteenth century), for he was widely read, imitated, and quoted; even some of his success in the material world was probably a reward for his skill with his pen. Three qualities are outstanding in his writings; a humor which is sometimes gentle, sometimes sly, often satiric, but never vicious (quite frequently he is the butt of his own jokes), an understanding of human beings which is warm and compassionate but never sentimental; and an acuteness of observation which is unfailing in its ability to discern the most significant detail. Chaucer's fame, unlike that of many writers was great in his own lifetime and has remained consistently so for over 550 years.

The general prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, in some respects the most remarkable product of Chaucer's genius, is an extended "dramatis personae" for the collection of tales. In it, Chaucer presents his characters, one by one, in a series of vivid, detailed, and lifelike portraits, and also sets forth his plan: to have each of his characters tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two more on the way back, to while away the time. The result is a continuous drama, for the tales give rise to altercations and other byplays and also further characterize their tellers. Chaucer did not live to complete his ambitious project. *The Prologue*, however shows how fully he grasped it in his own mind. It would be a mistake to consider the *Prologue* as merely an introduction. It is a mature and highly finished work in its own right – the liveliest, most convincing picture of life in the middle Ages which has come down to us. The language used by Chaucer comes from the Middle English rather different from the modern English we know.

### **2.2.5 The Narrator**

Linking the episodic nature of the gallery of characters and their stories is the engaging presence of the narrator, who is a major presence in the poem. Chaucer presents the narrator as one of the pilgrims, a fellow Christian traveling to Canterbury and meeting the various characters and hearing their stories. This gives his descriptions the immediacy of a personal narration based upon intimate conversations and direct witnessing of the dramatic events which take place upon the way (like the different quarrels among some of the pilgrims.)

At the same time, however, it is quite clear that many of the details we learn (especially in the General Prologue) are obviously based upon a perspective that cannot be simply derived from a personal encounter. The details we learn about all the Knight's achievements, for example, or the details of the Wife of Bath's behaviour back home in her own church, these are not things that a pilgrim narrator could learn in such vivid detail.

Hence, we are dealing with, in effect, two narrators. The shifts, between them are unannounced, but not many readers enjoying the poem are at all disturbed by questions about how a pilgrim-narrator could possibly know so much about people he has just met. This, in itself, is a good reminder that what matters in reading a poem is not the total absence of logical difficulties of this sort but rather the skill with which the writer avoids drawing attention to any such inconsistencies. The dual point of view has the great advantage, of detail of the sort available only to an omniscient narrator where this is a useful supplement to a portrait or a narrative.

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## 2.3 Some Thematic Considerations

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When we first start reading the General Prologue we are likely to be drawn first to the richness and variety of the gallery of characters. This is, indeed, one of the wonderful things about this poem; as Dryden observe,, “Here is God’s plenty.” To approach a work thematically is to consider what ideas of leitmotivs co-ordinate its details, how these ideas are presented, modified, challenged, and resolved by the end of the work. Thematic criticism will tend to see characterization as primarily important for what it contributes to the complication or presentation of such co-ordinating ideas.

It’s important to stress for all those interested in thematic criticism that works of fiction are not philosophical works. They do not present rational arguments (although such arguments may exist in them at times). Thus, thematic criticism is not simply a matter of reducing a work to some simple “moral” or prose summary. What matters in thematic criticism is following the way in which a particular idea or theme is qualified, complicated, challenged, deepened, resolved, reinforced as one proceeds through the fiction. In some fictions, the thematic dimension will be very clear indeed (e.g., in allegories); in others, it may not exist at all (the point of the fiction may well be to disqualify and thematic approach to experience- which, when one thinks about it, is a theme in its own right).

### 2.3.1 The Opening Sentence

So a thematic approaches to the General Prologue might begin by focusing attention on the famous opening sentence. The first point to notice about that opening sentence is that it falls into two equal parts, the first focusing on the spring and the second on the holy duty of the pilgrimage. The first half really stresses the erotic energies of spring, with words like “engendred”, “Inspired,” “priketh,” “Ram,” and so on. These words often denote penetration and fertilization, and the movement of the lines and the short vowels in some of the words help to create a sense of erotic energy of a time when nature is so charged with sexual vitality that even the birds sleep with one eyes open.

The second half of the sentence focuses on something entirely different, the desire of people to give thanks to God for having survived another winter, having with the help of God and his special saint overcome illnesses and threats of death. The sounds and movements of this part of the sentence is much softer and gentler.

Now this sentence holds in perfect balance the two primary motives of life-the erotic drives which come to us from spring push up forward into newly renewed life, and the desire : for a common religious experience to thank God for our life together, something which pulls us to worship. On the basis of these two motions, the irrational push of Eros and the spiritual pull of Thanatos (to use Freudian terms) we can approach the study of society which Chaucer then depicts for us.

The opening sentence announces a powerful theme which runs throughout the General Prologue: that there are two essential forces of life and that what matters is that they be held in a balance (as they are grammatically in the opening sentence). This theme, you might think, is not nearly so explicit as I am suggesting in the opening sentence. But portraits (of the Knight and Squire, father and son), a pairing which unties the highest virtues of active Christianity displayed in the lifetime of service of the Knight with the exuberant vitality of the son, an erotic love of life which yet remains in check, so that he knows his duties towards his father (as the last detail of the portrait makes clear).

If we look closely at the first pair of portraits in the light of the theme suggested by the opening sentence, then we encounter a standard of human conduct against which we will inevitably compare the

later portraits. What is clear about the Knight is that he has led a active life fighting on behalf of Christianity, especially against the threat of Turkish invasion. He has displayed fortitude, courage, truth, honour, and earned a high reputation. Yet he remains humble and does not flaunt his rank in an expensive exterior or display any sense of superiority. He has just arrived back in England and immediately joins the procession to give thanks.

His son, the Squire, shows all the virtues of youth, full of erotic energy, song, a love of the fine things of spring and a commitment to the ideals of chivalry; he is a creative spirit, able to sing, write lyric poetry, dance, and, in general, celebrate the joy of life. But, as already mentioned, this has not led him to forget the respect he owes his father.

Later in the poem, near the end, we meet another pair, the Parson and the Ploughman. They display virtues remarkably similar to those of the Knight and the Squire. They are, above all, charitable and hard working. They have dedicated their lives to the service of their fellow creatures and do not shrink from self-sacrifice or danger to stand up to injustice. What seems clear is that the energies which drive them through life (and into this pilgrimage) are in harmony with the highest ideals by which the narrator measure human conduct.

There's an important point to starting the catalogue of pilgrims with an ideal standard and to reintroducing it near the end. What this achieves is to enable us to make moral judgments more easily about the other portraits. It is clear what the narrator in this poem most admires; he conveys that in this ideal portraits. In this way, we could claim that a central theme of the General Prologue is an exploration of the full range of the moral qualities of late Medieval Christianity as they manifest themselves in the daily of the people.

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## 2.4 The General Prologue as an Epic Poem

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If we wish to address the vision of life developed in the General Prologue, we can pay tribute to its epic quality. This literary term is usually reserved for certain narrative fictions which hold up for our exploration something more than just a story. They have a social breadth and a narrative scope which provide a much wide and all-inclusive canvas than an ordinary fiction. In reading them, we are exploring, not simply particular characters in a particular setting, but an entire cultural moment. Epic narratives, from Homer onwards, celebrate civilization in a particular manifestation, and part of their power and interest comes from our sense that an entire way of life is under scrutiny. Parenthetically, what is curious about epic poems is that they tend to appear when the way of life they celebrate is the process of disappearing forever (Homer, for example, is writing about a heroic society a couple of centuries older than him, *Paradise Lost* appears when the great Protestant experiment under Cromwell is clearly over, many of the novels celebrating the American South come after the Civil War and the defeat of the Confederate cause.)

In that sense, the General Prologue invites us to evaluate a particular society. Like all societies this culture is under tension. It has a clear sense of values, what we might call the traditional values of active Christianity, bet summed up in the well known Biblical celebration of faith, hope, and charity (and the greatest of these is charity). The ideal portraits make it clear to us that the narrator of this poem admires such qualities more than any others. Any the remaining portraits acquaint us with the various ways in which these qualities are under threat. Hence, reading the General Prologue is a voyage through the evaluation of an entire society.



Two comments about the moral visions we encounter: First, by the end of the General Prologue we have become well acquitted with the seven cardinal virtues (prudence, fortitude, temperance, justice, faith, hope, and charity) and the seven cardinal sins (pride, envy, covetousness, sloth, anger, lust, and gluttony). And it seems clear importance of this traditional value scheme.

Second, and related to the above point, is the emphasis on the social basis for virtue. What makes people good or bad Christians, in the world of this poem, is how they treat each other. Virtue is not an abstract matter of doctrine, a purification ritual carried out in contemplative isolation, or a challenge to the individual will. It is thoroughly social, a matter of one's obligations to help others and to refrain from mistreating them. That list of virtues and vices is primarily social and cannot be understood outside of a rich social context.

### **Comparative Critical Details**

In this respect, you should notice how certain words and details appear from one portrait to the next. For example, we are often told about a character's attitude to or use of money. And it's worth paying attention to what each character values enough to spend money on. The Knight's price is his reputation, and he has paid for horse. The Parson's gold is his sense of Christian duty ("if gold rust, what shal iren do?"), the Clerk (student) spends money on books. The Ploughman dutifully gives money to the Church. Other pilgrims spend money on a wide variety of consumer goods: clothes, food, fine living. How do these people get their money? How do they use their money?

In following just this one point, we can see how that necessary balance between one's erotic and one's religious feelings can be upset, perhaps in some places corrupted. Here it is important to notice how many of the portraits are of Church officials, for whom this question is of particular importance. By looking closely at what the Monk purchases with his money or the tactics used by the Friar and the Pardoner to get money we see immediately where their particular sense of priorities drive them.

Similarly, we should pay attention to clothes. Sometimes these are quite appropriate to the social function a character occupies (e.g., the Knight and perhaps the Prioress). At other times, we might wonder. The narrator clearly likes a fine appearance and has a keen eye for good clothes, just as he values books and his ability to read and write, as well good manners (courtesy). But his highest praise is reserved, for those details which enable us to see someone as charitable, that is, as loving his neighbours more than himself. So when the words charity or charitable appear we need to be particularly alert to assessing just what the words mean in this context.

This business of love is essential. What does each character love? Is this love a corruption of the spirit? In the Prioress we are not sure. The brooch might very well refer to love of God (for the slogan is a common religious statement). In the Monk, his love of God has become a lust for hunting and eating; the Friar's love directs him to all the common pleasures. The finest thing about the Parson is the perfect balance between his love of God and for this world. In the Pardoner, by contrast, the love of God's justice (of which he is the agent) and for humanity has become hopelessly corrupted.

We have to be careful about assessing the importance of each detail. The task asks us to evaluate, not what we think of the character in question, but what the narrator thinks. How do the details he presents about each character shape our understanding of how he feels about them? What emotional pressures is the language putting on us to understand a particular character in one way rather than

another? The narrator rarely, if ever, offers an explicit judgment that is not tinged with some irony. But the list of specific details develop a latent judgment in a very delicate manner that the reader needs to attend to and respect.

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## 2.5 Chaucer's Irony

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This sort of assessment is particularly challenging in the General Prologue because of the ironic tone which pervades so many of the portraits. In fact, there could hardly be a better introduction to the importance of evaluating irony than this famous poem. So it is appropriate here to say a few words about this all-important critical term.

Irony, considered very generally, refers to the quality of language to have different levels of meaning, to be ambiguous, so that we are not entirely certain how to interpret a particular phrase or descriptive detail or action. The presence of irony complicates our response because it reveals that what is being described is not a simple literal fact for all to see, it is more complex and layered than that. Irony in language is, as one might expect, not welcome in certain forms of writing, especially in scientific and legal writing, where the unambiguous clarity of clearly defined words is the essence of the prose. In poetry and fiction generally, irony is a writer's stock in trade because it is the surest way to remain the reader that the subject matter of this text is not something simple and literal, but inherently ambiguous.

How does irony work? We don't have to read very far in the General Prologue to see Chaucer's standard technique. He is always setting morally loaded language against actions which do not live up to that high praise, thus inviting us to see a discrepancy, an ambiguity between the moral language and the action. Here is a famous example from the portrait of the Wife of Bath:

She was worthy woman al hir live

Husbondes at chirche dore she hadd five.

The word *worthy* in the first line sets up a very approving moral value judgment; the detail in the second line undercuts it. Note that that detail doesn't necessarily cancel the approval, but it redirects our attention. We have to wonder about just what the precise nature of the Wife's worthiness consists of. The narrator is not telling us directly how to clarify the nature of the Wife, but he complicates it, inviting us to see her in a more complex way.

Similarly, the narrator tells us that the Prioress is charitable (very high praise indeed, given the importance of this term established in the earlier [ portrait of the Knight) and then, to establish that point, tells us that she weeps if she sees an animal in pain. The details add a distinct note of irony to the work *charitable*. We know the literal meaning of the word, but the style is asking us to qualify our literal understanding with something more ambiguous. Similarly the Friar is the best beggar in his order. What does that mean? Obviously he is a good beggar in the sense that he obtains a great deal of money, but the details of how he gets his money really qualify the moral content of the potential moral approval in that world *best*.

Some of the portraits are clearly not ironic; we are invited to take them as literal portraits of an ideal, the Knight and the Squire and the Parson and the Ploughman are such ideals. Perhaps the Clerk is as well. But almost all the rest are ironic portraits of human characters whose qualities are inherently ambiguous.

### 2.5.1 Interpreting Irony

For the literary interpreter the presence of irony is an important challenge, largely because an interpretation must explore that irony and seek to assess its effects, without being too ham fisted, that is, without resolving the irony too simplistically. If the effect of an ironic portrait is often thoroughly ambiguous, then one must acknowledge that and not close off the ironies too quickly. For example, the portrait of the Prioress has invited some people either to claim that there is no irony in the portrait whatsoever (and thus she is as fine and elegant a person as one might wish for), while others have dismissed her as a thoroughgoing hypocrite. Both of these reactions, in my view, deal with the portrait by destroying its most obvious and interesting quality, its elusiveness. Yes, there are contradictory tendencies in the details, but (and this is a crucial point) human characters often consist of contradictory qualities bound up in a single personality, and one of the functions of poetry is to explore and illuminate such emotional contradictions, not to destroy them.

Hence, in reading the General Prologue, one has to take care to shape one's response to each character carefully, seeking to define as precisely as possible our sense of how the ironical details finally add up, what sort of critical weight we might give to the presence of irony. One of the obvious ways to do this (something the poem invites us to do) is to compare the characters with each other. We might sense, for example, that the Prioress is clearly not up to the standard of the Knight, but she does seem less corrupt than the Friar, who, in turn, is obviously not as scandalously hypocritical as the pardoner. Once we start comparing the characters with the theme of corruption of an ideal in mind, we will learn a great deal about the importance of making our responses to irony as precise as possible.

In this connection, it might be useful to remember and apply the concepts of sins of omission and sins of commission. The former stem from a failure to do what one's duty requires one to do; the latter stem from active deed injuring others directly. And we might want to differentiate between sins of commission which are more serious than others. For example, the Flair commits many sins of commission, but he brings a certain amount of pleasure and fun with him, and his sexual conquests of women, although a disgrace to his order, are, we are led to believe, often well received. The Summoner and the Pardoner, by contrast, actively extort money through systematic lies, threats, and a corruption of church doctrine in their sermons.

One final comment about irony in a style. Often, the most important debates between interpreters of a particular work hinge on whether or not they both see irony in the style of, if they do, just what weight to give it. Since irony inevitably undercuts the literal meaning of particular words and phrases, its presence or absence can make a huge difference. My favourite example of this is Machivaelli's *The Prince*. My sense is that this was intended as a thoroughly ironic, even satiric work, but so many people failed to see the irony, that the book has been hailed or condemned as a celebration of the political life totally divorced from morality. Debates over the ending of *Odyssey*, or Shakespear's *Twelfth Night* or *Henry V*, or *Paradise Lost*, some the most interesting and vital critical debates, hinge precisely on this question of detecting the presence of irony and evaluating it.

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## 2.6 Satire

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When does irony become satire? What is the difference between a thoroughly ironic portrait and a satirically ironic style? One way to sort out the difference is to remember that the purpose of satire is to hold someone up to ridicule as an example to others. Satire always has something aggressive about

it, a desire to point a finger and say, in effect, “Look now ridiculous this person is.” Making readers laugh at the foolishness of others is the essence of the satire. And irony is the key stylistic technique used to achieve it. All satire emerges from the ironic discrepancy between what people think they are or would like to be and what they, in fact, are. The challenge to the satirist is to make this discrepancy “witty,” so that people laugh at the hypocrisy.

But there is an enormous range to satire, and we are not really saying much about a style just by labeling it satiric. We need to evaluate as best we can, on the basis of the language, the precise nature of the satire. There’s huge difference, after all, between a very good natured, even affectionate joke at someone’s expense and a savagely harsh indictment of the sinful duplicity of a total hypocrite.

To make fun of people’s foolishness and to hold them up as satiric targets requires the satirist to put a certain amount of distance between the target and the reader and to simplify the potential complexity of the personality under attack. It’s clear that the narrator in the *Canterbury Tales* is inviting us to laugh at the foolishness of some of the portraits. In that sense, we can usefully talk about a satiric presence throughout the General Prologue. But as soon as we have acknowledged that, we would have to concede that much of this satire is extremely gentle. The narrator seems genuinely to like these people on the journey. He brings us quite close to them and indicates that he, for the most part, enjoys their company. So the potential of the satire is enormously muted, to the point where sometimes one can concede that satiric possibility disappears completely.

For example, the portrait of the Prioress is clearly ironic. We are invited to sense ambiguities in her character, to wonder about what earthly passions might exist beneath the proper attire and the religious icons. But the narrator is clearly much taken with her fine appearance and seems to like her clothing and the way she conducts the divine service. There is an affection, even an admiration, for the woman. Hence, the irony develops little-to-no-satiric energy. We do not, I think, respond to this portrait with the sense that the narrator is inviting us to mock the woman as a hypocrite.

In other portraits where the irony is considerably stronger and more overt, the attitude of the narrator is always muting the satiric potential. The Friar is obviously a sinner, derelict in his duties, as is the Monk. But the narrator conveys a liking for these characters and an admiration for some of their qualities. This collapses the distance between the target and the readers and makes the satire. If it is there at all, much gentler than it might otherwise be. As Paul Baum has remarked, if this is satire, it is satire without indignation.

This mildly affectionate satiric tone in the General Prologue gives to the style of this poem its unique quality. There’s firm moral vision at work here, and the narrator is not afraid to let us know what he believes in. At the same time, he has such a genuine liking for people and their various silly ways that he is not going to let a censorious judgment come between them. This adds a distinct note of compassion, humour, and sociability to the narrator himself who, in some ways, emerges by the end of the General Prologue as the most interesting person on the trip.

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## **2.7 More considerations**

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### **2.7.1 The Pervasiveness of Courtly Love**

The phrase “courtly love” refers to a set of ideas about love that was enormously on the literature and culture of the Middle Ages Beginning with the Troubadour poets of southern France in

the eleventh century, poets throughout Europe promoted the notions that true love only exists outside of marriage; that true love may be idealized and spiritual, and may exist without ever being physically consummated; and that a man becomes the servant of the lady he loves. Together with these basic premises, courtly love encompassed a number of minor motifs. One of these is the idea that love is a torment or a disease, and that when a man is in love he cannot sleep or eat, and therefore he undergoes physical changes, sometimes to the point of becoming unrecognizable. Although very few people's lives resembled the courtly love ideal in any way, these themes and motifs were extremely popular and widespread in medieval and Renaissance literature and culture. They were particularly popular in the literature and culture that were part of royal and noble courts.

Courtly love motifs first appear in *The Canterbury Tales* with the description of the Squire in the General Prologue. The Squire's role in society is exactly that of his father the Knight, except for his lower status, but the Squire is very different from his father in that he incorporates the ideals of courtly love into his interpretation of his own role. Indeed, the Squire is practically a parody of the traditional courtly lover. The description of the Squire establishes a pattern that urns throughout the General Prologue, and *The Canterbury Tales*: characters whose roles are defined by their religious or economic functions integrate the cultural ideals of courtly love into their dress, their behaviour, and the tales they tell, in order to give a slightly different twist to their roles. Another such character is the Prioress, a nun who sports a "Love Conquers All" brooch.

### **2.7.2 The Importance of Company**

Many of Chaucer's characters end their stories by wishing the rest of the "campaignye," or company, well. The Knight ends with "God save all this faire compaignye" (3108), and the Reeve with "God, that sitteth heighe in magestee, / Save all this compaignye, grete and smale!" (4322-4323). Company literally signifies the entire group of people, like the Middle deliberate choice of this word over other words for describing masses of people, like the Middle English words for party, mixture, or group, points us to another major theme that runs throughout *The Canterbury Tales*. Company derives from two Latin words, *com*, or "with," and *pane*, or "bread." Quite literally, a company is a group of people with whom one eats, or breaks bread. The word for good friend, or "companion," also comes from these words. But, in a more abstract sense, company had an economic connotation. It was the term designated to cannote a group of people engaged in a particular business, as it is used today.

The functioning and well-being of medieval communities, not to mention their overall happiness, depended upon groups of socially bonded workers in towns and guilds, known informally as companies. If works in a guild or on a feudal minor were not getting along well, they would not produce good work, and the economy would suffer. They would be unable to bargain, as a modern union does, for better working conditions and life benefits. Eating together was a way for guild members to cement friendships, creating a support structure for their working community. Guilds had their own special dining halls, where social groups got together to bond, be merry, and form supportive alliances. When the peasants revolted against their feudal lords in 1381, they were able to organize themselves so well precisely because they had formed these strong social ties through their companies.

Company was a leveling concept-an idea created by the working classes that gave them more power and took away some of the nobility's power and tyranny. The company of pilgrims on the way to Canterbury is not a typical example of a tightly networked company, although the five Guildsmen do

represent this kind of fraternal union. The pilgrims come from different parts of society-the court, the Church, villages, the feudal manor system. To prevent discord, the pilgrims create an informal company, united by their jobs and storytellers, and by the food and drink the host provides. As far as class distinctions are concerned, they do form a company in the sense that none of them belongs to the nobility and most have working professions, whether that work be sewing and marriage (the Wife of Bath), entertaining visitors with gourmet food (the Franklin), or tilling the earth (the Plowman).

### 2.7.3 The Corruption of the Church

By the late fourteenth century, the Catholic Church, which governed England, Ireland, and the entire continent of Europe, had become extremely wealthy. The cathedrals that grew up around shrines to saints' relics were incredibly expensive to build, and the amount of gold that went into decorating them and equipping them with candlesticks and reliquaries (boxes to hold relics that were more jewel-encrusted than king's crowns) surpassed the riches in the nobles' coffers. In a century of disease, plague, famine, and the Church's preaching against greed suddenly seemed hypocritical, considering its great displays of material wealth. Distaste for the excesses of the Church triggered stories and anecdotes about greedy, irreligious churchmen who accepted bribes from others, and indulged themselves sensually and gastronomically, while ignoring the poor famished peasant begging at their doors.

The religious figures Chaucer represents in *The Canterbury Tales* all deviate in one way or another from what was traditionally expected of them. Generally, their conduct corresponds to common medieval stereotypes, but it is difficult to make any overall statement about Chaucer's position because his narrator is so clearly biased toward some characters-the Monk, for example-and so clearly biased against others, such as the Pardoner. Additionally, the characters are not simply satirical versions of their role; they are individuals and cannot simply be taken as typical of their professions.

The Monk, Prioress, and Friar were all members of the clerical estate. The Monk and the Prioress live in a monastery and a convent, respectively. Both are characterized as figures who seem to prefer the aristocratic to the devotional life. The Prioress's bejeweled rosary seems more like a love token than sometimes expressing her devotion to Christ, and her dainty mannerisms echo the advice given by Gullanume de Loris in the French romance *Roman de la Rose*, about how women could make themselves attractive to men. The Monk enjoys hunting, a pastime of the nobility, while he disdains study and confinement. The Friar was a member of an order of mendicants, who made their living by travelling around and begging, and accepting money to hear confession. Friars were often seen as threatening and had the reputation of being lecherous, as the Wife of Bath describes in the opening of her tale. The Summoner and the Friar are at each others' throats so frequently in *The Canterbury Tales* because they were in fierce competition in Chaucer's time-summoners, too, extorted money from people.

Overall, the narrator seems to harbor much more hostility for the ecclesiastical officials (the Summoner and the Pardoner) than he does for the clerics. For example, the Monk and the pardoner possess several traits in common, but the narrator presents them in very different ways. The narrator remembers the shiny baldness of the Monk's head, which suggests that the Monk may have ridden without a hood, but the narrator uses the fact that the Pardoner rides without a hood as proof of his shallow character. The Monk and the Pardoner both give their own opinions of themselves to the narrator-the narrator affirms the Monk's words by repeating them, and his own response, but the narrator mocks the Pardoner for his opinion of himself.

### **2.7.4 Motifs**

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

#### **Romance**

The romance, a tale about knights and ladies incorporating courtly love themes, was a popular literary genre in fourteenth-century literature. The genre included tales of knights rescuing maidens, embarking on quests, and forming bond with other knights and rulers (kings and queens). In particular, the romances about King Arthur, his queen, Guinevere, and his society of "knight's Tale incorporates romantic elements in an ancient classical setting, which is a somewhat unusual time and place to set a romance. The Wife of Bath's Tale is framed by Arthurian romance, with an unnamed knight of the round table as its unlikely hero, but the tale itself becomes a proto-feminist's moral instruction for domestic behaviour. The Miller's Tale ridicules the traditional elements of romance by transforming the love between a young wooer and a willing maiden into a boisterous and violent romp.

#### **Fabliaux**

Fabliaux were comical and often grotesque stories in which the characters most often succeeded by means of their sharp wits. Such stories were popular in France and Italy in the fourteenth century. Frequently, the plot turns or climaxes around the most grotesque feature in the story, usually a bodily noise or function. The Miller's Tale is a prime experiment with this motif: Nicholas cleverly tricked the carpenter into spending the night in his barn so that Nicholas can sleep with the carpenter's wife; the final occurs when Nicholas farts in Absolon's face, only to be burned with a hot poker on his rear end. In the Summoner's Tale, a wealthy man bequeaths a corrupt friar an enormous fart, which the friar divides twelve ways among his brethren. This demonstrates another invention around this motif—that of wittily expanding a grotesque image in an unconventional way. In the case of the Summoner's Tale, the image is of flatulence, but the tale excels in discussing the division of the fart in a highly intellectual (and quite hilarious) manner.

### **2.7.5 Symbols**

Symbols are objects, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas concepts.

#### **Springtime**

The Canterbury Tales opens in April, the height of spring. The birds are chirping, the flowers blossoming, and people long in their hearts to go on pilgrimages, which combine travel, vacation, and spiritual renewal. The springtime symbolizes rebirth and fresh beginning, and is thus appropriate for the beginning of Chaucer's text. Springtime also evokes erotic love, as evidenced by the moment when Palamon first sees Emelye gathering fresh flowers to make garlands in honor of May. The Squire, too participates in this symbolism. He is compared to the freshness of the month of May, in his devotion to courtly love.

#### **Clothing**

In the General Prologue, the description of garments, in addition to the narrator's own shaky recollections, helps to define each character. In a sense, the clothes symbolize what lies beneath the surface of each personality. The Physician's love of wealth reveals itself most clearly to us in the rich silk

and fur of his gown. The Squire's youthful vanity is symbolized by the excessive floral brocade on his tunic. The Merchant's forked beard could symbolize his duplicity, at which Chaucer only hints.

### **Physiognomy**

Physiognomy was a science that judged a person's temperament and character based on his or her anatomy. Physiognomy plays a large role in Chaucer's descriptions of the pilgrims in the General Prologue. The most exaggerated facial features are those of the peasants. The Miller represents the stereotypical peasant physiognomy most clearly: round and ruddy, with a wart on his nose, the Miller appears rough and therefore suited to rough, simple work. The Pardoner's glaring eyes and limp hair illustrate his fraudulence.

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## **2.8 Self Assessment Questions**

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1. To which age does Chaucer belong?

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2. What kind of a writer do you consider Chaucer to be?

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3. What are the main features that are represented by Chaucer in his works?

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4. What were the main characteristics of the fourteenth century England?

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5. What was Chaucer's intention while writing this great *Prologue To The Canterbury Tales*?

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6. How many pilgrims contribute to the pilgrimage and to the *Prologue to the Cantrabury Tales*?

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7. Comment on Chaucer's humour?

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8. What was behind Chaucer 's portrayal of his pilgrims and marratives?

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9. What does the *Prologue to Canterbury try to depict*?

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10. What language has Chaucer used in his *Prologue To The Canterbury Tales*?

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11. Did Chaucer complete his *Prologue To The Canterbury Tales*?

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12. What is a “Satire”? Is the *Prologue* a piece of satiric composition?

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13. Chaucer’s group of pilgrims constitute a picture of the society of his times.” Discuss how many groups of people are there?

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14. Do you think that Chaucer was a social reformer? How?

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15. Write a short note on the ecclesiastical characters in the *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*.

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16. What are the main features of Chaucer’s characterization?

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17. Comment on the character of the Wife of Bath.

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18. Discuss Chaucer's contribution to English Literature.
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## 2.9 Answers to SAQs

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1. The age of Chaucer covers the period from 1340 to 1400. He was born at the middle of the transition period and the elements of renaissance were breeding.
2. Chaucer is the true representative of his age as Pope is of the eighteenth century and Tennyson is of the Victorian era.
3. Chaucer's works breathe the political social' economic and religious tendencies of his time. He stands on the threshold of the new age, but is still hedged in a backward gazing world.
4. The fourteenth century in England was the most important of the mediaeval centuries. It covered the period of the Black Death and Peasant's Revolt, the Hundred years war with France and the great economic and social changes which we associate with the decay of velleinage. Two kings were murdered and deposed and the authority of church was questioned and there was a demand of freedom of thought. Even the Renaissance and Reformation were on their way.
5. The *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* is a work of supreme importance, as created by Chaucer for the understanding of the English history in a dramatic, piquant and all embracing picture of a real mediaeval life before the great changes should arrive.
6. There are thirty persons with the addition of Chaucer himself and the Host of the Tabard, makes in all thirty two.
7. Chaucer's humour has three main qualities in his writings; a humour which is sometimes gentle, sometimes sly, often satiric, but never vicious. (quite frequently he is the butt of his own jokes) an understanding of human beings which is warm and compassionate but never sentimental; and an acuteness of observation which is unfailing in its ability to discern the most significant detail.
8. To have each of his characters tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back, to while away the time.
9. The general *Prologue* shows how fully Chaucer grasped it in his own mind. It is not merely an introduction but a mature and highly finished work in its own right – the liveliest, most convincing picture of life in the middle ages which has come down to us.
10. The language used by Chaucer comes from the middle English rather different from the modern English we know.
11. Chaucer did not live to complete his ambitious project.

12. It may be defined as a literary composition whose principal aim is to ridicule folly or vice. It is a light form of composition, intended to keep the reader in a good humour even when it is of its most caustic. It may be inspired by either a personal grievance or a passion for reform. It is like a dome, holds the mirror up to nature and lashes out at contemporary follies and foibles. Yes, Chaucer's prologue is a great satiric piece of work.
13. The pilgrims in the "Prologue" may be classified into three groups which throw a lot of light on the social structure of England in the fourteenth century. The first group represents agricultural feudalism founded on land ownership and service to the king and the country eg. The Knight, the Squire, the Yeoman, the Franklin, the Miller, the Reeve and the simple Plowman.

The second group represents the growth of a new, urban society that came to rise in the fourteenth century eg. Doctor, Lawyer, Manciple, Merchant and even Wife of Bath along with the Haberdasher, Carpenter, Weaver and the Dyer.

The third group represents the church which was in those days one of the most powerful forces in the society. Eight of the Chaucer's pilgrims belong to the church, eg. Prioress, her Chaplain, the Monk, the Friar, the Clerk, the Parson, the Summoner and the Pardoner.
14. Chaucer is generally regarded as a painter of life in his age, but not as a social reformer. Although a good deal has been written about the social life of the second half of the fourteenth century in England – its ecclesiastical troubles, its dynastic and military frauds, the evil consequences of the Black Death, the Peasant's Revolt, the growing power of the trading classes. But all these things make their appearance on the fringe of Chaucer's poetry: they are referred to in passing and everything represented in marginal. In fact, the *Prologue* clearly shows that Chaucer is interested only in portraying characters as they are. He does not anywhere urge people to improve themselves morally or in any other way.
15. There are eight ecclesiastical characters dealt with by Chaucer in the *Prologue*. These eight characters, in the order in which they appear before us are; the Prioress, the Monk, the Friar, the Clerk of Oxford, the Parson, the Summoner and the Pardoner. Chaucer represents the clergymen of his times in a very unfavourable light. The only ecclesiastical characters whom Chaucer admires and whom we admire also are The Clerk and the Parson for whom the author has nothing but praise. The other characters belonging to the church are ridiculed and satirized. Chaucer exposes the follies, the absurdities, the monetary greed, the hypocrisy and on the whole, the unreligious nature of these men. Indeed we feel greatly depressed and dismayed by the spectacle of these clergymen who are not only most worldly minded but dishonest, immoral and corrupt. It is the abundance of humour in the portrayal of these persons that relieves the depression and dissolves it in laughter. When we consider that the character of the men of religion all over the world even today is no better than it was in Chaucer's time, we are driven to the conclusion that human nature has not changed much since then and that religion has served largely as a cloak for the nefarious. Actually it is a group of unscrupulous people who resort to the "religious profession to promote their selfish ends."
16. Chaucer is the first character delineator in English literature. His characters are drawn from his observation of men and women he saw around him. He was a man of keen observation and that represents his creativity and he represented men and women as they really are:

- (a) Real characters: Chaucer's characters are real, full-blooded personalities. We see them laughing, moving, talking, eating and gossiping or we do in our lives.
  - (b) Universal types: They are timeless creations on a time-determined stage. The pilgrimage is the pilgrimage of the world and the pilgrims the epitome of mankind. The knight represents the species of character which in every age stands as the guardian of man against the oppressor. The good parson, a real message of heavy covers in every age of the illumination of divine light etc.
  - (c) Types and individuals: The characters of Chaucer, though well-defined types of contemporary society and of the universal traits of mankind are also vividly delineated individuals. All the characters have strongly individual tastes and contrasting social backgrounds. Chaucer endows life-like individuality to his pilgrims though form of speech appropriate to them a rank and personal temperament.
17. The universal characteristics of the Wife of Bath are obvious. She represents not the virtuous or pious class of womanhood, but the class of women, who, having an amorous nature, care little for chastity, who are fond of merry-making and fun, and who enjoy gossip. The wives of the guildsmen possess the universal trait of vanity they wish to be given a measure of respect which they think is their due. These wives wanted to be addressed as "Madame" and they wanted to lead ceremonial possession. This desire for social recognition and for precedence is common to most women.
18. Chaucer's abiding contribution to literature may be summed up as follows:
- a. He is the creator of English language and poetry.
  - b. He is the first great material artist.
  - c. He is the first great realist who breathed a free secular spirit in the poetry.
  - d. He is the first great character painter.
  - e. As a narrator in verse he is superb. He is also the father of English novel.
  - f. Chaucer was a dramatist before the drama proper was born.
  - g. Greater humorist and humanist
  - h. The first national poet of England.

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## 2.10 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have looked at various issues that go into the making of Chaucer's *Prologue* as a great classic of English Literature. The many considerations bring together the various ways in which this text can be interpreted.

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## 2.11 Review Questions

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1. How does Chaucer describe the ecclesiastical.
2. Discuss *Prologue* as a social satire.

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## 2.12 Bibliography

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## UNIT-3

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### EDMUND SPENCER : THE FAERIE QUEENE

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#### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
  - 3.1.1 Introduction to the age
  - 3.1.2 Introduction to the author
  - 3.1.3 Introduction to the work *The Faerie Queene*
- 3.2 Edmund Spencer : *Faerie Queene* (Extracts from Book 1 Canto 1)
  - 3.2.1 Notes and annotations
- 3.3 Self Assessment Questions
- 3.4 Answers to SAQs
- 3.5 Let us Sum Up
- 3.6 Review Questions
- 3.7 Bibliography

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#### 3.0 Objectives

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

- understand the ideas contained in the poems,
- understand the meaning of 'moral allegory' (dark conceit) and also the qualities of Spenserian stanza,
- explain and interpret the text in your own words,
- use a dictionary to find out the meanings of words and definition of literary terms.

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#### 3.1 Introduction

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##### 3.1.1 Introduction to the age

The age in which Edmund Spencer wrote is known as the Elizabethan Age. The age of Elizabeth is historically also very significant. Milton said about this age that, we suddenly see England, a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible lock's. The queen had an iron image. She loved England and England's greatness and she inspired all her people with the unbounded patriotism and personal devotion which finds a voice in *The Faerie Queene*. Under her administration the English national life progressed by leaps and bound and English literature reached the pinnacle of its development. The characteristics of this great age had a direct bearing upon its literature.

The most characteristic feature of the age was the comparative religious tolerance, largely due to the influence of the queen herself. After the Thirty Years' War on the continent, the whole kingdom stood divided. The North was Catholic and the South was strongly Protestant. Scotland followed the Reformation in its own manner and Ireland remained true to its old religious traditions and both countries had a rebellious attitude. The preceding century hardly produced any literature worthy of the name, partly due to the absorption of men's minds in religious questions. Elizabeth favoured both religious parties and it was as a result of her efforts that the two worked as trusted counsellors. The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 established the Reformation in England and infused an element of nationalism and united all Englishmen. Since the starting of Reformation, the question of religious toleration seemed to settle and the mind of man now turned to other forms of activity with a great creative impulse and provided the mind with literary stimulus.

This was also an age of social contentment. The rapid increase of manufacturing units and towns gave employment to thousands. This brought about enormous wealth to England and a systematic care for the needy was attempted. The increase in wealth, the improvement in living standards and the new social content are factors which helped to account for the new literary activity. It was an age of dreams of adventure and unbounded enthusiasms, springing from the new lands of fabulous riches discovered by English explorers. The poets of the time created literary works that are young forever. A score of explorers revealed a new earth to men's eyes and literature created a new heaven to match it.

So the age of Elizabeth was a time of intellectual liberty, of growing intelligence and comfort among all classes, of unbounded patriotism and of peace at home and abroad. Such an age of great thought and great action, appealing to the eyes as well as to the imagination and intellect, finds adequate literary expression in drama, which expresses the whole man. So it saw the rise of writers like Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson among the dramatists and Sidney, Spenser, Raleigh, Bacon and many other extraordinary writers of prose, lyric and narrative poetry.

### **3.1.2 Introduction to the Author**

Edmund Spenser is considered the most representative poet of the Elizabethan Age. He therefore cannot be studied in isolation from the times in which he lived and wrote. He was born in 1552, in a family which had produced gentlemen whose circumstances were so humble that the poet and his brothers went to the Merchant Taylors School in London as 'pore scholars'. In time to come, their education at school was subsidized by a wealthy Lancashire family.

At school, a powerful influence of Spenser's genius was Richard Mulcaster, the headmaster. He was a humanist, gifted with a mind that was 'learned', 'original' and 'great'.

His linguistic convictions together with the new trades in art, religion, and poetics affected Spenser's attitude towards and use of the English language and poetic technique in *The Faerie Queene*.

At Cambridge where he studied from 1569-1576, he lived a uniformly 'scholastic life'. It is believed that chronic ill-health probably encouraged the dreamy and reflective side of his nature. But it did not affect his avid reading of wide-ranging scholarly works and so he has come to be known as the most learned of English poets. *The Faerie Queene* was intended not for the average but for a sophisticated and learned reader.

Spenser's mind was influenced by the works of Greek writers' chiefly Plato and Aristotle, and



Virgil and Ovid among the Romans. The Italian epic poets of the Renaissance, Ariosto and Tasso, inspired him greatly through their poems *Orlando Furioso* and *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Among the English poets were Chaucer and the little known writers of the medieval romances. As an enthusiastic student of Greek thought and language, Spenser was genuinely impressed by the neoplatonic philosophy and Aristotelian ethics. He also loved and used Greek and Roman mythology lavishly, while the Bible was his mainstay.

The varied knowledge that he derived from his reading was seldom used with the precision and exactness of a meticulous scholar. Instead, as C.S. Lewis notes, Spenser's mind was so concoctive and esemplastic that the fruits of his reading met and mingled and transformed one another till they became unrecognizable. *The Faerie Queene*, therefore, is a rich and impressive combination of a variety of ideas, images and symbols derived from books, tapestries, emblems, paintings, woodcuts, masque, pageant and tournament. The first three books of the poem were dedicated to Queen Elizabeth.

### 3.1.3 Introduction to the work '*The Faerie Queene*'

#### A Continued Allegory, or Darke Conceit

In a letter of the author's expounding his whole intention, written to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser described *The Faerie Queene*, as 'a continued Allegory' or 'Darke Conceit'. These descriptive labels indicate the two essential characteristics of allegory as a literary form. The first is the story or a linked sequence of events, which all the books of *The Faerie Queene* have. By the time Spenser wrote, allegory was no longer thought of as a mere figure of speech in rhetoric as it was in classical times nor as a dialogue meant for moral edifications.

The second characteristic indicated in the Letter is the 'darke conceit': which means that the central ideas of the poem are hidden or camouflaged, but that they need to be unfolded by knowing the literal and non-literal or symbolical meanings. It was the essential feature of 'allegoria', derived from a Greek work which meant 'speaking otherwise than one seems to speak'. It was a safety device employed by writers in classical Greek and Roman times for self protection if they sought to criticize contemporary life and institutions. From this basic requirement of allegory it followed that the reader's understanding was invariably required to function at two levels.

At the literal level, Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene* tells the story of the Red Crosse Knight, who, accompanied by Lady Una, undergoes several adventures. His main aim is to free Una's parents, the King and Queen of Eden, from a castle where they are held captive by a dragon. The principal encounters on the way are the fight with Dragon Error (Canto-I) and three 'paynim' brethren Sans Foy, Sans Loy and Sans Foy (Cantos II, III, IV), the separation from Una caused by the magician Archimago (Canto-II); the deception of Duessa, a witch who brings him to the House of Pride (Canto IV); an encounter with Despair (Canto IX); the struggle with the Dragon of Original Sin (Canto XI) and marriage with Una after her parents are liberated (Canto XII).

It is apparently a romance tale full of the usual characters like giants, dragons, and witches which help to create a sense of the supernatural. But the purpose of the poet is deeper and decidedly moral. Therefore, at the symbolical level, the allegory is primarily concerned with the moral or spiritual evolution of every-man, the 'humanum genus' as represented by Red Crosse. The dark forest which he enters is the world where is seen the interaction of good and evil forces. It is the home of error or morals born of ignorance. The Knight overcomes it. He next experiences faithlessness, lawlessness and

joylessness which are the inner states of his own being. His next experience is of falsehood or illusion in the form of Archimago, the magician, and duplicity in the form of Duessa.

On being deceived by evil, Red Cross experiences spiritual pride represented by the House of Pride and immense self-importance or the giant Orgoglio, which he overcomes, the latter, with the help of Prince Arthur. He is then acquainted with Christian truths and methods of self-discipline in the House of Holiness so that he may realize his essential identity which is holiness, devoutness or poetry. Having equipped himself with the necessary religious knowledge, he sets forth to overcome the intrinsic evil of his own being or Original Sin. This great conquest of all is made finally. The truth about himself is known and his spiritual identity revealed to himself and accepted as symbolized by his marriage with Una.

These two levels of allegory are sustained throughout Book I, despite certain interpolations in the form of separate allegorical episodes, varied historical, political and religious interpretations are given to the main story but not in a sustained manner. The consistency of the basic allegorical strands, namely, the literal and the moral in the narrative, give Book I a structural compactness which is not discernible in the remaining six books.

This sustained presentation of the moral allegory in Book I underlines the ultimate purpose of all allegorical writings. *The Faerie Queene* is a poem with a reformatory purpose. Allegory is not an art for art's sake, nor is it a form of pure self-expression. Spenser, like all traditional allegorists, has a definite moral aim which is made clear in the 'general end' noted in the letter. It was 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline'. But, as an allegorical hero, Red Cross represents every man too, who can by means of trial and error, together with divine grace, attain spiritual perfection. He is an affirmation of Spenser's faith in the perfectibility of the human soul. The true Christian is a man of action. He is the 'vita activa' and not the 'vita contemplative' that medieval Christianity advocated.

When Spenser wrote of doctrine being made more gracious or pleasing by example, he meant a situation which could be enacted by the characters for the purpose of exemplification and instruction. In allegory such a situation is the 'psychomachia' or soul of man. Knightly combats and fights with giants and dragons are symbolic of the contention between the opposing forces in human nature.

The conflicts consists of a struggle between personified attributes: Holiness, Truth, Falsehood, Deceit, Pride and several others are moral qualities which are animated and attired as befitting their essential nature, and are made to perform their parts. Their conception is simplistic but elemental as illustrated by Red Crosse, Error, Orgoglio, Despair, for whatever they do, say, or wear is strictly in keeping with the nature of the idea that they embody or impersonate. Therefore, an allegorical personification lacks complexity or nuance. *The Faerie Queene* contains an impressive pageant of colourfully portrayed abstractions of whom the most memorable are Error, the Seven Deadly Sins, Orgoglio and Despair in Book I.

The background to the action or conflict in the first book, as in the entire poem, is symbolic landscape. It is an important structural feature of all traditional allegories. In Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, it consists of a forest, wood, and waste land. Each is an externalization of an inner psychic condition. Not merely the symbolic landscape but edifices are also used by Spenser to typify the different states of individual consciousness. Examples are the House of Pride and the House of Holiness. When Spenser deals with a psychic condition deeply embedded in the human consciousness, he uses the symbolism of the cave; as for instance, the Cave of Archimago, symbolizing the inherent love of falsehood and illusion in human nature and the Cave of Despair.

The traditional framework in which allegorical drama takes place is the dream. It is identifiable as a trancelike state in which the prophets of old found themselves when they apprehended truths about life and people. From this experience resulted the belief that truth is known in a dream-vision. The traditional allegorist therefore used this convention to unfold the deeper and truer significance of his narrative. Spenser follows the practice but not in a conventional nor in a consistent way. The apocalyptic vision is seen only by Arthur, the Magnificent Man of the poem in which he apprehended Divine Glory in the form of Gloriana, or ultimate divinity. The two dreams of Red Crosse, on the other hand, are the results of the knight's erotic fancy in Canto II, which are purely illusory and false, and which lend a touch of psychological realism to the poem, and thereby intensify its moral significance.

Despite the remote character of the technique of the allegorist, *The Faerie Queene*, especially Book I, continues to appeal to the reader today. It testifies to the essential interest of the allegory, which is contained not in the topical allusion or historical and political matter but in the archetypal symbols. All allegory is symbolic art. But its universality lies in the symbols which are easily almost intuitively recognized by the reader as suitable for the expression of idea and experiences which are permanently valid. These are the dragon, witch, enchanter, king and queen who are not merely the stuff of romance but whose impressions probably lie deeply embedded in the collective unconscious of man. *The Faerie Queene* has them all in the Book I, and this is responsible for its universal appeal and for 'the willing suspension of disbelief that the modern reader readily experiences.

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### 3.2 Edmund Spenser: *The Faerie Queene* (Extracts from Book I Canto 1)

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#### The book of the faerie queene

#### Contayning the legend of the knight of the red crosse, or of holiness

#### Poem

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,  
 As timer her taught, in lowly Shepheards weeds,  
 Am now enforst a farre vnfitter taske,  
 For trumpets sterne to change mine Quaten reeds.  
 And sing of knights and Ladies gentle deeds;  
 Whose praises having slept in silence long,  
 Me, all too meane, the sacred Muse areeds.  
 To blazon broad emongst her learned throng;  
 Fierce wares and faithful loues shall moralize my song.  
 Help then, O holy virgin chiefe of nine,  
 They weaker Nouice to performe thy will;  
 Lay forth out of thine euerlasting scryne  
 They antique rolles, which there lye hidden still,  
 Of Faerie Knights, and fairest *Tanaquill*

Whom that most noble Briton Prince so long  
Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,  
That I must rue his vnderued wrong:  
O, helpe thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong.

### CANTO 1

The Patrone of true Holiness,  
Foule Errour doth defeate:  
Hypocrisie him the entrappe,  
Doth to his home entreate.  
A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,  
Y cladd in nightie armes and siluer shielde,  
Wherein old dints of deepe, woundes did remaine,  
The curell markes of many' a bloody fielde.  
Yet armes till that time did neuer wield:  
His angry steede did chide his forming bitt,  
As much disdayning to the crube to yield:  
Full iolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,  
As one for knightly guists and fierce encounters fitt.  
And on his breast a bloudie Crosse he bore,  
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord.  
For whole sweete sake that glorious badge he wore.  
And dead as liuing euer him ador'd,  
Upon his shield the like was also scor'd.  
For soueraine hope, which in his helpe he had.  
Right faithful true he was in deede and word.  
But of his cheere, did seeme too solemne sad.  
Yet nothing did he dread, but euer was ydrad.  
Vpon a great adventure he was bond,  
That greatest Gloriana to him gaue.  
That greatest Glorious Queene of Faerie lond.  
To winne him worship, and her grace to haue.

Which of all earthly thinges he most did craue.  
And euer as he rode, his hart did earne.  
To proue his puissance in battell braue.  
Vpon his foe, and his new force to learne.  
Vpon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne;  
A louely Ladie rode him faire beside,  
Vpon a lowly, Asse more white then snow.  
Yet she much whiter, but the same was full low,  
And ouer all a blacke stole she did throw.  
As one that inly mourned: so was she sad,  
And heauie sate vpon her palfrey slow,  
Seemed in heart some hidden care she had,  
And by her in a line a milke white lakbe she lad.  
Yea but (quoth she) the perill of this place,  
I better wot then you, though now too late.  
To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace.  
Yet wisdomes warnes, whilest foot is in the gate,  
To stay the steppe, ere forced to retrate.  
This is the wandring wood, this *Errours den*.  
A monster vile, whom God and man does hate.  
Therefore I read beware. Fly fly (quoth then  
The fearefull Dwarfes:) this is no place for liuing men.  
But full of fire and greedy hardiment,  
they youthfull knight could not for aught be staide,  
But forth vnto the darksomehole he went,  
And looked in: his glistering armor made.  
Alittle glooming light, much like a shade,  
By which he saw the vgly monster plaine,  
Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,  
But th' other halfe did womans shape retaine,  
Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.

His lady sad to see his sore constraint,  
Cride out, Now now Sir Knight, shew what ye bee.  
Add faith vnto your force, and be not faint:  
Strangle her, els she sure will strangle thee.  
That when he heard, in great perplexitie.  
His gall did grate for grieve and high disdaine.  
And knitting all his force, got one hand free,  
Wherewith he grypt her gorge with so great paine,  
That soone to loose her wicked bands did her constraine.  
Therewith she spewd out of her filthy maw.  
A floud of poison horrible and blacke.  
Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw.  
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke,  
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe.  
With creeping sought way in the weedy gras.  
Her filthie parbreake all the place defiled has.  
As when old father Nilus gins to swell,  
With timely pride about the Aegyptian vale.  
His fattie waues do fertile slime outwell,  
And ouerflow each plaine and lowly dale.  
But when his later spring gins to auale,  
Huge heapes of mudd he leaues, wherein there breed.  
Ten thousand kindes of creatures, partly male,  
And partly female of his fruitful see;  
Such vgly monstrous shapes elsewhere may no man reed.  
Her scattred brood, soone as their Parent decare.  
They saw so rudely falling to the ground.  
Groning full deadly, all with troublous feare,  
Gathred themselves about her body found,  
Weening their wonted entrance to haue found.  
At her wide mouth: but being there withstood

They flocked all about her bleeding wound,  
And sucked up their dying mothers blood.  
Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good.  
At length they chaunst to meet vpon the way  
An aged Sire, in long blacke weedes yclad.  
His feete all bare, his beard all hoarie gray,  
And by his belt his booke he hanging had;  
Sober he seemed, and very sagely said  
and to the ground his eyes were lowly bent,  
Simple in shew, and voyde of malice bad:  
And all the way he prayed as he went,  
And often knockt his brest, as one that did repent.  
He faire the knight saluted, louting low,  
Who faire him quited, as that courteous was:  
And after asked him, if he did know,  
Of straunge adventures, which abroad did pas  
Ah my dear Sonne, (quoth he) how should, alas.  
Silly old man, that liues in hidden cell,  
Bidding his beades all day for his trespass,  
Tydings of warre and worldly trouble tell?  
With holy father sits not with such things to mell.  
Arriued there, the little house they fill,  
No looke for entertainment where none was:  
Rest is their feast, and all things at their will;  
The noblest mind the best contentment has.  
With faire discourse the euening so they pas:  
For that old man of pleasing wordes had store,  
And well could file his tongue as smooth as glass;  
He told of Saintes and Popes, and euermore.  
He strowed an *Aue-Mary* after and before.  
Then choosing out few words most horrible,

(Let none them read) thereof did verses frame,  
With which, and other spellles like terrible,  
He bad awake blacke *Plutoes* griesly Dame,  
And cursed heauen; and spake reprochfull shame  
Of highest God, the Lord of life and light;  
A bold bad man, that dar'd to call by name  
Great *Gorgon*, prince of darkness and dead night,  
At which *Cocytus quakes*, and *Styx* is put to flight.  
Whose double gates he findeth locked fast,  
The one faire fram'd of burnisht Yuory,  
The other all with siluer ouercast;  
And wakefull dogges before them farre doe lye,  
Watching to banish Care their enemy,  
Who oft is wont to trouble gentle Sleepe.  
By them the Sprite doth passe in quietly,  
And vnto Morpheus comes whom drowned deepe.  
In drowsie fit he findes; of nothing he takes keepe.  
The sprite then gan more boldly him to wake,  
And threatned vnto him the dreaded name  
Of Hecate: whereat he gan to quake,  
And, lifting vp his lumpish head, with blame  
Halfe angry asked him, for what he came,  
Heither (quoth he) me Archimago sent,  
He that the stubborne Sprites can wisely tame,  
He bids thee to him send for his intent.  
A fit false dreame, that can delude the sleepers sent.  
Thus well instructed, to their worke they hast  
And comming where the knight in slomber lay  
The one vpon his hardy head him plast,  
And made him dreame of loues and lustfull play,  
The night his manly hart did melt away,



Bathed in wanton blis and wicked joy:  
Then seemed him his Lady by him lay,  
And to him mplaynd, how that false winged boy  
Her chast hart had subdewed, to learn Dame pleasures toy.  
In this great passion of vnwonted lust,  
Or wonted eare of doing ought amis,  
He starteth vp, as seeming to mistrust  
Some secret ill, or hidden foe of his:  
Lo there before his face his Lady is,  
Vnder blake stole hyding her bayted hoke,  
And as halfe blushing offred him to kis,  
With gentle blandishment and louely looke,  
Most like that virgin true, which for her knight him took.  
Loue of your s elfe, she said, and deare constraint  
Lets me not slelepe, but wast the wearie night  
In secret anguish and vnpittied kplaint,  
Whiles you in carelesse sleepe are drowned quight.  
Her doubtfull words made that redoubted knight  
Suspect her truth: yet since no' vntruth he knew,  
Her fawning loue with foule disdaine full spight  
He woule not shend, but said, Deare dame I rew,  
That for my sake vnknowne such grieve vnto you grew.  
Assure your selfe, it fell not all to ground;  
For all so deare as life is to my hart,  
I deeme your lour, and hold mi to you bound;  
Ne let vaine feares procure your needlesse smart,  
Where cause is none, but to your rest depart,  
No all content, yet seemd she to appease  
Her mournfull plaints, beguiled of her art,  
And fed with words, that could not chuse but please,  
So slyding softly forth, she turnd as to her ease.

Long after lay he musing her mood,  
 Much grieu'd to thinke that gentle Dame so light,  
 For whose defence he was to shed his blood,  
 At last dull wearinesse of former fight  
 Hauing yrockt a sleepe his irksome spright,  
 That troublous dreame gan freshly tosse his braine,  
 With bowres, and beds, and ladies deare delight;  
 But when he saw his labour all was vaine,  
 With that misformed spright he backe returnd againe,

### 3.2.1 Notes and Annotations

Lo I the man: the opening line and the implied address to the reader are after the manner of Virgil, the Roman poet. Muse: one of the nine goddesses, who inspired learning and the arts, especially of poetry and music. In this line, Spenser appears to invoke no particular muse, but uses the term in a general sense.

lowly Shepherds weeds: pastoral poetry which Spenser no longer wishes to write. Before he wrote *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser had completed *The Shepherdes Calender* in 1579, a landmark in the history of Elizabethan poetry, where he sought not any to revive the conventions of classical pastoral verse but reinstate the native English tongue to its rightful place of honour. *The Faerie Queene* was also intended to a fulfillment of this idea on a grander scale unfettered: an unsuitable undertaking. Spenser is being conventionally modest about his poetic ability

trumpets sterne... Oaten reeds: the two phrases indicate two different types of poetry. One is chivalric romance and the other pastoral poetry. The pipes upon which the shepherds made music were of reed grass like the pipes of Pan, their god.

gentle: derived from the French 'gentle', meaning 'one who is well-born or of high-birth'

the sacred Muse: either Clio, the muse of history, or Calliope, the muse of epic poetry.

moralize my song: supply my poem with a moral lessons

holly Virgin chiefe of nine: Clio, the muse of history, and the leader among the group of nine. *The Faerie Queene* is an expression of national enthusiasm and of a desire to glorify England's historical past.

scryne: chest for the safe keeping of books and documents.

antique rolles: historical records.

Faerie Knights and fairest Tanaquill: the word 'faerie' was Spenser's coinage, and in the poem, has reference to the moral quality or spiritual essence of the titular knights. It was Spenser's belief that brave deeds were possible only if the doer was spiritually or morally excellent. Tanaquill is identified with Queen Elizabeth I who is also Gloriana or the Chief Glory whom Prince Arthur seeks. Tanaquill was an Etruscan wife and is considered the type of a noble queen. The compliment is Elizabeth is

obvious.

most noble Briton Prince: Arthur before he became king.

Sought through the world: The basis of the Faerie Queene is non-Platonism. According to this mode of philosophical belief when the knightly lover had a glimpse of the beloved in a dream-vision, he was smitten with love longing for her. It was the desire for perfection or spiritual completeness. Thus Arthur saw the faerie queene in a dream once and was filled with longing for her. He could not be at peace till he found her.

rue : pity

my weake wit, and ... my dull tong: 'wit' implies the faculties of the mind, and 'tong', the capacity for using words.

### **Canto 1**

Gentle Knight: a well-born knight who is gentle and courteous in his ways. Pricking on the plaine: 'spurring or riding across the plain.

Yeladd : dressed. An example of Spenser's archaisms.

Old dints of deep wounds: the old marks of hard blow in battle. Redcrosse however was still untried in battle.

iolly: gallant, brave, fine.

guests: mock battles fought on horseback with a long heavy lance.

a bloudie Crosse: the red cross after which the knight of Holiness is named. He is represented as a crusading knight. In a Christian allegory which The Faerie Queene is, every man is a crusader fighting against the force of evil within himself. The shield of St. George the patron Saint of England was silver with a red cross upon it.

dying Lord : Christ. The crucifixion was represented by the red cross on the Knight's shield. It symbolized suffering and death for the sins of mankind.

cheer: countenance.

ydrad: feared

Gloriana : Queen Elizabeth the First

earne : yearn, long for.

Puissance : strength, power, might braue : splendd'y, finely

a Dragon: one of the chief opponents of a Knight in the chivalric romances. The dragon is invariably an evil force.

There is repeated use of the word 'white' to emphasize the purity of Truth.

wimpled: arranged or falling in pleats or folds.

Una's attire indicates that she dressed like the Virgin Mary as portrayed in some medieval paintings. It is a sober, austere garb which was later adopted by the nuns.

At this stage, Una is sad and serious, for Truth is seldom appreciated. A second reason for her sad seriousness is that her parents are held in bondage by the Dragon of Original Sin. Her face is veiled because Truth cannot be perceived in all her perfection by the man who is still unpurified.

milk white lambe: symbol of meekness, purity and self sacrifice. The association of the Lamb with Christ is implied.

read: advice or counsel (archaic)

hardiment: courage, boldness

This description of Error shows, firstly Spenser's conformity to the medieval convention of portraying the serpent with the face of a woman. Secondly it is Spenser's satire on womankind who came to be associated, on account of the Fall of Man with the Evil One.

Spenser expresses his loathing for evil by means of these adjectives. The alliteration in the line is obviously effective.

constraint: confinement, which was a form of oppression.

The gall was thought to be the seat of anger. Thus Una's words provoked the knight's wrath against the evil force, and he literally came to grips with Error. It is a moment of great moral and spiritual trial.

Spenser's religious satire. The books and papers refer knowledge in general, which, being ill-digested cause error and confusion, and in particular, commentaries on the Bible and religious pamphlets which created confusion in the mind of the reader.

the 'loathly frogs and toadies' are the distorted bits of information which are born of ignorance.

an epic simile which was one of the conventions of epic poetry. Spenser uses it frequently in his poem. The comparison of Error's vomit is with the waters of the river Nile which overflow the banks and leave behind filthy mud which breeds different kind of ugly creatures. The latter are the symbolic equivalents of the forms and ways whereby Error expresses itself.

gins to aulæ: begins to sink or recede.

reed: describe

Weaning: thinking (archaic),

Wonted entrance: usual entry.

If one error is destroyed, a hundred take its place and prosper by its death

aged Sire: a venerable old man. Spenser introduces a powerful personification of Evil in the form of hypocrisy and deceit. The old man is Archimago (Archmagus) or the chief magician and necromancer. The choice of this personified form is significant, firstly, because a magician deals in illusions. An illusion is a form of falsehood. Hypocrisy and deceit are a kind of illusion meant to harm by misleading another human being. Secondly, Archimago is no simple enchanter but a necromancer, i.e. one who trafficked in evil and summoned and powers of darkness to do his commands. Necromancy had been forbidden by the church. Yet, as a holy man, he practices it.

At the level of religious allegory, Archimago is identifiable with Catholicism, since to do Prot-

estant poet it appears to emphasize more the outward ceremonies and rituals with pomp and show than propagate the true spirit of Christianity. The aged sire is a commonplace of the romances as well.

weeds: attires, clothing

hoarie grey : white with age

book : prayer book or the Bible. It is important to note how Archimago makes a show of piety. It is a form of religious hypoerisy associated by Spenser with Catholicism.

It is characteristic gesture of a hypocrite in religious matters. Spenser presents a subtle distinction between appearance and reality. The dolman in fact is the arch deceiver, a supreme embodiment of craft and cunning.

faire : gently.

louting low: bowing low. 'Lounting low' is said to be a proverbial expression meaning 'servilely bowing'

quited : returned.

Silly : simple, ignorant.

Cell : a small, severe - looking room in which a monk or hermit lived.

Bidding his beades: an alliterative phrase meaning, saying his prayer.

Trespass: sin.

holy father : a pious, elderly man. They phrase has reference to the Pope with whom this personification is identified. The Pope with his pattern of life characterizxed by alluence and intrigue becomes a symbol of deception.

to mell : to meddle.

the hermitage has only a semblance of peace. For, in truth, it is an evil place where Redcrosse finds himself tortured by doubt which creates in him a diviion of the mind.

file : polish, smooth or smoothen

It is now stated explicitly that religion and prayer were mere forms of camouflage for concealing villainy.

strowd : scatered

Aue - Mary : 'Hail Mary' repeated at intervals during Catholic services and private devotions.

blacke Plutoe : God of the Underworld and Death an therefore 'black' griesly Dame : Proserpine, the wife of Pluto. She was once a beautiful girl, but when carried off by the God of the Underworld and made his queen, she acquired a terrible aspect. Hence the word 'griesly' to describe her face.

great Gorgon: Daemogorgon, a terrible nameless diety of whom the magicians speak, when they threaten the infernal gods. According to Boccaccio, it is the name of the primal diety, 'the greatest majesty of shadows', who lives in the bowels of the earth, surrounded by clouds and vapour. Caves are associated with him. Spenser's conception of Daemogorgon is essentially the same is Boccaccio's.

Cocytus: one of the four rivers of the underworld. Its name means lamentation. The other two are Acheron, of grief, and Phlegethon, of burning. The fourth river is Styx.

The power of Archimago's art and his own considerable authority over the powers of darkness are indicated by these lines.

double gates: in Homer's *Odyssey* there are two gates of sleep, one of horn from which true dreams proceed, and one of ivory, which sends forth false dreams.

The alliterating d's combine with the sibilants and long drawn vowel sounds to illustrate the nature of sleep which is personified by Morpheus.

of nothing he takes keepe: he pays attention to nothing.

Hecate : the power of Hecate extends over both heaven and hell. She is also considered the daughter of Night. By some writers she is identified with Proserpine. With whom she shares many characteristics and powers. Among other things, she is patron of magic and the black arts of potions and poisons. She is also credited with being the goddess of dreams.

lumpish : dull and heavy on account of sleepiness.

intent: purpose, objectives

a fit false dreame : it is possible that instead of the classical or Italian epic sources, Spenser borrowed the idea of romance creating a false image with the help of spirits, from a wicked sprite with a counterfeit appearances.

whose appearance (i.e. Una's) the spirit bore in a false manner.

playnd : complained.

false winged boy: Cupid. He is 'false' because love is fickle, and it creates illusions of the beloved in the mind of the lover.

to learn DAME pleasures toy : to be instructed in the art of amorous play.

vnwonted lust: unaccustomed passion.

wonted feare : usual, habitual fear.

ought amis: anything wrong. A piece of psychological realism. The Red Crosse Knight must resist his erotic fancy which misrepresents Una to him. To succumb to these impressions is to be unworthy of knighthood.

constraint: confinement.

carelesse sleepe: sleep that is free from care.

shend: reproach.

appease : cease.

musing at her mood : wondering at her state of mind and being.

light : wanton.

irkesome : tired.

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### 3.3 Self Assessment Questions

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1. What is the most striking feature of Spenser's language?  

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2. What kind of poems was Spenser engaged in writing before embarking upon writing *The Faerie Queene*?  

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4. Who was Tanaquill? Whom does Spenser intend to refer to?  

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5. What does the Red Cross Knight's entry into the 'wandering wood' despite Una's warning show about his character?  

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6. What is the moral allegory in the Red Cross Knight's fight and his final victory over the monster at the very outset of the poem?  

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7. What does 'loathly frogs and toads' symbolize?  

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8. Which convention of poetry do you find in stanza 21?

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9. Whom does the phrase 'An aged Sire' refer to?

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10. Whom does the phrase 'holy father's in stanza 30 refer to?

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11. Why has Proserpine, who was beautiful been called 'griesly Dame'?

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12. Why is Cupid called 'false winged boy'?

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13. Explain the following:

a. 'Shepherds weeds'

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b. 'antique rolles'

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c. 'Gloriana'

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d. 'milke white lambe'

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e. 'to learn Dame pleasures toy'

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14. Explain the lines:

'For that old man of pleasing wordes had store,  
And well could file his tongue as smooth as glass;  
He told of Saintes and Popes, and ecermore?

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15. Explain the following:

a.     tired

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b.     cease

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c.     dreaded, distinguished

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d.     strange

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e.     purpose

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f.     frighten fray

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g.     scattered

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h.     simple

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i.     describe

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j.     courage

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k.     feared

16.    Write a note on the moral and spiritual allegory in Book I Canto 1 of *The Faerie Queene*?

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17. Write a note on the peculiar qualities of Spenser's verse in Book I Canto 1 of *The Faerie Queene*.
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### 3.4 Answers to SAQs

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1. The language is archaic and it has been done with a design to lend a dignity to the piece of verse to suit the stately setting.
2. Before embarking upon writing *Faerie Queene*, Spenser was writing pastoral poems.
3. Clio, the muse of history, or Calliope, the muse of epic poetry is the 'chiefe of nine'.
4. Tanaquill was an Etruscan wife and she is a noble queen. Spenser uses the name to refer to Queen Elizabeth I.
5. It shows the adventurous spirit of the Knight.
6. The allegory lies in the victory of Holiness (the Red Knight) with the motivation of Truth (Una) and the assistance of common sense (the dwarf) over Error (the monster).
7. It symbolizes distorted bits of information resulting out of ignorance.
8. Stanza 21 is a clear example of an epic simile. The vomit of Error has been compared with the dirt and filth left behind after the overflowing of the river Nile.
9. It refers to Archimago, the chief magician and necromancer. At the level of religious allegory, he is identifiable with Catholicism.
10. It refers to the Pope.
11. Proserpine, who was beautiful has been called 'griesly Dame' because when she was carried off by the God of the Underworld, Pluto and made his queen, she lost all her beauty and acquired a terrible figure.
12. Cupid is called 'false winded boy' because love is not constant, it keeps changing and creating illusions of the beloved in the mind of the lover.

13. a) Before Spenser wrote *The Faerie Queene*, he had completed *The Shepheardes Calender* in 1579, where he sought to revive the conventions of classical pastoral verse. Now he no longer wishes to write pastoral poetry.
- b) Historical records were called as 'antique rolles'.
- c) This name refers to Queen Elizabeth the First.
- d) Lamb is associated with Jesus Christ and the phrase is symbolic of meekness, purity and self-sacrifice.
- e) This means to be instructed in the art of amorous play.
14. These lines describe the old man whom the Red Cross Knight met. The old man had a large stock of leasing words. He could polish his tongue and make it appear as smooth as glass. He told the guests stories about saints and popes and all through his conversation kept on repeating the words 'Hail, Mary',
15. a) irksome
- b) appease
- c) redoubted
- d) uncouth
- e) intent
- f) fray
- g) strowd
- h) silly
- i) reed
- j) hardiment
- k) ydrad
16. Spenser has himself clarified that his poem, *The Faerie Queene* was a dark conceit or a continuous allegory. His intention in the poem was to depict the twelve ethical virtues of mankind. Although in the six books in which the poem is written, he could depict only six of them viz, Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice and Courtesy. He considered Magnificence as the highest of the twelve virtues and Arthur was to be the embodiment of this virtue. Spenser has shown each of these virtues struggling against the evil forces and whenever they are unable to cope with those evils, Magnificence takes over and rescues them but its limitation is that it cannot advance these virtues up to heaven. This according to him can be done with the help of Christian virtues like Faith, Hope and Charity. So every book has been designed to show struggle, victory, defeat, rescue and final triumph.
- The theme of Book I is Holiness. The various characters in this book are symbolic. The Red Cross Knight personifies Holiness, Una personifies Truth, the dwarf personifies Prudence, the monster personifies Error, Archimago personifies heathenism or infidelity, Sans Foy personifies

faithfulness, Sans Loy lawlessness, The lion the natural reason of man, Corceca blind devotion, Abessa (her daughter) superstition, Kirkrapine the plunder of the church. Lucifera represents Pride alongwith the six Deadly Sins (acting as her counselors). The fauns and the satyrs are symbolic of barbarism and sir Satyrane heroic activity, Orgoglio, the giant represents Carnal Pride, Prince Arthur Magnificence, Despair represents Hopelessness, the House of Holiness and its inhabitants represent those qualities which inspire a man with a new hope, courage and desire for heaven and the Dragon stands for Satan, the Devil.

In Canto I, the Red Cross Knight travels in the company of Una followed by the dwarf to her father's kingdom. Her father is in great danger from a Dragon as his kingdom is being destroyed by it. The allegorical significance here is that Holiness has joined hands with Truth for the spiritual liberation and emancipation of the human race from the bondage of the Devil. Unless the powers evil are conquered, emancipation is not possible. The first of these powers of evil is Error, moral and political error and error of all kinds. It is symbolized by a monster who is half-woman and half-serpent. It can be defeated by the combined strength of Holiness and Truth. Error is conquered when the monster is killed by the Red Cross Knight but he becomes a victim to another opponent named Archimago who symbolizes Hypocrisy. In Canto II we find the description of all the mischief that he is capable of and his deception of both the Red Cross Knight and Una.

17. *The Faerie Queene* of Spenser is remarkable for its smooth verse and decorous diction. This complex long poem is a continued allegory or dark conceit. The most significant contribution that spenser made to literature through this work is the Spenserian Stanza. It shows his originality and inventiveness as a craftsman in verse. Spenser's intention in designing it was to suit his purposes in this poem in particular.

The stanza has been described as fluent and luxuriant. It is known for its fluidity and ease. Each stanza is compoete in itself any conveys a complete portion of a picture. Each stanza ends with an Alexandrine, almost summing up the verse, indicating a clear pause and gives a definite climax. The rhyming of this last line with the sixth and the eighth ensures its linkage to the stanza as a whole. The rhyme scheme is a b a b b c b c c. The rhythms of the stanza is iambic pentameter for the first eight lines and iambic hexameter (Alexandrine) for the ninth line.

Spenser's stanza is suited to a description of landscape, scenes, situations and events and even sketches and portrayal of persons. It also suits the analysis of thoughts and feelings, to moralizing and sermonizing, to reflection and meditation. Book I is full of descriptions of various monsters, fights and weapons of Prince Arthur and the Spenserian stanza very much suits the description. The individual quality of Spenser's melody also finds a perfect expression through this stanza. This stanza form is ideal for the elaborate epic simile also. The nine long lines of this stanza can very well convey the complete intended meaning of the writer. There are quite a number of such similes in Book I. For instance there is one in Canto 1, stanza 21. Here the poet compares the vomit of Error with the waters of the river Nile which overflow the banks and leave behind filth and mud which become breeding ground for different kinds of ugly creatures. The latter are the symbolic equivalents of the forms and ways wherby Error expresses itself.

The Spenserian stanza is capable of infinite variations. This variety is achieved by constant

assonance, by great rhythmical variation and by use of rhetorical devices like alliteration and onomatopoeia. The alliterating d's in stanza 40, line 8-9 illustrate the nature of sleep which is personified by Morpheus.

The Alexandrine (iambic hexameter) as has been pointed above is of immense importance to Spenser in providing a splendid conclusion to the stanza. It is capable of providing variations in its sound and its sense. It can sum up what has been in the earlier lines of the stanza in the form of a terse and pithy comment like. 'Yet nothing did he dread, but euer was ydrad' about the Red Cross Knight. The variation which Spenser gives to the rhythm and the balance of the Alexandrine greatly helps to vary the general rhythm of the succession of stanzas.

Spenserian stanza for these reasons is pliant and stately and it serves every purpose for which he needs it. The adaptability of this stanza is the reason why Book I sustains itself throughout its great length with becoming monotonous.

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### 3.5 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit, we have given you practice in the study of

- Spenserian poetry and its peculiar form.
- meaning, interpretation and explanation of the poem *The Faerie Queene*
- literary terms and rhetorical devices

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### 3.6 Review Questions

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1. Discuss the *Faerie Queene* as a moral allegory.
2. What is it that appeals the modern reader in *Faerie Queene* Book I ?

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### 3.7 Bibliography

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## UNIT-4

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### SIR THOMAS WYATT & HENRY HOWARD, EARL OF SURREY

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#### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 About the Age
- 4.3 About the Authors
- 4.4 Sir Thomas Wyatt:
  - (a) “Lo What it is to love”
  - (b) “And wilt thou leave me thus”
- 4.5 Earl of Surrey
  - (a) “Give place, ye lovers”
  - (b) “The Golden gift that Nature did the give”
- 4.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 4.7 Answers SAQs
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Review Questions
- 4.10 Bibliography

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#### 4.0 Objectives

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After going through this unit, you will be able to

- understand the ideas contained in the poems of Wyatt and Surrey,
- understand that in the poetry of Wyatt and Surrey the theme of love was a recurring element,
- rewrite in your own words the given text.

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#### 4.1 Introduction

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In this and the next unit you are going to study some small poems written by Wyatt, Surrey, Nashe and extracts from Kyd’s play, *The Spanish Tragedie*. Word meaning, wherever required, have been given. The poems have been paraphrased for you. This will enable you to appreciate the works of these poets. You are advised to keep a dictionary with you so that you, too, can look up the meanings of the words. We have written a short note explaining to you the chief characteristics of the age. A short note has also been given about the works of the authors.



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## 4.2 About the Age

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### The Renaissance (1485-1660)

The Renaissance ('rebirth' of learning and culture) is a movement that originated in Italy. There, it reached its peak in the early sixteenth century; in Britain Renaissance reached its zenith in the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1 (1558-1603)

During the Renaissance some important events occurred. Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492; Copernicus and Galelio established scientifically that the earth is not the centre of the universe. At the same time occurred the birth of modern science, mathematics and astronomy.

Another important influence was the Reformation, which gave rise to a new political and religious identity and led to then examination of the relationship between man and God. Literature before this time offered an ideal pattern for living dominated by the ethos of the Church. After the Reformation, the search of individual expression and meaning took over. The philosophy of Humanism placed Man at the centre of the universe. How did man make use of his powers, capabilities and free will? This was a question often discussed and debated. The Literature of the English Renaissance contains some of the greatest names in all world literature (some names have been given-Shakespeare, Marlowe, Philip Sidney, Thomas Nashe, Spencer).

The plays written during this period dealt with religious stories and were performed in or near churches. These were called miracle or mystery plays. English comedy was born in these plays. Some other types of plays were written and these were called Morality Plays. The characters in these plays were not people but abstract qualities like Death, Beauty, Knowledge. These plays presented moral truths in a new way. One of the best - known play is titled *Every Man in his humour*.

Drama developed rapidly during the ring of Queen Elizabeth 1 (1558-1603) Nicholas Udall wrote the play *Ralph Roister Doister* in 1552 - this is considered to be the first English Comedy. Credit for writing the first English tragedy goes to Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville who wrote *Gorbodac* in 1564. *The Spanish Tragedy* was written in 1587 and it is the first example of revenge tragedy. The dramatists Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare wrote their best plays during this period. Morlowe's plays especially *Tambourlaine the Great* and *The Jew of Malta* are both violet plays. His play *Doctor Faaustus* is based on the well known story of a man who sold his soul to the devel in return for a splendid life during which time the devil would fulfil all his desires William Shakespeare's plays can be divided into History, Tragedy, Comedy and Romances. In this plays moral and philosophical issues are presented. His plays have an appeal even now, and the modern reader can identify with the characters. After Geoffery Chaucer there was a decline in English poetry. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1478) is an incomplete cycle of stories told by pilgrims. Some of the important elements of this work are irony and satire, chivalry and courtly love, marriage and the Church. When Chaucer died he left behind to him the realisation that a great force in English literature had passed away. Italy, which Chaucer had revealed in his works, remained forgotten for a whole century. Chaucer's successors tried to copy his simple works, but they could not imitate his rhythm. When Henry VIII ruled over England, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey were writing poetry. Wyatt translated Patriarch and introduced the Sonnet to England, whereas Surrey established the blank verse. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Edmund Spenser was considered to be a great poet. His greatest work is *The Faerie Queen* (1589-96) for which he invented a special meter, the Spensarian Stanza. The famous prose writers of this time were Thomas Moore, Sir Philip Sidney, Thomas Nash and Francis

Bacon. The prose of the age took very different forms like travel accounts, translations and chronicles.

The beginning of the Tudor dynasty coincided with the arrival of William Caxton's printing press. Caxton established the press in 1476, only nine years before the beginning of Henry VII's reign. The early Tudor Period, particularly the reign of Henry VIII (Queen Elizabeth's father), was marked by a break with the Roman Catholic Church and a weakening of feudal ties, which brought about a vast increase in the power of the monarchy. Stronger political relationships with the continent were also developed, increasing England's exposure to Renaissance culture. A myriad of new genres, themes, and ideas were incorporated into English Literature, Italian poetic form, especially the sonnet, became a model for English poets.

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### 4.3 About the Author

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When we speak of the glory of Elizabethan verse, we think of the lyric quality that is there in nearly all the poems written during this period.

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) held various diplomatic posts in the service of Henry VIII in France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. His first visit to Italy in 1527 probably encouraged him to translate and imitate the poems of Petrarch. Wyatt knew that after the death of Chaucer, no one had been able to produce good quality English verse. He was fascinated by the sonnets of Petrarch and the lyrics of the French poet Marot. He imitated the sonnet form and brought back to English poetry the note of lyricism. Wyatt's works bear the influence of French and Italian writers. His works include sonnets, rondeaux, epigrams, satires, songs, and a version of the seven Penitential Psalms. Wyatt is the embodiment both of an age that was dying and an age that was springing to life, of Middle Age and Renaissance. A "singing quality" is discernible in Wyatt's poetry and this is due to the fact that Wyatt was an accomplished player of the lute. According to Emile Legouis "It was by the sonnet that lyricism again entered English poetry. Whether it was translated or imitated mattered little. It rendered the music of feeling or passion. It called forth the rare word, the Metaphor, subtlety and condensation. Its very brevity necessitated artistic labour. Wyatt wrote no memorable sonnets, but he blazed the trace. His imitations of Petrarch brought bold and new images into English." He wrote a number of love poems and is considered to be the forerunner of John Donne.

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey was born in 1517 and died in 1547. He was with the army during the war with France (1544-46) and was commander of Boulogne, 1545-46. His works consist of sonnets and poems in various meters. These are very elegantly constructed. He used the blank verse in his translation of the Bks 2 and 4. Surrey was a disciple of Wyatt. Surrey verses are regular and harmonious. The Italian models of the sonnet cultivated by Wyatt, was substituted by Surrey for the less elaborate and easier English form, which William Shakespeare afterwards adopted, three quatrains with different rhymes followed by a couplet. Surrey, as stated earlier, introduced the blank verse into English.

It must be admitted that Wyatt and Surrey were much in advance of their time, yet they were in no way in revolt against the national tradition. Surrey sang in his sonnets his entirely imaginative love for Geraldine, or Lady Elizabeth Fitzgerald. The elegiac tone comes naturally to him. There is in his poems a love for nature also.

In the work of Wyatt and Surrey we mark for the first time a more personal note in English poetry. The great characteristic of medieval verse is its impersonal character. The poems are still written conventionally and there is a certain stiffness in expression, but Wyatt and Surrey impart a more personal

tone to it.

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#### 4.4 Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542)

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(a) “Lo, What it is to Love”

Lo, What It Is To Love

Lo, What it is to love!

Lean ye that list to prove

At me, I say,

No ways that may

The ground of grief remove,

My life always

That doth decay:

Lo, what it is to love!

I'll love Horatio, my Andrea's friend,

Flee always from the snare!

Learn by me to beware

Of such a train

Which doubles pain,

And endless woe and care

That doth retain;

Which to refrain,

Flee always from the aware!

To love and to be wise,

To rage with good advice:

No thus, now than,

No off, now an,

Uncertain as the dice:

There is no man

At once that can

To love and to be wise

Such are the divers throes,

Such that no man knows,  
That hath not proved,  
And once have loved:  
Such are the raging woes,  
Sooner reprov'd  
Than well removed:  
Such are the divers throes.  
Love is a fervent fire  
Kindled by hot desire;  
For a short pleasure  
Repentance is the hire;  
A poor treasure  
Without measure:  
Love is a fervent fire.  
- Lo, what it is to love!

### **Paraphrase**

Look, what it is to love!  
Learn you that long to prove  
Me wrong, I say  
That there are no ways to remove the grief  
My life has decayed (gone waste)  
Look, what it is to love!  
(Flee) Run away from the Snare (trap) of love Learn from me to beware of such events  
which increase pain  
And bring about sorrow and strain  
Avoid (refrain) and evade (retain) the path of love  
Run away from the trap of love.  
One cannot be in love and be wise  
One rages (becomes very angry) when offered good advice  
One rages (becomes very angry) when offered good advice  
One's mood varies when one is in love

(Now this, now that, now off, now on)  
Love is as unpredictable as the game of dice.  
There is no man who can be in love  
And be wise and judicious  
For love takes away all wisdom.  
Such are the struggles of people who dive in love  
No man knows these struggles  
Unless he has loved and proved  
That such stormy are the sorrows.  
One can be sooner blamed  
Than be removed  
From the deep struggles love love.  
Love is a glowing fire  
Burning with hot desire  
For momentary pleasure  
One incurs long displeasure  
One repents but in vain  
A trifle gift  
Without depth  
Love is a glowing fire.  
Look, what it is to love.

**(b) And Wilt Thou Leave Me Thus?**

And wilt thou leave me thus?  
And wilt thou leave me thus?  
Say may! Say may, for shame!  
To save thee from the blame  
Of all my grief and grame.  
And wilt thou leave me thus,  
    Say nay! Say nay!  
And wilt thou leave me thus,  
That hath loved thee so long,

In wealth and woe among?

And is thy heart so strong

As for to leave me thus?

Say nay! Say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus

That hath given thee my heart,

Never for to depart,

Other for pain nor smart

And wilt thou leave me thus?

Say nay! Say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus,

And have no more pity

Of him that loveth thee?

He has! Thy cruelty!

And wilt thou leave me thus?

Say nay ! Say nay!

### **Paraphrase**

And will you (thou) leave me thus?

And will you leave me (thus) in this way

Say no Say no, that you won't do so (for shame)

This will save you from the blame

Of all my grief and sorrow (grievance)

And will you leave me in this state

Say no! Say no!

And will you forsake me/leave me

Me, who has (hath) loved you so long

In your happiness (wealth) and grief (woe)?

And is your heart so strong

As to leave me in this state?

Say no! Say no!

And will you depart from my life/leave me thus

I have (hath) given you my heart (and promised)

Never to part (depart)

Neither (another) in pain nor in joy (smart)

And will you leave me thus/in this state?

Say no! Say no!

And will you walk out of my life? leave me thus

And have no pity

One me that loved you (thee)

Alas! (helas) you are cruel

And will you leave me thus?

Say no! Say no!

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## 4.5 Earl of Surrey

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### (a) Give Place, Ye Lovers.

Give place, ye lovers, here before

That spent your boasts and brags in Vain;

My lady beauty passeth more

The best of yours, I dare well sayn,

Than doth the sun the candle light,

Or brightest day the darkest night.

And there to hath a troth as just

As had Penelope the fair;

For what she faith, ye may it trust,

As it by writing sealed were;

And virtues hath she many moe

Than I with pen have skill to show.

I could rehearse, if that I would,

The whole effect of Nature's plaint,

When she had lost the perfit mould

The like to whom she could not paint:

With wringing hands how she did cry,

And what she said, I know it, I.  
I know she swore with raging mind,  
Her kingdom only set apart,  
There was no loss, by law of kind,  
That could have gone so near her heart;  
And this was chiefly all her pain:  
She could not make the like again.  
Sith Nature thus gave her the praise  
To be the Chiefest work she wrought,  
In faith, me think, some better ways  
On your behalf might well be sought,  
Than to compare, as ye have done,  
To match the candle with the sun.

### **Paraphrase**

Give way, you Lovers  
Give way, (ye) you lovers from (here) this place,  
Your boasts and braggings have gone (in vain) waste  
My lady's beauty is mosre  
Than the best of your bragging, I dare  
    Say that you donot have words to praise my lady's beauty,  
It is like showing a candle light to the sun  
Or comparing the dark night with the bright day.  
There is a truth in this saying  
As there was truth in what Penelope\* said  
By writing about the beauty of my lady  
No body can describe her virtues for she has many (Moe) more  
And I do not have the skill to write  
    About them and show them to you.  
I could practice, if that would enable me  
To bring into effect Nature's charge (plaint)  
When my lady had lost the perfect



(mould) garb  
The like (same) which nature could not paint again  
By twisting her hands (with wringing hands),  
(how she did cry) she expressed her distress  
And what she said only I know.  
I know she swore (Promised, use profane oaths)  
In great anger,  
Only her kingdom was set apart  
There was no loss that could be defined by loss of any kind  
Something must have hurt her and gone straight to her heart  
And this was mainly her pain  
And she could not be the same again  
So Nature (God) made her praise worthy  
She was the most beautiful work  
That Nature (God) created (wrought)  
Truly I think I must devise  
Some better ways  
On your behalf,  
You should do better than to compare her  
To a candle, and compare the candle with the sun.

\*Penelope - In Greek Mythology she is the wife of Odysseus. She was beset by suitors when her husband did not return after the fall of Troy. She put off her suitors by saying that she would marry only when she had finished the piece of weaving on which she was engaged. Every night she unraveled the work she had done during the day.

**(b) The Golden Gift that Nature Did Thee Give**

The golden gift that Nature did thee give  
To fasten friends, and feed them at thy will.  
With form and favour, taught me to believe,  
How thou art made to show her greatest skill,  
Whose hidden virtues are not so unknown,  
But lovely dooms might gather at the first,  
Where Beauty so her perfect seed hath sown,

Of other graces follow needs there must.  
No certe, Garret, since all this is true,  
That from above thy gifts are thus elect,  
Do not deface then with fancies new,  
No change of minds let not thy mind infect;  
But mercy him thy friend that doth thee serve,  
Who seeks always thine honour to preserve.

### **Paraphrase**

The Golden Gift That Nature Did Thee Give  
(The Golden Gift (Beauty) That Nature (Used symbolically for God)  
Gave Thee (You)  
The gift of Beauty that Nature Gave you  
Enabled you to have friends, who were at your command (feed them at thy will)  
(They literally ate at your will/command)  
Your form and the favour made me believe  
That you are made to show Nature's skill;  
Nature's hidden virtues are not unknown,  
Delightful destruction (of people) might occur in the first instance  
Because Beauty (Nature/God) has created in you so perfect a mould,  
That other graces virtues will soon follow.  
No it is certainly true, as true or the watch tower (garret)  
That your beauty was a gift from God above.  
Do not disfigure your mind with new fancies (desires)  
Nor let other minds (Other people's behaviour) effect your mind;  
But be merciful on one, who is your friend and wishes to serve you,  
He (this friend) always seeks to preserve your honour.

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### **4.6 Self Assessment Questions**

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- (a) Why does Wyatt caution the readers not to fall in love ?

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(b) Does one repent in love ?

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(c) What does the lover do in the poem 'And Wilt Thou Leave Me Thus'?

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(d) What reasons does the Lover give the beloved for not leaving him.

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(e) What image of the beloved does the reader get on reading Give Place, ye Lovers.

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(f) What Gift did nature give Surrey lady love ?

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(g) What does the pet beg of his lady love ?

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#### **4.7 Answers to SAQs**

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- (a) Wyatt cautions the readers not to fall in love because love brings grief in its wake. It is like a snare where individuals get entrapped. One is bereft of the power to think and act judiciously.
- (b) One does repent in love especially if it is unrequited.
- (c) The lover keeps telling the beloved not to leave him.
- (d) The lover tells his beloved that he has loved her and tried to save her from all sorts of blame. He tells her that he has been with her in her joys and sorrows. He asks her to have pity on him, because he loves her sincerely.
- (e) One gets the image of a very beautiful lady who is not taken in by the bragging and boastings of her suitors. She is as wise as Penelope and as bright as the sun.
- (f) Nature gave Surrey's lady love the gift of beauty. Nature carved her in such a way that nothing and no one could deface her.

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#### **4.8 Let Us Sum Up**

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- 1. In this unit you have read and understood small love poems.
- 2. The questions asked will make you more familiar with the poems
- 3. Annotation will help you to understand certain terms

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#### **4.9 Review Questions**

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- 1. Discuss Sir Thomas Wyatt as a poet of love with reference to the poem you have read.
- 2. How does Surrey adore Nature in his poems ?

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#### **4.10 Bibliography**

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## UNIT-5

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### THOMAS KYD AND THOMAS NASHE

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#### Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Note on the Age
- 5.3 Note on the Author
- 5.4 Thomas Kyd extracts from the *Spanish Tragedy*
- 5.5 Thomas Nashe:
  - (a) Spring The Sweat Spring
  - (b) In Time of Pestilence.
- 5.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 5.7 Answers to SAQs
- 5.8 Let us Sum Up
- 5.9 Review Questions
- 5.10 Bibliography

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#### 5.0 Objectives

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

- What is meant by the term revenge tragedy
- Your knowledge of the age is further reinforced in this unit
- You will become more familiar with the style of writers writing after Chaucer.
- This unit along with Unit 3 will enable you to understand how the English verse gained popularity.

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#### 5.1 Introduction

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In this unit you are going to study some extracts from Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and two poems of Thomas Nashe. Word meanings will be explained. Keep a dictionary with you and use it as much as possible. This unit will further reinforce your understanding of the Renaissance.

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#### 5.2 About the Age

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In a previous Unit you have read about the chief characteristics of this age. After Chaucer there was a decline in English poetry for about two hundred years. The successors of Chaucer were only poor imitators of his style. The age witnessed the War of the Roses (1453-83) and after this terrible

civil conflict, art and literature declined rapidly. With Renaissance, the influence of foreign countries, especially Italy began to be felt. The theatre developed rapidly and people went in large numbers to see plays being staged. Stories were borrowed from foreign countries, but the English playwrights rewrote these stories keeping the English public in mind. Tragedies, comedies and historical dramas were written during the period.

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### 5.3 About the Authors

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Thomas Kyd (1558-1594) - He was the son of a London scrivener and he studied law. He was very fond of reading the plays of Seneca. In Kyd's plays one notices the influence of Seneca. Kyd learnt from Seneca the art of producing terror : Kyd used ghosts who narrated past events in striking lyrical expressions. He cared nothing for the Aristotelian unities. Kyd, in English Literature, wrote the first revenge play called *The Spanish Tragedy*. The atmosphere of gloom envelopes the play as vengeance is sought. There is a lot of violence in his play.

However much Kyd may discard the unities of place and time, it must be remembered that in *The Spanish Tragedy* the unity of action is there. There is also the unity of motive, for it all centres round revenge. Kyd also wrote a play called Hamlet but the text is no longer available, it is probably lost.

Kyd was connected with the coterie around the countess of Pembroke. He translated Robert Garnier's play the *Tragedy of Cornelia* in 1594. This play bears Kyd's name on the title - page. Garnier was called the 'French Seneca'. The influence of Kyd is marked on all the immediate writers who wrote during the Elizabethan era. The bold way in which scenes of violent crime were treated on the Elizabethan stage appears to be because of the pioneering work done by Kyd.

Thomas Nashe (1567-1611) - He was in the literal sense the successor of Robert Greene, the realist and the satirist. Educated at Cambridge, he came to London and became Greene's friend. Nashe was a satirist and he wrote against the Puritans. In English prose, Nashe was the creator of a new genre. He wrote in a grotesque satirical style, which at times appeared lyrical. Nashe was satirical of Kyd - he felt that Kyd had left his father's trade only to write tragedies borrowed from Seneca. Nashe and Greene both show resentment at the rise of dramatists without classical training who were proving more effective than the University Wits. In his preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* addressed to the members of *Oxford and Cambridge* Universities, he poses as defender of the classical tradition against the bombast of the recent authors of tragedies. Nashe wrote one novel, numerous pamphlets and some poems. These have won for him a reputation that survives even today.

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### 5.4 Thomas Kyd: Extracts from The Spanish Tragedy

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The Spanish Tragedy is called a 'revenge tragedy'. In a revenge tragedy the leading motive is revenge and the main action of the play deals with the progress of this revenge. The revenge tragedy ends with the death of the murderers and the death of the avenger himself. Revenge tragedy came into Elizabethan Literature through the writings of Kyd who was much influenced by Seneca. Seneca was playwright, an essayist and a statesman. A born Stoic, Seneca preached and practiced stoicism in all his writings. He was drawn to the psychology of crime. In all his plays, horrors are piled on horrors. He revels in the scenes of blood, and blood revenge is always there in his plays. Despite the fact the revenge is personal, it assumes the form of a religious duty. His plays abound in supernaturalism. The

avenger is inspired by ghosts, but the ghosts do not take any active part in the action of the drama. Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy is the outcome of the spirit of Seneca as well as that of Machiavelli (Niccolo di Bernanrdo dei 1469-1527, Italian Statesman and political philosopher. His best known work is **The Prince (1532)**, which advises rulers that the acquisition and effective use of power many necessitate unethical methods). Thomas Nashe the writer wrote that during the course of his travels he learnt that the Italians were cunning, scheming, and unscrupulous when it came to advancing their careers. Inspired by Seneca and Machiavelli, Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* has the claim of being recognized as the first Revenge play in England. It is a paradox of history that Seneca a product of decadent Rome, influenced the Elizabethan age that was full of life and energy. Seneca's plays breathe a sentiment of deep pessimism and reveal spiritual crisis amongst the characters. In Greek drama supernatural elements in the form of Nemesis, Furies, and the *dues ex machine* were there. They often appeared on the scene and resolved the difficulties of the protagonists. In Seneca's plays ghosts belonged to the lower world. Like the Romans, the Elizabethans, too, liked to read Seneca. Dramatic declamation, rant and bombast were welcomed by the Elizabethans who were probably tired to the saintly austerity of the language of **Everyman**.

*The Spanish Tragedy* is a play about the urge for revenge, and it is the spirit of vengeance that motivates the entire action. Andrea has a lust for blood, since his own has been shed (he has been killed in battle). Even Gods condescend to favour Andrea in his quest for revenge. Towards the end of the tragedy, Andrea speaks with a note of exaltation saying that his soul is now satisfied on viewing the deaths of people who mattered in his life.

The extract given below is taken from Act 1 Scene IV. Bel- Imperia is the woman whom Andrea loved. On bearing of Andrea's death, Bel-Imperia is keen to take revenge at any cost. In the Elizabethan age women were remarkable for their vengeance.

**Bel - Imperia:**

Ay, go Horatio, leave me here alone.  
For solitude best fits my cheerless mood  
Yet what avails to wail Andrea's death,  
From whence Horatio proves my second love ?  
Had he not loved Andrea as he did;  
He could not sit in Bel - Imperia's thoughts,  
But how can love find harbour in my breast,  
Till I revenge the death of my beloved?  
Yes, second love shall further my revenge.  
I'll love Horatio, my Andrea's friend,  
The more to spite the prince that wrought his end.  
And where Don Balthazar, that slew my love,  
Himself now pleads for favour at my hands,

He shall in rigour of my just disdain  
Reap long repentance for his murderous deed.  
For what was't else but murderous cowardice,  
So many to oppress one valiant knight,  
Without respect of honour in the fight?  
And here he comes that murdered my delight.

### **Paraphrase**

Do go Horatio (Andrea's friend) and leave me alone  
It is best that I remain alone in this present state of mind.  
Yet of what use is it to wait at Andrea's death  
Because Horatio has begun to occupy my thoughts.  
It is true that Horatio loved Andrea and was his best friend  
It is were not for this fact, he would not be in Bel - Imperia's thoughts.  
But how can love find a place of my heart  
Till I have avenged the death of my beloved.  
Yes, my second love shall further my plans for revenge.  
I'll love Horatio who has been my Andrea's friend,  
This I shall do to spite the Prince  
(Don Balthazar) who killed Andrea.  
Don Balthazar, who killed my beloved  
Pleads for my favour, my love  
He shall now be the victim of my just anger  
And suffer much for his murderous deed  
(the act of killing Andrea).  
It was no thing but sheer cowardice,  
On the part of so many to surround One knight  
(warrior who fought for God fought for God and country)  
Without respecting the code of honour of war.

Here he (don Balthazar) comes who was instrumental in murdering my delight (Andrea)

(Bel - Imperia is a woman of strong will and independent spirit. She is convinced that her love for Horatio will enable her to take revenge against Balthazar, who killed Andrea and is now courting



her)

#### **Act IV Scene V**

Enter Ghost (of Andrea) and Revenge.

**Andrea:**

Ay, now my hopes have end in their effects,  
When blood and sorrow finish my desires:  
Horatio murdered in his father's bower,  
Vile Serberine by Pedringano slain,  
False Pedringano hanged by quaint device,  
Fair Isabella by herself misdone,  
Prince Balthazar by Bel - Imperia stabbed,  
The Duke of Castile and his wicked son Both done to death by old Hieronimo,  
My Bel - Imperial fallen as Dido fell,  
And good Hieronimo slain by himself:  
Ay, these were spectacles to please my soul  
Paraphrase

This is the last scene of the play and the ghost of Andrea and Revenge are on the state. The ghost is happy that his death has been avenged and proceeds to give an account of the various deaths/ murders that have occurred.

**Andrea**

Now my hopes have been realized  
Blood loss and the sorrows of others have satisfied my desires  
Horatio was murdered in his father's house,  
Vile Serberine was killed by Pedringano.  
Pedringano proved to be false and was therefore hanged,  
The beautiful Isabella died heart broken,  
Prince Balthazar was killed by Bel - Imperia  
The Duke of Castile and his evil son were both killed by the brave Hieronimo,  
My beloved Bel - Imperia committed suicide like Dido

(Didoin Virgil's works aenied BK IV committed suicide after her beloved Aeneas left Carthage.)

And the good and brave Hieromino killed himself.

Ah ! these were sights to please my soul.

(I am satisfied, my death has been avenged).

(students are advised to read The Spanish Tragedy because it is the first Revenge play written in English).

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## 5.5 Thomas Nashe

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### (a) Spring, The Sweet Spring

Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant king;  
Then Blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring;  
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing:  
Cuckoo, jug jug, pu we, to witta woo.  
The palm and may make country houses gay,  
Lambs frisk and play, the shep herds pipe all day,  
And we hear ay birds tune thin merry lay:  
Cuckoo, jug jug, pu we, to witta woo.  
The fields breath sweet, the daisies kiss our feet,  
Young lovers meet, old wives a - sunning sit,  
In every street these tunes our ears do great:  
Cuckoo, jug jug, pu we, to witta woo.  
Spring, the sweet spring !

### Paraphrase

#### Spring, the Sweet Spring

Spring, sweet spring is the king of the Year  
(it is the best season of the year)  
Flowers are then full bloom, and  
Joy and gladness fill the hearts of maids as they dance in a ring.  
It is no longer biting cold, birds begin to sing  
(In winter everything is covered with snow and due to the cold even birds do not sing)  
The songs of the birds herald the arrival of spring  
Cuckoo, cuckoo let us welcome the spring  
Palm trees sway and country houses wear a festive look in the month of May  
Lambs frisk about and play in the fields, the shepherds play their pipes all day  
And we hear the songs of the birds as they herald the arrival of Spring

Cuckoo, cuckoo, let us welcome the Spring.

With the snow thawing, the fields seem to breathe sweetly again and as we walk in the fields daisies kiss our feet

Spring is the time when lovers meet, and old woman sit out in the sun

In every street lively tunes greet our ears

The dawn of spring is heralded,

Cuckoo, cuckoo, let us welcome the spring,

Spring, the sweet Spring.

**(b) In time of Pestilence**

Adieu, fare well, earth's bliss !

This would uncertain is,:

Fond are life's bustful joys

Death proves them all but toys

None from his darts can fly:

I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us !

Rich men, trust not in wealth,

Gold cannot buy you health;

physic himself must fade;

All things to end are made;

The plague full swift goes by;

I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us !

Beauty is but a flower,

Which wrinkles will devour;

Brightness falls from the air;

Queens have died young and fair;

Dust hath closed Helen's eye;

I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us !

Strength stoops unto the grave:  
Worms feed on Hector brave;  
Swords may not fight with fate:  
Earth still holds ope her gate.  
Come, come, the bells do cry;  
I am sick I must die.

Lord have mercy on us.

Wit with his wantonness,  
Taste death's bitterness.  
Hell's executioner  
Hath no ears for to hear  
What vain art can reply;  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord have mercy on us !

Haste therefore each degree  
To welcome destiny:  
Heaven is our heritage,  
Earth but a player's stage.  
Mount we unto the sky;  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us !

**Paraphrase At the time of Disease.**

Farewell to the earthly pleasures  
In this world everything is temporal  
When one is alive one craves for life of pleasure  
But Death proves them all Death  
No one can escape from Death

I am sick, I know I have to die

May the Lord have mercy on us all.

Rich men are advised not to think that wealth,

And gold will buy the, good health

Even the physician must die (face)

All things will have their end

The plague (in the form of death) will swiftly overtake us all

I am sick of the worldly ways, I know

I have to die

May the Lord have mercy on us !

Beauty is like a flower which fades away

Wrinkles will soon cover a beautiful face

A bright person have died at a young age

Even Queens have died at a young age

The beautiful Helen of Troy, too, returned to dust

I, too, am sick, I know I have to die

May the Lord God have mercy on us !

Even the most brave and strong person has to go the grave

Worms are feeding on brave Hector's body

One cannot fight fate (what is destined cannot be changed)

The gates of Earth are open to receive the dead

Come, Come, the church bells are tolling the funeral knell

May the good Lord have mercy on us.

A witty person who leads a gay (wanton) life

Even he has to taste death.

Hell's executioner Death

Does not hear nor does he listen to prayers

Only Art remains permanent and immortalizes the artist

(what vain art can reply)

I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us.

Therefore hurry and at each step

Welcome your destiny (fate)

Remember, heaven is where we will attain glory

Earth is but a temporal place

We are all players (actors) we come

And play our part on the stage called Earth,

Let us fly up to the sky

I am sick of this world, I must

May God have mercy on us.

(Helen of Troy - In Greek mythology she is the daughter of Zeus and Leda. She was born from an egg. In the Homeric poems she was the outstandingly beautiful wife of Menelaus and her abduction by Paris (to whom she had been promised, as a bribe by Aphrodite led to the Trojan war.

(Hector - In Greek mythology he is a Trojan warrior. He was the son of Priam and Hecuba and husband of Andromache. He was killed by Achilles, who dragged his body behind his chariot three times round the walls of Troy)

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## 5.6 Self Assessment Questions

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(a) Who is Bel-Imperia ?

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(b) Who is Andrea ?

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(c) What do you understand by the term “revenge tragedy”

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(d) How is Spring addressed ?

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(e) What happens during Spring ?

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(f) Who is supreme - Life or Death ?

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## 5.7 Answers to SAQs

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- (a) Bel - Imperia is the daughter of the Duke of Castile and she is also Lorenzo’s sister. She loved Andrea and she avenges Andrea’s death by killing Don Balthazar
- (b) Don Andrea was a courtier of Spain. He was killed in Battle between Portugal and Spain. He loved Bel - Imperia. After his death, his ghost seeks revenge, on the people who mattered in his life.
- (c) The Spanish Tragedy is a tragedy of revenge. The spirit of vengeance Motivates the entire action. Andrea desires revenge, since his own blood has been she. Even the Gods favour Andrea in his quest for revenge. When the motive has been achieved Andrea’s ghost feels happy.
- (d) Spring is addressed as the King of the Year
- (e) During spring flowers bloom, birds sing, the snow thaws, lambs frisk about, and lovers meet. Old women sit basking in the sun.

- (f) Death is supreme and before death everyone has to bow.

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## 5.8 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit you have read extract from The Spanish Tragedy. You have also read two poems of Thomas Nashe. This unit further reinforces your understanding of unit-3.

You have also come to know what the term revenge tragedy means.

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## 5.9 Review Questions

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1. Write your impressions about the Elizabethan age women on the basis of the extracts of 'The Spanish Tragedy' you have read.
2. What are Thomas Nashe's ideas about the spring season.
3. Comment on the imagery in 'In Time of Pestilence.'

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## 5.10 Bibliography

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## UNIT-6

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### JOHN WEBSTER : THE DUCHESS OF MALFI -I

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#### Structure

- 6.0 Objective
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Summary of the Play and Characters
- 6.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.4 Review Questions
- 6.5 Bibliography

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#### 6.0 Objective

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The purpose of this unit is to introduce you to the English Revenge Tragedy. After reading this play you will be able to understand how it is different from the Roman revenge tragedy on the one hand, and English revenge tragedy like Hamlet on the other.

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#### 6.1 Introduction

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The Duchess, a woman of true blue blood and a widow to boot, falls in love with a man far below her station. This is resented by her brothers who fear they will lose her patrimony if she marries. They find an agent in a hardened criminal whom they put in her service. Eventually she and her children are eliminated.

This play was written in 1613 or 1614 and is generally considered to be Webster's masterpiece. The story is based on actual events that took place in Italy in the early sixteenth century. Webster freely borrowed elements of his story from several sources. The play is sometimes ridiculed by modern critics for the excessive violence and horror in its later scenes. Nevertheless the complexity of some of its characters, particularly Bosola and the Duchess, and Webster's poetic language, give it a continuing interest, and it is still performed in the 21st century.

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#### 6.2 Summary Of The Play And Characters

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##### Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play opens in Malfi, in the presence-chamber (the room where royalty would receive visitors) in the Duchess's palace. Antonio and Delio enter. Antonio Bologna is the steward of the Duchess's household; Delio is his friend. Antonio has been away in France visiting the French court, and Delio asks him what he thinks of it. Antonio tells him he admires the French king very much, because the king has dismissed all the yes-men and immoral hangers-on, and has rewarded men who tell him the truth about court corruption. Antonio believes it is a noble duty to advise royal persons about morally sensitive matters.

Daniel de Bosola enters, along with the Cardinal, who is one of the Duchess's brothers. Bosola

is pestering the Cardinal about not being justly rewarded for service he has fulfilled for the Cardinal- in fact, Bosola says, he was in the galleys (that is, serving as an oarsman in a warship) for two years in the Cardinal's service. The Cardinal puts him off, telling him he wishes Bosola could be honest. As the Cardinal leaves, Bosola responds sarcastically that the Cardinal, being a man of divinity, should teach him how; after the Cardinal exits, Bosola declares that the Cardinal is worse than any devil. Antonio asks him what he is talking about. Bosola says that the Cardinal and his brother (Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria-the Duchess's other brother) are rich and corrupt, and that they do not reward faithful service. Bosola departs after a few more bitter comments. Delio tells Antonio that Bosola had been in the galleys for seven years, serving time for a murder reputedly ordered by the Cardinal. Then Delio reminds Antonio that he had promised to tell Delio about all the noblemen and courtiers.

Ferdinand enters with Castruchio, Silvio, Roderigo, Grisolan, and attendants. The group has been at a sporting contest where Antonio has triumphed most often. Ferdinand asks when they will give up the games and get to real action, and Castruchio tells him he should not wish to go to war, but rather he should send deputies to war in his place. Ferdinand changes the subject to a witticism that Julia, Castruchio's wife, made about a wounded soldier. Then he changes the subject again, asking what his companions think of his horse. The men banter about the horse, but Ferdinand chides Roderigo and Grisolan for laughing when he is not laughing. Ferdinand tells Silvio he will visit him in Milan soon. Ferdinand tells Antonio he is a good horseman and asks him what he thinks of good horsemanship. Antonio says good horsemanship elevates the mind to noble action; Ferdinand agrees.

The Cardinal reenters, along with the Duchess, Cariola, and Julia. In an aside, Delio reminds Antonio of his promise and asks him about the Cardinal. Antonio tells Delio the Cardinal is a scheming church politician who uses informers and bribes to get what he wants, and that what Delio has heard about the Cardinal being a brave and sporting fellow who courts women is true only outwardly, "for form." Delio asks about Ferdinand, the Cardinal's brother. Antonio says much the same thing about him - that his mirth is outward only, and that he uses informers and hearsay to doom men to death. Antonio tells Delio that the two brothers are corrupt and scheming, but that their sister the Duchess is good and noble as well as beautiful. Cariola interrupts Antonio's rapturous comments to tell him he must attend the Duchess in the gallery in half an hour. Antonio and Delio exit.

Ferdinand asks the Duchess to appoint Bosola as her horseman (stable keeper). The Duchess says Ferdinand's recommendation is evidence of Bosola's worthiness.

Silvio says his goodbyes to Ferdinand and the Duchess. Ferdinand asks Silvio to commend them to "all our noble friends at the leaguer" (military camp). The Duchess offers to transport Silvio in her coaches. Everyone exits except Ferdinand and the Cardinal.

The Cardinal tells Ferdinand to make use of Bosola now that he's going to be part of the Duchess's household. Ferdinand says Antonio would have been a better choice, but the Cardinal tells Ferdinand that Antonio is too honest for the role Ferdinand has in mind. The Cardinal exits; Bosola reenters, telling Ferdinand he was summoned there. The men have an exchange about how the Cardinal has treated Bosola. Ferdinand gives Bosola gold; Bosola assumes he must kill someone to earn it. Ferdinand says he might in the future, but for now he must live in the palace and spy on the Duchess. The Duchess is a young widow, and Ferdinand wants to know who her suitors are because he does not want her to remarry. Bosola reluctantly accepts the task of being Ferdinand's spy, believing he is indebted to Ferdinand because Ferdinand procured the provisorship of the horse for him.

## **Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis**

This scene introduces most of the characters in the play. The setting is the Duchess's presence-chamber, or royal receiving room, but the Duchess herself is an "absent presence" for the first scene. The Duchess' absence here presages her powerlessness that will follow for the rest of the play. However, the fact that it is her palace and her presence-chamber (and "her" play, since it is named after her) also underscores her centrality to the action.

Antonio's importance is immediately indicated by the fact that he appears on the first page and has the most to say. Delio, his honest and loyal friend, serves to explain how Antonio stands apart from the other courtiers (he has been in France, acquiring grand ideas about how noblemen should behave) and to elicit Antonio's opinion of the other main characters. An expository device like this is less artificial than a formal narration by an otherwise uninvolved character would be, and it also gives the audience/reader a chance to like Antonio for his honesty and goodness. The relationship between Antonio and Delio is reminiscent of that between Hamlet and his faithful friend Horatio in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. One large difference is that Antonio does not struggle with conscience and reluctance to act as Hamlet does (of course, Antonio doesn't have his father's ghost urging him to take revenge by committing murder!).

With Antonio's introduction in mind, the audience is immediately ready to distrust and dislike Bosola upon his entrance. It soon becomes clear that the Cardinal has instigated whatever crimes Bosola has committed, and that he has reneged on whatever promise of reward he has made Bosola. The old saying, "There is no honor among thieves," springs to mind as the initial exchange between the long-suffering Bosola and the long-exploiting Cardinal plays out. Antonio again presages the action when he tells Delio that Bosola is actually a good man, but that being denied recompense for the shady favors he has done the Cardinal will poison his remaining goodness and breed further unhappiness in his heart.

Ferdinand's entrance shows him to be a man interested in sport and action, and also someone who leaps from subject to subject as it suits him. Ferdinand banters jocularly with all the men at court, but he controls the conversation and immediately chides his underlings if their behavior does not match his expectations. The man is impressed by Antonio's response to his question about horsemanship, as he knows it shows that Antonio is an honorable and noble man despite his lowborn status. Ferdinand thinks Antonio would have made a better choice than Bosola as a spy in the Duchess's household, but the Cardinal correctly surmises that Antonio is too honest and would not have accepted the offer (indeed, if Ferdinand had made such an offer to Antonio rather than Bosola, this would be a very different play). The Duchess reveals her complete ignorance of her brothers' true natures when she grants Bosola the provisorship of the horse upon nothing but Ferdinand's recommendation.

Antonio continues his function as unwitting forecaster of plot twists to come when he goes on at length to Delio about how wonderful the Duchess is. Bosola also participates in the foreshadowing when he accepts Ferdinand's offer and says it seems the duke is making him one of his "familiar"; later (in Act 5, Scene 4), when Bosola suddenly kills Antonio, it seems he has indeed acted entirely apart from his own will. Here in the beginning, it seems Bosola is simply out to improve his lot in life.

## **Act 1, Scene 2 Summary**

Ferdinand, the Duchess, the Cardinal, and Cariola enter a gallery in the palace. The brothers

tell the Duchess they are leaving and that she must use her own discretion about suitors. The men tell her she should not marry again and she assures them she will not. The brothers warn her against marrying secretly. The Cardinal exits. The Duchess tells Ferdinand she believes their warnings were rehearsed. Ferdinand shows her a dagger and issues a veiled threat. Then he makes a final admonition that the Duchess understands as a lewd warning against giving in to sexual desire, but he says he is merely talking about the lure of smooth-talking men.

After Ferdinand exits, the Duchess declares that her brothers' threats will not prevent her from the marriage she has planned. Cariola pledges her secrecy and devotion. The Duchess asks Cariola to hide behind the curtain when Antonio comes in.

When Antonio enters, the Duchess tells him to get pen and ink, as she is going to dictate her will to him. It soon becomes clear she is proposing to Antonio. The Duchess says it is a misery of the highborn that they must woo because no one will woo them. The woman then declares her love for Antonio, and though he declares himself unworthy of her, he pledges his devotion to her. Cariola comes out from behind the arras and serves as witness to their declared marriage. Antonio asks the Duchess what her brothers will do; she assures him that in time the storm will blow over. The Duchess and Antonio exit; Cariola declares that the Duchess is a great woman but that she pities her.

### **Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis**

The brothers' rehearsed lecture to their sister about not marrying or being carried away by silver-tongued suitors indicates that they do not trust her. There is no indication how long she has been a widow, but perhaps she has recently put off her mourning attire and seemed too happy for her brothers' comfort. The sexual innuendo of the duke's admonition about the "part which, like the lamprey, / Hath never a bone in 't," shows what low esteem he holds his sister in, as no decent man of 1504 would talk to his noble sister so suggestively. The fact that she takes it as a sexual innuendo, rather than as the "sweet talking" comment Ferdinand says he meant, reveals a hint of her secret intention to marry.

Antonio's astonishment at the Duchess's declaration of love and proposal of marriage is genuine; he has lived a virtuous life and never expected such a great reward. When he asks what her brothers will think, the Duchess assures him, essentially, that time heals all wounds, and if they should discover the marriage, they will get over it. Antonio accepts this, saying he should have been the one to offer bravery in the face of their opposition. The happiness of the loving couple is overshadowed by Cariola's comment about pitying the Duchess for what is either great spirit or great folly; in this instance, Cariola serves as the forecaster of impending doom.

### **Act 2, Scene 1 Summary**

This scene takes place in a room in the Duchess's palace. Bosola and Castruchio enter, bantering about Castruchio's ambition to be a great courtier. Bosola is exercising his usual melancholic/choleric manner, talking nonsensically, and Castruchio is playing along. An old lady enters, and Bosola engages her in an insulting banter about her appearance. After a long speech about the diseased and transitory nature of life, Bosola tells Castruchio his wife has gone to Rome, and tells Castruchio and the old lady to go to the wells at Lucca; he has work to do. Castruchio and the old lady exit. Bosola says he suspects the Duchess is pregnant and he hatches a plot to disclose her pregnancy with the first apricots of the spring.

Antonio and Delio enter, talking together aside. Antonio discloses his secret marriage with the Duchess to Delio, who is amazed. Antonio swears him to secrecy.

Antonio tells Bosola to stop pretending to be melancholy; he deduces that Bosola is acting melancholy so as not to appear big-headed about his position in the palace. Bosola declares he wants simply to be honest. The man says the same evil passions motivate all people, highborn as well as poor.

The Duchess and her ladies enter. The Duchess takes Antonio's arm, saying she is growing fat and is short of breath. The Duchess tells Bosola to provide her with a litter, such as the one the Duchess of Florence rode in. Bosola says the Duchess of Florence rode in it when she was pregnant; the Duchess agrees, then bursts out impatiently that she is troubled "with the mother" (footnote indicates this means "hysteria"). Bosola plays on the phrase in an aside. The Duchess changes the subject, beginning a conversation with Antonio about how the French wear hats in court. Bosola gives the Duchess the apricots and she eats them with great relish; in asides, Bosola declares that his trick has worked—he has proven she is pregnant. Suddenly the Duchess feels unwell and must hasten to her chamber. As she and her ladies exit, she tells Antonio she fears she is undone. Bosola exits on the other side of the stage.

Antonio tells Delio he is afraid the Duchess has gone into labor before the time he has arranged to spirit her away somewhere. Delio advises him to use the apricots as an excuse for the Duchess's indisposed condition; he tells Antonio to make it known that the apricots were poisoned.

### **Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis**

Presumably, about nine months have passed since the secret marriage. Bosola is ensconced in his provisorship of the horse and continues his antagonistic ways, as illustrated by his exchange with the old lady and Castruchio. Antonio's interpretation of Bosola's ill humor is, unfortunately for Antonio and the Duchess in scenes to come, short of the mark; he believes Bosola's bluster is all an elaborate cover so that people will not think he is feeling superior about his position in the Duchess's household. Antonio does not know about (or yet guess at) Bosola's appointment as household spy by Ferdinand, and so he misses the truth in Bosola's comments about common passions motivating high and low alike.

Bosola's "trick" with the apricots is far-fetched if we are to believe eating them actually causes the Duchess to go into labor (after all, she is already short of breath, and therefore, we assume, very close to the end of her pregnancy). A more sensible reading is that she happens to go into labor after eating the fruit, and everyone accepts the superstitious conclusion about the cause. It is the early 1500s, after all, and much about pregnancy and childbirth is not understood (even in the early 1600s, when the play was written, such things were still largely mysterious). Indeed, even when the quick-thinking Delio helps Antonio devise a plausible cover-up for the Duchess's withdrawal to her chamber to give birth, Antonio can only respond that he is "lost in amazement."

### **Act 2, Scene 2 Summary**

In a hall in the palace, Bosola enters, gloating about his confirmed knowledge of the Duchess's pregnancy. An old lady enters and tells him she is in a hurry. Bosola engages her in more of his caustic banter, making it clear that he knows about the pregnancy. The old lady exits.

Antonio, Delio, Roderigo, and Grisolan enter. Antonio orders all the court gates shut and all officers of the court called. Grisolan goes to do these things, returning quickly with servants. In an aside,

Bosola worries that the apricots were poisoned without his knowledge. Two servants joke together about a “French plot” and make crude jokes about a Swiss man being caught in the Duchess’s chamber. Antonio tells the officers that jewels worth four thousand ducats have been stolen from the Duchess’s cabinet; all officers are to be locked in their rooms until sunrise. Bosola challenges one of the servants who had been talking about the “Switzer,” and the servant declares that the story had been believably reported by one of the blackguards (lowly servants). Everyone exits except Antonio and Delio. Antonio sends Delio ahead to Rome, entrusting him with his life and secrets. Delio pledges his loyalty and wishes Antonio joyous fatherhood. Delio exits. Cariola enters and tells Antonio he has a son.

### **Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis**

Paranoia is running high, with the servants hearing rumors from servants about a Swiss man caught red-handed in the Duchess’s quarters. The reference to a “French plot” hints that Antonio’s secret marriage to the Duchess may be known-but Bosola dismisses the rumor as soon as Antonio orders the lockdown, so it is apparent the rumor is not very strong if it has not reached the ears of a diligent household spy; and apparently the “French connection” with Antonio (who had spent lots of time at the French court before the play began) does not occur to Bosola. After all but Delio and Antonio exit, Delio sensibly assures Antonio that his fears are nothing but superstition, and not anything to truly worry about. Cariola’s announcement of Antonio’s new son seems to echo Delio’s reassurances.

### **Act 2, Scene 3 Summary**

In the courtyard of the Duchess’s palace, Bosola enters, declaring that he was sure he heard a shriek from the Duchess’s rooms. Bosola suspects that everyone has been confined to their lodgings to keep them from discovering the Duchess is giving birth.

Antonio enters with a candle and a drawn sword. Bosola declares himself Antonio’s friend; Antonio, in an aside, calls Bosola a mole. Bosola says it is cold but Antonio is sweating and looking wild. Antonio says he has been working out which jewels were taken. Bosola asks what he has discovered, and Antonio says a better question is why Bosola is out and about when all have been ordered to stay in their quarters. Bosola claims he has come to the courtyard to pray. Antonio tells Bosola to pray that the apricots he gave the Duchess were not poisoned; Bosola takes great offense. Antonio tells Bosola he is the chief suspect in the jewel theft. Bosola says if he is ruined he may take Antonio down with him. Antonio suddenly has a nosebleed; in an aside, he says that a superstitious person would take it as an omen and he tells Bosola he may not pass the door to the Duchess’s lodgings. On his way out, he drops something.

Bosola finds the paper Antonio dropped; it is the baby’s nativity (including a sort of fortune-telling narrative foretelling a short life and violent death). Bosola says he understands now that Antonio is the Duchess’s bawd, and that the Duchess’s confinement will be blamed on Bosola’s allegedly poisoned apricots. Wishing he knew who the father of the baby was, he determines to send a letter to the Duchess’s brothers via Castruchio.

### **Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis**

This scene establishes Antonio’s mistrust of Bosola. Antonio’s nosebleed recalls Delio’s assurances about taking such occurrences as omens; indeed, Antonio must talk himself out of believing it means anything. However, in a clever bit of foreshadowing, the blood from the nosebleed makes illegible “Two letters, that are wrought here for my name,” presumably on the document Antonio carries

that describes his son's birth and astrological forecast. When Bosola finds this paper which Antonio carelessly drops (a difficult plot contrivance to believe, given Antonio's now clear suspicion of Bosola), he interprets it to mean that Antonio is the Duchess's bawd-that is, the facilitator of her illicit relationship with the baby's father. It does not occur to Bosola that Antonio's agitation strongly suggests much more than merely faithful service to the Duchess and her unknown paramour. Bosola is still blinded by his own determination to make something of himself by spying for Ferdinand, and the news of the Duchess's newborn and apparently bastard son is enough of a plum for him to report.

#### **Act 2, Scene 4 Summary**

The Cardinal and Julia are in a room in the Cardinal's palace in Rome. Julia has come to Rome without her husband, telling him she was visiting to make religious devotion. Julia and the Cardinal are discussing their ongoing affair. A servant comes to tell Julia there is a messenger from Malfi to see her. The Cardinal exits; Delio enters. Delio tells Julia (who in an aside identifies Delio as one of her old suitors) that her husband Castruchio has hurried to Rome and he offers Julia money to become his mistress. Meanwhile, the servant reenters to announce that Castruchio has delivered a letter to Ferdinand that has made him angry. Julia exits. Delio declares that he fears Antonio has been betrayed.

#### **Act 2, Scene 4 Analysis**

The conversation between the Cardinal and Julia reveals that they are lovers, but she wants assurances of his love and he insists that the pleasure and escape from her dreary husband that he has provided should be enough. The Cardinal seems to enjoy toying with her emotions.

Delio's offer to Julia of gold to become his mistress seems quite out of character for someone who otherwise proves to be true and noble-minded. The inclusion of this brief interlude can be read as an attempt to make Delio more believable, as no one is perfect. Presumably, Julia is attractive, or the power- and status-hungry Cardinal would not have wanted her; conceivably, Delio is also drawn to her simply because she is attractive. The scene may also be read simply as a means to get Delio in the room, where he can overhear the servant's announcement about the letter that has upset Ferdinand so much.

#### **Act 2, Scene 5 Summary**

In another room in the Cardinal's palace, the Cardinal and Ferdinand enter, discussing the letter Ferdinand has received. Ferdinand is furious; he declares he will kill the Duchess and her lover and their child. Ferdinand rages and rants while the Cardinal attempts to calm him down. Finally, Ferdinand declares that he will do nothing until he knows who the father of the Duchess's child is.

#### **Act 2, Scene 5 Analysis**

Here we see the first hints of Ferdinand's coming madness. Ferdinand lets his anger get away from him and grow into rage, while the Cardinal continually counsels him to get control of himself. The contrast between the brothers is well illustrated here: Ferdinand is ready to fly into a murderous frenzy as he wildly imagines the Duchess having relations with some of the lowliest servants; the Cardinal is all chilling self-control, biding his time and storing up his anger for future action after careful consideration. Finally, Ferdinand agrees to do nothing until he knows who the Duchess's lover is-but he is still fixed on bloody revenge.

Having so adamantly warned their sister against remarrying, either openly or in secret, it should

come as no surprise to them that she would (apparently) take a lover. In refusing to allow her the possibility of marrying, they have left her no choice but to act illicitly. This does not occur to them; all they see is that she has disobeyed and shamed them-a terrible crime for a woman in this era.

### **Act 3, Scene 1 Summary**

In a room in the Duchess's palace, Antonio greets Delio after Delio has been away for several years. Antonio tells Delio that since he last saw the Duchess, she has had a daughter and another son. Delio asks what the Duchess's brothers think of her having more children. Antonio tells him that Ferdinand seems to be storing up his anger as if in hibernation. Meanwhile, the common people are saying the Duchess is a strumpet, while the nobility are noticing that Antonio is gaining wealth. Antonio says they would never dream of the real reason-that he is married to and loves the Duchess-and assume that he is somehow cheating the Duchess out of her holdings.

Ferdinand enters on his way to bed and he tells the Duchess she is to marry Count Malateste; she tells Ferdinand that when she chooses a husband, she will choose a man more worthy of Ferdinand's honor than the Count. The Duchess tells Ferdinand she needs to talk with him privately about a rumor being spread about her. Ferdinand tells her not to believe it, and that he will not believe it: "Go, be safe in your own innocence." The Duchess is relieved, thinking the air has been cleared. The Duchess, Antonio, and Delio exit. Bosola reports to Ferdinand what he has learned through spying - that the Duchess is reputed to have had three children, but no one knows who the father is. Bosola gives Ferdinand the key he has stolen to the Duchess's room. Ferdinand vows to force a confession from the Duchess that night.

### **Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis**

Delio has apparently been serving Ferdinand in Ferdinand's palace, and has returned to the Duchess's court now that Ferdinand has returned. However, his ignorance of Ferdinand's behavior and apparent opinion of the Duchess seems to indicate that he has not worked closely with Ferdinand. (This is quite possible; a duke such as Ferdinand would have had dozens, if not hundreds, of courtiers, most of whom he would not have known nor had much contact with.) Antonio, serving the Duchess closely even before he became her secret husband, would have more direct contact with the royals and would therefore have more insight into their behavior, so he is able to provide Delio with a report.

Ferdinand's behavior is, again, rather bizarre. After drifting into the room in a sleepy daze, he seems to give the Duchess a sort of moral blanket immunity, telling her to rest secure in her innocence (this can be read as sarcasm, of course). As soon as she is out of the room, he comments on her guilt and demands a spy report from Bosola. Bosola's opinion that the Duchess has been bewitched strikes Ferdinand as ridiculous; he angrily insists that free will alone accounts for the Duchess's immoral behavior. Ferdinand's hibernating anger is clearly waking up, as he thanks Bosola for both his obnoxiousness and his service, and hints that he is going to do something drastic with the key Bosola has procured for him.

### **Act 3, Scene 2 Summary**

The Duchess, Antonio, and Cariola enter the Duchess's bedchamber. The group banters about love and marriage, and the Duchess tells Antonio he cannot spend the night with her tonight. Antonio teases Cariola about wanting never to marry. The Duchess's mood shifts, and Antonio and Cariola leave the room. The Duchess talks to herself about her fear stemming from Ferdinand's presence at court,



which Antonio scoffs at. While she is talking, Ferdinand sneaks into the room, leaps out at her, and gives her a dagger. Ferdinand tells her she is hideous and shameful; she pleads with him that she is married and asks whether he would like to meet her husband. Ferdinand tells her he had intended to discover the man's identity, but he has changed his mind. Then he addresses the Duchess's husband, saying that he assumes the man is listening, and tells him he must never reveal his identity. Ferdinand tells the Duchess she must conceal her husband; lock him in a cell, if she wishes to keep him alive. The Duchess protests that Ferdinand is overreacting, because her reputation is safe. However, he tells her she has abandoned reputation, and declares that he will never see her again and he leaves.

Antonio and Cariola reenter, Antonio with a pistol. Antonio accuses Cariola of betraying them, but Cariola protests her innocence. Antonio wishes Ferdinand would return so that he could declare his love for the Duchess. The Duchess shows him the dagger Ferdinand left for her, and they both surmise that he intended her to kill herself with it. Suddenly Bosola knocks on the door, and as Antonio exits, the Duchess tells Antonio she has already arranged for his getaway. Bosola enters and tells the Duchess that Ferdinand has suddenly left for Rome, telling Bosola as he left that the Duchess was "undone." The Duchess tells Bosola that Antonio has dealt falsely with the household accounts; she orders Bosola to call up the officers.

Bosola exits to get the officers. Antonio reenters and the Duchess quickly tells him of her plan to accuse him of a crime to cover up his escape. Bosola reenters with the officers. The Duchess and Antonio enact their accuser/accused "scene" for the officers and Antonio exits after the Duchess declares that she is confiscating all he has to satisfy the household accounts he has allegedly neglected to the point of great loss. The Duchess then asks the officers what they think of Antonio, and they respond with various insulting comments. The Duchess dismisses the officers and asks Bosola what he thinks of the officers' characterization of Antonio. Bosola responds that they have been entirely unjust, and that Antonio is a great and virtuous man, despite being lowborn. The Duchess is delighted to hear Bosola's high praise of Antonio, and confides to Bosola that Antonio is her husband and the father of her three children. Bosola swears confidentiality and loyalty to her and Antonio, and she entrusts him with her money and tells him to follow Antonio to the secret rendezvous in Ancona, where she will soon reunite with Antonio. Bosola agrees, but suggests the Duchess pretend to leave on a pilgrimage to a shrine near Ancona, to lend more believability to her departure. The Duchess agrees, dismissing Cariola's protestation about using religion falsely as mere superstition. The Duchess and Cariola leave. Bosola remains, declaring that he must reveal everything to Ferdinand, and that his service as a spy will surely elevate his station in life.

### **Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis**

The confrontation between the Duchess and Ferdinand is all about semantics. The Duchess believes she has not soiled her reputation because she and Antonio are married; Ferdinand believes her reputation is ruined because no one knows she is married. To the Duchess, the truth (however hidden) is what matters; to Ferdinand, perception (no matter how far off the mark) is all that counts. For this time period, Ferdinand's interpretation is actually the more accurate; and indeed, the Duchess is staking her reputation on a marriage undertaken secretly, without the blessing of the very powerful Church, legal only by virtue of the presence of one witness (Cariola-whose station in life lessens her worth as a witness, regardless of the fact that she is one of the most truthful and reliable people in the play). The Duchess is staking her reputation on technicalities, while Ferdinand is insisting on both propriety and the blatant appearance of propriety. In giving her the dagger, he is telling her to do the right thing-to

kill herself out of remorse (or at least the appearance of remorse) for her sins and thus salvage her reputation. Of course, what Ferdinand is really interested in is salvaging his own reputation; it is disgraceful for him and his brother the Cardinal to have a “strumpet” for a sister.

This scene is a turning point in the play. The Duchess again chooses deception rather than honest defense of her choices. The Duchess believes it is unfair that she “must” engage in lies and deceptions, but she does not even consider any other course of action. The woman is indeed the Duchess of Malfi-the name conjures “malfeasance” as well as the Latin *mala fides*, “bad faith”-though she is sympathetic to our modern sensibilities.

The layers of paranoia and mistrust continue to build. In addition to the Duchess’s inability to see any alternative but dissembling, Bosola immediately suspects the Duchess’s claim that Antonio has dealt falsely with the accounts, and Antonio momentarily suspects Cariola of betraying him and the Duchess. Bosola is smart enough to fool the Duchess into believing he supports Antonio, thus using her own deception against her and gaining her confession that Antonio is her husband and the father of her children. Bosola also suggests yet another layer of deception-that of pretending a pilgrimage to Loretto-which the Duchess immediately agrees to. Cariola’s warning against using religion as a ruse quietly sounds the bell of foreshadowing again; and with Bosola’s parting soliloquy, we know no good will come of the Duchess’s numerous bad choices.

### **Act 3, Scene 3 Summary**

The Cardinal, Ferdinand, Malateste, Pescara, Silvio, and Delio are in a room in the Cardinal’s palace at Rome. The Cardinal and Malateste are discussing a minor military plot. Meanwhile, Delio and Silvio are telling Ferdinand that Malateste is not a genuine soldier, but merely a foppish lord playing at being a soldier. As they are making jests about Malateste, Bosola enters and speaks to Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Silvio, Delio, and Pescara comment on the anger and violence that are apparent in Ferdinand’s and the Cardinal’s faces as Bosola speaks to them. Ferdinand declares that the Duchess’s false pilgrimage damns her. The Cardinal says he will ask Ancona to banish the Duchess, Antonio, and their children. Ferdinand tells Bosola to write to the Duchess’s son from her first marriage, the young Duke of Malfi, and to gather 150 horsemen.

### **Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis**

It is interesting that in this scene, Delio is clearly working quite close to Ferdinand. Delio and Silvio together pick apart Malateste’s character for Ferdinand’s benefit (and possibly amusement). Delio also provides a short character summary on Bosola for Silvio and Pescara-though his assessment is limited to the sort of dismissive opinion Antonio held about Bosola early on. Silvio, Delio, and Pescara share unflattering thoughts about the Duchess’s two brothers-but with an air of respectful remove that shows they know their places in the hierarchy. However, just because they serve Ferdinand does not mean they must admire and emulate him.

Bosola, in appearing and sharing the whole of his newly-gained intelligence with the Cardinal and Ferdinand, has made his first irreversible and fateful choice for evil. Like the Duchess, he does not consider any alternative actions, but immediately shares the damning information with the evil and powerful brothers he continues to hope will reward him for his dark and faithful service. For their parts, the Cardinal and Ferdinand continue to differ in their approach to the embarrassing problem of their sister. The Cardinal says he will work to have the Duchess, Antonio, and their children banished;

Ferdinand essentially declares war on them, ordering Bosola to gather an army.

### **Act 3, Scene 4 Summary**

At the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto, two pilgrims are talking about the upcoming ceremony in which the Cardinal will resign his position to become a soldier. Without dialogue, the Cardinal's ceremony is enacted, followed by an enactment of the banishment, by the Cardinal and the state of Ancona, of Antonio, the Duchess, and their children. During these unspoken enactments, churchmen sing a solemn song. After all but the two pilgrims exit, the pilgrims discuss the ceremony and the banishment. The pilgrims voice surprise that the Duchess would have married such a lowly man, but declare that the Cardinal's cruelty was out of proportion. The men also report that the Cardinal has convinced the Pope to confiscate all of the Duchess's property and they lament Antonio's great misfortune.

### **Act 3, Scene 4 Analysis**

Here the two pilgrims and various churchmen serve as a sort of Greek chorus, commenting as impartial outsiders on the mounting action of the play. The men do not comment on the Cardinal's abandonment of his powerful church post in favor of a soldier's position (which is very strange, as he would have enormous power as a cardinal), except to sing solemn wishes of victory and protection. The pilgrims observe the strangeness of the Duchess's choice of Antonio for a husband-and indeed, it would have been widely known as scandalous for the Duchess to marry so far "beneath" her position-but counter that with an observation of the Cardinal's severe overreaction in having the Duchess and her family banished from Ancona. The final word from the pilgrims intones Antonio's impending doom.

### **Act 3, Scene 5 Summary**

Near Loretto, we see the Duchess, Antonio, their children, Cariola, and some servants. The Duchess and Antonio talk about how few servants they have left-most have fled now that the Duchess and Antonio and their children have been banished from Ancona and stripped of property. The Duchess tells Antonio about a dream she had in which the diamonds on her crown were suddenly changed to pearls; he interprets this to mean she will soon weep.

Bosola enters with a letter from Ferdinand, declaring that Ferdinand sends his love. The Duchess reads parts of the letter aloud, showing that Ferdinand has couched threats against Antonio while supposedly innocently summoning him to court. The Duchess declares her complete mistrust of Ferdinand; Antonio says he will not obey the summons. Bosola declares that Antonio's refusal to go to Ferdinand out of fear for his life reflects his low breeding. Bosola leaves. The Duchess tells Antonio to flee with their oldest son, fearing an ambush is planned against them all. Antonio and the Duchess exchange a wrenching farewell as he departs with the oldest boy. Cariola sees a troop of soldiers coming toward them.

Bosola reenters wearing a mask and accompanied by a guard. Bosola tells the Duchess that her brothers offer pity and safety, which she does not believe. Bosola tells the Duchess to forget lowborn Antonio, and she defends Antonio's virtue. The Duchess asserts her bravery in the face of oppression, and all exit for her palace, where her brothers summon her.

### **Act 3, Scene 5 Analysis**

Bosola walks a fine line in this scene. Antonio has previously mistrusted him, yet the Duchess

has entrusted Bosola with her secrets and apparently still believes he is protecting them. Bosola has brought a letter from Ferdinand, but it has somehow escaped the Duchess's notice that Bosola is the likeliest suspect for the betrayal of her confidences. After she sends Antonio and the oldest boy away to Milan, Bosola returns with a guard to force the Duchess to return to her palace, which will serve as a prison. Bosola reveals his true allegiance at this time, turning his previous arguments in favor of Antonio's birth-defying merit into more conventional statements of Antonio's worthlessness because of his low birth. Finally, the Duchess sees Bosola's true colors, vowing that she would beat the two-faced Bosola if she were a man. Now that all her deceptions have failed, the Duchess has no choice but to bear up as bravely as possible as she is compelled to submit to her brothers' control.

#### **Act 4, Scene 1 Summary**

Ferdinand and Bosola enter a room in the Duchess's palace at Malfi. Ferdinand is receiving Bosola's report on how nobly the Duchess is bearing her imprisonment. Ferdinand dismisses Bosola, and then exits. The Duchess enters, and Bosola tells her Ferdinand must speak to her in the dark so as not to break his vow never to see her again. Ferdinand reenters in the dark and professes an offering of peace. Ferdinand gives her a dead man's hand, which the Duchess understands to be his own; she comments on how cold his hand is. Then she demands lights and discovers he has given her a severed hand. Ferdinand exits. A curtain is drawn to reveal the waxen figures of Antonio and the children, as if they are dead. Bosola counsels her to stop grieving now that they are dead and irrecoverable. The Duchess declares that she wishes she were dead. Bosola tells her she must live, and she tells him that would be the greatest torture. The Duchess declares that she will go curse rather than pray and she exits with a servant. Ferdinand returns and gloats about the emotional torture he is putting the Duchess through. Bosola asks him to stop and to take pity on his sister. Ferdinand vows to bring all the madmen from the local hospital to torture the Duchess with their raving outside her room. Bosola demands that Ferdinand not send him to the Duchess again unless on a mission of true comfort. Ferdinand tells Bosola he will soon send him to Milan, where Antonio is.

#### **Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis**

Some time seems to have passed since the Duchess was forced to return to Malfi, where she is essentially being held prisoner by Ferdinand. Bosola has begun his slow transformation to a man with a conscience, telling Ferdinand that the Duchess is being brave and strong and noble. Ferdinand still has a loose grip on sanity, but the dead hand incident-along with the wax figures showing the supposedly dead Antonio and children-illustrates his extreme cruelty. The Duchess, believing all her beloved ones dead, wishes she herself were dead, and she curses her brothers for their long, drawn-out cruelty in place of quick and decisive murder.

Bosola's transformation continues when he pleads with Ferdinand to stop torturing the Duchess. Bosola refuses to go to the Duchess again as himself, knowing that he has lost all her trust and respect-things he now values as he never did before. Ferdinand dismisses Bosola's newfound pity for the Duchess and moves right along to his nefarious plans for Antonio, in which he will entangle Bosola. The audience begins to see that this entanglement will be at least partly against Bosola's will.

#### **Act 4, Scene 2 Summary**

The Duchess and Cariola are discussing the noise of the madmen sent by Ferdinand. The Duchess tells Cariola that the madmen are actually helping to keep her sane. A servant enters and tells

the Duchess that Ferdinand intends the madmen to cure her melancholy. The Duchess tells the servant to bring in the madmen and they come in and sing a song about dying for love. Then several madmen have a crazy conversation amongst themselves. After that, eight madmen do a dance. Then Bosola, disguised as an old man, enters. The servant and the madmen exit. Bosola tells the Duchess he has come to make her tomb. The two of them banter about death and tombs, and then executioners enter with a coffin, cords, and a bell. Bosola tells the Duchess the coffin is a present from her brothers. Cariola is dismayed, but the Duchess is calm and she asks Cariola to take care of her children. The executioners force Cariola to leave. The Duchess tells Bosola to tell her brothers that death is the best gift they can give her now and the executioners strangle her. Bosola orders them to find Cariola and to strangle the children. Some of the executioners leave and then return with Cariola, who fights with Bosola and the executioners before being strangled. The executioners carry away Cariola's body, leaving Bosola with the strangled Duchess.

Ferdinand comes in and Bosola shows him the strangled Duchess and children (the latter, as stage directions indicate, probably behind a curtain that Bosola draws open). Ferdinand reveals that he and the Duchess were twins. Ferdinand asks Bosola why Bosola did not pity her and whisk her away to sanctuary. Bosola protests that he was following Ferdinand's orders in killing the Duchess and her children. Ferdinand tells him he should have disobeyed such a crazy order, and confesses that his main motive was gaining the Duchess's property for himself. Ferdinand tells Bosola he hates him for doing so much evil so well. Bosola reminds Ferdinand of his promised reward to Bosola, but Ferdinand refuses to acknowledge his own culpability in the murder and insists he will destroy Bosola. Bosola says he is angry with himself, now that he fully understands what awful things he has done in striving to be a true servant rather than an honest man. Ferdinand leaves suddenly, leaving Bosola with the Duchess. Suddenly she stirs, and Bosola pleads with her to live and so retrieve him from the hell he has made for himself. The Duchess regains consciousness long enough for him to tell her Antonio and the children are alive, and that Antonio is reconciled with her brothers through the Pope's action, but she dies. Bosola repents and declares that he will fulfill the Duchess's last wish of having her body entrusted to some good women for burial.

#### **Act 4, Scene 2 Analysis**

Although we saw Bosola make tentative steps toward behaving as if he had a conscience in the last scene, here he again has thrown his fate into the brothers' powers-a risky wager, given their cruelty and obvious penchant for betraying or using anyone and everyone if it suits their purposes.

The madmen serve as a distraction from the heavy action of the play-rather like Hamlet in the gravediggers' scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the Duchess takes the opportunity to muse on her situation and enjoy some rather prescient gallows humor. Ironically, the madmen lift her spirits somewhat, reassuring her that she is not yet mad herself and giving her a bit of extra gumption with which to face Bosola when he returns, now disguised as an old man. The madmen have also served to put the Duchess off her guard somewhat, so that when the "old man" appears, she assumes he is another intended annoyance from Ferdinand. Their conversation about her impending death and burial is almost light at times, full of witty banter. When the executioners enter, the Duchess realizes the disguised Bosola is in earnest, but she has already embraced her own coming death and shows no fear-only concern for her children (a bit inconsistent, since she clearly believed them dead when Ferdinand showed her the wax figures). While the Duchess has given up the possibility of fighting for her life, Cariola still rebels with spirit, refusing to submit peaceably to being murdered.

Ferdinand comes on the scene again with his twisted logic. Although he is mad in the sense that his actions are beyond the pale for cruelty, he is clearly still capable of self-preserving scheming as he refuses to acknowledge Bosola's faithful service as his instrument of murder and torture, leaving Bosola with the sudden understanding that he has been left to twist in the wind. Bosola's conscience finally fully wakes up as he realizes that being a faithful servant to evil brings only more evil as its reward. In the Duchess's last moment of life, Bosola gives her the gift of knowing her loved ones are alive. Bosola also tells her Antonio and her brothers are reconciled through the Pope's action, but we will see in the next scene that this is not really true; if Bosola knows the reconciliation is false, his statement may be merely an attempt to give a wronged woman some comfort as she dies. Bosola's promise to give her body into the care of some good women is further evidence that he is finally figuring out how to be honorable rather than merely seek the appearance of honorability.

### **Act 5, Scene 1 Summary**

Antonio and Delio are in a public place in Milan, discussing whether Ferdinand and the Cardinal's proffered reconciliation with Antonio is genuine. Delio doubts it, since Pescara has reportedly been seizing some of Antonio's lands. As Pescara approaches, Delio tells Antonio he will determine whether this is true by asking Pescara for some of Antonio's former property. Antonio hides while Delio talks with Pescara, but before he can determine whether Antonio is safe, they are interrupted by Julia. Julia gives Pescara a letter from the Cardinal that requests that Pescara give her the same piece of land Delio has just asked for. Pescara grants the request, and Julia leaves. Delio protests to Pescara, who explains that because the land was essentially stolen from Antonio by the Cardinal, it would have been wrong to give it to Delio, who is his friend; but the Cardinal's mistress is welcome to such tainted property. Pescara then exits, saying he must visit Ferdinand, who is sick. Antonio vows to sneak into the Cardinal's room that night and try to frighten him into reconciling-or die in the attempt. Delio again vows loyalty to Antonio.

### **Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis**

It is rather remarkable that Delio is still serving as Antonio's loyal friend and protector-actually, as his spy, as he counsels Antonio based on intelligence against the powerful brothers he works for-but someone truly honest must remain after all the bloodshed to resurrect the fallen royal house. Julia reprises her role as the Cardinal's strumpet, reminding us of the double standard the brothers imposed on their sister. The Cardinal, a man of the Church, has a mistress, but the Duchess is not even allowed to marry. Antonio's decision to sneak into the Cardinal's room and try to frighten him into reconciliation seals his doom; for we know, as he does not, that the Duchess and the two youngest children are dead.

### **Act 5, Scene 2 Summary**

In the Cardinal's palace, Pescara and a doctor are discussing Ferdinand, who the doctor says is suffering from the belief that he is a werewolf; Ferdinand has been found roaming the streets with dead body parts he has dug up out of graves. The doctor says Ferdinand is doing better after his treatment, but that he may relapse.

Ferdinand, the Cardinal, Malatesta, and Bosola enter. Ferdinand demands to be left alone, then attacks his own shadow and talks nonsense. The doctor attempts to scare Ferdinand out of his crazy behavior, but Ferdinand rants and runs off. Pescara asks the Cardinal whether he knows why his brother has gone insane. The Cardinal admits in an aside that he must lie; he tells them a tale about Ferdinand seeing a ghost that reputedly appears only when someone in their family dies, and that the

apparition has scared him out of his wits. Bosola tells the Cardinal he must speak with him. All the others exit, with Pescara voicing their get-well wishes for Ferdinand as they go.

In an aside, the Cardinal says he must not let on to Bosola that he was behind the order to kill the Duchess, wanting all the blame to appear to be Ferdinand's. The Cardinal asks Bosola how the Duchess is doing. The Cardinal outwardly takes Bosola's wild-eyed response to be a result of Ferdinand's madness, as Ferdinand has been Bosola's master. The Cardinal promises to reward Bosola if he does one thing for him. Bosola promises to do whatever it is.

The men are interrupted by Julia, who enters and asks the Cardinal to come in to supper. In an aside, she admires Bosola. The Cardinal dismisses her. Immediately he tells Bosola to kill Antonio, who is somewhere in Milan. The Cardinal says while Antonio lives, his sister cannot marry, and he has found a match for her. Bosola promises to do the deed. The Cardinal leaves. Bosola remarks that the Cardinal's apparent ignorance of the Duchess's murder is evidence of his scheming, but determines that he must follow the Cardinal's example.

Julia reenters, carrying a pistol and she demands that Bosola tell her how he managed to poison her with love potion, and declares her love for him that has brought her so much pain, with the only solution being death. Julia is determined to woo Bosola, and Bosola decides to use her to his advantage. Bosola asks her to determine the cause of the Cardinal's recent melancholy. Julia immediately agrees and sends him out so she can begin working. The Cardinal returns, looking for servants, who enter immediately. The Cardinal tells them not to talk with Ferdinand unless he, the Cardinal, knows about it; in an aside, he reveals that he is afraid Ferdinand will reveal the truth about the Duchess's murder. The servants exit.

The Cardinal notices Julia and declares out of her hearing that he is tired of her. Julia demands to know what is bothering him, and he refuses to tell her. Julia pesters him until he finally tells her that the Duchess and two of her children were killed by his order four days before. The woman says she cannot keep this secret, but he makes her promise to keep it and she swears by kissing the book he tells her to kiss. Then he tells her she will keep the secret, because the book was poisoned. Bosola reenters, revealing that he has heard the Cardinal's confession and Julia dies. Bosola extracts a promise of reward from the Cardinal, and promises to kill Antonio for further reward. The Cardinal gives him a master key for his lodgings and tells him to hide Julia's body in her room, saying he will make it known she died of the plague. The Cardinal exits. Bosola swears he will do anything but kill Antonio, that indeed he will find him and protect him from the Cardinal's evil plots. Bosola imagines the Duchess haunts him, and prays to achieve true penitence.

### **Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis**

All the scheming and plots are coming to a head in this scene. The witless Julia, who apparently believes herself impervious to harm because she is the Cardinal's lover, nevertheless schemes against him; she has set her sights on Bosola-bizarrely so, since he is so far beneath the Cardinal and even Julia herself (who is married to the courtier Castruchio, about whom we hear very little). The Cardinal has apparently foreseen the possibility of needing to kill someone by having that person kiss a poisoned book cover, as he has one on hand to dispatch Julia with.

Bosola's attempt to become a man of conscience continues. Now he schemes against the schemers, hoping to foil them at their own game. The cautions to himself to step carefully foreshadow

the general doom we know is coming. Bosola's prayer of penitence seems, finally, genuine.

Julia proves herself a true strumpet (providing quite a contrast to the Duchess, who was only perceived as such) by throwing herself at Bosola and agreeing to extract the information Bosola needs from the Cardinal.

### **Act 5, Scene 3 Summary**

In a fortification in Milan, Antonio and Delio are talking about Antonio's plan to frighten the Cardinal in his room that night. As they talk, an Echo begins repeating Antonio's words, even seeming to counsel him with his own words. Delio tells Antonio he should not go on his dangerous errand, but Antonio insists he will risk all rather than continuing to live "by halves," in hiding. Delio promises to fetch Antonio's son and come soon to support him.

### **Act 5, Scene 3 Analysis**

The Echo in this scene can be read as a contrived device to reinforce Delio's wise counsel to Antonio not to go to the Cardinal's chamber that night. Alternatively, it can be read as Bosola's anonymous attempt to protect Antonio, especially since in the immediately preceding scene, Bosola has vowed to help Antonio avenge the deaths of the Duchess and their children. Unfortunately, Antonio has determined to stare down his fate-although he seems to know this will go badly-rather than continue living in hiding and fear. Although he has advised Antonio not to act rashly, he nevertheless immediately promises his loyalty and support once Antonio has made his decision. Delio even holds out some hope that the Cardinal may still have some human compassion in his soul, saying that the sight of his young nephew might persuade him to peaceful reconciliation. This may simply be an attempt to buoy up Antonio, however, as the Cardinal has shown plenty of evidence to this point that he is evil to the core.

### **Act 5, Scene 4 Summary**

In the Cardinal's palace, the Cardinal tells Pescara, Malatesta, Roderigo, and Grisolan not to watch over the sick Ferdinand that night because he has recovered quite well. The Cardinal tells them Ferdinand himself has asked that they not come to him, even if they hear noises. The Cardinal makes them promise, and tells them he may test their promise by making terrible noises himself. Everyone agrees not to come, no matter what the disturbance. The group all exit, leaving the Cardinal alone. The Cardinal confesses that he extracted their promise so that he would have the freedom to dispose of Julia's body and he says that after Bosola brings Julia's body, he is going to kill Bosola. The Cardinal exits.

Bosola enters, saying that he has overheard the Cardinal's promise to kill him. Ferdinand enters, talking about strangling in general; he exits, apparently not having seen Bosola.

Antonio and a servant enter. The servant goes to get a dark lantern, and Bosola stabs Antonio. The servant returns with the lantern, and Antonio and Bosola each realize who the other is. Bosola realizes he has stabbed the man he wanted to save. Bosola tells Antonio that the Duchess and the two younger children are dead. Antonio says he is glad to be dying as he hears this news. Antonio wishes his remaining son will stay away from princes' courts. Antonio dies. Bosola tells the servant to take Antonio's body to the Cardinal's lodgings.

### **Act 5, Scene 4 Analysis**

The Cardinal finally schemes himself into a corner in this scene. The man cannot risk being seen



as he disposes of Julia's body (or rather, has Bosola dispose of it), but he unwittingly seals his own fate by ensuring that no one will come to his rescue if he yells for help. The Cardinal has not counted on Bosola's counter scheming against him.

Unfortunately, Bosola's apparent growth of a conscience has not been equaled by any growth of good judgment on the spur of the moment. There is no textual explanation for the terrible mistake Bosola makes in killing Antonio, except for Bosola's "O direful misprision [i.e., mistake]!"

### **Act 5, Scene 5 Summary**

In another room in the palace, the Cardinal is reading a book and struggling with his conscience. Bosola and the servant carrying Antonio's body enter. Bosola declares he has come to kill the Cardinal. The Cardinal cries out for help, then offers money to Bosola. Bosola says he will allow the Cardinal to retreat no further than Julia's chamber. The Cardinal keeps yelling for help. Pescara and the rest enter above and listen to the Cardinal yelling, but they do not go to help because they believe he is feigning madness as he said he might. Pescara alone goes to help, while Roderigo and the rest believe he will be ridiculed for breaking his promise.

Bosola kills the servant so that he cannot open the door to rescuers. The Cardinal asks Bosola why he is attacking him; Bosola points to the dead Antonio and declares that he killed him by mistake, and tells the Cardinal that his subornation of the Duchess's death was a crime against Justice herself. Bosola stabs the Cardinal twice as the Cardinal cries out for help. Ferdinand enters, calling for a fresh horse and guards. The Cardinal says, "Help me; I am your brother," but Ferdinand wounds him as well as Bosola. Bosola stabs Ferdinand. As Ferdinand dies, he declares that his sister was the cause of their fall. Ferdinand dies.

Pescara and the rest enter as Bosola and the Cardinal lie dying. Bosola reveals to them that the Cardinal and Ferdinand were behind the Duchess's murder, that he himself killed Antonio; that the Cardinal killed Julia; and that he himself has been an actor in all these treacheries. The Cardinal dies after asking to be forgotten. Pescara asks Bosola how Antonio came to die. Bosola tells him it was a simple mistake. Bosola declares that worthy people should not fear dying noble deaths, but that his end is quite different. Bosola dies.

Delio enters with Antonio's only remaining son. Malateste tells him he is too late. Delio invites those present to join forces in establishing the boy in his mother's rightful place. The evils that have transpired, he says, will melt away as snow in the sunshine; what will last is integrity of life.

### **Act 5, Scene 5 Analysis**

The Cardinal's struggle with his conscience is too little, too late, especially since he peevishly takes issue with the book's author's ideas about hell, rather than genuinely confronting his own culpability for so many crimes. It has not occurred to the Cardinal that the people he has used might turn around and betray him, but Bosola does exactly that. The Cardinal's last-ditch effort to bribe Bosola is pathetic. Besides, Bosola is too angry-and knows he himself is much too far past redemption-to consider doing anything but killing the Cardinal. Ferdinand enters at the Cardinal's cries, apparently as a rescuer, but it immediately becomes apparent that he has lost almost the last of his wits. In the final moment before he dies, he proclaims that the Duchess is the cause of everything that has happened. That is debatable; it would be more accurate to say that the brothers' overreaction to their sister's poor choices has wrought all the death and destruction.

The downfall and death of all the wicked characters hearkens back to Antonio's opening lines about the corruption of yes-men and schemers at court. Delio enters with the hope of resurrection in Antonio's son, rather like Horatio arriving at the end of *Hamlet* to tell the truth about all that has transpired; the young son stands in for *Hamlet's* Fortinbras, the one who will transform ruin into renewed glory. Delio's invitation to those present to rise above the evil and help the boy become a good leader brings the play full circle, back to Antonio's shining optimism about the nobility and integrity of true men.

## **Characters**

### **Antonio Bologna**

Antonio is the steward, or the manager, of the Duchess of Malfi's palace. He is good with a horse and a lance, and he is widely known to be honest—so honest that the Cardinal rejects a suggestion that Antonio be hired to spy on the Duchess. He is also a good judge of character, delivering to his friend, Delio, insightful descriptions of the others as they appear. He is in awe of the Duchess, because of her beauty and her disposition, and humbly accepts her proposal of marriage without regard for the wealth he will obtain by marrying her. In fact, he agrees to keep the marriage secret, and so he gains no power or prestige from it. After he is married, Antonio is less sharply drawn, but the glimpses given of him do not fulfill the promise of act 1. He loses the paper on which he has calculated the baby's future. He follows the Duchess's plans for avoiding capture, making no suggestions himself. Finally, he is killed as he walks to the Cardinal's door to ask for a reconciliation. Still, he is a good man, and the Duchess clearly loves and trusts him until the end.

### **Daniel de Bosola**

Bosola is the Duchess's Provisor of Horse. As the play opens, he has just been released from imprisonment because of "a notorious murder" the Cardinal hired him to commit. Now, he is employed by Ferdinand, who arranges his position with the Duchess so he can spy on her and prevent her from marrying. In many ways, Bosola is the most complex character in the play, and the only one whose thinking and personality change from beginning to end. Antonio predicts this change at the beginning, when he comments that Bosola is "very valiant," but worries that his melancholy will "poison all his goodness." In fact, Bosola is capable of great evil. He spies on the Duchess (though he is unable in three years to discover that Antonio is the Duchess's husband), supervises her murder and the murder of her children and of Cariola, accidentally kills Antonio, and deliberately kills the Cardinal, Ferdinand, and a servant. As he observes the nobility of the Duchess and Antonio in facing death and also sees that committing heinous acts for the Cardinal and Ferdinand does not win him gratitude or financial reward, he begins to question his belief that it is better "To appear a true servant, than an honest man." But, when the "stars" drive Bosola to kill Antonio, whom he has resolved to protect, he concludes that all human endeavor and human goodness are meaningless.

### **The Cardinal**

The Cardinal is the brother of the Duchess and Ferdinand, as cold and calculating as Ferdinand is excitable. He is a high-ranking official in the Roman Catholic Church, but he does not live the life of a Christian saint: he has a mistress; he hires spies and murderers; and, he does not seem to have any religious duties or religious thought. As Antonio explains to Delio, "where he is jealous of any man, he lays worse plots for them than ever was imposed on Hercules, for he strews in his way flatterers,

panders, intelligencers, atheists, and a thousand such political monsters.”

The Cardinal is the quiet force behind the plotting against the Duchess. It is his idea to hire Bosola to spy on her, but even Bosola does not know of the Cardinal’s involvement. When Bosola has killed the Duchess, the Cardinal pretends to have no knowledge of the crime. He shares Ferdinand’s desire that the Duchess not marry, and Ferdinand’s anger when she bears a child, but he “can be angry / Without this rupture” of “intemperate noise.” He demonstrates no love or loyalty, treating with startling coldness Bosola, who killed and was punished in his employment, and Julia, who is his mistress, and the Duchess and Ferdinand, who are his siblings. His motives for tormenting his sister are not clear. He does not want her money or her love, and he is incapable of feeling humiliation or shame. He does not care for his reputation or legacy; his final words are “now, I pray, let me / Be laid by, and never thought of.”

### **Cariola**

Cariola is the trustworthy servant of the Duchess, privy to all of the Duchess’s secrets. Cariola witnesses the marriage between the Duchess and Antonio, helps deliver the Duchess’s children, and is with the Duchess when the Duchess dies. In her own death, she is not as noble as the Duchess, but kicks and screams and tries to escape. Throughout the play, she is more cautious than the Duchess, thinking that marrying Antonio is “madness,” and fearing that the trick of a false pilgrimage will prove unlucky.

### **Delio**

Delio is a courtier and a friend of Antonio. His main role in the story is to provide a sounding board for Antonio. Delio’s curiosity about the court gives Antonio the opportunity to speak aloud about the characters of the Duchess, her brothers, and Bosola in the way an omniscient narrator might in a novel. Delio is also the friend in whom Antonio confides the secrets of his marriage and the births of his children; like Cariola, Delio guards the secrets carefully. Delio has no direct connection with any of the siblings, and he does not directly participate in their plots and deaths. He is the faithful friend, always standing by to help Antonio when he is needed. In a scene in act 2, Delio comes to Rome and makes advances to Julia, who rebuffs him. Their interaction affects nothing else in the play, and the two never meet again. Delio speaks the last words in the play, when he enters “too late” with Antonio’s oldest son after his parents have been killed. He urges the survivors to help the young man gain his inheritance and proclaims, “Integrity of life is fame’s best friend, / Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown the end.”

### **The Duchess of Malfi**

The Duchess of Malfi is the sister of the Cardinal and the twin sister of Ferdinand. She is never referred to by name throughout the play, but only by the labels that describe her roles as sister, duchess, and wife. As the play opens, she is a widow, but still in the bloom of youth. (According to Webster’s source materials, the real duchess was a girl of twelve years old when she was married to a much older man; she became a widow when she was twenty.) Although her brothers forbid her to marry again, and she promises to obey them, she longs for a husband. Secretly, she asks her steward Antonio to marry her, and they perform a private marriage ceremony. Afraid of her brothers’ anger, the Duchess manages to keep her marriage a secret for years, even through the birth of three children. When the brothers do learn of the children, she flees with Antonio but is captured and murdered.

Early in the play, Antonio describes her as a woman whose speech is “full of rapture,” who has

a “sweet countenance,” who lives a life of “noble virtue.” Although her sweet nobility casts no spell over her brothers, her every word and action support Antonio’s judgment of her, and her subjects love and respect her. She is clever, able to match her brothers’ wit in her exchanges with them, and able to quickly craft intricate plots for escape. She is affectionate with her husband, children, and servant, showing a tenderness that is far beyond the capabilities of the Cardinal and Ferdinand. And she is dignified in the face of her brothers’ torments, stating even at the worst of it, “I am Duchess of Malfi still.”

Some critics have commented that the Duchess deserves death because of her rashness in marrying beneath her station, but most reject that notion, agreeing that there is nothing in the play to indicate that Webster found fault with the marriage of Antonio and the Duchess. What happens to her is not her fault, but the result of living in a “gloomy world.”

### **Ferdinand**

Ferdinand, the Duke of Calbria, is the twin brother of the Duchess, younger than her by a few minutes. He is as emotional as his brother the Cardinal is icy, and his response to the idea of his sister marrying is beyond all bounds. Ferdinand’s motivation has always been a central question for critics of this play, and many critics have seen incestuous feelings in his rage. Whatever the cause, when he learns that his sister has given birth to a child, he declares her a whore and “a sister damn’d,” creates a mental picture of her “in the shameful act of sin,” and imagines burning her and her lover in a coal pit with no vent, so that “their curs’d smoke might not ascend to heaven,” or boiling her child into a soup and serving it to the father.

As with other characters, Antonio’s early description of Ferdinand proves insightful. Antonio tells Delio that Ferdinand has “a most perverse, and turbulent nature.” Even the Cardinal wonders whether Ferdinand is “stark mad,” and after brooding over his sister’s betrayal for a time, Ferdinand does approach insanity. After he has had the Duchess killed and sees her lying dead, he regrets that he ordered Bosola, “when I was distracted of my wits, / Go kill my dearest friend,” but there has been no hint previously that he and the Duchess shared any closeness.

The realization of what he has done pushes Ferdinand over the edge into insanity, perhaps even to the point of imagining that he is a werewolf. He is found in the graveyard digging up dead bodies and is seen “with the leg of a man / Upon his shoulder; and he howl’d fearfull, / Said he was a wolf.” Ferdinand is not seen again until the last scene, when he charges in on the Cardinal and Bosola, and stabs them both. Bosola stabs him in return, and just before Ferdinand dies, he “seems to come to himself,” saying, “Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust.”

### **Julia**

Julia is the wife of an old nobleman and is the Cardinal’s mistress. While she is staying with the Cardinal, she is propositioned by Delio, whom she refuses; she also tries to seduce Bosola. Ironically, the Cardinal kills her by tricking her into kissing a poisoned book, while she is swearing to keep his secret.

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## **6.3 Let Us Sum Up**

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The detailed scenewise summary and analysis must have helped you understand the action of

the play. An insight into some of the prominent characters must have also helped you develop a critical understanding.

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#### **6.4 Review Questions**

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1. Discuss *The Duchess of Malfi* as tragic satire.
2. Comment on the use of violence and horror in the later scenes of the play.
3. How do you find Bosola and the Duchess as complex characters.
4. Write a note on Webster's use of poetic language with reference to *The Duchess of Malfi*.

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#### **6.5 Bibliography**

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## UNIT-7

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### JOHN WEBSTER : THE DUCHESS OF MALFI -II

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#### Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Themes, Style, Blank Verse, Historical Context, Jacobean age
- 7.3 Critical Overview
- 7.4 Critical Essays
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 Review Questions
- 7.7 Bibliography

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#### 7.0 Objectives

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The purpose of this unit is to further the critical information contained in the previous Unit on John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. This unit provides a critical overview of the play and some seminal essays to help you understand the text better.

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#### 7.1 Introduction

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*The Duchess of Malfi* is considered one of Webster's two greatest works and one of the canonical works of Jacobean drama. It is also roundly criticized as being weak, confusing, and illogical. In his thorough overview of more than three centuries of criticism, *John Webster and His Critics 1617-1964*, Don D. Moore writes that there may be no one other than Webster "whose plays have received a more varied reception and whose critics have been so divided among themselves on whether the writer was due praise or excoriation." In Webster's own time, *The Duchess of Malfi* sold enough tickets to be profitable, and the publication of the play in 1623 was accompanied by verses from other playwrights who seem to have found the play worthy of praise.

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#### 7.2 Themes, Style, Blank Verse, Historical Context, Jacobean Age

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##### Themes

##### Fate and Belief

Considering that one of the main characters of *The Duchess of Malfi* is a Cardinal, one of the highest-ranking officials in the Roman Catholic Church, there is a surprising lack of reference to God in the play. The characters do not turn to God for help in trouble, and they do not seek forgiveness when they come to believe they have acted wrongly. The only certainty in life is death, and there is no promise here of an afterlife. The world of *The Duchess of Malfi* is controlled not by God, but by fate.

Ferdinand is the character most conscious of his religion, but his Christianity is not a religion of love but one of vengeance, not of forgiveness but of damnation. In act 2, in his anger at learning of

the Duchess's child, Ferdinand's first instinct is to call her "a sister damn'd." Naming wild punishments he would like to administer to her, he declares that he would like to have the Duchess and the unknown father of the child "burnt in a coalpit" with no vents, so that "their curs'd smoke might not ascend to heaven." In act 4, he brings a series of horrors to the Duchess to drive her to despair, so that she will renounce God and be sent to hell when he has her murdered. Ferdinand is so clearly insane, that his understanding of religion must be seen as a product of rage, not of religious teaching.

Other characters turn elsewhere for their understanding of the world. Antonio learns by astrological calculation that his first child will have a "short life" and a "violent death." The Cardinal, whose lavish lifestyle and mistress would seem to distance him from the teachings of his church, does not suggest that the Duchess pray for guidance if she finds herself tempted to remarry, but advises that "your own discretion / Must now be your director." Cariola warns the Duchess not to use a false religious pilgrimage to fool her brothers, but the Duchess rejects the warning, calling Cariola "a superstitious fool." Although she faces her death on her knees to more easily pass through heaven's gates, there is no real sense of faith in her last speeches.

Of all the characters, it is Bosola who most changes during the play, and whose psychology is revealed the most clearly. As he watches the conduct of the three siblings, he comes to a new understanding of the differences between a good servant and a good man, and he grows in respect for the honesty of Antonio and the dignity of the Duchess. If anyone were going to turn to God in the end, it would be Bosola, but he does not. Instead, when he realizes that he has accidentally killed Antonio, he utters the line that expresses the world view for the entire play: "We are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and banded / Which way please them."

### **Appearances and Reality**

Repeated throughout *The Duchess of Malfi* is the idea that people cannot be trusted, that things are not as they appear. People, both the essentially good people and the villains, disguise their bodies and their motives. In act 1, several instances of pretending and concealing occur to set the tone for the rest of the play: the Cardinal pretends to have no interest in Bosola; Bosola is hired to spy on the Duchess, pretending only to tend her horses; the Duchess pretends to have no interest in marriage; Cariola hides behind the arras without Antonio's knowledge and promises the Duchess that she will "conceal this secret from the world / As warily as those that trade in poison / Keep poison from their children." Antonio, who is known for his honesty, agrees to keep the marriage a secret. The Duchess complains that women of wealth and stature cannot be honest about their feelings, but are "forc'd to express our violent passions / In riddles, and in dreams, and leave the path / Of simple virtue, which was never made / To seem the thing it is not."

Further incidents of deception and disguise occur throughout the play. The Duchess and Antonio invent stories to conceal the birth of their first child and their plans to escape to Ancona. Ferdinand brings the Duchess a dead man's hand that he knows she will take for Antonio's and shows her wax figures that look like her husband and children. Bosola visits the imprisoned Duchess in disguise, appearing as an old man and a bellman. Even Bosola's one kindness to the Duchess is a deception, as he tells the dying Duchess that her husband is alive and reconciled with her brothers. The Cardinal kills Julia (with whom he has been having an affair without her husband's knowledge) by giving her a poison disguised as a holy book, not knowing that Julia has deceived him by hiding Bosola behind the door. The Cardinal, Bosola, and Ferdinand die without anyone coming to save them, because the

Cardinal has lied to keep the servants from entering his chambers.

Although none of these deceptions brings about its desired end, the characters turn again and again to secrecy and disguise to solve their problems, as though they know no other way to move in the world. It is not an optimistic picture, as Bosola realizes just before he dies: “O, this gloomy world! / In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness, / Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!” If the world is steered not by God but by uncaring stars, and if men and women cannot trust their own perceptions to steer through it, it is a gloomy world, indeed.

## **Style**

### **Revenge Tragedy**

Between 1542 and 1642 in England, many dramatists looked back to early Latin writers for their models. In particular, one group of English Renaissance plays, later called Revenge Tragedies, was based on the tragedies written by the Roman philosopher and playwright Seneca, who lived from 4 B.C. to A.D. 65. Seneca’s tragedies employed a set of conventional characters and plot devices that these Renaissance writers found appealing, and at the end of the sixteenth century, English plays imitating Seneca began to appear. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) wrote two plays, *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1590) and *Hamlet* (c. 1601) that are generally considered to be revenge tragedies. Although *The Duchess of Malfi* is often labeled a revenge tragedy, it is more accurate to say that it was strongly influenced by the movement, but that Webster uses revenge tragedy conventions to create a different kind of play.

The nine Senecan tragedies have several features in common: a five-act structure; a theme of revenge; long-suffering nobles; trustworthy female companions; ghosts; gruesome violence inspired by lust, incest, and vengeance; the death of children; and a chorus that comments on the action and describes the violent acts, which happen offstage. During the Elizabethan period, playwrights began to present the violence on stage in response to demands from audiences, who were accustomed to public executions and other forms of public violence. To Seneca’s ingredients, they added a hero who is called upon but unwilling to seek revenge, actual or feigned insanity, and an emphasis on schemes and secrets.

Clearly, many of these elements are present in *The Duchess of Malfi*, but it varies from the conventions in important ways. The revenge tragedy has a hero whose honor has been wronged (often it is a son avenging his father); in this play, the brothers seek revenge on the Duchess, who has done them no harm. The Duchess is surely the hero of the play named for her, and yet she does not seek or win vengeance for the harm done to her. The fact that she is killed in act 4 (and does not die in the act of winning revenge) deflects attention away from her as the center of the action and moves the play out of the category of revenge tragedy. The motive for the actions of the two brothers is unclear, but revenge—whatever they may think themselves—is not at the heart of it.

### **Blank Verse**

Many of the lines spoken by the characters in *The Duchess of Malfi* are written in a poetic form called blank verse. Blank verse is the name given to unrhymed lines of ten syllables each, accented on the even-numbered syllables, though lines need not be in perfectly regular iambic pentameter (the name given to lines constructed in this way) for the poetry to be labeled blank verse. For example, Ferdinand at one point wishes he were a wild storm “That I might toss her palace ‘bout her ears, / Root up her goodly forests, blast her meads.” Each of these lines has exactly ten syllables, and the underlying



pulse or stress felt as one reads the lines naturally gives a slight accent on the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth syllables of each line. If every line were so regular, however, the speeches would develop a singsong rhythm that would be unnatural and distracting, so the poet's task is to write lines that are near enough to the regular pattern but with enough variety that different characters speak differently, and different tones can be heard. In fact, very few lines in *The Duchess of Malfi* are regular ten-syllable lines; most have more or fewer syllables or stresses in different places, as in the line "We are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and banded."

Not all of the lines in *The Duchess of Malfi* are written in verse. Antonio speaks in prose with Bosola and with Ferdinand before Antonio marries the Duchess, and the eight madmen speak in prose. The Duchess and Bosola speak in prose while he is disguised as the tomb-maker, but they shift to verse when he declares his intention to kill her. The blank verse is thought to convey solemnity and nobility, and all of the important speeches by important people are in blank verse. (An interesting use of this idea is Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, in which Prince Hal speaks in prose when he is with his friends in the tavern and speaks in blank verse when he is with the King or on the battlefield.)

Using blank verse for tragedy was a convention for Elizabethan dramatists. The first English tragedy, *Gorboduc* (1561), was also the first English drama written in blank verse, in a deliberate attempt to echo in English the regular rhythms of Senecan tragedy, written in Latin. Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare brought the form to its greatest heights with their writing some thirty or forty years later. A generation after these two, Webster and his contemporaries were still writing tragedies in blank verse, though never as well.

Webster frequently ends a scene with two rhyming lines, called a couplet. The rhyme catches the audience's ear, making the last lines of a scene slightly more noticeable and giving a finished quality, rather like a period at the end of a sentence. Within fifty years after the publication of *The Duchess of Malfi*, most English poetic drama was written entirely in couplets.

## **Historical Context**

### **The Renaissance**

The term "Renaissance" means "rebirth," and the period known as the Renaissance was a time of new beginnings in Europe, an emergence from the Middle Ages. The Renaissance brought with it new ways of thinking about science, religion, philosophy, and art. During the earlier medieval period, Europeans had come to think of themselves as insignificant creatures subject to and inferior to divine beings. When some Italian scholars began to read ancient Latin and Greek texts that had been ignored for centuries, they began to look for ways to combine contemporary Christian thought with the classical belief in human capabilities. This belief in what is now called Renaissance humanism drove a new passion for celebrating human endeavor and potential. The ideal "Renaissance man" would be talented in science, mathematics, poetry, art, and athletics.

As an intellectual movement, the Renaissance touched every aspect of life. Science and exploration proliferated. Political theorists attempted to apply the best features of classical thought, and religious reformers asserted the rights of the common person to have direct access to Biblical texts. There was a new passion for reading classical literature in the original Greek and Latin and for incorporating classical mythology into literature and art. New forms emerged, based on classical forms, as the revenge tragedy grew out of the study of Senecan tragedy. Literature, including drama, moved

beyond its role as an outgrowth of the church and turned to stories that celebrated or decried human capabilities.

Of course, there was no particular day on which the Middle Ages ended and the Renaissance began. The transformation happened over many years and did not affect every country at the same time. Generally, the Renaissance is said to have begun in Italy during the fourteenth century and to have reached England about a century later. The height of the English Renaissance was during the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. Webster's career comes at the end of this period, and *The Duchess of Malfi* shows many traces of its creation during this period. The Duchess's insistence that she be allowed to make individual choices, the secular tone of the play, the five-act structure and blank verse, the allusions to classical mythology, and the Cardinal's many references to new technology and science all point to the play as coming from the Renaissance.

One aspect of Renaissance literature that may strike readers in the twenty-first century as peculiar is the notion of imitation. Greek and Roman students frequently copied from models to create their own compositions, and the Renaissance writers adopted this technique. The basic story of the Duchess of Malfi, for example, is a true story that occurred in Italy around 1510. The story was adapted in Italian in a sixteenth-century novella, and in English in William Painter's collection of stories, *The Palace of Pleasure* and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, Webster used incidents from all of these sources—sometimes using lines and phrases word for word—in creating his own play. He also kept a journal throughout his career, jotting down scraps of poetry and quotations he found interesting. He drew freely from this journal in writing his plays, inserting lines where they fit pleasingly. This was not considered plagiarism but a sensible way to draw on the learning of those who had come before.

### **Jacobean Age**

The period within the Renaissance when England was ruled by King James I is known as the Jacobean period, from the Latin form of the name James. James I ruled from the death of Elizabeth I in 1603 until his own death in 1625, and although he was not a beloved king, the years of his reign saw a great period of English drama. William Shakespeare, for example, began his career before James came to the throne, but his greatest and most mature work was produced during the Jacobean age. Webster also produced his best work during these years, as did many other important dramatists.

James's rule was guided by the strength of his religious convictions. He was a member of the Church of England, and it was under his direction that the King James Bible was produced. James also believed devoutly in the divine right of kings, or the idea that kings and queens are accountable only to God, and that the system of inheriting the monarchy was created by God. Because the Church of England was the official religion of the monarch and of the country, religion and politics were intertwined in a way that is not the same in England today. The divine right of kings gave James power, while the Roman Catholic idea of a pope chosen by God opposed that power. To protect his stature, James dealt severely with those who believed differently, including Puritans (who eventually began to leave England for the New World), Catholics (who are portrayed with irreverence in Webster's character of the Cardinal), and Jews (who are treated with casual disrespect in *The Duchess of Malfi* and other popular works of literature from the period).

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## **7.3 Critical Overview**

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From the second half of the seventeenth century through the eighteenth, the play was seldom

performed and there was no extended criticism of it. Criticism of the nineteenth century tended more toward appreciation than study, and Webster was alternately praised for his overall effect or reviled for specific flaws in logic or ideology. Much of this criticism was based on performances, rather than on scrutiny of the text. Academic criticism, beginning in the late nineteenth century, focused at first on uncovering the sources for Webster's understanding of the Duchess's story.

In the twentieth century, dozens of critics have written about the play. William Archer, writing a 1920 article for *Nineteenth Century*, is typical of those who have found the play lacking. Inspired to examine the play closely after seeing a production, Archer found it "three hours of coarse and sanguinary melodrama" and pronounced it "fundamentally bad." With unblinking honesty, Archer points out several bits of inconsistency and illogic in the play, including the son of the Duchess and her first husband, who is mentioned only once in the play and then forgotten. Inga-Stina Ekeblad, on the other hand, explains in an article in *Review of English Studies* that Webster, "though he often leaves us in confusion," does achieve in this play a fusion of convention and realism, "creating something structurally new and vital."

Psychological questions about the play have been raised by several critics. What is Ferdinand's motive for tormenting his sister? Sheryl Craig believes that the answer lies in the fact that the Duchess and Ferdinand are twins. She explains in an article in *Publications of the Missouri Philological Association* that for Renaissance audiences, the siblings would have resembled biblical twins, whose "conflicts with each other are symbolic of their conflicts with God; one twin is the chosen one, God's elect, and the other twin is the outsider." Much more common is the opinion expressed by James Calderwood in *Essays in Criticism*, that within Ferdinand's actions are "unmistakable suggestions of incestuous jealousy." Calderwood finds that when Ferdinand becomes aware of his own sinful desires, he becomes a "physician-priest-executioner who seeks the purgation of his own tainted blood in the purging of hers."

Another central question that has engaged critics grows out of that fact that the title character dies in act 4. Is the Duchess really the main character of the play and, if so, what is the play about? Charles Hallett and Elaine Hallett, in *The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs*, write that the play is a drama of initiation, much like *Hamlet*, and that the Duchess is at the heart of it: "The test she must pass is whether she will remain the woman she was, once she sees what the world is." Kimberly Turner examines the play as a critique of the female ruler within the context of Renaissance patriarchy in an article in the *Ben Jonson Journal*, and finds that Webster creates a new kind of female hero who "participates actively in her own life."

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## 7.4 Critical Essays

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### Critical Essay #1

*Bily teaches writing and literature at Adrian College. In this essay, Bily examines Webster's manipulation of the five-act structure in his play.*

When John Webster sat down to write *The Duchess of Malfi*, he had several goals in mind. He was a professional playwright, trying to earn a living and support a large family by writing plays that people would pay to see. To achieve that goal, he needed a fascinating story with enough intrigue and violence to appeal to his audience. He wanted, as all artists do, to earn a reputation for quality. Although he was writing plays to be performed on the London stage during his lifetime (he never could have dreamed that five hundred years later scholars would be studying the texts of his plays in libraries and

classrooms—without even seeing them performed), he shared the awareness of his age that art is a continuum, that the literature of one period influences, and is influenced by, the literature of other times. As a serious writer, he followed literary convention, finding the idea for his story from early sixteenth-century Italy via a late sixteenth-century English collection of stories, and finding the structure for his play in first century Rome.

Although the idea of “imitation,” or borrowing ideas and even phrases from earlier models, might strike the modern reader as hack work, simple cobbling together of other people’s ideas, the task Webster faced was quite difficult. He had before him two or three versions of the story of one Giovanna, who in 1490 at the age of twelve married a man who would later become Duke of Amalfi and leave her a widow at twenty. At least one of these retellings was in English prose; one may have been in Italian. To create the play as he envisioned it, Webster had to follow the general arc of the true story, which some of his audience would have read in William Painter’s collection *The Palace of Pleasure*, turn narrative into drama, create dialogue and render it in blank verse, and shape the whole thing into the five-act structure that he had inherited from the Roman philosopher Seneca. Webster saw *The Duchess of Malfi* as a tragedy, and in Renaissance England, a tragedy called for Seneca’s five acts.

The idea of following a pattern in creating art may be counterintuitive, but it is actually quite common. Anyone who has been to a lot of movies knows about the plot that runs “boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl.” Even audiences who could not articulate the pattern are subconsciously aware of it—they know what to expect, and part of the pleasure in watching the film is in seeing the old story unfold in a new way. Many romance novels are written with strict formulas that dictate how many chapters the book will run, which chapter will include the heroine’s first meeting with her dream man, and so on. Epics from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to *The Call of the Wild* and *Star Wars* follow the same arc. We like pattern, we expect it, and we rely on it to help us make sense of complexity.

The idea that a drama might be divided into five parts actually came from Aristotle, a Greek philosopher in the third century B.C.. Four hundred years later, the Roman playwright Seneca refined Aristotle’s ideas and wrote nine tragedies in five acts, each act having a particular function in the drama. Elizabethan playwrights knew Seneca’s plays and used them as a model for their own work, and Webster is among those whose own tragedies follow Seneca’s pattern of Exposition, Complication, Climax, Resolution, and Catastrophe. Or do they?

In Seneca’s plan, the first act presents the Exposition, or the background information an audience needs to understand the play. This act will introduce the characters, establish the setting, and hint at the conflicts to come. This is clearly what happens in act 1 of *The Duchess of Malfi*. We meet Antonio, Delio, Bosola, the Cardinal, Ferdinand, and the Duchess. Because a drama typically does not have a narrator who steps in to interpret characters for the audience, Webster creates reasons for the characters to talk about each other. Delio asks Antonio “to make me the partaker of the natures / Of some of your great courtiers,” and Antonio obliges by standing off to the side and commenting on the personalities of Bosola and the three siblings. Likewise, the Cardinal and Ferdinand talk about Antonio, so it is established early on that Antonio’s “nature is too honest.” Lines such as “I knew this fellow seven years in the galleys / For a notorious murder” and “Here comes the great Calabrian duke” serve the purpose of conveying information to help the audience make sense of what will come.

Setting is established beginning in the first line, when Delio says, “You are welcome to your

country, dear Antonio—/ You have been long in France.” Throughout the act, there are references to Naples, Milan, the sea coast, and other locations in Italy. The central conflict is set in motion when the Cardinal and Ferdinand order the Duchess to remain unmarried, and she defies them by marrying Antonio. When the first act ends, the audience has gotten everything expected from the Exposition.

Act 2, according to Seneca, should present the Complication, sometimes called the Rising Action. In this section, the forces that will be opposed gather together and intersect—that is, they become complicated. In the second act of *The Duchess of Malfi* the Duchess gives birth to the first child of her marriage to Antonio, Bosola’s suspicions are raised and then confirmed, Bosola shares the knowledge of the birth with Ferdinand and the Cardinal, and Ferdinand begins his descent into madness. With the Duchess and Antonio on one side, and Bosola, the Cardinal and Ferdinand gathered on the other, the action pauses, as on the night before a great battle.

In fact, the action pauses for several years, while the Duchess gives birth to two more children and Bosola tries to determine who their father is. Seneca placed the Climax, the turning point and the moment of the highest emotional response, in act 3. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, act 3 presents the sweetly touching scene with Antonio and the Duchess in the bed chamber, immediately followed by Ferdinand’s sudden appearance. Coming at the center of the play, the scene between the Duchess and Antonio is the last moment of happiness they will share; from this point on, there is a steady progression of sorrow and torment until both are dead. The rapid juxtaposition of the Duchess’s happiness with her husband and conflict with her brother takes the audience on a rapidly shifting roller coaster of emotion, rather like the “whirlwind” that takes Ferdinand away. This is followed by a tender parting as Antonio flees, the Duchess’s innocent sharing of her secret with Bosola, another tearful parting, and the Duchess’s arrest.

Act 4 presents the Resolution of the conflict, sometimes called the Falling Action. As the hero ascended in stature through act 2, the hero descends through act 4. Act 5 is the Catastrophe, or the conclusion. Typically, the hero of a tragedy dies in act 5, often accompanied by more deaths. Here *The Duchess of Malfi* seems to break from the five-act structure of Seneca. The Duchess does not decline in any significant way through act 4. In the face of unspeakable torment, she remains dignified and noble, “the Duchess of Malfi still.” She does not die bravely, a result of her tragic flaw, in act 5, because she has already died in act 4. (In addition, it would seem to be a perversion of the notion of tragic flaw to find one in the Duchess, whose only error seems to have been in marrying for love.) What might this mean? How can the hero die in act 4? If she does, what is act 5 for?

What if the play is not really about the Duchess after all? Some critics have identified Bosola as the only character in *The Duchess of Malfi* who undergoes any psychological growth or change. Could he be the real hero of the play? What would the five-act structure look like if one foregrounded Bosola instead of the Duchess?

Act 1 presents the Exposition. The audience is introduced to the characters and setting, but they pay perhaps more attention to Bosola’s situation.

SHE DOES NOT DIE BRAVELY, A RESULT OF HER TRAGIC FLAW, IN ACT 5, BECAUSE SHE HAS ALREADY DIED IN ACT 4.... WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN? HOW CAN THE HERO DIE IN ACT 4? IF SHE DOES, WHAT IS ACT 5 FOR?”

He has just returned from seven years in prison for a murder he committed for the Cardinal.

The Cardinal shows Bosola no gratitude but secretly arranges for him to be hired by Ferdinand to spy on the Duchess. Act 1 ends with Bosola in position, poised for action.

Act 2 is the Complication, or the Rising Action. After at least nine months of fruitless spying, Bosola suspects and confirms a pregnancy through a combination of his own wiles (the apricot trick) and good fortune (Antonio's dropping the paper). Bosola's star is certainly rising. His letter to Ferdinand shows that he has done his job well, and Bosola might well expect a reward for his success. However, the letter to Ferdinand ironically "hath put him out of his wits," driving Ferdinand's attention far away from his faithful servant.

In act 3, the audience finds a turning point and a strong emotional response. Bosola begins to turn away from Ferdinand and finds himself speaking admiringly of Antonio. When the Duchess sends Antonio away for supposedly stealing from her, Bosola scolds her for not seeing Antonio's true value: "Both his virtue and form deserv'd a far better fortune." Learning that the Duchess and Antonio are married, he wonders "can this ambitious age / Have so much goodness in't?" It is his highest moment. One admires the eloquence with which he celebrates virtue, but his path from this point is a steady descent. The next time the audience sees him, he is himself again, arresting the Duchess and speaking ill of Antonio's humble birth.

Act 4 finds Bosola in Resolution or Falling Action. Trying to drive the Duchess to despair, he turns to despair himself and cannot even face her without a disguise. He continues to do Ferdinand's bidding, bringing the madmen and supervising the murders of the Duchess, the children, and Cariola, but his heart is not in it. At the end of the act, he realizes that Ferdinand has no intention of paying him for his evil work. He has chosen poorly, misread the world, lived a life in which he "rather sought / To appear a true servant, than an honest man." Now, he sees the flaw (the tragic flaw) in his thinking, and says "I am angry with myself, now that I wake." In act 5, the spiraling descent continues, until Bosola has killed Antonio, a servant, the Cardinal, and Ferdinand, and until he dies himself. Of all the characters, he is the only one whose thinking has changed in fundamental ways through the play, the only one who has changed his situation through his own actions, the only one who has learned. He is the one who obtains revenge in the end, just before dying: "Revenge, for the Duchess of Malfi, murdered," for Antonio, for Julia, "and lastly, for myself, / That was an actor in the main of all." Bosola is a good candidate for hero of *The Duchess of Malfi*.

**Source:** Cynthia Bily, Critical Essay on *The Duchess of Malfi*, in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

## **Critical Essay #2**

*In the following essay, Morton examines how the language in The Duchess of Malfi contributes to the play's emotional intensity and dramatic power.*

*The Duchess of Malfi's* emotional power and theatrical potency, first defined by Charles Lamb and A.C. Swinburne, derives from its persuasive dramatic realism and its tirelessly intelligent and complex poetry.

The plot follows an account in William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1567) based on true events in early 16th-century Italy. Two powerful brothers, Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, and the Cardinal, are determined that their widowed sister, the Duchess, shall not remarry. They set Bosola, a malcontent courtier, to spy on her. She secretly marries her steward, Antonio Bologna, and bears him

several children. Bosola betrays her and, on instructions, imprisons her, torments her with false news of Antonio's death and with a grisly display of mad folk, and finally has her killed, together with two of her children and her maid Cariola. Ferdinand, repentant after the fact, runs mad. In a grim final sequence of confusion and revenge, Ferdinand, the Cardinal, Bosola, and Antonio die, and it is left to the Duchess's young son to restore an orderly society.

At every turn in this dark action, the characters identify their fears, their rage, or their despair in language startling in its specific physical immediacy and its general moral pessimism: "We are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and banded/ Which way please them." The events and the language—equally painful—mark Webster's characteristic awareness of human impotence before evil and malignant fate.

Critics have observed many ambiguities and inconsistencies. There is no convincing reason for the brothers' prohibition of the Duchess's remarriage, nor do they justify her murder as an appropriate consequence of her actions. That a marriage and the birth of three children should remain secret is highly unlikely. A child of the Duchess's first marriage is mentioned, then ignored. An elaborately presented horoscope does not come true. Antonio and the Duchess flee in different directions for no clear reason.

Some theatrical problems have been noted. The crucial moment of the Duchess's banishment is relegated to part of a dumb show. Act V, subsequent to the Duchess's death, may seem anti-climactic: a hectic series of accidents and random killings.

But such inconsistencies may be validated; Webster's realism depends on his recognition that his characters' intense emotions create around them, as if by passionate magnetism, a field of irrational behaviour and fatal consequence. Ferdinand's sexually explicit ravings against his sister—"Are you stark mad?" asks the Cardinal—his extravagant grief and his collapse into lycanthropia cannot be rationally explained, but Webster's language gives his actions a potent, frightening plausibility.

The malcontent Bosola is ambiguous; a reputedly skilled intelligencer who cannot solve the simple mystery of the Duchess's marriage and who finally stabs Antonio by mistake, he is conscience-stricken and ashamed, even while he undertakes the brutal murders. Yet his ceaseless and insightful self-analysis is convincing and even extenuating.

The events of Act V may be seen not as anticlimactic, but as the unavoidable results of Machiavellian policies which, after the Duchess's murder, must be played out in a sequence of lesser acts—ignoble, grotesque, but still inevitable. Webster finds an apt symbol of inflexible fate when an "ECHO *from the Duchess' grave*" prompts Antonio and his friend Delio by ironic repetition.

Webster is dramatising an historical event which English audiences would believe only possible in the intolerant and disorderly society of 16th-century Italy, with its dissolute churchmen, corrupt courtiers, and crazed nobility. The opening contrasts the court of Italy with that of France, where the "judicious king" has sought to "reduce both state and people/To a fix'd order." Two pilgrims, the only outsiders in the play, express their opinions with equally judicious balance:

*Here's a strange turn of state! Who would have  
thought  
So great a lady would have match'd herself  
Unto so mean a person? yet the cardinal*

*Bears himself much too cruel.*

Their comments remind the audience that a world does exist outside the malevolent environment of the action. The obvious lapse of time in the Duchess's marriage between the scenes similarly draws attention to a period of presumed tranquillity and domestic love. The moment at which chaos and horror descend on the Duchess and Antonio is precisely marked. Antonio and Cariola tiptoe from the Duchess's bedroom, leaving her alone. As she continues talking, Ferdinand enters *solus*, showing her a poinard when, thinking Antonio is silent behind her, she queries, "Have you lost your tongue?" The Duchess's instant recognition that the inevitable discovery has come to pass is brilliantly expressed:

*Tis welcome:*

*For know, whether I am doom'd to live or die.*

*I can do both like a prince.*

These contrasts between an attainable harmony in a time or a place outside the confines of the tragic setting and the necessary chaos within that setting, are mirrored by the contrasts in the Duchess's character. She begins the play by assuring her brothers that she will never remarry, but without a pause in the action proceeds to the dangerous wooing of Antonio: "If all my royal kindred/Lay in my way unto this marriage,/I'd make them my low footsteps." Recognising her "dangerous venture," she undertakes, "through frights, and threat'nings," the commitment which Cariola sees as a "fearful madness." Though full of "noble virtue" and a model of sweet and pious behaviour, her "tetchiness and most vulturous eating of the apricocks" when pregnant are hardly evidences of nobility. After the birth of three children, she still lies to Ferdinand: "when I choose/A husband, I will marry for your honour." Moments later, in conversation with Antonio and Cariola, she is "merry," holding that

"Love mix't with fear is sweetest." She can organise Antonio's escape with good sense and dispatch, but is trapped by her thoughtless and misplaced trust in Bosola. She meets her torments and death with grandeur—"I am Duchess of Malfi still." Some critics have suggested that these inconsistencies are flaws in characterisation. By turns deceitful and impassioned, playful and fearful, practical and naive, haughty and petulant, her character may indeed not be consistent, but her frailties and strengths are recognisably human responses to the terrible world into which she is thrust.

**Source:** Richard Morton, "The Duchess of Malfi: Overview," in *Reference Guide to English Literature*, 2d ed., Vol. 3, edited by D. L. Kirkpatrick, St. James Press, 1991, pp. 1557-58.

### **Critical Essay #3**

With Antonio we turn to the issue of upward mobility seen from below. Antonio and Bosola are presented as members of the new class of instrumental men, functional descendants of fifteenth-century retainers who fought the Wars of the Roses for their masters. Under Henry VIII and Elizabeth some of these men came to major power, and many more served in lesser capacities, often as bureaucratic specialists but also as all-purpose henchmen. Wallace MacCaffrey notes that "the practice of the Elizabethan administration mingled confusedly the notion of a professional, paid public service with that of personal service to the monarch." These roles interact in Antonio and Bosola—steward and spy, bureaucrat and hit man. Each feels the new obscure insecurity later to be identified and explained by reference to the cash nexus, the shift from role to job. Each feels it differently.

Antonio enters the play as a choric voice, praising French courtly virtues and presenting the



dramatis personae in the reified generic terms of the seventeenth-century “character.” He is thus grounded in our sympathy (and distanced from the action) by his ideological and narrative spokesman ship, an apparently authorial substantiation that Webster immediately undermines by plunging him into political elevation. He loses his distancing footing at once, in part through the very virtues that entitled him to the choric role.

After the choric exposition, we hear of Antonio’s first action, his victory in the joust, a traditional arena for aristocratic character contests. But for this achievement Ferdinand has only perfunctory applause: “Our sister duchess’ great master of her household? Give him the jewel:—When shall we leave this sportive action, and fall to action indeed?.” Such archaic and sanitized—that is to say, fictional—warfare bores the great duke. Mobile men like Antonio strive continually to grasp such identity as Ferdinand seems effortlessly to possess (though we know better), but they fail to extract satisfying ratification from its established possessors. This problem is more pressing—and more developed—in Bosola than in Antonio, so I will postpone full discussion of it until the next section. But it is important to see that Antonio’s efforts are ill-fated from the start.

We must also see Antonio as one who, like Bosola, is a man in the way of opportunity, a man with a fortune to make. In an early conversation the two servants are superimposed by Ferdinand and the cardinal, who consider them for a job of spying. As a relatively solid steward, Antonio occupies a more assured position than Bosola, whose tormenting search for secured identity constitutes his role in the play; perhaps for this reason Bosola is judged more apt for spying. But they share the a priori situation of men whose identity is achieved, not ascribed, in a society where such identity has not yet been accepted as fully substantial.

As we have seen, the duchess’s coercive offer animates Antonio’s social insecurity. Her steward holds an achieved status of considerable power and security: the skilled estate manager was a Jacobean eminence. For Antonio has arrived at a local pinnacle, and he is satisfied to rest there in honorable service. In part because of this basic satisfaction, he fears the duchess’s adventurous proposal. Despite his erotic fantasies concerning his mistress, he must be coerced into further mobility. Antonio is a “new man,” his position based on new practices of personal self-determination. But his horizon of mobility is clearly circumscribed; beyond its limits he is ill at ease, unprepared for a society open to the top.

Once he enters that turbulent realm his public behavior becomes apparently more confident and aggressive, more typical of a man on the move. His sparring with Bosola, whose espionage he suspects from the start, takes the form of class insults. He sneers at him as an upstart, publicly adopting the attitude of the class he has secretly entered as the duchess’s consort: “Saucy slave! I’ll pull thee up by the roots”; “Are you scarce warm, and do you show your sting?”. In so doing, he emphasizes his own capacity to hire and fire, to make men and break them, ultimately to establish or deny their status; his sneers are combative and self-creative at once.

Such utterances are actually rooted in insecurity. “This mole does undermine me . . . This fellow will undo me.” But Antonio’s insecurity is less remarkable than its restriction to himself; he does not consider his wife and child in his fear. Barely able to cope with the storms of courtly intrigue to which the duchess has brought him, he is “lost in amazement” when she goes into labor; having presented the cover story, he mutters, “How do I play the fool with mine own danger!”. When he hears the threats of Ferdinand’s letters, he follows his wife’s instructions, however grievously, and leaves his family to face Ferdinand’s murderous rage without him. He fears for his own safety more than for theirs.

Antonio's insecurity also appears expressly in terms of gender roles. He agreed to his wife's coercive marriage proposal with the deference of the subordinate he feels himself to be. Yet he is miserable at one level of this enforced marriage, insofar as it subordinates him to a woman in that private context where both personal and gender will are at issue. When she reassures him that her brothers will not ultimately cause them harm, that "time will easily / Scatter the tempest", he cannot allow the maternal address to his unmanliness. He asserts that "These words should be mine, / And all the parts you have spoke, if some part of it / Would not have savour'd flattery." But clearly he would never have spoken such words to her. It was not for him to dismiss her brothers as insignificant until she had done so; only then can he painfully claim, for his own sense of self, that he would have said the words.

A similar compensatory gesture occurs in the boudoir scene. Antonio listens silently in hiding while Ferdinand threatens his wife. Having sworn not to seek Antonio, the duke leaves; only then does Antonio claim to wish that "this terrible thing would come again, / That, standing on my guard, I might relate / My warrantable love." But he had been free just minutes earlier to defy Ferdinand. Then Bosola knocks; Antonio cries in dread, "How now! who knocks? more earthquakes?." During the banter before Ferdinand's arrival Antonio had jested with relative ease about his privately subordinate position. But his elevation, because covert, has not given release from insecurity. He still feels the need to assert his own substance but does so only when he can avoid being held accountable for the assertion.

To rebuke Antonio's petty self-defenses would be to miss the point. They should be recognized as unchosen responses to stresses not of his making. Antonio had filled a place where he felt secure and significant. When the duchess converts his erotic daydreams to reality, they become social nightmares. He is not prepared for life in the seismographic realm of noble intrigue. The duchess is not insolvent, for instance, as Webster might have arranged, with ample contemporary precedent, if he had desired to probe Antonio as a powerful new man of finance. Antonio is a man of regularities, not an improviser like Bosola. For this reason he is uncomfortable in his private relations with his wife, feeling bound both to the traditional hierarchy of rank, which enjoins his submission, and to the traditional gender hierarchy, which enjoins him to dominate. His culture has not prepared him to be a subordinate husband or to be a princely consort continually at risk. He is finally to be seen, and sympathized with, as a man helplessly ruled by problems arising from a superior's ambitious love. He lives uncomfortably in the courtly world that has enclosed him. Indeed, we might say, the text infects him with ambition: by the time the news of his child reaches Rome he seems ambitious even to his best friend, who fears "Antonio is betray'd. How fearfully / Shows his ambition now!". And at his death Antonio speaks of a "quest of greatness" now his own, retrospectively apparent by its present collapse. This false dream he would spare his son, bidding him fly the courts of princes (a wish in fact ironically ungranted: the son's restoration at the play's end bodes ill for him, whatever it may say for Amalfi). Antonio's final action, the desperately naive journey to the cardinal for reconciliation, freezes him for us, as one whose unsought elevation never brought much sense of how to navigate the webs of alliance and enmity.

Like the other characters, Bosola is concerned to govern the grounding of his identity. As an employee he presents one of the most intricate examples of the Renaissance problematic of self-shaping. This representation is initially adumbrated through a dense blend of the predicates of counselor, mal-content, have not, henchman, and aesthete, roles all marked by alienation.

Bosola enters on the heels of Antonio's normative set piece on the French court, a model of public service in which the solipsistic vanities of the decorative gentleman are given a final cause in political service to the prince. In Bosola's intensified and privatized enactment of Castiglione's courtly

counselor, Webster dissects the internal contradictions of the life to which the nation's ambitious young men were drawn.

In swift succession Bosola annexes a variety of stances toward "courtly reward and punishment." Antonio first labels him "the only court-gall", suggesting the standoffish or outcast malcontent, almost a specialist Jeremiah. Yet this estimate is at once complicated further:

*his railing Is not for simple love of piety;  
Indeed he rails at those things which he wants,  
Would be as lecherous, covetous, or proud,  
Bloody, or envious, as any man, If he had means to be so.*

The distanced moralist and the envious parasite coincide in uneasy dissonance.

Webster also evokes the unrewarded servant: in having Bosola immediately demand belated reward from the cardinal for a suborned murder, Webster links him to the social problem of the veteran soldier, a stranger in his own land, dismissed from desert as well as from service. Then as now this figure was unprovided for, and Bosola has not even the minimal fact of service to his country to cushion his return to social life. He has been a more private soldier and has taken the fall. He will not rise in the pub or feast his friends on Saint Crispin's Day. He can only sneer bitterly at his employers for their relative depravity. Still, he is more than a Pedringano, much more than a Pistol, for Antonio has "heard / He's very valiant: this foul melancholy / Will poison all his goodness." So "'Tis great pity / He should be thus neglected." The most complex of Bosola's ills, however, arise not from neglect but from employment.

For Bosola is preferred, to spy on the duchess. He is made a henchman, an agent, an instrument, and so suggests the complicated new problems that arise from the status of *employee*. At this point in English history, at the beginning of capitalist dominance, service was undergoing the momentous shift from role to job, and the ways in which it could ground a sense of self were changing. Hitherto the prince had been seen as the sacramental source of identity. Puttenham specifies this relation in a poem about Elizabeth: "Out of her breast as from an eye, / Issue the rayes incessantly / Of her justice, bountie and might": these rays make "eche subject clearely see, / What he is bounden for to be / To God his Prince and common wealth, / His neighbour, kindred and to himselfe." In this view service was simply a mode of assent to the static fact of ascriptive rank. As Stone shows, however, James's sale of honors helped to displace the power to confer identity from God's representative to the money that bought him. As the human origin of rank was gradually revealed, it became clear that the power to confer it was freely available to those who could pull the strings of influence or purse. When ascriptive status emerged as a commodity, the king's sacred role as fount of identity began to decay, and with this shift came a change in the nature of identity itself. It became visible as something achieved, a human product contingent on wealth, connection, and labor. Later, when Marx described it theoretically, the notion could seem a conceptual liberation. As individuals express their life (i.e., as they "produce their means of subsistence"), so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. Here human beings create themselves in the process of work. But in the Renaissance, when this insight began to be visible, it seemed a loss rather than liberation. The obligation to found identity on one's actions seemed to sever the transindividual bonds that bound the polity together; it left one on one's own, save for the new power of cash, which could

buy knighthoods, even titles. Marx of course clearly specifies this historical passage as a demolition: the exchange relation of capitalism, he says, “has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors,’ and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment.’” For Bosola, an early transitional figure, such clear formulation was not available. I think this nexus seemed to him like a lifeline, weaker perhaps than Elizabeth’s nearly divine “rayes” but still somehow linked to the ontologically solid ground of the ruling aristocracy. In examining Bosola’s “neglect,” Webster offers us the first tragic figure whose isolation is formulated in terms of employment by another.

Bosola initially reflects this coincidence of loss and possibility in bitterly deploring his “miserable age, where only the reward / Of doing well is the doing of it.” Webster inverts the proverb to show that virtue is no longer its own reward but has become a commodity, only a means to an end. What formerly conferred a sense of absolute worth based on a collective cultural judgment has now lost its savor and is worthless unless vendible. Bosola is so far modern that he laments not the absence of the old mode but its residual presence. Still, he gets what he seems to want almost at once, within about two hundred lines, when Ferdinand says “There’s gold.” The rest of the play examines (as Bosola dourly inquires) “what follows.” For the post of intelligencer aggravates his discontent, though it frees him from the material want and shame that dominate his galley life. But such a reward is mere hire and salary; he wants more, is miserable without it. Bosola cannot be said to be merely greedy for gain, a motive that no more explains his actions than it does Ferdinand’s. But we need to understand what more he wants.

Of course the answer is the same total self-realization achieved by Cariola and Kent. But the personal service by which Bosola seeks this ultimate goal in fact reduces and dehumanizes him.

Where Kent’s desires were completely coincident with his master’s (“What wouldst thou?—Service”), Ferdinand’s are withheld from Bosola (“Do not you ask the reason: but be satisfied” and so cannot be adopted as purposes. Bosola is specifically alienated from the utility of the “intelligence” that is his labor’s product, and so he creates a reified commodity and a reified self along with it. Marx formulates this action precisely.

*[Alienated] labor is external to the worker . . . it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it . . . the external character of labor for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else’s, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another . . . [The worker’s activity] . . . is the loss of his self.*

Instead of founding his identity, Bosola expends it in his work. Hungry for spiritual ratification, Bosola offers up to Ferdinand all he has. He expects this relationship, his relation to his prince, to found him; he expects the cash relation to carry the same kind of life-giving social blood as the earlier circuit of rule and fealty. But instead he merely spends himself and gets paid. Then, of course, he resorts to working harder, presuming he has not yet sufficiently earned his ontological paycheck; and the more he

puts himself into his production, the more he loses himself. This sense of his desire helps construe what would otherwise seem a simply “depraved” ongoing decision to continue doing Ferdinand’s dirty work, much in spite, he claims, of his own good nature. Compulsively seeking to be paid, recognized, acknowledged, identified, Bosola expends efforts that intensify his sense of need but prove unequal to the task of filling it. The cash payment is the full exchange value to be got from this employer.

Bosola tries to obliterate this lack of ratification with a device prominent in the English machiavel’s career: the aestheticizing of intrigue. Noble machiavels may seek this stance in search of Ferdinand’s *sui generis* alienation, but Bosola’s purpose is different, even somewhat the reverse. A clue to his practice can be found in Georges Sorel’s suggestion that artistic creation anticipates the way perfected work will feel in the society of the future. This kind of activity confers just the unity that alienated labor undercuts. Hence, it may be argued, aestheticizing can restore a felt unity or wholeness to actions by decontextualizing them, separating them from the context that displays one’s fragmentation. In focusing on the aesthetic shape of, say, a suborned act of violence or betrayal, to the exclusion of awareness of the context that marks it *as* suborned violation, alienated laborers can grasp a false sense of integrity by, as it were, alienating themselves from their alienation. Seen in this light, Bosola’s aestheticizing functions as an evasion, a narcotic that lends a sense of totality while dulling awareness of its falsity. The part seems the whole, for he can devote his whole self (and so reconstitute it for the duration) to the means of the task by ignoring the opacity of its end.

The apricot incident offers a specimen of this technique. Here Bosola observes the duchess’s physical condition in considerable specialist detail and applies a test for pregnancy—the typically alimentary Renaissance device of administering apricots (a laxative and thus labor stimulant). The trick is, he says to himself, “A pretty one”: Bosola watches not only the duchess but himself at work, taking pleasure in his professional prying, even setting up private dramatic ironies and *sotto voce* gloating for his own entertainment. Lukács offers a theoretical frame. “The specialized ‘virtuoso,’ the vendor of his objectified and reified faculties does not just become the [passive] [sic] observer of society; he also lapses into a contemplative attitude *vis-a-vis* the workings of his own objectified and reified faculties.” Bosola is thoroughly engaged (and thus unifyingly estranged) not only in practicing the technicalities of his craft but in appreciating his own stylistic flair.

We can see a similar bifurcation of consciousness in the interrogation scene, where Bosola discovers that Antonio is the duchess’s husband. To unfold it properly we must first examine Bosola’s youth, which was characterized by a more ostentatiously aesthetic sense of his actions. For according to Delio, Bosola was

*a fantastical scholar; like such who study to know how  
many knots was in Hercules’ club, of what colour  
Achilles’ beard was, or whether Hector were not  
troubled with the toothache: he hath studied himself  
half bleareyed, to know the true symmetry of Caesar’s  
nose by a shoeing-horn; and this he did to gain  
the name of a speculative man.*

Bosola has had the sort of university training that warped his predecessor Flamineo, gave him

a sense of ambition, and fitted him for little but mobility. The Lylyan dandy's mode seems not to have worked for Bosola; instead he finally found work with the cardinal and thus found his way to the galleys. But Delio's gossip shows that the exquisitely intellectual management of reputation is to Bosola a familiar tool, cognate with spying and thuggery; he has only retreated from its more precious manifestations.

Under Bosola's questioning, the duchess screens her liaison by accusing Antonio of peculation (yet another false financial motive). When Bosola defends him against this accusation and other criticisms from Antonio's former fellows, she replies that Antonio was basely descended. Bosola then explicitly raises the contrast between ascription and achievement that is so central to the play: "Will you make yourself a mercenary herald, / Rather to examine men's pedigrees than virtues?". This pointed challenge inspires her to reveal that Antonio is her husband, because it so clearly specifies the terms of her rebellion in choosing him. Bosola's reply says as much about himself as about her.

*No question but many an unbenefic'd scholar  
Shall pray for you for this deed, and rejoice  
That some preferment in the world can yet  
Arise from merit. The virgins of your land  
That have no dowries, shall hope your example  
Will raise them to rich husbands: should you want  
Soldiers, 'twould make the very Turks and Moors  
Turn Christians, and serve you for this act.  
Last, the neglected poets of your time,  
In honour of this trophy of a man,  
Rais'd by that curious engine, your white hand,  
Shall thank you, in your grave for't; and make that  
More reverend than all the cabinets  
Of living princes. For Antonio,  
His fame shall likewise flow from many a pen,  
When heralds shall want coats to sell to men.*

Her unequal marriage will legitimate many other sorts of deserving mobility: the unemployed graduate will find preferment, the impoverished virgin security with a rich husband. Alien Turks and Moors will flock like Othellos and Ithamores to her side in gratitude for this tolerance of heterodox origin. And this multifoliate action will be eternized by neglected poets happy to get the work. The duchess has ratified elevation by merit, and Bosola's applause betrays his own authentic experience of the dream—and of the attendant anomie, a blend of the loss of old securities and the lack of new ones.

Many readers accept Bosola's speech as sincere; others presume it to be a ploy designed to unlock the duchess's tongue. I think it is both: his own sincere response managed in pursuit of his employer's goal. This apparent contradiction is only a particular case of Lukács's reified employee's

general deformation: “His qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can ‘own’ or ‘dispose of’ like the various objects of the external world.” Bosola exchanges his authentic emotional stance for the information his master wants. But this self-commoditizing exchange manipulation is asymmetrical, for Bosola does not easily revert to the dispassionate stance of the intelligencer. Perhaps the plan for the false pilgrimage is a sarcasm enabling the difficult shift from intimacy to the spy report by positing a ground for an intermediate stage of sneering distance: he can call her a politician, a soft quilted anvil, and so forth and return to his habitual malcontent mode. But even this self-manipulation (if that is what it is) is not fully anesthetic, for when Bosola *returns* to his commoditized state (the obvious force of the mediate pause of “What rests, but I reveal / All to my lord?”) it is with self-loathing: “O, this base quality / Of intelligencer!”. A further deflection is needed, a universal projection of the commodity model: “why, every quality i’t’h world / Prefers but gain or commendation: / Now, for this act I am certain to be rais’d, / *And men that paint weeds to the life are prais’d*”. If the duchess’s act was sordid, and his own no lower than any other, Bosola may sedate the sympathy he had for her, at least long enough to file his report.

I will pass more briefly by the well-known torture and murder scene, pausing only to note how it combines the predilections of Ferdinand and his agent. The motive force is of course the brother’s, a fact often missed, owing perhaps to his apparent absence. Michael Warren (of the Nuffield Theatre) has suggested that Ferdinand’s role in this scene might be made clear by “having Ferdinand on or above the stage, physically directing the action”; I would prefer to have the duke visible but inactive, frozen in his contemplative mode of alien voyeur. For his part, Bosola steepes himself in procedure, but in the process he is touched by the insistent coherence of his fellow galley slave. She does not reach for external legitimation as he has done but rests in the fact that she is, like Middleton’s Beatrice-Joanna, “the deed’s creature,” needing no DeFlores to tell her so. And as Bosola lives the parts he plays, his dismissal of earthly values besieges his increasingly stunted goals, even as he pursues ever more grimly the aesthetic anesthesia of obsession with form. He is finally silent throughout the strangling, returning to life (that is, jerking away from reflection to instrumentality) with the uncharacteristically brutal “Some other strangle the children.” He seems barely under control in the face of the tragedy he has caused, less and less confident of what has now come to seem repayment from Ferdinand.

Instead, of course, Ferdinand rewrites the contract (repudiating debt as Jacobean nobles often did) by pardoning Bosola’s *murders*, ironically restoring to his agent the fully humanizing capacity of the moral sense. (The “gift” inverts Lear’s denial of Kent’s loyal advice about Cordelia.)

*Why didst thou not pity her? what an excellent*

*Honest man mightst thou have been*

*If thou hadst borne her to some sanctuary!*

*Or, bold in a good cause, oppos’d thyself*

*With thy advanced sword above thy head,*

*Between her innocence and my revenge!*

Action beyond the employer’s instruction is available only to the independent human, not to the tool that cannot think for itself. When Ferdinand challenges Bosola’s humanity, he speaks his own heart too, called out of alienation too late, like Bosola’s. But this castigation, meant to deflect his pain, only postpones it. In “pardoning” his henchman, he schizophrenically enacts revenge and forgiveness at once.

Though the reproach nourishes Bosola's developing rebellion against his reification, he cannot at first abandon his own project. He feverishly opposes legal, moral, rational, and courtly sanctions to Ferdinand's dismissal, demonstrating his service to be in all particulars deserving. This dismissal perverts justice, he says; you shall quake for it; let me know wherefore; "though I loath'd the evil, yet I lov'd / You that did counsel it; and rather sought / To appear a true servant, than an honest man." The parallel with the duchess's defense in the boudoir is striking; here as there the arguments are incomprehensible to Ferdinand, who again burrows into the dark. And like the duchess, Bosola must face the ultimate failure of his project, for self-fashioning through employment:

*I stand like one That long hath ta'en a sweet and golden dream:*

*I am angry with myself, now that I wake*

*off my painted honour:*

*While with vain hopes our faculties we tire,*

*We seem to sweat in ice and freeze in fire.*

His dream of ultimate grounding at the hands of another stands revealed as a delusive Petrarchan hope for an absolute beyond earthly grasp.

Faced with this failure, Bosola seeks his ontological grounding anew in a succession of chosen actions that he sees as neither derived from another (as his service was) nor evasively contemplative: "somewhat I will speedily enact / Worth my dejection." Personal vengeance will at least make him his own deed's creature. (This action obscurely coalesces the dual motives of compassion for the duchess and anger over his own neglect: Ferdinand causes both sufferings.) When we next see Bosola he is accepting employment from the cardinal with ironic alacrity: "Give it me in a breath, and let me fly to't: / They that think long, small expedition win, / For musing much o'th'end, cannot begin." Security, like virtue, rests in the doing, in the subsuming process of unalienated action itself—in the search for a vengeance that he desperately wants to be decisive, constitutive. As Bosola opens himself more and more to the sacramental powers of moral confidence to be got from the act, he turns hopefully to a traditional self-sacrificial idiom: "O penitence, let me truly taste thy cup, / That throws men down, only to raise them up." Though he still feels neglect and seeks advancement, he has shifted his ground to the seemingly more reliable realm of the transcendent moral order.

It can only be Webster's comment on this posture that Bosola's next action (reminiscent of Cordelia's death after Albany's "The gods defend her!") is the unwitting murder of Antonio. His short-lived transcendental stance is utterly disrupted by this monstrous error: "We are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck and banded / Which way please them." The dream of self-substantiation through self-abnegation he now rejects as pointless, swearing "I will not imitate things glorious, / No more than base: I'll be mine own example." He denies service to God and to Ferdinand alike as falsely coherent. In being his own example he returns to a stance like the duchess's unitary "I am Duchess of Malfi still." If he cannot realize himself in any cosmic or social terms, he may yet seek identity *par sibi*, and so he grimly carries out a revenge now sheerly his own.

In the play's final action Bosola begins firmly enough, killing the cardinal's innocent servant to secure the room. But mad Ferdinand comes in as to the wars, finally falling to action in deed, and wounds everyone to the death. Bosola lasts longest, playing his own Horatio for the astounded witnesses:



*Revenge, for the Duchess of Malfi, murdered  
 By th' Arragonian brethren; for Antonio,  
 Slain by this hand; for lustful Julia,  
 Poison'd by this man; and lastly, for myself,  
 That was an actor in the main of all  
 Much 'gainst mine own good nature, yet i'th'end  
 Neglected.*

He casts himself finally and summarily as an agent, a vicarious actor on behalf of all the victims, not least for himself, murderer and murdered at once, haunted throughout by an always pending better self, now definitively neglected. The supposed restorative of revenge has littered the stage, but the body count, though lavish, is sterile. Bosola ends by fixing our eyes on this lack, this gulf, in his final line, about "another voyage." For as Lear's undone button invokes nakedness and the heath, Bosola's departure is seaward, to the galleys, to the pathless wilderness from which he entered the play, a castaway looking for solid ground to call his own.

#### **Critical Essay #4**

This is the burden felt by all: the shaping of the social self in the abrasive zone between emergent and residual social formations. Webster's play is what Kenneth Burke calls a magical chart, a cognitive decree that names a problematic situation and voices an attitude toward it. Webster's chart insists that the characters' urges and defining gestures are transformations of one another; that they are fundamentally constituted by, "struck and banded which way please," a net of dimly understood and contradictory social forces; and that these forces shape and limit the kind of actions we habitually regard as individually authentic and chosen (and that carry the responsibilities we associate with tragedy and villainy). Webster provides a social world that constitutes what are clearly not the transcendental subjects of traditional moral inquiry.

Fredric Jameson suggests a more political repossession:

*The cultural monuments and masterworks that have survived tend necessarily to perpetuate only a single voice . . . the voice of a hegemonic class . . . They cannot be properly assigned their relational place in a dialogic system without the restoration or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the wind, or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture.*

I believe that this play was written, at least in significant part, to dissect the actual workings of the normative ideology set before us at its beginning. Far from providing criteria for the judgment of the heterodox characters (as criticism, seduced by power as order, has often presumed), this ideological frame and those who pose and endorse it are themselves to be judged by the “heterodox.” Critics’ moral judgments directed against the outcast duchess (as lustful, irresponsible, unwomanly, womanish) emanate from this ideological center; they are at one with high-minded humanist sneering at sycophants whom the center in fact invents, summons up for service and ideological approbation. I believe that Webster strives to recover such stifled voices, to bare oppositional gestures usurpingly rewritten, both then and often even now, as womanish eccentricity or base-mindedness. My analysis has sought also to reclaim Ferdinand for understanding (if not sympathy) by reading his motives as the absolutized and finally self-destructive core of the nobility’s project for dominance. Ferdinand’s savage gestures strip to the skin the soothing discourse of reciprocity. To its incantations the play is addressed as a disruptive symbolic act, the reverse of Burkean Prayer—as an Imprecation.

**Source:** Frank Whigham, “Sexual and Social Mobility in *The Duchess of Malfi*,” in *PMLA*, Vol. 100, No. 2, March 1985, pp. 167-86.

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## 7.5 Let Us Sum Up

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The critical overview of the play and some seminal essays must have gone a long way in helping you understand the better.

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## 7.6 Review Questions

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1. Discuss the plot of the play.
2. Write a note on the main characters in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
3. Write an essay on Webster’s tragic vision.
4. Describe *The Duchess of Malfi* as a play in the revenge tradition.
5. What makes *The Duchess of Malfi* the great play that it is ?

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## 7.7 Bibliography

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## UNIT-8

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### BEN JONSON : THE ALCHEMIST

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#### Structure

- 8.0 Objective
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Critical Essay on the Alchemist
- 8.3 His Writings
- 8.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.5 Review Questions
- 8.6 Bibliography

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#### 8.0 Objective

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After reading this unit you will know what the Comedy of Humours is. A *humour* is a predominant whim which bends a man's nature in one direction, so that all his actions are devoted to the realization of that whim. *The Alchemist* is a study of human gullibility. Shakespeare also studied the influence of a dominant passion on human character. But his method was more natural than Jonson's, who seems to be putting his characters in ready made casts rather than allow them to develop and unfold naturally.

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#### 8.1 Introduction

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This play was first acted in 1610. The scene is a house in London during a visitation of the plague; its master Lovewit, has taken refuge in the country, leaving his servant, Face, in charge. Face introduces two rogues : Subtle, a charlatan alchemist, and Dol Common, a whore. Together they collaborate in turning the house into a centre for the practice of alchemy in the hope that they can attract credulous clients who will believe that alchemical magic can bring them their heart's desire. Their expectations are realized, and their dupes are representative social types. Sir Epicure Mammon dreams of limitless luxury and the satisfaction of his lust; the Puritans hope to enrich their sect; Drugger, a tobacco merchant, wants prosperity for his business. Only Pertinax Surly, a friend of Mammon, sees the fraudulence of the enterprise, but Face and his colleagues manage to turn the clients against him and he is routed. Each of the clients is deceived by a separate technique, depending on his peculiar brand of social credulity, and this requires swift changes of role by the cheats, especially Subtle. They are equal to all emergencies until Lovewit suddenly returns. He expels Subtle and Common, and then wins over his master. The play is one of Jonson's best; it has energetic wit and extraordinary theatrical ingenuity. Moreover, the characterization has behind it the force of Jonson's conviction that human folly is limitless and can only be cured by exposure and castigation.

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#### 8.2 Critical Essays on The Alchemist

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Jonson the realist used his prologue to *Every Man in His Humour* to deal a blow at conventional

Elizabethan stage-practice:

To make a child, now swaddled, to proceed  
Man, and then shoot up, in one beard, and weed,  
Past threescore years: or, with three rusty swords;  
And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words,  
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars:  
And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars.

And he goes on to list numerous devices of illusion ('roll'd bullet heard/To say, it thunders'). He is questioning the validity of plays that need to establish principles of stylisation. Pushed to a logical extreme that line of argument would begin to question the very nature of drama as an exercise of the imagination requiring a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of its audiences. There is one dramatic genre - farce - that actually makes the willing suspension of disbelief its subject: it becomes the characters' whole mode of being, the 'longing that their condition in time should be transcendently different. This is as true of Aristophanes exploring whether life would be significantly better if women were in supreme control in parliament or if Aeschylus could be resurrected from the grave to combat with his art the cynicism prevailing in Athens, as it is of Feydeau investigating his characters' quest for the perfect sexual experience. Farce is about dreams of releasing the impossible: as Subtle observes of Sir Epicure Mammon in *The Alchemist*. 'If his dream last, he'll turn the age to gold' (I.iv. 29). Farcical humour derives from the dramatist's juxtaposing of fantasy alongside an alto-insistent reality and from the tenacious hold of the characters on their private dreams seemingly against all odds. When Feydeau's adulterous lovers finally get to their assignation in their chosen hotel, they continue to believe they are on the threshold of unimaginable raptures despite the tatty, impersonal bedroom, a flow of implausible interruptions from harassed or bewildered strangers and the massing of the gendarmerie in the lobby downstairs zealously scenting out vice. Equally funny is the way each of these flabby, middle-aged lechers, who imagines himself to be another Paris or a Romeo, can miraculously summon up the stamina and agility of an Olympic athlete the moment his idyll is actually threatened. This is partly to save face, and partly to keep open at any cost the possibility of releasing the dream-self on some future occasion.

In farce, each character is an actor on the epic stage of his imagination who chooses wilfully to suspend awareness of the grey reality that prevails around him. Seeking identification with his role makes him a rank amateur; the professional, as we saw in *Brainworm* and *Tiberius*, keeps a studied detachment, a consciousness aware of the fact of performing and alert to his effect on his audience; this allows him to encompass an endless variety of roles, whereas the character in farce continually type-casts himself. In *The Alchemist* Jonson creates a structure that examines this distinction: a series of farcical characters each intent on realizing a better self come in the clutches of a trio, consummate actors all, who in a mercantile age are choosing to sell illusion as a commodity. With the aid of a few tawdry props and appropriate foot-and-half-foot words they give their clients the chance to star in their various private scenarios - at a price, of course. Face, Dol and Subtle are cashing in on the fashionable belief that alchemy can manufacture the philosopher's stone and from it distil an elixir that will solve all human ills. Alchemy was the dream to end all dreams.' Jonson draws and sustains throughout the play a brilliant conceit relating alchemy, the refining of base metals into purest gold, with acting (the transfor-

mation of humble mortals into heroes). Subtle's alchemical laboratory we never see (patently it does not even exist): instead we watch the effects of the trio simply talking to their clients-about its potential. All the magic is in the power of their words to feed each client's imagination until it invents a brave new world to its own satisfaction. By making these moments of self-ranscendence plays within the larger play-structure, each carefully staged and paced by Face or Subtle, Jonson cunningly transforms a superb social comedy about Jacobean London into a serious disquisition on the nature of theatre. He was never one to let his 'judging spectators' rise comfortably superior to the stage action. Theatre is as much a house of illusions as Lovewit's house becomes when left in his butler's charge; to it come clients who pay for the privilege of letting actors and dramatists for 'two short hours' possess their imaginations. The conscious theatricality of *The Alchemist* seems designed as a strategy to make an audience look beyond their immediate enjoyment of the action and question the motive for their laughter and for deliberately seeking out Jonson's and his actors' arts. Is it for purposes of escapism (if so, there are manifest dangers in identifying with any of the characters on stage) or to seek to fine-tune one's sense and sensibility? In the themes and the strategies that shape its dramatic method *The Alchemist* shows how the seductions of city life are such that one must be ever on the alert. Young Kastril, newly come to London and already aware of its temptations, has one last and particularly pressing need to voice when he is checking out Subtle's credentials as a possible mentor: 'But does he teach/Living by the wits, too?' (III. iv. 41-2). Asked of Face, the most brilliant and adaptable of shape-changers, this is gloriously naive. Yet how is one to gain real knowledge of a world as intricately devious as the London of the play (short of learning the hard way by making an ass of oneself like Kastril) except it be to submit to Jonson's strategies with a good grace?

It is because poets and dramatists exert great power over people's imaginations that Plato chose to expel them from his Utopia: they would be dangerous in fostering disaffection. *The Alchemist* opens with Dol Common trying to stop a quarrel that has blown up between her colleagues Face and Subtle, who to her consternation have quite forgotten the terms of the league of amity between them and are roundly abusing each other at the tops of their voices. Crying out against their arrogance and stupidity, she finally gains silence when she appeals to them to 'Have yet some care of me, o' your republic' (I. i. 110). It is tempting to see this as a joke at Plato's expense, the strategies of the play being conceived as a defence of the comic poet against Plato's strictures. Plato's thinking about a rationally ordered, ideal society was subversive in its time, even if only hypothetical, since to conceive of a Utopia is to imply criticism of the prevailing political set-up; so there is a certain appropriateness in the naming of this alternative underworld establishment of three thieves after his great Republic, based as it is on the principles of respect for each other's skills and an equal sharing of all income accruing from their endeavours. If the allusion to Plato is intended, it would make this the first of a series of significant moral inversions.

The political implications of Dol's remark go reverberating through the play and gain weight by being reiterated through a pattern of variations. What motivates each of the gulls to come to the house is found in time to be a wish to improve his social standing. Their aspirations, modest at first, grow, sharpen, intensify under Face, Subtle or Dol's nurture. Dapper wishes for a familiar to help him win when he risks an odd bet at the races but quickly sees himself leaving his position as lawyer's clerk, when his 'unresistible luck' brings him 'enough to buy a barony' (III. iv. 59-60); instead he will become a kind of Lord of Misrule, taking the honoured chair at ordinaries, the toast of card-sharpers. Druggier just wants to attract customers to his tobacco shop but is egged on to imagine himself rising through his guild to -become mayor and marrying into the gentry. Mammon, already a knight, aspires to be

master of untold wealth, a great lord and a benefactor to society conferring honour and prosperity on all he favours. Dame Pliant aspires to a title; Kastril to be a fashionable rake-hell, a name in society. Ananias and Tribulation, the Anabaptists, ostensibly engaged in charitable works, warm to Subtle's flattery and make no denial of his supposition that they would use the philosopher's stone to redeem their political position (they are 'silenced Saints'), win aristocratic friends to strengthen their temporal power and, hope against hope, displace the Holy Roman Empire throughout Europe. Even Surly the gamester, Mammon's companion, who suspects the trio for what they are, disguises himself as a Spanish grandee when he seeks to gain entrance to the house, for all he sees himself as a pillar of commonsense and rectitude. Mammon's self-image inflates with his every appearance until, impassioned in Dol's arms, he is promising to show her off as his consort at 'feasts and triumphs' in such dazzling array that her fame will make 'Queens look pale' while 'Nero's Poppaea may be lost in story' (IV. i. 138, 144-5). Dol, with mock ingenuousness, asks a pertinent question.

But in a monarchy, how will this be?

The prince will soon take notice, and both seize You and your

Stone; it being a wealth unfit For any private subject

O, but beware, sir! You may come to end

The remnant of your days in a loathed prison...

(IV. i. 147-50, 152-3)

At the root of all their dreams lies a longing for esteem, position, conspicuous social success (except for Kastril who would prefer notoriety). Jonson establishes the point with a rich humour at the expense of the two Puritans when he has Subtle sympathise with them over the relief they will soon experience in possessing the Stone when they need no longer worship in a preposterous fashion ('leave off to make/Long-winded exercises' III. ii. 53-4) or cultivate singularly bizarre habits simply to draw attention to themselves, such as railing against plays 'to please the alderman/Whose daily custard you devour' (III. ii. 89-90) or taking such affected names as 'Tribulation, persecution, /Restraint, Long-patience' (III. ii. 93-4). Tribulation does not demur, he merely points out smugly that such 'inventions' have made the brethren 'grow soon and profitably famous' (III. ii. 101)

Dol begins the play warning her partners of the danger threatening the common wealth and well-being of their private republic if they indulge in 'civil war'. Steadily as the play advances social disaffection in varying degrees is seen to be the impulse behind the 'itch of the mind', as Face calls it, from which the gulls suffer. Face, Dol and Subtle profit by these rebellious instincts by cleverly stimulating the gulls' anarchic desires while managing simultaneously to contain them. But there is no denying that the fantasies of Dapper, Tribulation and Mammon would, if actually realised, be criminal: the Utopian self can only be realised in opposition 'to the prevailing status quo Mammon ecstatically envisages the corruption of all normal relations and behaviour to flatter his ego;

I'll ha' no bawds,

But fathers and mothers - they will do it best,

Best of all others. And my flatterers

Shall be the pure and gravest of divines

That I can get for money. My mere fools

Eloquent burgesses

(II. ii. 57-62) ,

Interestingly the imagined alternative self is in each case constructed out of a perverted idea of the privileges enjoyed by the aristocracy. Dapper yearns for a life of recklessly confident gambling; Druggier for the arranged marriage that will consolidate his estate; Mammon for an insatiable appetite for sensual gratifications which he will offset by philanthropy and charitable deeds to swell his good opinion of himself; Tribulation, a cunning manipulator of his fellow brethren, longs for the chance to exercise his real skills in statesmanship on an international scale; Surly for the voice of authority that commands immediate respect; Kastril for the right to be totally irresponsible, living in the whim of the moment. The result in each case is a parody of the aristocratic temper; all miss its true spirit by being obsessed with that temper as merely an expression of wealth. Were any of them to have his desire fulfilled the consequences socially would be disastrous: each fantasy-self is an exposure an exact judgement on the inadequacies of the dreamer. Much Jacobean city comedy sets out to satirise the pretensions of the rapidly augmenting ranks of *nouveauxriches*: *The Alchemist* has few rivals for the shrewdness and depth of its social insight. The persons to whom Jonson dedicated his plays on publication were always carefully and aptly chosen. Sir Philip Sidney was ever held in esteem by Jonson as the epitome of excellence in aristocratic virtues, one who was in every sense of the word a good man in scrupulously fulfilling the 'responsibilities of his position. It is fitting that *The Alchemist* with its depiction of a fallen world of would-be aristocrats should be offered to the 'judgement (which is Sidney's) of Lady Mary Worth as most deserving her name and blood'.

It is worth making this point because modern directors have a tendency to go for the preposterousness of these little men with voluptuous minds and so miss the element of danger in the play that makes for a much richer humour. The anarchy that generally prevails in farce and comedy has here, as frequently in Aristophanes, precise political implications. All too frequently today the sense of danger is confined to the threat of Lovewit's imminent return to his house. The problem is that the crimes contemplated or effected in the play are not deemed to be as heinous now as they were in 1610; and certainly are not punished today -as rigorously as then. Dabbling in the black or occult arts, pimping and prostitution, 'laundering gold' (forgery) whether termed 'coining' or 'casting', thieving (notice how Jonson keeps reminding us just how much money the trio have stolen from their clients in the space of a few hours), fraud, overdressing above one's station like Face as a 'whoreson, upstart. apocryphal captain' or Dol as 'my Lord Whats' hum's sister' in a velvet gown met, if proven, with savage correction. Too vigorous horseplay in the fight between Face and Subtle which opens the play often in modern productions- obscures Dol's genuine alarm. It is much more than a breach of the peace that she is afraid they will be accused of. Carting the pillory and mutilation is the best that they could hope for if the truth, about them 'were known; the worst outcome would be hanging :

Shall we go make A sort of sober, scurvy, precise neighbours,

That scarce have smiled twice. sin' the king came in, .

A feast of laughter at our follies? - rascals

Would run themselves from breath, to see me ride,

Or you t'have but a hole to thrust your heads -in,

For which you should pay ear-rent?

(I. i. 163-9)

Her fear quickly sobers them down. When a modern director and cast find a way of intimating this danger to an audience, the effect is to give the clients' - relentless visits to the house a positively manic urgency and to make Face, Dol and Subtle's activities in receiving them seem ever more brilliantly inventive: they must be brilliant as a matter of survival.

In Volpone and Epicoene Jonson had experimented with ways of creating the illusion that the stage-action was at various points a spur-of-the-moment improvisation by one or more of his characters. Mosca and Truewit gave virtuoso performances; Face, Subtle and Dol are remarkable for working superbly as a troupe: playing against manifestly dangerous odds is a spur to their wits. They change roles and identities with a wonderfully slick precision, Face especially. Each assumption of a role, each transformation, is total, involving not only a change of costume and perhaps makeup or wig but significantly too a convincing change of voice and idiom (Jonson several times in the play has Face as Captain go unrecognised by a character accustomed to dealing with him in his personification as Lungs and he is deemed missing for weeks by the neighbours who are used to seeing him, clean-shaven, in his butler's livery as Jeremy). With each arrival, they check they are wearing the appropriate costumes, then -decide which of them are to appear in this episode, on what cues and in what tone; the one who knows the new gull best (usually Face who acts as general intelligence) gives a quick character-sketch -as the donnee about which they will extemporise, then all three trust to their proven skill to play off their colleagues' inventions. The whole scheme is set-up in a flash even as they are making themselves ready :

SUBTLE : Who is it, Dol?

DOL COMMON : A fine young quodling.

FACE : O,  
My lawyer's clerk, I lighted on last night,  
In Holborn, at the Dagger. He would have  
(I told you of him) a familiar  
To rifle with at horses, and win cups.

DOL COMMON : O, let him in.

SUBTLE : Stay. Who shall do't?

FACE : Get You  
Your robes on. I will meet him, as going out.

DOL COMMON : And what shall I do?

FACE : Not be seen, away!  
[Exit DOL COMMON.]

Seem you very reserv'd

SUBTLE : Enough. [Exit.]

FACE : God b' w' you, sir!



I pray you, let him know that I was here. His name is Dapper. I would gladly have stayed, but

(I. i.189-99)

And they go straight into their act for Dapper's benefit without pause. The fact that this rapid exchange is all beautifully contained within regular lines of verse adds to the speed of the preparations if those lines are meticulously observed in performance: this is living by the wits after a fashion Kastril could never hope to emulate.

Their technique is-dazzling as they shift effortlessly between seven differently evolving scenarios, all running concurrently, several by Act Three being developed simultaneously. At one point this requires Face to perform a veritable tour de force: he speaks in Lungs' voice through the key hold to Sir Epicure waiting without; in his own workaday tones Sotto voce giving instructions to Dol and Subtle; as the Captain advising the blindfolded Dapper how to conduct himself through the ritual in which he is being 'purified' ready to meet his aunt, the Queen of Faery; and in squeaking falsetto as one of the elves searching the clerk for evidence of worldly pelf. He has scarcely left the stage in his captain's outfit to dispose of Dapper in 'Fortune's privy lodgings' than he is back on again with Mammon and metamorphosed into Lungs. It is the mark of their success that their dupes return relentlessly to the house keeping the trio's services in constant demand. Generally in farce the accelerating intrigue calls on an actor's versatility, stamina and resourcefulness to express his character's mounting panic and desperation; Face, however, thrives on the exhilaration of living at a pitch of attention in order to keep events under his control. He and Subtle make a dreadful gaffe with Surly when he appears in his Spanish garb and with umbered face: they presume because they do not understand a word he says that he cannot possibly understand them and proceed jokingly to tell him that he is going to be robbed, even repeating themselves slowly and at the tops of their voices, as is the English way with uncomprehending foreigners:

SURLY : Por dios, senores, muy linda casai

SUBTLE : What says he?

FACE : Praises the house, I think;  
I know no more but's action.

SUBTLE : Yes, the casa,  
My precious Diego, will prove fair enough, To cozen you in. Do you mark?  
you shall Be cozened, Diego.

FACE : Cozened, do you see? -  
My worthy Donzel, cozened.

SURLY : Entiendo.

SUBTLE : Do you intend it? So do we, dear Don.  
Have you brought pistolets or portagues?

(IV. iii. 34-42)

Subtle has his suspicions ('Slud, he does look too- fat to be a Spaniard' (IV. iii. 28)) but defers to Face's judgement - unwisely as things turn out. When Surly, watching Subtle later trying to rifle his pockets, reveals who he really is by speaking in his own voice and in English ('Will you Don Bawd,

and Pickpurse? [Knocking him down.] How now! Reel you?' IV. vi. 26), Subtle is stupefied. Until now the gulls, once known, have been- completely predictable; Surly throws him right off cue and he dries. But when Face is drawn to the action, he coolly appraises the situation: 'the priggish Surly is so enamoured of his importance in having at last got centre-stage where he can castigate the world at large for its moral shortcomings that his attention is focused only on the quality of his own performance. Face quietly goes out to return with a motley assortment of their gulls - Kastril, Drugger, Ananias - who proceed to contest Surly's right to the star role. Kastril questions his manhood ('Where is he'? Which is he? He is a slave/ Whate'er he is, and the son of a whore' IV. vii. 4-5); Drugger his moral probity; an Ananias the decorum of his costume ('Thou look'st like Antichrist, in that lewd hat' IV. vii. 55). They demolish all Surly's pretensions to authority and force him to quit the stage. Face has surpassed himself in sheer ingenuity and imaginative daring - and all, seemingly impromptu.

Masterly strategies contrived by Jonson's characters often, as we have seen in Volpone and F.picoene, cover masterly strategies worked by Jonson himself on his audience. When Surly threatens to expose the trio to the authorities (and we know from the opening scene what the consequences of that will be), the play is well on its way -to a conclusion. Dapper is in the final stages of his initiation and has only temporarily been baulked of getting his familiar by the inopportune arrival of other gulls at the house; Drugger has served his turn and lured Dame Pliant into Face and Subtle's clutches; the Anabaptists have bought and made an inventory of the goods in the cellar down to the last andiron that Mammon has brought there ready to transmute into gold when he finally possesses the stone; by getting Tribulation to agree now to sponsor some secret coining, the trio have an effective weapon over the Brethren in the form of blackmail, should they subsequently turn nasty over the tricks played on them; Mammon has been spurred on by Dol to a display of unbridled lust that is the cue for Face and Subtle to fake an explosion supposedly of the alchemical apparatus, since the philosopher's stone by timehonoured reputation can come into the hands only of men 'free from mortal sin and very virgin' (II. ii. 99).. It is difficult to see where the play could go next when Surly arrives coveting the role of *deus ex machina*. Yet there is no obvious sense of an impending conclusion at this point and we are frankly relieved and delighted when Surly gets expelled from the\_ action after threatening to stop all the fun. Played well, the scene invariably provokes applause the instant the door slams shut on his indignant figure. Scarcely have we and Face taken breath than Dol races in with the news that Lovewit has come home. From the first this was always accepted as the natural termination of the 'venture tripartite' and all the shared knavery: Lovewit was the expected *deus ex machina*. (Peter Womack has shown that the first performances of *The Alchemist* coincided with the reopening of the London theatres as safe public venues after a particularly long season of plague, so initial audiences would have had throughout the play a pressing sense of Lovewit's likely arrival at any moment to complicate or resolve the action.<sup>4</sup>) Having had a false attempt at an ending, we could now justifiably suppose that Lovewit will bring matters to a brisk and efficient close. But Jonson is never one to pander to an audience's expectation. Face, cool as ever, makes a prompt decision, gives his colleagues a new set of cues ('Be silent: not a word, if he call or knock', pack all the stolen goods, take ship to Ratcliff and await instructions about dividing the booty) 'and begins calmly to metamorphose himself into a shape we have not seen him in before - all his Captain's beard 'must off' to make him 'appear smooth Jeremy', Lovewit's butler (IV. vii. 119-131). Jonson now just as coolly breaks all the rules of drama: he shifts his scene outside the house, introduces a whole new set of characters and starts what promises to be a fresh action. The quality of improvisation seems suddenly to take over the whole drama. In effect the last act works like a musical coda: a surprising finale is achieved by a magnificent flourish of all the foregoing themes.

We find Lovewit beset by his neighbours complaining about the weird goings-on in his house:

LOVEWIT : Has there been such resort, say you?

NEI.1 : Daily, sir.

NEI 2 : And nightly, too.

NEI 3 : Ay, some as brave as lords.

NEI 4 : Ladies and gentlewomen. .

NEI. 5 : citizen's wives:

NEI. 1 : And knights.

NEI. 6 : In coaches.

NEI. 2 : Yes, and oyster-womerl.

NEI. 1 : Beside other gallants.

NEI. 3 : Sailors' wives .

NEI. 4 : Tobacco-men.

NEI. 5 : Another Pimlico! (V. I. 1-6)

Again if the verse lines are respected in the delivery, the scene has a hilarious pace, exactly capturing the rhythms of tittle-tattling gossip. What emerges from it all for the bemused Lovewit is that his good neighbours have seen and heard much but know little with any factual accuracy. From chance occurrences their fertile imaginations have bred the tallest of stories:

NEI. 6 : About

Some three week's since I heard a doleful cry, As I sat up a-mending my wife's stockings.

Yes, sir, like unto a man

That had been strangled an hour, and could not Speak. (IV. i. 32-7)

Clearly humdrum lives like these have welcomed a little excitement. When Face appears as Jeremy he is the perfect servant, quiet-voiced, solicitous, even a shade obsequious. this, we find, is Face's habitual role in life and he plays it to perfection, but -who can vouch that Jeremy is Face's genuine identity, knowing (as we do) that he is such a consummate actor? Perhaps in the past Jeremy may have been the man's stable ego, but after his translation to the likes of Captain Face that old self can only be resumed as a role in future. This causes us to reflect on the identity of Lovewit throughout what follows.

In the list of *dramatis personae*, in the argument and throughout the text of the play. Lovewit is described as simply 'the master of the house'; his precise social standing is never defined. Clearly he is a gentleman and a householder, sufficiently wealthy to retire to the country when plague carries off his wife. He has no title, yet everyone immediately defers to him because his whole manner clearly implies respect is his due. Circumstances having compelled Jeremy to tell his master the truth, Lovewit takes over control of the situation. He manipulates the law more deftly than Dapper or the Brethren could do to deny anyone's claims to the goods stowed away in his house, displaces Drugger in marrying

the widow, commands with authority as Surly never could, and acts with a prompt, nonchalant effrontery that fills Kastril with admiration. He has the knack of winning the game, prizes and all, without the help of any charm or familiar; though he lacks the philosopher's stone, he has a golden tongue and a precious wit that makes him master of every eventuality; and without any profession of zeal or belief in special divine favour he conspicuously better his condition financially and emotionally to the dismay of Ananias, Tribulation and Mammon. Jeremy is required to dispose of his two partners with a minimum of fuss and return for keeping his job as butler. Except that he tells us that he loves 'a teeming wit', Lovewit remains a complete enigma to the last: the only certain facts about him are his intelligence, efficiency and power and the means by which these are expressed - his tone of voice, which is always meticulously judged, incisive - an exact, the product of a disciplined mind. Imagination in him as in Face, Subtle and Dol, is directed wholly and penetratingly at the matter in hand; fancy plays no part in its workings. He vaunts no self-importance, suffers no qualms of conscience, but succeeds by being rigorously impersonal, by projecting not a character but the stance and -vocal attributes of a type; an upper-class imperiousness, that will brook no denial. It is a typical Jonsonian joke that the *deus ex machina* who visits the benighted world of the play should possess all the qualities that the gulls severally aspire to, 'yet conspicuously not be a true aristocrat in spirit any more than they are. Lovewit's is a more studied version of the role-model than any of theirs but his observations have been single-mindedly directed at those features which are distinctively expressive of power. He may have a genial sense of humour, but he is quite ruthless.

Lovewit's arrival in Act Five brings a refreshing note of commonsense to the proceedings. His verse is regular, contained, precise. It startles us into realising that for the best part of the last three acts Jonson has been getting us to listen to sheer nonsense. His verse has shaped language into syntactical units that have given it the appearance of sense but it would be well nigh impossible to paraphrase much of the dialogue. Face, and Subtle (and to a lesser extent Dol) are adept at mesmerising their clients with scientific, fey, occult and simply street-wise jargons which they use with the incantatory power of adepts in some mystic rite. It is not what is said but the manner in which it is said that compels assent from all but Surly, just as ultimately it is Lovewit's manner that compels assent when he sends everyone but Jeremy, Kastril and his sister packing back to their private abodes to nurse their injured vanity, anger and shame. Listening to Subtle and Mammon discourse happily about alchemical practice - 'Let the water in glass E. be filtered/ And, put into the gripe's egg. Lute him well; /And leave him closed in herlneo' (II. iii. 39-41) - excites Surly's derision: all this conjuring with terms is 'somewhat like tricks o' the cards, to cheat a man/With charming' (Surly is a gamester so can recognise a con-trick when he sees one). It is all a matter of 'brave language' to him, like canting, an attempt to invest the flotsam and waste of existence ('piss and eggshells. women's terms. man's blood, /Hair o' the head, burnt clouts, chalk, merds and clay' II. iii. 194-5) with value.

Morose had been appalled by the triviality of social relations and retreated into silence the better to cultivate his inner resources. Absurd though this mania is, it springs from an accurate appraisal of the play-world: the London of Epicoene is obsessed with the need to keep up appearances; its concern with a proper decorum hardly touches on the life of the mind: let alone the spirit. Imagination is in short 'supply there except in organising games of one-upmanship. The Alchemist explores a world where imagination is for many the one solace in an otherwise bleak existence: far from inducing stillness and serenity, imagination runs riot and produces nothing but noise and vexation. We pass with lightning speed from a charade of squealing fairies to an erotic encounter between an ageing lecher and a whore in which preposterously - he struggles with rhetoric to try and make them 'feel gold, taste- gold, hear

gold, sleep gold:....concumbers gold' (IV. i: 24-30); then we are plunged into a lesson in speaking with an 'angry tongue', interspersed with a study in incomprehension between a Spaniard and several Englishspeakers where it is thought that gesture, signifies a- degree of communication, next Dol in her role of Lor's sister has her 'fit of raving' and screams gibberish which Face and Mammon endeavour to suppress; this is climaxed by a tremendous explosion and a battle royal in which Kastril, Druggez and Ananias shout down Surly. The long-sustained crescendo in sound is beautifully paced and as the decibel count increases, language increasingly parts company, with meaning. The presence of syntactical structures only emphasises the outrageous absurdity of what is being uttered:

Thou art not of the light! That ruff of pride.  
About thy neck betrays thee, and is the same  
With that which the unclean birds, in seventy-seven,  
Were seen to prank it with on divers coasts.

(IV. vii. 51-4)

Ananias is denouncing Surly's vast Spanish ruff: oratorical rhythms are being used to give a specious moral weight to what is an expression of bigotry and spite. It is simply rodomontade: so much hot air. Alert as all this makes us in detecting specious assumptions of authority, we cannot but be conscious of the gap between tone and intention in Lovewit as he takes possession of the stage-space in the final scenes. Jonson's strategies in *The Alchemist* increasingly draw our attention to the way people use words as the surest index to their inner natures, to the degree to which their minds and imaginations are disciplined. He works repeatedly by contraries to have us find directions out: noise educates us in the significance of tone; from parodies of authority and the aristocratic temper we are to infer their intrinsic constitution. It is to flatter our powers of discrimination that Jonson finally shifts Face from the centre of the stage and gives it over to the even more subtly devious Lovewit: As Face himself admits in his epilogue there is 'decorum' in this: it shows a proper humility in a good actor, that he can respect the superior artistry of another. It is a shared epilogue and it is as performers in a play which, if successful, will be regularly revived that Lovewit and Face address us, reminding us that every man in imagination is his own actor, a view of life which clearly has its thrills and its dangers.

*The Alchemist* has been the most regularly revived of Jonson's comedies in the modern theatre but the productions have not always done the play full justice. Too often it has been presented as simply a farce with little attention being paid to Jonson's richness of characterisation. It is the one play of his which directors have consistently felt free to transpose to more recent times. Gruff Rhys Jones at the Lyric Hammersmith (1985) set the action in Victorian London, wittily examining through the text the nineteenth-century ethos of the self-made man. This approach had some cogency, as did Tyrone Guthrie's up-to-the-minute 1962 version at the Old Vic which reflected the soul-destroying shabbiness of the rationconscious, post-war years in England and the nostalgia for a lost, largely mythical world of genteel ease. The problem with productions of this kind, however thoroughly carried out, is that they tend to emphasise the games with illusion in the play at the expense of the more astringent qualities in Jonson's writing. All references to the plague obviously have to be cut whereas in the original production that constant reminder of Last Things would have given a particularly pressing anxiety to the gulls' efforts at selftranscendence: their escapism, as Jonson defines it, is not just the product of a compulsive taste for fantasising; there are grim realities hedging round the characters' existence. The distinct political connotations of the dream-selves tend to be lost sight of in modern dress productions too - another

aspect of the subtle differentiations in psychology through which Jonson distinguishes the various tricksters and gulls in the play. It consequence the playing tends to be broad, even pedestrian, when nuance and precision of detail in characterisation are wanted. There is no denying the play works best when a cast allow the text to evoke a convincing sense of Jacobean London for their audiences. This was certainly the case with Trevor Nunn's production for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1977 with Ian McKellan -and John Woodvine as Face and Subtle. There was a heart-stopping precariousness about it all, which manifested itself in an increasing panic on the part of the gulls as if -deep down - they sensed they were to be balked of their goals, and in a delirious excitability in the tricksters (Face especially) at , what they were nerving themselves to do, as if they were awed by their own audacity. It was exhilarating because it was all felt to be dangerous, the anarchy had a plausible manic drive to it, because every development in the action was carefully rooted by Nunn and his cast in character. There is an element of self-consciousness about Ian McKellan's style of acting: it seems intrinsic to the dynamism of his stage personality as sit is to Olivier's or Gielgud's. The energy of his' creative intelligence during a performance compels attention, never more so than when a role allows him scope for an exuberance and fervour in his temperament. Nunn wisely built his production around this quality in his Face and made *The Alchemist* less a play about folly or greed than about acting and its\* ubiquity in human relations. That was to touch the pulse of Jonson's comedy.

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### 8.3 His Writings

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The first thing to realise about Jonson's work s that in his sharp and incisive criticism of famous contemporaries, he was actuated entirely by a well-considered theory of the drama, quite opposed to the methods of Shakespeare and other exponents of the romantic drama. There was never any petty : That “ she “ is also a boy, is speedily disclosed by the nephew, and the farcical denouement is accomplished with many ingenious turns and boundless vivacity. The characters one and all are vigorously .and amusingly drawn.

*The Alchemist* gives us another and less farcical study in trickery, though there is abundant merriment in it ; while there are excellent sketches of -humbugs and gulls of every variety ; one of the most successful being Sir Epicure Hammon. This play, like *Volpone*, is written in blank verse-prose being used in *The Silent Woman*-and the style through out is animated and flexible, well suited to the subject matter.

For sheer fun and high spirits, however, *Bartholomew Fair* must take the first place. Inferior to the other comedies in constructive skill, and overdrawn in parts, it is an amazingly vivid and -many-sided presentment of contemporary manners. The stage is crowded with amusing figures, the mountebank, the fussy politician, the “Ebenezer Stiggins “of the day, and many others.

After an interval of nine years, came *The Staple of News*, modelled on Aristophanic lines, but lacking in the constructive power and comic invention of the earlier work, and those that followed show even a greater falling off ; “mere dialogues” Dryden called them not unfairly. -Indeed, Jonson was played out.

#### (2) His Gift of Detailed Observation

In treating of Jonson's craftsmanship, something has been said of this visualising power. Here is the ‘most remarkable side of his power as a writer for the stage. Whether he is dealing with clear-cut characters or clear-cut repartee, he is equally happy. He has an eye for external peculiarities,

unequalled by any of our men of letters save Smollett and Dickens. He points to the men of his day full of whims and cranks

“When some one peculiar quality

Doth so possess a man that it doth draw All his affects, his spirits and his power  
In their Confluxions all to run one way ; This may be truly said to be a humour.”

Note the touches with which he builds up Volpone's character :

“I gain

No common way ; I use no trade, no venture ; Wound no Earth with ploughshares, fat  
no beasts

To feed the, shambles ; have no mills for iron, Oil, corn, or men to grind them into  
powder.”

There is something of Dickens' enjoyment in the comic invention with which he overlays his figures. One recalls Zeal of the Land Busy in Bartholomew Fair, who pretended to be so greatly shocked by the gaieties, yet is discovered “ fast by the teeth in the cold turkey pie with a great white loaf on his left hand and a glass of Malmsey on his right.” Later on he moralises (a la Pecksniff at Todgers') about his food, “We may be religious in the minds of the profane, so it be eaten with a reformed mouth.” He calls the fair “ the shop of Satan,” yet is surprisingly familiar with its devious ways. Ultimately he gets put in the stocks.

### **1 Every Man in his Humour (Prologue.)**

There is no more elaborate painter of London life than Jonson. Shakespeare paints with a bigger brush, but for detailed effects Jonson is supreme. He satirises vice with the vigour of Moliere, but not with his adroitness. Had he lashed less furiously he might have kept a better edge on his rapier. Truly did a friend once say to him, “You write with a porcupine quill dipped into too much gall.”

Yet this over emphasis was certainly not due to any blunted observation. His similes are neat and happy. For instance, this of an ill-bred man :

“He minds

A curtesy no more than London Bridge

Which arch was mended last.”

And when he keeps his didacticism in check, as in that amusing farce, Bartholomew Fair, his observant humour finds abundant scope.

### **(3) His Graceful Fancy**

In imaginative intensity Jonson is inferior not only to Shakespeare, but to Marlowe, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, and other contemporaries. But he had a graceful fancy which showed to rich advantage in the Masques ; and here and there it lightens up the Comedies with luminous flashes.

His last work, The Sad Sheplard, contains some of his pleasantest conceits. The Shepherd laments his charming Earine ; spring had died with her, and since then earth has borne but thorns : “  
Here she was wont to go, and here, and here,

Just where those daisies, pinks, and violets grow ;

The world may find the spring by following her. ...”

His lyrics have sweetness and abundant grace. As instances, there are the songs, “C do not wanton with those eyes,” the “Celia” cycle, and the familiar paraphrase from Philistrates, “Drink to me only. . . .”

Yet with all these qualities, with an exuberant and graceful fancy, with his ripe scholarship, his clear visualising power, his satiric faculty, the plays of Jonson leave in the reader’s mind a certain coldness. We feel something is lacking. We admire, but are not carried away ; our minds are stimulated but the emotions are rarely ‘gripped. We realise the greatness of the man, but-What then is the matter Y The matter seems to be that his mind and imagination never fused with the white heat of creative passion as was the case with Shakespeare. His intellect tyrannised over his art. He was too intent on proving some moral thesis, and admirable as his satire is, he was ever forgetting the artist in the moralist and riding a folly to death ; spoiling a humorous character by a multiplying of comic minutiae. None the less, many of the figures, despite the touch of caricature, are alive. His vitality and observant power endow them with life ; and make us believe in them-anyhow for the time being—even if they do not enshrine themselves in our memories, as do the characters of Shakespeare.

But if there are very definite limitations to Jonson’s attractiveness as a dramatist, it would be hard to exaggerate the remarkable influence he exercised on the drama. His jealousy for form and coherence, his scrupulous avoidance of the weaknesses of the Romantic drama; his shrewd spite or jealousy in his criticisms ; sharply as he chided the great Master on occasion, no other has left a more splendid or\_ more memorable tribute to his genius than he, in declaring that his works were “ not of an age, but for all time.”

There is, despite all the natural contentiousness of the man, an invincible honesty, a fine generosity, that make his criticism especially valuable.

With his non-dramatic writings we are concerned elsewhere. It is sufficient there to emphasize the strength and clarity of his prose, the charm and grace of much of his verse. Unlike Marlowe, he leaned towards classic rather than romantic methods. Unlike Shakespeare, he deals with human life in sections rather than as a whole ; being content to satirise manners rather than to paint men and women. In his drama, he is a moralist first and foremost, afterwards the artist. But his scope is very wide, comprising tragedies, comedies, masques, and farces.

His masques, replete in folk-lore learning, and ‘classical imagery, are enlivened with gay interludes and pretty flights of fancy, for which he has less scope in the orthodox drama. If some of his contemporaries excelled him, as certainly they did in lyric sweetness and abandon, or displayed a more delicate invention on the purely imaginative side, no other writer of the time equalled, much less excelled him, in the all-round excellence of the masques, in the piquant blend of scholastic learning and fantastic frippery ; indeed the famous Court masque of Jacobean times owes its form and comeliness largely to his indefatigable labours. Akin to the Masques, is the unfinished Pastoral, *The Sad Shepherd*, written with a lightness of touch, and delightful abandonment, that comes on the reader as a surprise.

We may regard the comedies and tragedies under three aspects, especially characteristic of Jonson.

### **(1) His Technical Skill as a Playwright**

When first he threw in his lot with the playwrights, he frankly followed the current demand, for



romantic drama, showing no small skill in adopting the full-blooded romantic manner. Even here, in the early years of apprenticeship; he displayed vigorous power of imagination ; but romantic drama was not characteristically expressive of the man's personality. After his dismissal by the theatrical manager, Hensbwe, a rival manager William Shakespeare—come forward and helped him to put on his comedy, *Every Man in His Humour*. Here Jonson for the first time struck the anti-romantic note, and sought to establish a satirical comedy of manners framed in a definite plan. He saw clearly enough that despite the splendid, exuberant power of the Shakespearean drama, there was no underlying theory or convention, and that its tendency to become formless and chaotic would be a serious matter without the genius of such men as Shakespeare to guide and control.

In the prologue to *Every Man in His Humour*, Jonson puts forward his plan of reform, electing to “sport with human folliee, not with crimes.” The word “humour,” as used by Jonson, implied some oddity of disposition, especially with regard to the ‘manners of the day.

The invention of Bobadil is one of his happiest; - and the whole play, while clear and coherent in its’ framework, is alive with cosmic power, happy and not too heavily underlined.

Jonson made quite clear how he disapproved of : the happy-go-lucky selection of plots. He would” have none of those who “ waylay all the old books \_ they can hear of, in print or otherwise, to farce their ‘ scenes withal . . . as if their imagination lived wholly upon another’ man’s trencher.” He came to= the making of comedies with a fine knowledge of Old English Literature, and of the classics, and with an intimate acquaintance of London life in all its guises. In the comedies that follow *Every Man out of His Humour*, and *Cynthia’s Revels*, the same care for clearness and definition are observed ; but the moral aim of the satirist is somewhat too obvious; and the machinery creaks at times rather painfully.

His next ventures are in the direction of tragedy -of these *Sejanus* and *Catiline* are the most noteworthy. Here he tried to carry out the same plan previously attempted in comedy. He wished to revert to the severe conventions of the classic drama., But the scholar trips up the artist this time, just as the moralist did before. In his endeavour to be genuinely historical, and to avoid all irrelevance,’ he becomes dull and pedantic.

Not that *Sejanus* and *Catiline* are complete failures. If the endeavour to preserve, so far, as practicable, the dramatic unities (in *Sejanus* he gives up unity of Time) leads to dullness, and if his avoidance of comic contrasts found no compensating advantage in eloquent diction, yet the characterisation is always thoughtful and well considered, and at times arresting. But whatever the \_ merits of these plays may be, they pale beside the rich power of the comedies that followed : *Volpone*, *The Silent Woman*, and *The Alchemist*.

*Volpone*, or the Fox, is a study in avarice.

*Volpone* is no common miser, he glories **less in** the hoarding of his treasure than in its acquisition; and he revels in the hypocrisies of those who are ever ready to fawn upon the rich man, fooling them to the top of their bent. The play is extraordinarily clever, and brilliantly constructed. Its defects lie in a certain hardness, and in lack of,, humanity. It deals relentlessly with the most contemptible qualities in human nature, and the bitterness of its cynical humour leaves an unpleasant taste in the mouth.

*The Silent Woman* is written in more genial vein. Here is comedy, with a dash of farce, and

Coleridge considered it the most entertaining of the author's comedies. It is certainly highly amusing, and in point of construction fully as admirable as *Volpone*.

The story deals with a disagreeable old man, Morose, who has a special hatred of noise. Upon him is played a trick by his nephew, who introduces a boy dressed up as a woman, with a special gift for, silence. This trait naturally commends itself to Morose, who marries Epicoene and, finds, after the wedding, that his wife is a perfect tornado of noise, penetrating observation of manners, these things may be traced in the work of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Chapman, Marston, and Middleton, of Randolph and May, to mention some who profited by Jonson's methods. After the restoration his popularity increased, and although his serious efforts failed to attract, yet his comedies held the stage for many years, and proved more to the taste of the Court than the pastoral comedies of Shakespeare.

As an influence on other forms of literatures, the "humours" of Jonson are not without literary descendants in the novel of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They can be met in the pages of Fielding; they crowd the stories of Smollett; and Dickens, who was certainly influenced by Smollett in his earlier work, was as certainly indebted to the comic inventiveness of Jonson.

Source : Arthur Compton-Rickett, *A History of English Literature*.

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## 8.4 Let Us Sum Up

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A critical overview of Jonson's the *the Alchemist* must have helped you understand what comedy of humour is. Besides you have seen how as a moral comedy it reflects the society and London of his times.

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## 8.5 Review Questions

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1. Write an essay on the themes of lust and greed as developed in *The Alchemist*.
2. Do you agree that the plot of *The Alchemist* is very simple ? Give a reasoned answer.
3. Discuss *The Alchemist* as a moral comedy.
4. How does Jonson reflect the society and London of his times ?
5. Write a note on Jonson's art of characterization in *The Alchemist*.
6. Illustrate Jonson's use of satire and ridicule in *The Alchemist*.

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## 8.6 Bibliography

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## UNIT-9

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### CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE : DOCTOR FAUSTUS-I

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#### Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Christopher Marlowe: *Dr. Faustus*.
  - 9.2.1 The Elizabethan Age.
  - 9.2.2 Christopher Marlowe
  - 9.2.3 Introduction to the Play: *Dr. Faustus*
  - 9.2.4 Summary of the Play: *Dr. Faustus*
  - 9.2.5 Dramatis Personae.
  - 9.2.6 Extracts from the Play
  - 9.2.7 Glossary
  - 9.2.8 Commentary on the Extracts
  - 9.2.9 Model Explanations
- 9.3 Self- Assessment Questions.
- 9.4 Answers to SAQs.
- 9.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.6 Review Questions
- 9.7. Bibliography

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#### 9.0 Objectives

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After going through this unit you will be able to

- know about Christopher Marlowe and some of his important works.
- have an opinion about morality plays and *Dr. Faustus* as an example of that kind.
- know how a writer uses personification & allegory in drama.
- know how conflict in the mind of the protagonist is an important part of his character.
- know how wrong choice by a character is made under temptation in a drama.

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#### 9.1 Introduction

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The play *Dr. Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe has been discussed for your benefit in two consecutive units. As it is not possible for us to give you the whole play in these Units, selected

important extracts from the play have been given for you in original. It is advised that you should study the whole play at your own level taking help from the summary and commentary on the extracted passages. Glossary for the three extracts of this unit has been given after the extracts. Commentary given will help you to understand these extracts in particular and the whole play in general. Model explanations have been given so as to enable you to attempt well in your examinations. As the unit cannot have long answers, self-assessment questions and their short answers have been provided. You should match your answers with the given ones. You can use your own words and rephrase the given matter. You should consult the material mentioned for further reading. At the end of this Unit you will find certain essay-type, long answer questions. These questions are to be attempted by you to improve your writing skills for the examinations.

As Unit 7 and Unit 8 are based on the same play *Dr. Faustus*, you will study the rest of the play in Unit 8 by way of citing important extracts from Act III to Act V.

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## **9.2 Christopher Marlowe: *Dr. Faustus***

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### **9.2.1 The Elizabethan Age**

The Elizabethan Age denotes the period of Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558-1603). This was the period of great development in England, especially in the fields of commerce, naval power and nationalistic feelings e.g. the event of the defeat of Spanish Armada (1588). It was also a great age of English literature.

Though the Renaissance had reached England a little earlier yet it did not have its flowering till the Elizabethan Age. The age has such writers as Sidney, Marlowe, Spencer, Shakespeare, Raleigh, Bacon, Ben Jonson and many other writers who excelled in prose, drama, lyric and narrative poetry. Literature in this age was greatly influenced by two movements – Reformation and Renaissance.

The most striking feature of the Elizabethan Age is the rise of Romantic drama. Further, while in France the literary arts were meant for aristocratic class, in England the Renaissance in literature and other arts was rooted in the masses. Another important feature was the introduction of new form of expression e.g. the sonnet form in English Literature by Wyatt.

Some of the important works of the age include Spencer's *Faerie Queene* and *Epithalamion*, Bacon's *Essays*, Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*, Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*.

But the two among the most important writers of the age were Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare whose works are discussed for you in Unit No. 7, 8, 12 and 13.

Thus, we see that Elizabethan Age saw the upsurge in literature as a result of the Renaissance. This age is considered the most illustrious age in the history of English literature. Poetry, drama and a rich variety of prose flourished during the era. Though some patterns and themes lingered on, the high tone of most of the literary forms, particularly drama, weakened suddenly at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **9.2.2 Christopher Marlowe**

Christopher Marlowe (1564-93) was the son of a poor Canterbury shoemaker. Through the

kindness of a patron he was educated at the King's School, Canterbury and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In London he lived in a low-tavern atmosphere of excess & wretchedness. He had excellent classical achievements as is clear from his works but he had a violent temperament. From 1587 he wrote plays for London theatres. In 1592 he was deported from Netherlands for attempting to issue forged gold coins. Different descriptions of Marlowe's death have been provided by different writers. According to documents in Public Record Office, in 1593 he was killed in a Deptford tavern after a quarrel over the bill. He was only 29 when he died. The ending of *Dr. Faustus* is applicable to his own life:

*Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burned is Apollo's laurel-bough  
That sometime grew within this learned man.*

In spite of his violent life Marlowe was an admired and influential figure. Shakespeare's early histories are strongly influenced by Marlowe and a rich tribute is paid to him in *As You Like It*. Dr. Samuel Johnson praised him for his "mighty line". Peele, Nashe, Chapman, G. Harvey & Drayton also praised Marlowe. His career has been short but brilliant. He is the most important contemporary of William Shakespeare in English drama.

Some of his important works are the following:

<i>Tamburlaine –</i>	1590
<i>The Tragedie of Dido, Queen of Carthage -</i>	1594
<i>The Massacre at Paris -</i>	1594
<i>Edward II</i>	1594
<i>Dr. Faustus</i>	1604
<i>The Jew of Malta</i>	1633

Besides these plays he has written a poem called *Hero and Leander* (1592) in which the Renaissance movement is clearly reflected. This poem was later completed by George Chapman. He has also written one of the finest pastoral lyrics in the English language: *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*.

### **9.2.3 Introduction to the Play: *Dr. Faustus***

*Dr. Faustus* is Marlowe's most famous play which uses the dramatic framework of a morality play. Its characters have allegorical significance & personification of moral qualities. It is a presentation of a story of temptation, fall, and damnation. Marlowe has dramatized the medieval legend of a man who sold his soul to the Devil. He became identified with a Dr. Faustus who was a necromancer of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It echoes the fall of Adam and Eve through temptation by the Devil.

### **9.2.4 Summary of the Play: *Dr. Faustus***

*The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* is a drama in blank verse and prose by Christopher Marlowe. The protagonist of the play, Dr. Faustus, does not choose the sciences and many other

disciplines of knowledge but studies magic. He opines that a mighty magician is a mighty god. With the help of necromantic books he calls up Mephistopheles and gets knowledge about God, Devil, Heaven and Hell. He makes a contract with Mephistopheles to surrender his soul to the Devil, for 24 years of pleasure life. During these 24 years of contract Mephistopheles shall attend on him, provide him whatever Dr. Faustus demands. This contract is fulfilled through a number of scenes.

As the drama has been written in the form of a morality play, good and evil are personified and have allegorical significance. Time and again conflict takes place in the mind of Dr. Faustus when Good Angel advises him to shun the path of evil and remember Christ. God can pardon the sinner but whenever Faustus thinks of God he is tortured by the devilish spirits or is tempted and lured by the seven deadly sins. The middle part of the play is full of farce, frolic and comic scenes. On the request of his friends and with the help of Mephistopheles Faustus calls up Helen of Troy and wishes to enjoy kissing her. He addresses Helen in the well known lines: “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium...” As the time of completion of 24 years of pleasure life is about to come to an end, the mind of Dr. Faustus is greatly anguished. He has to surrender his soul to the Devil. As the time of the contract expires, the Devil takes away his soul, and the play comes to an end.

### 9.2.5 Dramatis Personae

The Pope	An Old Man
Cardinal of Lorraine	Scholars, Friars, and Attendants
The Emperor of Germany	Duchess of Vanholt
Duke of Vanholt	Lucifer
Faustus	Beelzebub
Valdes	Mephistopheles
Cornelius	Good Angel
Wagner, servant to Faustus	Evil Angel
Clown	The Seven Deadly Sins.
Robin	Devils
Ralph	Spirits in the shapes of Alexander
Horse-Courser	the Great, of his Paramour, and of Helen.
A Knight	Chorus.

### 9.2.6 Extracts from the Play

#### Extract I [Act I sc(i). ll 42-95]

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

Why, then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die:

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.  
What doctrine call you this, *Che sera, sera*,  
What will be, shall be ? Divinity, adieu !  
These metaphysics of magicians,  
And necromantic books are heavenly;  
Lines, circles, scenes, letters, and characters;  
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.  
O, what a world of profit and delight,  
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,  
Is promis'd to the studious artizan!  
All things that move between the quiet poles  
Shall be at my command: emperors and kings  
Are but obey'd i' their sev'ral provinces,  
Nor can they raise the wind, or rend the clouds;  
But his dominion that exceeds in this  
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man;  
A sound magician is a mighty god:  
Here, Faustus, tire thy brains to gain a deity

**Enter Wagner**

Faust            Wagner, commend me to my dearest friends,  
                  The German Valdes and Cornelius;  
                  Request them earnestly to visit me.

Wag            I will, sir

Faust            Their conference will be a greater help to me  
                  Than all my labours, plod I ne'er so fast.

**Enter GOOD ANGEL and EVIL ANGEL**

Good Ang.    O, Faustus, lay that damned book aside,  
                  And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,  
                  And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head!  
                  Read, read the Scriptures: - that is blasphemy.

Evil Ang.     Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art

Wherein all Nature's treasure is contain'd:  
 Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,  
 Lord and commander of these elements.

Faust      How am I glutt'd with conceit of this !  
 Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,  
 Resolve me of all ambiguities,  
 Perform what desperate enterprise I will ?  
 I'll have them fly to India for gold,  
 Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,  
 And search all corners of the new found world  
 For pleasant fruits and princely delicates;  
 I'll have them read me strange philosophy,  
 And tell the secrets of all foreign kings;  
 I'll have them wall all Germany with brass,  
 And make swift Rhine circle fair Wittenberg;  
 I'll have them fill the public schools with silk,  
 Wherewith the students shall be bravely clad;  
 I'll levy soldiers with the coin they bring;  
 And chase the Prince of Parma from our land,  
 And reign sole king of all the provinces;  
 Yea, stranger engines for the brunt of war,  
 Than was the fiery keel at Antwerp's bridge,  
 I'll make my servile spirits to invent.

**Extract II [Act I sc(iii), ll 26 - 114]**

Faust.      I see there's virtue in my heavenly words:  
 Who would not be proficient in this art ?  
 How pliant is this Mephistopheles,  
 Full of obedience and humility !  
 Such is the force of magic and my spells:  
 Now, Faustus, thou art conjuror laureate,  
 That canst command great Mephistopheles:



**Enter MEPHISTOPHELES (like a Franciscan friar)**

Meph. Now, Faustus, what wouldst thou have me do ?

Faust. I charge thee wait upon me whilst I live,  
To do whatever Faustus shall command,  
Be it to make the moon drop from her sphere,  
Or the ocean to overwhelm the world.

Meph. I am a servant to great Lucifer,  
And may not follow thee without his leave:

Faust. Did not he charge thee to appear to me ?

Meph. No, I came hither of mine own accord.

Faust. Did not my conjuring speeches raise thee ? Speak.

Meph. That was the cause, but yet per accident;  
For, when we hear one rack the name of God,  
Abjure the Scriptures and his Saviour Christ,  
We fly, in hope to get his glorious soul;  
Nor will we come, unless he use such means  
Whereby he is in danger to be damn'd.  
Therefore the shortest cut for conjuring  
Is stoutly to abjure the Trinity,  
And pray devoutly to the prince of Hell.

Faust. So Faustus hath  
Already done; and holds the principle,  
There is no chief but only Beelzebub  
To whom Faustus doth dedicate himself.  
This word "damnation" terrifies not him,  
For he confounds hell in Elysium:  
His ghost be with the old philosophers !  
But, leaving these vain trifles of men's souls,  
Tell me what is that Lucifer, thy Lord?

Meph. Arch-regent and commander of all spirits.

Faust. Was not that Lucifer an angel once?

Meph. Yes, Faustus, and most dearly lov'd of God.

Faust. How comes it, then, that he is prince of devils?

Meph. O, by aspiring pride and insolence;  
For which God threw him from the face of heaven.

Faust. And what are you that live with Lucifer ?

Meph. Unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer,  
Conspir'd against our God with Lucifer,  
And are for ever damn'd with Lucifer.

Faust. Where are you damn'd ?

Meph. In hell.

Faust. How comes it, then/, that thou art out of hell ?

Meph. Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it:  
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,  
In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss ?  
O, Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul !

Faust. What, is great Mephistopheles so passionate  
For being deprived of the joys of heaven ?  
Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude.  
And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess.  
Go bear these tidings to great Lucifer:  
Seeing Faustus hath incurr'd eternal death  
By desperate thoughts against Jove's deity.  
Say, he surrenders up to him his soul,  
So he will spare him four and twenty years,  
Letting him live in all voluptuousness;  
Having thee ever to attend on me,  
To give me whatsoever I shall ask,

To tell me whatsoever I demand,  
To slay mine enemies, and aid my friends,  
And always be obedient to my will.  
Go and return to mighty Lucifer,  
And meet me in my study at midnight,  
And then resolve me of thy master's mind.

Meph. I will, Faustus.

Faust. Had I as many souls as there be stars,  
I'd give them all for Mephistopheles.  
By him I'll be great emperor of the world,  
And make a bridge through the moving air,  
To pass the ocean with a band of men;  
I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore,  
And make that country continent to Spain,  
And both contributory to my crown:  
The Emperor shall not live but by my leave,  
Nor any potentate of Germany.  
Now that I have obtain'd what I desir'd,  
I'll live in speculation of this art,  
Till Mephistopheles return again.

**Extract III [ Act II sc. (i), ll 43-108]**

Meph. As great as have the human souls of men.  
But tell me, Faustus, shall I have thy soul ?  
And I will be thy slave, and wait on thee,  
And give thee more than thou hast wit to ask.

Faust. Ay, Mephistopheles, I give it thee.

Meph. Then, Faustus, stab thine arm courageously,  
And bind thy soul, that at some certain day  
Great Lucifer may claim it as his own;  
And then be thou as great as Lucifer.

Faust. [Stabbing his arm] Lo, Mephistopheles, for love of thee,

I cut mine arm, and with my proper blood  
Assure my soul to be great Lucifer's,  
Chief lord and regent of perpetual night !  
View here the blood that trickles from mine arm,  
And let it be propitious for my wish.

Meph. Write it in manner of a deed of gift.

Faust. Ay, so I will . [Writes]. But, Mephistopheles,  
My blood congeals, and I can write no more.

Meph. I'll fetch thee fire to dissolve it straight.

Faust. What might the staying of my blood portend ?  
Is it unwilling I should write this bill ?  
Why streams it not, that I may write afresh ?  
*Faustus gives thee his soul:* all, there it stay'd !  
Why should'st thou not ? is not thy soul thine own ?  
Then write again, *Faustus gives thee his soul.*

**Re-enter MEPHISTOPHELES with a chafer of coals**

Meph. Here's fire; come, Faustus, set it on.

Faust. So, now the blood begins to clear again;  
Now will I make an end immediately.

Meph. O, what will not I do to obtain his soul ?

Faustus. *Consummatum est* ; this bill is ended,  
And Faustus hath bequeathed his soul to Lucifer.  
But what is this inscription on mine arm ?  
*Homo, fuge:* whither should I fly ?  
If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.  
My senses are deceiv'd; here's nothing writ:  
I see it plain; here in this place is writ,  
*Homo, fuge:* yet shall not Faustus fly.

Meph. I'll fetch him somewhat to delight his mind.  
[Aside, and then exit]

**Re-enter MEPHISTOPHELES with DEVILS, who give crowns and rich apparel to**

## FAUSTUS, dance, and then depart.

Faust. Speak, Mephistopheles, what means this show !

Meph. Nothing, Faustus, but to delight thy mind withal,  
And to shew thee what magic can perform.

Faust. But may I raise up spirits when I please ?

Meph. Ay, Faustus, and do greater things than these.

Faust. Then there's enough for a thousand souls.

Here, Mephistopheles, receive this scroll,

A deed of gift of body and of soul:

But yet conditionally that thou perform

All articles prescrib'd between us both.

Meph. Faustus, I swear by hell and Lucifer

To effect all promises between us made.

Faust. Then hear me read them. *[Reads]* On these conditions following. First, that Faustus may be a spirit in form and substance. Secondly, that Mephistopheles shall be his servant, and at his command. Thirdly, that Mephistopheles shall do for him, and bring him whatsoever he desires. Fourthly, that he shall be in his chamber or house invisible. Lastly, that he shall appear to the said John Faustus at all times, in what form or shape soever he please. I, John Faustus of Wittenberg, Doctor by these presents, do give both body and soul to Lucifer, prince of the East, and his minister Mephistopheles; and furthermore grant unto them, that, twenty-four years being expired, the articles above written inviolate, full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods, into their habitation wheresoever. By me, John Faustus.

## 9.2.7 Glossary

### Extract I

<i>che sera, sera</i>	- what will be, shall be i.e. whatever is to happen must happen
necromantic	- concerning magic
scenes	- diagrams
characters	- signs
omnipotence	- unlimited power
artizan	- artist
quiet	- motionless, unmoving
rend	- tear apart, separate

sound	- competent
tire	- exhaust by working hard
conference	- conversation
plod	- work laboriously
[Good Angel, Evil- Angel]	[allegorical representation of good and evil as is found in morality plays]
Scriptures	- holy books like the Bible
blasphemy	- insult to God
Jove	- Jupiter, chief god of ancient Rome & Italy
glutted	- filled, overloaded
conceit	- notion
ambiguities	- doubtful or obscure matter
desperate	- reckless
ransack	- search thoroughly
orient	- shining (literally it means eastern )
delicates	- delicious eatables
Rhine	- name of the river in Germany
Wittenberg	- name of the city where the protagonist of the play Dr. Faustus studies.
schools	- universities
bravely	- finely
clad	- clothed, dressed
Prince of Parma	- enemy of Germany. Parma is the name of the region in Northern Italy.
brunt	- assault, fighting
keel	- ship
Antwerp	- name of a place in Belgium, one of the world's major seaports. It is located 88 Km south-east of the North Sea. As a distribution centre for Spanish & Portuguese trade, it became the commercial and financial capital of Europe in the 16 <sup>th</sup> Century.
servile	- obedient and humble

## Extract II

- virtue - merit, power
- pliant - obedient, ready to be influenced
- conjurer laureate - highly distinguished magician.

*Quin regis Mephistopheles* - for indeed you rule in the image of your brother,  
Mephistopheles. *frantris imagine*

- per accident - incidentally
- rack - twist, distort
- abjure - renounce, give up
- stoutly - firmly
- Trinity - In Christian doctrine, the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one God in three persons. The word "Trinity" does not appear in the Bible. It is a doctrine to interpret how God revealed himself.
- Beelzebub - a devil, follower of Lucifer or Satan
- Elysium - heaven
- Arch – regent - chief ruler
- aspiring pride - pride of ambition
- frivolous - trivial, silly.
- passionate - emotionally stirred
- fortitude - courage
- tidings - message, news

## Extract III

- wit - intelligence
- bind - pledge
- proper - own
- assure - promise
- regent - rural
- perpetual night - place of everlasting darkness, hell
- view - sea
- propitious for - favourable to
- congeals - thickens, solidifies
- portend - foretell, indicate

bill	- document
chafer	- vessel
<i>consummatum est</i>	- it is finished
<i>Homo, fuge</i>	- man, flee
writ	- written
withal	- besides, in addition to
scroll	- roll of paper
articles	- clauses, conditions
prescribed	- laid down
effect	- implement, fulfill.
presents	- present document
minister	- agent, attendant
inviolat	- intact, not violated
habitation	- dwelling place

### 9.2.8 Commentary on the Extracts

Extract I is a part of Act 1 Sc (i). In the early part of this extract Dr. Faustus, the chief character of the play, decides to study necromancy i.e. black art. He intends to attain supernatural powers by studying necromancy. The other branches of knowledge cannot make him a mighty god. He thinks that the study of magic can lead him to attain infinite powers. He will be greater and mightier than emperors and kings of various nations. By black art he will be able to rule over all the elements of this world and can extend his rule as far as man can think of. The character of Faustus through the critical choice is revealed in this scene. His vigour, impatience and a proud Renaissance humanism are felt in his soliloquy. The Good Angel and the Evil Angel are the representation of good and evil. The personification and allegorical devices make it clear that the Good Angel and the Evil Angel are representatives of good and evil impulses of Dr. Faustus. The conflict in his mind has begun. The two types of angels are the two dimensions of his own soul.

Extract II is the major part of Act I Sc (iii). In the beginning of this extract Dr. Faustus feels overjoyed at his achievements. He finds Mephistopheles very pliant, obedient and humble. Dr. Faustus feels that he has become an expert magician. He treats Mephistopheles as his brother through whom he will rule over the world. There are some important observations which Mephistopheles makes during his dialogue and discussion with Dr. Faustus. He has not responded to the conjuring of Dr. Faustus but more because Faustus is ready to be damned. Mephistopheles tells that Lucifer fell from heaven due to pride & insolence but Faustus does not take heed of it and is bent upon being a mighty god. Faustus ignores the remark of Mephistopheles about hell as hell is not a place but a state of mind. Faustus fails to understand why Mephistopheles regrets his fall from heaven into hell. Faustus reaffirms to give his soul to Lucifer (even if he had as many souls as are the stars) for 24 years of voluptuousness & power.

Extract III is from Act II Sc (i) of the play where Faustus makes a deed of gift of body & soul



after much discussion with Mephistopheles. This is dramatically a very important scene of the play. Faustus is mentally alert and is advised by the Good Angel and the Evil Angel before signing the bond. He feels the mental conflict but decides in favour of the evil as Mephistopheles succeeds in tempting him. The conflict increases as the two angels are allegorically two parts of Faustus' own soul. Faustus could have taken a warning note from the congealing of his blood and the inscription "Homo, fuge". This inscription on his arm reminds the reader the dagger scene in *Macbeth* where Macbeth sees a dagger in the air or it might be hallucination due to the heat-oppressed mind in both the cases. The inscription on the arm of Faustus is a warning signal signifying his blunder. Congealing of the blood & the inscription on his arm add tension and conflict in the mind of the hero, and have a psychological value. But against these two warnings, Faustus signs the bond due to the strong temptations offered by Mephistopheles.

### 9.2.9 Model Explanations

(a) Lines, circles, scenes .... studious artizan,

This is an extract from the soliloquy of Dr. Faustus which appears at the beginning of the play written by Christopher Marlowe. Dr. Faustus, the protagonist of the play, in Act I, Sc (i), rejects study of various branches of knowledge namely logic, philosophy, medicine, law and theology. They cannot fulfill the desires of Faustus as he wants to be a mighty god to rule over all the elements of the world. In the end he chooses necromancy for his career.

In necromancy Faustus is ready to know and learn all the meanings of lines, circles, scenes, letters and signs so that he may raise devilish spirits at his command to perform what he wants. He feels that black art is a world of profit, delight, power, honour and omnipotence if one becomes a studious scholar of magic.

Faustus is responsible for his final tragedy as he makes a choice at an early stage in the play to study magic for his career. He can be compared to Lucifer who fell from heaven as he aspired to be supreme power and waged a war against God. Faustus like Icarus wants to achieve greatness despite clear warnings from Good Angel. These lines reflect that Dr. Faustus wants to gain power & wealth for voluptuousness which leads to his damnation. Marlowe wrote this play in the form of a morality play.

(b) Why, this is hell..... everlasting bliss?

These lines are an extract from Act I Sc (iii) of the play *Dr. Faustus* written by Christopher Marlowe. After the choice to study necromantic books to gain power and wealth for 24 years of pleasure life, Faustus is being lured by Mephistopheles to give his body & soul to Lucifer. In response to Faustus' question Mephistopheles explains what hell is and how the fallen spirits cannot go out of it.

Mephistopheles is one of the followers of Lucifer who revolted against God and he is damned forever in hell. He explains to Faustus that he used to be one of the angels in heaven and enjoyed all eternal joys of heaven. Because he is deprived of that everlasting bliss, he is being tormented with many hells. He explains that wherever he goes, hell is there. Hell is not a fixed place but a situation of extreme torture for all the damned souls.

As Faustus is determined to abjure the Trinity and abuse God, the Scriptures and Christ, he

calls it manly fortitude from which even Mephistopheles can take inspiration. He is hell-bent to bargain power and pleasure for 24 years by presenting his body & soul and all belongings to Lucifer. Despite Mephistopheles' frank description of hell where fallen angels live a tormenting life away from eternal joys of heaven, Faustus is not terrified of damnation. Desire of power and voluptuousness leads him to damnation in the end.

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### 9.3 Self Assessment Questions

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#### Extract I

1. Why does Dr. Faustus decide in favour of necromancy than any other field of knowledge?

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2. Describe the roll played by Good Angel & Evil Angel.

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3. What does Dr. Faustus intend to do with the help of spirits?

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4. Name the two friends of Dr. Faustus. What is their role?

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#### Extract II

5. Describe hell as depicted by Mephistopheles.

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6. When & why does Mephistopheles appear?

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7. Describe Lucifer.

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8. What led to the fall of Lucifer and his followers?

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**Extract III**

9. Write the manner in which Faustus has to pledge his soul to Lucifer.

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10. What happens when Faustus stabs his arm?

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11. What happens when the document or the will to give the soul to Lucifer is executed?

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12. What is done by Mephistopheles to delight Faustus' mind?

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13. For what does Dr. Faustus sign the bond?

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14. What are the main conditions of the bond?

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15. What are the things given by Dr. Faustus to Lucifer after the expiry of 24 years of bond?

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## 9.4 Let Us Sum Up

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By now you have studied the short life history of Marlowe and titles of his main works. You have gone through the summary of the whole play *Dr. Faustus* in brief and the important extracts in original. With the help of the commentary and the explanations you have got an idea about the theme and the art involved in the play. You have studied how certain characters create conflict in the mind of the protagonist through allegorical representation.

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## 9.5 Answers To SAQs

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### Extract I

1. According to Dr. Faustus divinity cannot save us from being sinners & death. Similarly other branches of knowledge are rejected by Faustus as they cannot make him immortal & powerful. In magic he finds the world of profit, delight, power, honour and omnipotence. A sound

magician can be a powerful god. Due to all these reasons Faustus decides to study magic.

2. Good Angel and Evil Angel are symbolic representation of good and evil in this world. They are very much inside the mind and soul of Faustus himself. The two types of contrary voices cause conflict in the mind of the hero.
3. By raising spirits with the help of magic Faustus wants to perform certain hard tasks. He will get all his ambiguities resolved, get gold from India and pearl from ocean and delicacies from America. He will get all the secrets of the foreign kings & wall Germany with brass. He will divert the course of the river Rhine. He will have enough silk clothes for the students. With the wealth he will raise armies and chase away the Prince of Parma from Germany & become the sole king. He will make the spirits invent new war weapons. All these are meant for making him a mighty god.
4. German Valdes and Cornelius are his two friends. They are also learned in black art. They advise and inspire Faustus to study magic. Faustus discusses his problems with them.

### **Extract II**

5. Hell is not a fixed place. It is a state of tormenting mind & soul. Wherever the fallen angels, Lucifer and his followers go, hell is there. They cannot be out of it. They are for ever deprived of the everlasting bliss of heaven.
6. Mephistopheles is a servant to his master Lucifer. He performs all the commands of Lucifer. He does not do anything without his permission. Like other followers of Lucifer he appears when anybody abjures the Trinity, abuses God, Scriptures and Christ. Like other fallen angels he flies to get Faustus' glorious soul.
7. Lucifer is the leader of the fallen angels. He conspired against God. He along with his followers was thrown out of heaven by God with the help of thunderbolts. He and his followers are perpetual unhappy spirits as they are damned in hell.
8. Lucifer used to be angel and most dearly loved of God. Because of his aspiring pride and insolence he revolted against God and that led to his fall from heaven.

### **Extract III**

9. Faustus has to stab his arm and write the deed with the help of his blood. He writes all the conditions to give away his soul, body and other possessions after 24 years of pleasure life.
10. Blood congeals which indicates that Faustus should not pledge his soul with his blood. It reflects the contrary feeling before signing the bond. But Mephistopheles brings burning coals to make the blood flow so that he may get the deed pledged.
11. An inscription 'Homo, fuge' appears on his arm. It means "man, fly". Faustus is puzzled. He feels that his senses are deceived. But this is a warning which tells him not to be lured or tempted by devilish spirits.
12. Mephistopheles brings devils who give crowns and rich clothes to Faustus. They perform dance to delight Faustus' mind.
13. Faustus gives his soul to Lucifer and his followers for 24 years of pleasure life. His voluptuous-

ness and craving for power to be a mighty god lead him to give his body, soul and other belongings to Lucifer.

14. Faustus signs the bond of giving his soul to Lucifer on certain conditions. The main are described in the agreement as under :
  - i. Faustus may be a spirit in form or substance.
  - ii. Mephistopheles shall be his servant.
  - iii. Mephistopheles shall fulfill all the desires and demands of Faustus.
  - iv. Mephistopheles shall remain invisible in the chamber or house of Faustus.
  - v. Mephistopheles shall appear to Dr. Faustus in the shape or form desired by Faustus.
15. After the expiry of 24 years of bond Faustus is ready to give to Lucifer or his followers his body, soul, flesh, blood or goods.

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## 9.6 Review Questions

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1. What is Chorus in a play? What is its role in *Dr. Faustus*?
2. Write a character-sketch of Wagner.
3. What is the importance of Act-I Sc(iv)?
4. Who is Mephistopheles? Why does he tempt Faustus?
5. Draw a character-sketch of Faustus based on Act-I of the play.
6. Write a note on soliloquy as a structural device in the play.

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## 9.7 Bibliography

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1. Oxford Companion to English Literature ed. Margaret Drabble, OUP
2. A Glossary of Literary Terms. by M.H. Abrams
3. Dr. Faustus – A Selection of Critical essays ed. by John Jump
4. Marlowe – A Collection of Critical Essays ed. by Clifford Leech

## UNIT-10

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### CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE : *DOCTOR FAUSTUS-II*

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#### Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Christopher Marlowe: *Dr. Faustus*
  - 10.2.1 Extracts from the Play
  - 10.2.2 Glossary
  - 10.2.3 Commentary on the Extracts
  - 10.2.4 Model Explanations
- 10.3 Literary Terms
- 10.4 Self-Assessment Questions
- 10.5 Answers to SAQs
- 10.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.7 Review Questions
- 10.8 Bibliography

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#### 10.0 Objectives

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After studying this Unit you will be able to:

- know how a Morality Play like *Dr. Faustus* uses conflict between good and evil as two forces in the mind of the chief character,
- know how wrong choice leads to tragic death in the end,
- know the role of Chorus in a play,
- know about various types of temptations in the life of human beings,
- know how this play has a serious beginning and a serious ending and the middle is full of farcical and comic scenes,
- how to understand a play and write appropriate answers to various types of questions in examinations,

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#### 10.1 Introduction

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This Unit deals with the last three Acts of *Dr. Faustus*. For the background material to this Unit namely from 8.2.1 to 8.2.4 you are to consult the corresponding titles of Unit 7 as they are common for these two Units. You have been given four important extracts from Act III, IV & V with glossary,

commentary and model explanations which will help you to understand these Acts in the proper context.

Literary terms given for you are described in brief. For detail explanations, you should consult *A Glossary to Literary Terms* and the other books recommended under the title “For Further Reading”. Extract-wise self-assessment questions and their respective answers are a help for you to frame your own answers. As the length of the Unit does not permit much space for long answers, you have been given Unit-End Questions for practice.

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## **10.2 Christopher Marlowe: *Dr. Faustus***

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### **10.2.1 Extracts from the Play**

#### **Extract 1 [Act III, Chorus .ll 1-25]**

Cho.            Learned Faustus,  
                 To know the secrets of astronomy,  
                 Graven in the book of Jove’s high firmament,  
                 Did mount himself to scale Olympus’ top,  
                 Being seated in a chariot burning bright,  
                 Drawn by the strength of yoky dragons’ necks.  
                 He views the clouds, the planets, and the stars,  
                 The Tropic, Zones, and quarters of the sky,  
                 From the bright circle of the horned moon  
                 Even to the heights of Prime Mobile:  
                 And whirling round with this circumference,  
                 Within the concave compass of the Pole,  
                 From East to West his dragons swiftly glide,  
                 And in eight days did bring him home again.  
                 Not long he stayed within his quiet house,  
                 To rest his bones after his weary toil,  
                 But new exploits do hale him out again;  
                 And mounted then upon a dragon’s back  
                 That with his wings did part the subtle air,]  
                 He now is gone to prove cosmography  
                 [That measures coasts and kingdoms of the earth:]  
                 And, as I guess, will first arrive at Rome,  
                 To see the Pope and manner of his court,



And take some part of holy Peter's feast,

That to this day is highly solemniz'd.

**Extract II [Act IV (Sc. IV) ll 36-83]**

Faust. Away, you villain ! what, dost think I am a horse-doctor ?

[Exit Horse – courser].

What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemn'd to die ?

Thy fatal time doth draw to final end;

Despair doth drive distrust into my thoughts:

Confound these passions with a quiet sleep:

Tush, Christ did call the thief upon the Cross;

Then rest thee, Faustus, quiet in conceit.

**Re-enter Horse Courser, all wet, crying**

Horse-c. Alas, alas, Doctor Fustian, quotha mass, Dr. Lopus was never such a doctor: has given me a purgation, has purged me of forty dollars; I shall never see them more. But yet, like an ass as I was, I would not be ruled by him, for he bade me I should ride him into no water: now I, thinking my horse had had some rare quality that he would not have had me know of, I, like a venturesome youth, rid him into the deep pond at the town's end. I was no sooner in the middle of the pond, but my horse vanished away, and I sat upon a bottle of hay, never so near drowning in my life. But I'll seek out my doctor, and have my forty dollars again, or I'll make it the dearest horse ! – O, yonder is his snipper-snapper. – Do you hear ? you, heypass, where's your master ?

Meph. Why, Sir, what would you ? you cannot speak with him.

Horse-c. But I will speak with him.

Meph. Why, he's fast asleep: come some other time.

Horse.c. I'll speak with him now, or I'll break his glass windows about his ears.

Meph. I tell thee, he has not slept these eight nights.

Horse.c. And he have not slept these eight weeks, I'll speak with him.

Meph. See, where he is, fast asleep.

Horse.c. Ay, this is he. – God save ye, Master Doctor, Master Doctor, Master Doctor Fustian! forty dollars, forty dollars for a bottle of hay !

Meph. Why, thou seest he hears thee not.

Horse.c So-ho, ho ! so-ho, ho ! [ Hollas in his ear.] No, will you not wake ? I'll make you wake ere I go. [Pulls Faustus by the leg and pulls it away.] Alas, I am undone ! what shall I do?

Faust. O, my leg, my leg ! – Help, Mephistopheles! call the officers. – My leg, my leg!

Meph. Come, villain, to the constable.

Horse.c O Lord, sir, let me go, and I'll give you forty dollars more !

Meph. Where be they ?

Horse. c I have none about me: come to my ostry and I'll give them.

Meph. Be gone quickly.

Faust. What, is he gone ? farewell he ! Faustus has his leg again, and the Horse courser, I take it, a bottle of hay for his labour: well, this trick shall cost him forty dollars more.

**Extract III [Act V (Sc. I) ll 36-110]**

**Enter an OLD MAN**

Old Man. Ah, Doctor Faustus, that I might prevail  
 To guide thy steps unto the way of life,  
 By which sweet path thou mayst attain the goal  
 That shall conduct thee to celestial rest !  
 Break heart, drop blood, and mingle it with tears,  
 Tears falling from repentant heaviness  
 Of thy most vile and loathsome filthiness,  
 The stench whereof corrupts the inward soul  
 With such flagitious crimes of heinous sin  
 As no commiseration may expel,  
 But mercy, Faustus, of thy Saviour sweet,  
 Whose blood alone must wash away thy guilt.

Faust. Where art thou, Faustus ? wretch, what hast thou done ?  
 Damn'd art thou, Faustus, damn'd; despair and die !  
 Hell calls for right, and with a roaring voice  
 Says, "Faustus, come; thine hour is almost come;"  
 And Faustus now will come to do thee right.  
 [Mephistopheles gives him a dagger.]

Old man. Ah, stay, good Faustus, stay thy desperate stabs !  
 I see an angle hovers o'er thy head,  
 And, with a vial full of precious grace,  
 Offers to pour the same into thy soul:

Then call for mercy, and avoid despair.

Faust. Ah, my sweet friend, I feel  
The words to comfort my distressed soul:  
Leave me awhile to ponder on my sins.

Old Man. I go, sweet Faustus; but with heavy cheer,  
Fearing the ruin of thy hopeless soul.

Faust. Accursed Faustus, where is mercy now ?  
I do repent; and yet I do despair:  
Hell strives with grace for conquest in my breast:  
What shall I do to shun the snares of death ?

Meph. Thou traitor, Faustus, I arrest thy soul  
For disobedience to my sovereign lord:  
Revolt, or I'll in piece meals tear thy flesh.

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

Meph. Do it, then, quickly, with unfeigned heart,  
Let greater danger do attend thy drift.

Faust. Torment, sweet friend, that base and crooked age.  
That durst dissuade me from thy Lucifer,  
With greater torments that our hell affords.

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

Faust. One thing, good servant, let me crave of thee,  
To glut the longing of my heart's desire –  
That I might have unto my paramour  
That heavenly Helen which I saw of late,  
Whose sweet embracing may extinguish clear  
Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow

And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer.

Meph.       Faustus, this, or what else thou shalt desire,  
              Shall be perform'd in twinkling of an eye.

**Re-enter Helen**

Faust.       Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,  
              And burnt the topless towers of Ilium ? –  
              Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.-  
              Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies ! –  
              Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
              Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips.  
              And all is dross that is not Helen.  
              I will be Paris, and for love of thee,  
              Instead of Troy, shall Wittenberg be sacked;  
              And I will combat with weak Menelaus,  
              And wear thy colours on my plumed crest.  
              Yea, I will wound Achilles in the heel,  
              And then return to Helen for a kiss.  
              O, thou art fairer than the evening air  
              Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;  
              Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter  
              When he appeared to hapless Semele;  
              More lovely than the monarch of the sky  
              In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms;  
              And none but thou shalt be my paramour!

**Extract IV [Act V (Sc. iii) ll 66-131]**

Faust.       Ah, Faustus,  
              Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
              And then thou must be damn'd perpetually !  
              Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,  
              That time may cease, and midnight never come:  
              Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make

Perpetual day; or let this hour be but  
 A year, a month, a week, a natural day,  
 That Faustus may repent and save his soul !  
*O lente, lente currite, noctis equi !*  
 The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,  
 The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.  
 O, I'll leap up to my God ! – Who pulls me down ? –  
 See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament !  
 One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ! –  
 Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ !  
 Yet will I call on him : O, spare me , Lucifer ! –  
 Where is it now ? 'tis gone: and see, where God  
 Stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows !  
 Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,  
 And hide me from the heavy wrath of God !  
 No, no !  
 Then will I headlong run into the earth;  
 Earth, gape ! O, no, it will not harbour me !  
 You stars that reign'd at my nativity,  
 Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,  
 Now draw up Faustus, like a foggy mist,  
 Into the entrails of yon labouring clouds,  
 That, when you vomit forth into the air,  
 My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,  
 So that my soul may but ascend to heaven !  
 [The clock strikes the half hour.]  
 Ah, half the hour is past ! 'twill all be past anon.  
 O God,  
 If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,  
 Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransom'd me,  
 Impose some end to my incessant pain.

Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years.  
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd !  
O, no end is limited to damned souls !  
Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul ?  
Or why is this immortal that thou hast ?  
Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis, were that true,  
This soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd  
Unto some brutish beast ! all beasts are happy,  
For, when they die,  
Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements;  
But mine must live still to be plagu'd in hell  
Curs'd be the parents that engender'd me !  
Nor, Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer  
That hath depriv'd thee of the joys of heaven.

[The clock strikes twelve]

O, it strikes, it strikes. Now, body, turn to air,  
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell !

[Thunder and lightning]

O soul, be chang'ed into little water-drops,  
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found !

[Enter Devils]

My God, my God, look not so fierce on me !  
Adders and serpents, let me breathe a while !  
Ugly hell, gape not ! come not, Lucifer !  
I'll burn my books – Ah, Mephistopheles !

[Exeunt Devils with Faustus]

Chor. Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burned is Apollo's laurel – bough.  
That sometime grew within this learned man.  
Faustus is gone: regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise,

Only to wonder at unlawful things,  
 Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits  
 To practise more than heavenly power permits.

### 10.2.2 Glossary

#### Extract I

astronomy	- a science of stars and planets
graven	- inscribed
Jove	- Jupiter, an important god of ancient Rome and Italy
firmament	- sky
Olympus	- name of a mountain where the ancient Greek gods lived a luxurious life.
yoky	- bearing the yoke.
The Tropic, Zones and quarters	- The tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, and divisions of the sky.
Prime Mobile	- The sphere which first moved and communicated movement to all the other heavenly bodies
concave compass of the Pole	- The concave outer limits of the Pole.
subtle	- thin, refined
cosmography	- the science that deals with the structure of the universe
holy Peter's feast	- the holy feast that is held on St. Peter's day i.e. June 29
highly solemnized	- observed with all the ceremonies and dignity

#### Extract II

Tush	- a term which expresses disapproval
call	- show mercy to
conceit	- thinking, notion
Dr. Fustian	- Dr. Faustus
Dr. Lopus	- Dr. Lopez, name of a physician to Queen Elizabeth. The horse dealer wants to say that even Dr. Lopez was not so deceitful as Dr. Faustus has proved to be.
quotha	- said he
mass	- by holy mass. This is a form of an oath.

purged	- deprived
venturous	- adventurous, overbold
rid him	- rode on him
bottle	- bundle
yonder	- there
snipper-snapper	- fellow, servant, the horse dealer refers to Mephistopheles
heypass	- juggler (i.e. Mephistopheles)
hollas	- shouts
undone	- ruined
ostry	- hostelry, inn
be gone	- go away

### **Extract III**

prevail	- succeed
loathsome	- hateful
filthiness	- wickedness
stench	- foul smell
flagitious	- heinous, deeply criminal
commiseration	- pity
vial	- a small bottle for holding a medicine
heavy cheer	- sorrowful mood
shun	- avoid
snares	- trap
piece-meals	- bit by bit
presumption	- insolence
unfeigned	- sincere
drift	- purpose, intention
durst	- dared
afflict	- torment
glut	- satisfy
paramour	- mistress



Ilium	- Troy
Helen	- most beautiful woman of Greek. She was married to Menelaus of Greek. Her elopement to Troy with Paris led to the Trojan war. The Greek soldiers besieged the city of Troy to get her back.
dross	- worthless thing
sacked	- destroyed
colours	- sign
plumed	- decorated with a feather

*O lente, lente currite, noctis equi* - It is a Latin expression which means “slowly, slowly, run, ye horses of the night”

firmament	- sky
rend	- tear into pieces
ireful	- angry
gape	- open
harbour	- shelter
nativity	- birth
intrails	- inner part
issue	- come out
anon	- soon
ransomed	- redeemed
incessant	- continuous, constant
Pythagoras	- The ancient Greek Philosopher who believed in transmigration of souls. (that the soul of a human being entered the body of an animal after his death.) He is famous for the discovery of theorem named after him.
metempsychosis	- theory of transmigration of soul.
plagued	- tormented, cursed
engendered	- produced, gave birth
laurel bough	- poetic ability
fiendful	- devilish
entice	- lure
forward wits	- advanced minds, intellectuals

crest	- helmet
Achilles	- a Greek warrior, Paris of Troy killed him by shooting an arrow aimed at his heel.
Jupiter	- main deity of ancient Greek & Italy
hapless	- unfortunate
Semele	- Jupiter's mistress, she was burnt to ashes by Jupiter's excessive brightness
monarch of the sky	- Apollo, sun-god
wanton	- flirtatious, amorous
Arethusa	- water-nymph
azured	- blue

#### 10.2.4 Commentary on the Extracts

Extract I reflects the Renaissance spirit of the Elizabethan Age to which the play belongs. Faustus has not forgotten his scholarly pursuits. He has made use of his black art to know the secrets of astronomy and cosmography.

The extract defines the role of chorus also, as it narrates and briefs the incidents which are to be staged.

Extract II is a part of clowning scenes in the middle of the play. Faustus cheats a horse dealer and plays tricks upon him with the help of his black art. The scene might have provided crude comedy to the contemporary audience of lower society. It shows the deterioration in the character of Faustus. He finds pleasure in the kind of coarse and crude tricks & thus has lowered his dignity as a great scholar. Some critics say that the play has the beginning and the ending but no middle as the middle part of the play is full of such farcical and comical scenes.

In Extract III the Old Man is introduced to show how Faustus feels agonized. He advises Faustus but that heightens his mental torture and conflict. The Old Man and Faustus are completely contrasted because Faustus completely identifies himself with the devil. Faustus' sensuality is reflected in the wish to have Helen as his paramour. His speech in praise of Helen is highly imaginative, suggestive and sensuous. It has rich poetic quality and uses strong mythical comparisons to highlight Helen's beauty.

Extract IV depicts the terrible pain and agony Faustus faces before his death. His state of mind is reflected in the final soliloquy. Psychological self-revelation takes place. Praise of Helen and the final catastrophe can be contrasted. The feelings of pity and fear are aroused. The extract ends with the moral of the play contained in the speech of Chorus. Chorus plays an important role in a Morality Play. Certain explanations and comments in the course of the play are provided by Chorus time and again. At the close of the play Chorus appears to sum up the tragic history of Faustus. A warning to the intellectuals and moralizing comments are introduced through Chorus as was the practice of the old Morality Plays.

### 10.2.5 Model Explanations

(a) Was this the face..... soul again.

These lines are an extract from Faustus' speech in Act V Sc(ii) of the play *Dr. Faustus* written by the famous Elizabethan dramatist Christopher Marlowe. On the request of Dr. Faustus, Helen, one of the most beautiful lady of the Greek period is brought on the stage. On having a look on her face Faustus speaks these lines in her praise.

Faustus is stunned looking at one of the most beautiful face of the ancient world. He poses an emphatic question whether this very beautiful face of Helen caused the ruin of topless towers of Troy. He wishes to become immortal by kissing Helen. He feels that his soul is being taken away by Helen. He requests Helen to give his soul back.

These lines depict the story of the Trojan war when Paris of Troy took away Helen from Greek Menelaus and a severe war happened between Greek & Troy. The lines reflect sensuality of Faustus when he wants to become immortal by kissing Helen. Faustus uses his black art for sensual pleasure and power which bring his tragic death in the end.

(b) Cut is the branch..... learned man.

These are the lines spoken by Chorus at the end of the play *Dr. Faustus* written by the famous Elizabethan dramatist Christopher Marlowe. Chorus plays an important role in a Morality Play and here Chorus is conveying the moral of the play.

Dr. Faustus was a learned scholar. He rejected other braches of science in order to be a competent magician. By learning necromancy, he got power over the spirits. His voluptuousness and insolence led to his damnation after twenty four years of pleasure life.

Chorus means to say that forward wits like Faustus should not practise more than permitted by heavenly power. Faustus attempted unlawful things and because of them his soul is damned for ever. This must be a lesson for all other scholars. This is a convention in a Morality Play to provide a moral at the end of the play. Here it is done through the speech of Chorus

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### 10.3 Literary Terms

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1. **Allegory** : It is a literary device in which symbolic figures, objects and actions are used to convey truth or generalizations about human conduct or experience. A fable or a parable is used to convey a parallel meaning. Abstract conceptions are often personified.
2. **Chorus**: In this play the word 'Chorus' is used for a single actor who speaks the Prologue. Chorus also provides explanation to certain passages. There are certain events which are not staged but are narrated by Chorus. In ancient classical drama Chorus used to be group of persons who represented what was being acted, and gave expression to their thoughts and feelings regarding the incidents and characters of the play.
3. **Morality Play**: It was one of the early forms of drama. It was allegorical drama of 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe. The characters of the play personified moral qualities such as evil or good or abstractions such has death or youth. It progressed from the mystery or miracle plays. It does not present a Biblical story in the manner of the miracle play. It conveys a moral or a lesson

through personification and allegorical representation.

4. **Personification:** It is a literary figure related to metaphor in which the writer attributes human qualities to non-living things or abstract concepts.
5. **Prologue:** a speech made by an actor on the stage before the proper play begins. It provides a good introduction to the coming events and characters.
6. **Renaissance:** A French term which means “rebirth”. It began in Italy in the late 13<sup>th</sup> Century and spread through out Europe in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It was a renewed interest in classical learning and values. Humanism was an integral part of this movement. Due to revival of learning new discoveries and inventions were made throughout the world.
7. **Soliloquy:** A soliloquy is the speech made by a character to himself. No other character remains on the stage. A single character talks to himself or herself. It is used to reveal what goes in the mind of the character on the stage. It is different from monologue in which a single character speaks but there are listeners on the stage whose point of view may be made by that lonely speaker. The play *Dr. Faustus* Act 1 Sc(i) begins with a soliloquy.

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## 10.4 Self-assessment Questions

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### Extract I

1. What does Dr. Faustus perform to know the secrets of astronomy?  

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2. What is Faustus’ new enterprise after knowing the secrets of astronomy?  

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3. Why has Faustus gone to Rome?  

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4. What does this extract reflect on the character of Faustus?  

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**Extract II**

5. Describe the reason why Faustus can sleep even when he is tense.

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6. Comment on the language used by the horse dealer.

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7. What happened to the horse purchased by the horse dealer from Faustus?

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8. What happened when the horse dealer pulled Faustus by the leg?

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9. Comment on the importance of this extract.

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**Extract III**

10. What is the role of Old Man?

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11. What penalty does Mephistopheles impose on Faustus for turning a traitor to Lucifer?

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12. Describe beauty of Helen.

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13. Taking hint from the extract, describe the Trojan War.

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**Extract IV**

14. What is the appeal of Dr. Faustus to God at 11.30 during night?

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15. Why does Faustus think that beasts are happy?

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16. What is the advice of Chorus?

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## 10.5 Answers To SAQs

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### Extract I

1. For eight days Dr. Faustus remained away from his home in order to see the clouds, the planets, the stars, tropics and other divisions of the sky. He went into the higher regions of the universe mounted on chariot dragged by the dragon.
2. He does not want to take rest even after eight days of toil. He mounts on the back of a dragon in order to investigate or examine cosmography which measures coast and kingdoms of the earth.
3. He was gone to Rome in order to take part in holy Peter's feast that is observed with all festivity and dignity on June 29.
4. This extract reflects that Dr. Faustus is a learned scholar who has interest in knowing secrets of various branches of science. He is interested in astronomy and cosmography. He is a Ulysses-type character who does not want to take rest. This reflects the Renaissance and Elizabethan spirit of adventure, symbolized through his character by the dramatist.

### Extract II

5. Faustus thinks that he is condemned and the hour of his death is drawing near. He is tense and despaired. But he is reminded of the story of the thief on the Cross who was pardoned by Christ. This gives relief to Faustus. He thinks that Christ may be merciful to him also and thus he can sleep.
6. The horse dealer is illiterate. He mispronounces certain names for example Fustian for Faustus or Lopus for Lopez.
7. The horse dealer purchased a horse from Faustus by paying forty dollars. He rode on the horse into water against the instructions given to him. The horse disappeared in the middle of the pond & the horse dealer found himself sitting on a bottle of hay.
8. When the horse dealer pulled Faustus by the leg, the leg came off in his hands.
9. This is one of the clowning scenes appearing in the middle of the play. Some critics say that the play has the beginning and the ending and no middle. In the middle part of the play farcical scenes like this appear. The fun is of crude variety. Comedy here borders on farce. It must have provided much mirth to the lower sections of the audience in those ways. But it does not become a great scholar like Dr. Faustus to indulge in cheating a poor horse dealer with the help of his black art.

### Extract III

10. Old Man advises Faustus to shun the path of evil. He guides Faustus to achieve his goal of

heavenly peace. Faustus should beg mercy of Christ so that His sacrifice might save Faustus.

11. He has to confirm his former promise to Lucifer with his blood again.
12. Faustus considers that heaven lies in the lips of Helen. Helen is so beautiful as everything else seems useless to Faustus. Faustus is ready to ruin his own Troy i.e. Wittenberg for her love. Helen is fairer than the evening air, brighter than Jupiter, lovelier than sun-god Apollo.
13. The Trojan war was fought between the warriors of Greek and Troy. Wife of Menelaus, Helen, was taken away by Paris of Troy. Paris killed Achilles the Greek hero by shooting at his heel, the only weak point of his body. In this war many topless buildings of Troy were burnt by the invading Greek forces.

#### **Extract IV**

14. Faustus appeals to God to have mercy upon him. If He cannot have mercy due to any reason, God is appealed to fix some date for the end of constant torture to which Faustus is subjected. If Faustus can come out of hell, he is ready to live in hell for a hundred thousand years.
15. According to the Greek philosopher Pythagoras when a human being dies, soul transmigrates into the body of some beast. The beasts die and their souls are dissolved into elements. Their souls cannot be damned forever like the souls of human beings. Therefore Faustus thinks that all beasts are happy.
16. Chorus advises that we should take some lesson from Faustus' fall. Intellectual people should not get tempted to unlawful things & practise black art. They should not practise more than is permitted by God as is clear from Faustus' case.

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### **10.6 Let Us Sum Up**

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Autobiographical details about Christopher Marlowe, introduction and summary of *Dr. Faustus* have already been studied by you in the previous unit. In continuation with that in this Unit you have studied the salient features of the Elizabethan Age and important extracts from Act III, IV and V of the play *Dr. Faustus*. Commentary on the extracts and sample explanations must have been useful to you to understand the play. Literary terms given for you, though not part of the play, must have helped you to understand the genre, the structure and the role of elements of the play.

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### **10.7 Review Questions**

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1. Compare the fall of Adam and Eve with that of the tragedy of Faustus.
2. Do you think Faustus is responsible for his damnation? How far is Mephistopheles responsible for it?
3. Compare the tragedy of mythical character Icarus with that of Dr. Faustus.
4. Discuss *Dr. Faustus* as a morality play.
5. Discuss Dr. Faustus as a man of Renaissance craving for more knowledge and power.
6. Discuss the role of evil powers to tempt and distract Dr. Faustus from the right path.
7. *Dr. Faustus* has the beginning & the ending but no middle. Discuss.



8. Discuss *Dr. Faustus* as a tragedy or comedy or farce.

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## 10.8 Bibliography

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2. A Glossary of Literary Terms. by M.H. Abrams
3. Dr. Faustus – A Selection of Critical essays ed. by John Jump
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## UNIT–11

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### BACON : OF TRUTH, OF REVENGE

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#### Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Age And Author
  - 11.2.1 About the Age
  - 11.2.2 About the Author
- 11.3 Reading Text ‘Of Truth’
  - 11.3.1 Text of Bacon’s essay ‘Of Truth’
  - 11.3.2 Glossary
  - 11.3.3 Summary
  - 11.3.4 Critical Analysis
  - 11.3.5 Style
- 11.4 Reading Text ‘Of Revenge’
  - 11.4.1 Text of Bacon’s essay ‘Of Revenge’
  - 11.4.2 Glossary
  - 11.4.3 Summary
  - 11.4.4 Critical Analysis
  - 11.4.5 Practical Suggestiveness
- 11.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 11.6 Answers to SAQs
- 11.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.8 Review Questions
- 11.9 Bibliography

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#### 11.0 Objectives

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In this unit our aim is to give you some practice in reading and understanding prose. A detailed summary would be given to bring forth the meanings of the text. This will also emphasise the reason for universal appeal of Bacon’s essays.

After reading and understanding various sections of this unit you will be able to :

- understand the text in its totality,

- develop the ability to read between the lines and understand the real motive of the author in writing these essays,
- appreciate and evaluate the given text,

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## **11.1 Introduction**

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Modern English prose writing according to George Saintsbury began from 1350. This period witnessed the great turning point which was partly due to the concentration of English patriotic sentiment aroused by the military conquests of Edward III. New English prose made a real start almost for the first time. Four writers of prose are very noteworthy in this period – Chaucer the poet, Wyclif the controversialist, Trevisa the Chronicler, and the shadowy personage long known as Sir John Mandeville. All of them were basically translators in a lesser or greater degree, but were also the founders of English prose writing.

Malory and Berners top the list of writers of English prose in the fifteenth century. It was a period of experiments where conscious efforts were made to develop a prose style following the path of Chaucer and Wyclif. Prose was written in several different branches of literature: history, law, politics, theology, philosophy, sermons, and letters etc. But it mostly depended on translations.

Europe witnessed the Renaissance in the field of creative writings in the fifteenth century. People developed interest in classical writings of ancient Greece and Rome. The influence of the new learning was not at first beneficial, on the whole writers were overladen with their new acquisitions and did not know what to do with them. Classical allusions became abundant. And there was a danger for English to lose its separate identity, its spelling, diction, syntax and style in the process of being overburdened with classicism, but the translations kept English prose on the path of development.

In the development of literature, the revival of learning worked in two ways : it did much to emancipate thought from the bondage of medieval theology by restoring the generous spirit and ideals of pagan antiquity; and it presented writers with masterpieces of literature which they might take as models for their efforts. For these two reasons, the renaissance is rightly taken as a chief source in the making of modern European literatures. England now began to share in these liberalising movements. Before the century was out, the new learning was firmly established at Oxford and Cambridge.

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## **11.2 Age And Author**

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In this section we will try to familiarize you with the sixteenth century literary scenario of England. We will discuss the main trends and literary currents of the age to which Francis Bacon belonged.

### **11.2.1 About the Age**

We are talking here only about the writings in prose in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Two factors are seen at work in most of these varied prose writings. First, the breakthrough of colloquial speech, with its vigour and raciness into the written word, and second, the attempt to mold a consciously artistic English prose style. These two factors are, surprisingly enough, often found in conjunction with colloquial vigor and over elaborate parallels or antithesis alternating in the same work.

No permanent resolution was achieved in the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries in spite

of the occasional prose triumphs of the age. Though an impersonal devotional prose developed, descending from the devotional prose of Rolle and Hilton in the fourteenth century and a biblical prose was wrought by the English translators of the Bible from Tyndale to the translators of the Authorized Version of 1611, it remains true that nearly all prose writers of the Elizabethan and immediately subsequent period wrote a highly idiosyncratic prose.

The Elizabethan settlement, completed with the establishment of the thirty-nine articles in 1571, produced the Church of England, Catholic in profession but national in character, repudiating the authority of the Pope but episcopal in organization; a national Catholic Church stripped of the abuses of Rome but resisting the demands of Puritans for extreme simplicity and severity in worship, for the abolition of episcopacy and for granting spiritual authority to individuals who claimed it on the grounds of grace vouchsafed to them and of preaching ability.

The settlement provided a wide roof under which different shades of opinion could shelter together as later divisions of 'high' and 'low' church were to testify; but it left out both Roman Catholics and the more extreme Puritans. The Puritans to whom preaching the Word was a sacred obligation would have had a greater effect on English preaching if they had not eventually been forbidden to preach by the repressive legislation introduced in support of the establishment of Archbishop.

Fortunately, the Church of England produced early in its history a succession of learned and able ecclesiastics who brought preaching in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to a new level of literary art. History and biography were also fields in which Elizabethan prose exercised itself. It was the best narrative prose with a flow and control which leaves its permanent mark in the literary annals. The balanced sentences, alliteration and other stylistic devices make the prose artful.

### **11.2.2 About the Author**

Francis Bacon was born on January 22, 1561 in London. His family was very powerful and very near to Queen Elizabeth. His father, Sir Nicholas Bacon, was Lord Keeper of the Great Seal. His mother was daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke and Sister-in-law of Sir William Cecil, the Lord of Burghley.

Bacon was a protected child. His early childhood was spent at his father's country palace. He was devoted to studies in a grave manner even at the tender age of ten. He was sent to Trinity College, Cambridge with his elder brother at the age of thirteen. He came back after three years and was then admitted to Gray's Inn on June 27, 1576.

But only after a few months, not liking the legal profession, he went along with the English Ambassador to France and thus began his career in diplomacy. After his father's death, he came back to England and again joined Gray's Inn. In 1584, he entered Parliament as representative of Malcombe Regis. He was again elected for Parliament in 1586 and 1589, he advocated for a middle course between popular privilege and royal prerogative, moderation in secular reform with toleration in religion. This policy he supported in two pamphlets published in 1585 and 1589. In both of them he pleaded for greater elasticity in matters of doctrine and of discipline.

In 1591, Bacon attached himself to the Earl of Essex, who was very near to Queen Elizabeth. In 1593 Bacon entered the Parliament from Middlesex. He severely criticised the Government's policy for the demand of a triple subsidy to help to meet the expenses of the Spanish War. The Queen was

annoyed and did not appoint him Attorney General in 1594. The Earl of Essex always tried to favour and make recommendations for Bacon, but the Queen paid no heed to them. Somehow he was made Learned Counsel. Bacon played a major role in securing Essex's conviction, when he was being tried for treason. As a result of his conviction, Essex was executed. Bacon incurred much ill feeling for this. In 1604, he published an Apology for this action.

The first edition of his "Essay's" was published in 1597. It had ten essays. It's popularity was great, almost from the very day of issue.

In 1603, King James I ascended to the English throne. Bacon tried to win the new King's favour by every way he could employ, he was ultimately successful and managed to get Knighthood in July, 1603. In 1604 he was confirmed as Learned Counsel and in 1607 became Solicitor General.

In 1605 Bacon published his *Advancement of Learning* and dedicated it to the King. This great philosophical work was later expended and translated in Latin. In 1606, Bacon got married to Alice Branham, daughter of a London alderman. In 1607 and 1612 new editions of his "Essays" were published with several additions. *Cogitata et Visa*, *In Felicem Memorium Elizabethae*, *De Sapientia Veterum* and *Wisdom of the Ancients* were published from 1607 to 1609. In 1613 he was made Attorney General. In The Parliament of 1614, he sat for The Cambridge University.

From 1612 onwards his counsels did not attract the King's attention and he was in the process of being marginalised. But Bacon soon made up for his decending position and became Lord Keeper in March 1617. In January 1618 he was promoted to Lord Chancellor and in July 1618 he was made Baron Verulam. A further honour was conferred on him in January 1621 when he was made Viscount St. Albans.

The remaining five years of his life were spent in work a more valuable to the world than anything he had accomplished in his high office. During this period he produced his histories, *De Augments*, *New Atlantis* and the final edition of *Essays*, which contained fifty eight essays.

In March 1626 while travelling near highgate in London, he performed an experiment, which was an anticipation of the modern process of refrigeration, but which caused his death. He decided to discover whether snow would delay the process of putrefaction, he stopped his carriage, purchased a hen, and with his own hands stuffed it with snow. As a result he caught a chill and fever. He was taken to the house of the Earl of Arundel, where he died on April 9, 1626. He was buried in St. Michael's Church at St. Albans. Bacon was intellectually great but morally weak. Pope calls him as "the wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind." His marvellous versatility renders it difficult to present a critical estimate which embraces all the varied aspects of his personality as lawyer, politician, scientist, philosopher, historian, and essayist. He took all knowledge for his province.

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## 11.3 Reading Text 'Of Truth'

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### 11.3.1 Text

Given below is the original text of Francis Bacon's essay.

#### OF TRUTH

What is Truth? said the jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer. Certainly there be that delight in giddiness, and count it a bondage to fix a belief; affecting free-will in thinking, as well as in

acting. And though the sects of philosophers of that kind be gone, yet there remain certain discoursing wits which are of the same veins; though there be not so much blood in them as was in those of the ancients. But it is not only the difficulty and labour which men take in finding out of truth; nor, again that when it is found it imposeth upon men's thoughts; that doth bring lies in favour; but a natural though corrupt love of the lie itself. One of the later school of the Grecians examineth the matter, and is at a stand to think what should be in it, that men should love lies, where neither they make for pleasure, as with poets, nor for advantage, as with the merchant; but for the lie's sake. But I cannot tell : this same truth is a naked and open day-light, that doth not shew the masks and mummeries and triumphs of the world, half so stately and daintily as candle-lights. Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that sheweth best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle, that sheweth best in varied lights. A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure. Doth any man doubt, that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves ? One of the Fathers, in great severity, called poesy *vinum daemonum*, because it filleth the imagination ; and yet it is but with the shadow of a lie. But it is not the lie that passeth through the mind, but the lie that sinketh in and settleth in it, that doth the hurt; such as we spake of before. But howsoever these things are thus in men's depraved judgements and affections, yet truth, which only doth judge itself, teacheth that the inquiry of truth (which is the love making, or wooing of it), the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth 'which is the enjoying of it' is the sovereign good of human nature. The first creature of God, in the works of the days, was the light of the sense; the last was the light of reason; and his Sabbath work ever since, is the illumination of his spirit. First he breathed light upon the face of the matter or chaos; then he breathed light into the face of man: and still He breatheth and inspireth light into the face of His chosen. The poet, that beautified the sect that was otherwise inferior to the rest, saith yet excellently well : *It is a pleasure to stand upon the shore, and to see ships lost upon the sea; a pleasure to stand in the window of a castle, and to see a battle and the adventures thereof below: but no pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of Truth* (a hill not to be commnaded, and where the air is always clear and serene), *and to see the errors, and wanderings, and mists, and tempests, in the vale below;* so always that this prospect be with pity, and not with swelling or pride. Certainly, it is heaven upon earth, to have a man's mind move in charity, rst in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth.

To pass from theological and philosophical truth, to the truth of civil business; it will be acknowledged, even by those that practise it not, that clear and round dealing is the honour of man's nature; and that mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it embaseth it. For these winding and crooked courses are the goings of the serpent, which goeth basely upon the belly, and not upon the feet. There is no vice that doth so cover a man with shame as to be found false and perfidious; and therefore Montaigne saith prettily, when he inquired the reason, why the word of the like should be such a disgrace and such an odious charge – saith he, *If it be well weighted, to say that a man lieth, is as much as to say, that he is brave towards God, and a coward towards men; for a lie faces God, and shrinks from man*

Surely the wickedness of falsehood and breach of faith cannot possibly be so highly expressed as in that it shall be the last peal to call the judgemnts of God upon the generations of men : it being froetold, that when Christ cometh, *He shall not find faith upon the earth.*

### 11.3.2 Glossary

1-10	Truth	: in the beginning of this essay it is used as religious and philosophical truth and later it is the truthfulness of daily life.
	Pilate	: pontius pilate, the Roman Governor of Indea in Palestine, before whom Jesus Christ was presented for trial by Jews
	giddiness	: in constancy, want of fixed belief
	count	: regard
	to fix a belief	: to adopt a decided opinion on any subject
	affecting	: desirous of having, aiming at
	discoursing	: wavering in thought or opinion, restless
	wits	: men who have wit without wisdom
	blood	: intellectual ability
	these	: refers to veins
	which	: not difficulty also
	imposeth upon	: fetters, deceive
	corrupt	: wicked, indicating a sinful nature
	of the later school	: a later sect of Greek philosophers
11-20	at a stand	: puzzled
	they make for	: when the lies conduce neither to
	same	: of which we speak
	shew	: show off
	rise to	: be so highly esteemed
	sheweth	: looks
	add pleasure	: make things appear more agreeable
	doth any man doubt	: everyone must admit
21-30	but it would leave	: that it would not leave
	shrunk	: minds filled with vain opinions
	in great severity	: using very harsh language
	vinum daemonum	: something purely mischievous
	passeth through the mind	: occupies mind for a while

	sinketh	: goes deep into
	settlesh	: makes its home in
	thus	: so important and attractive
31-40	sovereign good	: the highest object which we can aim at
	creature	: thing created
	the light	: physical light as perceived
	his sabbath work	: the seventh day (fixed for rest)
	matter	: the mass in universe from which world was created
	chaos	: state of universe when earth wasn't formed
	still	: always
	chosen	: the people who have true faith
	poet	: lucretius, the Latin poet and philosopher
	beautified	: was an ornament to
	the sect	: the Epicureans
	the rest	: the other sects
	excellently well	: exceedingly well
	tost	: hurled up and down
	"It.....Truth"	: the first ten lines of the second book of Lucretius
41-50	command	: overlooked
	errors	: wanderings and illusions
	mists	: errors of judgement
	the vale below	: life lived by ordinary people in the world
	so	: provided
	prospect	: looking forth, literally
	swelling	: sense of self importance
	heaven upon earth	: foretaste of the joys of heaven
	move in charity	: to have loving spirit for others
	rest in	: rely upon
	civil	: social
	clear and round	: honest and straight forward
51-64	embaseth	: corrupts, debases



winding	: deceitful
are the goings	: resemble the movements
upon the feet	: upright manner
perfidious	: untrue to his word, false
prettily	: wittily, cleverly
wood of the lie	: charge of falsehood
odious	: hateful
weighed	: considered
brave towards	: defies
shrinks from	: is afraid of
highly	: sublimely, impressively
peal	: short of appeal
generations	: races of men living on earth
faith	: truthfulness, honesty

### 11.3.3 Summary

Pilate, the ancient Roman Governor of Judaea, was not much interested in knowing the meaning of truth. He seemed to have a sceptical frame of mind. There are certainly people who frequently change their opinions. They consider it a sign of mental slavery to have fixed beliefs. They advocate free will in thought as well as in action. In ancient Greece there was a school of philosophers called the Sceptics.

The discovery of truth involves a lot of time and labour. Besides, when truth has been discovered, it acts as a kind of restraint upon the minds of men, because men cannot then change their beliefs according to their whims. Lies are in favour not because of either of these two causes. It seems that human beings are somehow or other attracted by lies.

Truth is like the clear day-light in which the shows and the spectacles presented on the stage of a theatre are seen for what they are, while lies are like candle-lights in which the same shows and spectacle appear to be far more attractive. Truth gives greater pleasure when a lie has been added to it.

An early writer of the church described poetry as the wine of the devils. But poetry tells lies which are received by the mind and then forgotten. Such lies do not settle down in the mind. But much harm is done by those lies that sink into the mind and settle down there.

Only those who understand truth realise the value of truth. Truth is the supreme good for human beings. The inquiry of truth may be described as the wooing of it; the knowledge of truth may be described as the presence of it; and the belief of truth may be described as the enjoying of it.

The first thing that God created was light, and the final thing that He created was the rational

faculty which He bestowed upon man. Having completed His work of creation, God has ever since been illuminating the minds of human beings with His divine spirit. Truth is important not only in theological and philosophical fields, but also in the sphere of ordinary life. Even those who do not practise truth know that honest and straightforward dealings show the dignity and honourable quality of a man.

### **11.3.4 Critical Analysis**

This essay gives expression to ideas which are noble and worthy of the highest appreciation. All great thinkers, philosophers, divines, saints, and prophets of the world have dwelt upon the supreme value of truth. Of course, it is very difficult to decide what truth is and Pilate was perhaps justified in not waiting for the answer to this question. Standards of truth in religious, philosophical, and moral spheres keep changing from time to time. The only truth of which we can be certain is scientific truth.

The essay is written in a didactic tone. The object of the writer is to instill into the mind of his readers a love of truth. A man's mind, he says, should turn upon the "poles of truth". Bacon recognises the fact that human beings have a natural though corrupt love of lies. The lies of a poet, he says, give pleasure. The lies of a trader bring financial return. But why people should love lies for the sake of lies, he is unable to explain. Nobody will disagree with Bacon when he says that false opinions, false hopes, and false judgments have a pleasing effect upon a human being.

The principal merit of this essay, however, lies in its stylistic qualities. While the ideas of the essay are already familiar to us, it is the manner in which they are stated and conveyed to us that is more important. Bacon shows his love of learning and his habit of introducing allusions.

Bacon gives us very vivid similes and metaphors in order to illustrate his ideas. He here compares truth to the naked and open day-light which does not show the masques and mummeries and triumphs of the world as half so grand and attractive as candle-lights show them. Again, truth, he says, may claim the price of a pearl which is seen to the best advantage in day-light; but truth cannot rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle that shows best in varied lights. He compares falsehood to an alloy in a coin of gold or silver.

This essay well illustrates Bacon's gift of compression. Most of the sentences here are written in that compact and terse style of which Bacon is a master. Allusions, aphorisms, illustrations, and quotations make the reading of this essay a rich, entertaining experience. The condensation of thoughts is, of course, its most-striking merit.

### **11.3.5 Style**

We have seen that Bacon has a distinct style. No man's style is more characteristic of its age than his. Bacon's style is still unmatched after more than five centuries. He has simplicity, strength, brevity, clearness and precision. His essays are simple only in the sense of being free from all affections, from any studied elegance in the choice of words in the structure of sentences. Strength of Bacon's style is intellectual rather than emotional. He has little taste for any energetic display of feelings; but he says what he has to say as vigorously and tersely as possible.

Indeed the secret of Bacon's strength lies in his conciseness. Hardly any writer, ancient or modern, has succeeded in compressing so much meaning within so short a compass. His essays are marvels of condensation. The secret of clearness of his style is the clearness of his thoughts.

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## 11.4 Reading Text ‘of Revenge’

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### 11.4.1 Text

Given below is the original text of Francis Bacon’s essay :

#### OF REVENGE

Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man’s nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out. For as for the first wrong, it doth but offend the law; but the revenge of that wrong putteth the law out of office. Certainly, in taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy, but in passing it over, he is superior; for it is a prince’s part to pardon: and Solomon, I am sure, saith, *It is the glory of a man to pass by an offence.*

That which is past is gone and irrevocable, and wise men have enough to do with things present and to come; therefore they do but trifle with themselves, that labour in past matters. There is no man doth a wrong for the wrong’s sake, but thereby to purchase himself profit, or pleasure, or honour, or the like. Therefore why should I be angry with a man for loving himself better than me? And if any man should do wrong, merely out of ill-nature, why, yet it is but like the thorn or briar, which prick and scratch, because they can do no other.

The most tolerable sort of revenge is for those wrongs which there is no law to remedy: but then, let a man take heed the revenge be such as there is no law to punish; else a man’s enemy is still beforehand and it is two for one.

Some, when they take revenge, are desirous the party should know whence it cometh. This is the more generous, For the delight seemeth to be not so much in doing the hurt, as in making the party repent. But base and crafty cowards are like the arrow that flieth in the dark.

Cosmus, Duke of Florence, had a desperate saying against perfidious or neglecting friends, as if those wrongs were unpardonable. *You shall read (saith he) that we are commanded to forgive our enemies; but you never read that we are commanded to forgive our friends.* But yet the spirit of Job was in a better tune; *Shall we (saith he) take good at God’s hands, and not be content to take evil also?* And so of friends in a proportion. This is certain, that a man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well. Public revenges are for the most part fortunate; as that for the death of Caesar; for the death of Pertinax; for the death of Henry the Third of France; and many more. But in private revenges it is not so. Nay rather, vindictive persons live the life of witches, who, as they are mischievous, so end they infortunate.

### 11.4.2 Glossary

1-15	kind	:	type
	wild	:	rude, barbarous
	even with	:	on a footing of equality with, on a level with
	doth	:	does
	putteth	:	to take into one’s hand
	passing it over	:	forgiving it

irrevocable	:	beyond the power of recalling
trifle	:	play with serious concerns of life
merely	:	purely
pick and scratch	:	deal petty wounds and injuries
no other	:	nothing else
16-30 to remedy	:	to provide justice
the party	:	the man who is the object of vengeance
cometh	:	who has committed it
base	:	mean minded
Cosmus	:	Cosmo de Medici (1579-1574), the Grand Duke of Tuscany
desperate	:	bitter, sarcastic
perfidious	:	unreal, false
commanded	:	by Christ in his Sermon on the mount
the spirit	:	the nature of job
31-37 studieth	:	to bent upon
own wounds	:	own memories
green	:	alive, fresh and vivid
do well	:	skin over, gradually close
public revenges	:	revenges for public cause
most part	:	most of the times
fortunate	:	successful
caesar	:	emperor Julius Caesar
death of	:	murder of
pertinex	:	a Roman Emperor who was assassinated in 193 a.D. by a group of rebellious guards
Henry	:	stabbed by a monk, Jaques Clement in 1589
vindictive	:	revengeful
not so	:	not the similar case
witches	:	some sort of magician
live the life	:	behave or work as

### 11.4.3 Summary

The revenge that a man takes for a wrong done to him by somebody represents an arbitrary kind of justice. The redress of a wrong should be obtained through legal means, but revenge means setting the law at naught. By taking revenge, a man can settle a score with his enemy. But if he refrains from taking revenge, he shows a moral superiority over his enemy. To forgive an enemy is a sign of an exalted heart. It was Solomon who said that by ignoring a wrong that has been done to him, a man shows how noble he is.

A man does a wrong in order to make a financial gain or for the pleasure of it or in order to win a higher position or for some other similar reason. There is, therefore, no point in feeling annoyed with a man just because he is selfish. And if a man does a wrong merely because of his malicious nature, it is best to ignore him because he is like the thorn or briar which can only prick and scratch but serve no useful purpose. A man can be forgiven for taking revenge for a wrong against which law provides no remedy. But, in such a case, a man should be careful that his revengeful action is such as does not bring any legal consequences with it because otherwise he will still be at a disadvantage as compared with his enemy. It is generous on the part of a man to reveal his identity to his victim when he takes revenge, because the pleasure lies not so much in the retaliatory action but in making the enemy repent his misdeed. It is commendable to forgive an enemy for doing us a wrong, but it is unwise to forgive a treacherous or faithless friend. However, Job was morally superior in declaring that, if we receive favours from our friends, we should also tolerate injuries or wrongs from them. History tells us that public revenges have, by and large, proved fortunate. But private revenges are not generally so fortunate. Revengeful persons often live miserable lives.

### 11.4.4 Critical Analysis

This essay is an excellent example of Bacon's tendency to dilute high ideals with expediency and a utilitarian approach to life. When Bacon says that a man, who pardons his enemies, reveals a noble heart, he certainly aims at a high ideal. But he dilutes this high ideal by justifying a revenge that is taken for a wrong for which there is no legal remedy. He shows his worldly wisdom when he cautions a man wishing to take revenge by saying that the revenge should be such as there is no law to punish. In other words, Bacon would not mind a man's taking revenge for those wrongs which there is no law to remedy; but he would suggest a revenge which law cannot take cognizance of. This is, indeed strange morality. In the same way, Bacon does not feel angry with a man who loves himself better than others.

Bacon is slightly off the mark when he says that a person taking revenge finds pleasure not in doing the hurt so much as in making the enemy repent. Actually a man takes revenge precisely in order to do the maximum possible damage to the enemy. Bacon is, however, right when he says that a man who meditates revenge keeps his own wounds green. He is also right when he says that revengeful persons live miserable lives. Bacon's attitude towards those who do wilful injury to their friends can also be defended. This essay is more or less a lesson in morality. It is a didactic essay and is an intelligent study of human nature.

As for style, this essay is a model of compactness. Bacon's terse and pithy manner of writing finds a perfect illustration here. Many of the sentences have that aphoristic quality for which Bacon is famous.

Bacon makes a liberal use of quotations in his essays. This essay, which is very brief, contains

three quotations, one from Solomon, another from Cosimo de Medici, and the third from Job. The ideas of this essay are such as go straight to the bosoms and hearts of readers. In fact, we find in this essay a confirmation of the ideas that most people already have in their minds.

#### **11.4.5 Practical Suggestiveness**

The essays of Francis Bacon are full of wit and practical wisdom. They give such suggestions which can be followed and adopted in daily life. Bacon's down to earth approach is reliable for everyman. They contain a handbook of practical wisdom and are a compendium of knowledge. This essay 'Of Revenge' as others reveals Bacon's wide experience of the world. Along with the experience they present the essence of his vast reading of Greek and Latin literatures.

In this essay also he give quotations and ample references. The references to the quotation from Chapter XIX, Verse II of "Proverbs". The Bible : Mathew. v.hu) and references to the incidents of death of Cosmo de Medici, Pertinax and Henry III of France have been given in this essay. If one follows the advice given in his essays, one is sure to attain success in life. Indeed, their practical suggestiveness is one of the two greatest qualities of Bacon's essays, the other being their conciseness and condensation in ideas. We have already discussed both those qualities earlier in this unit. In this essay he says man's first offence may not bring his punishment, but the act of revenge on that is sure to put one under the grip of law. Another loss of revenge is that the memory remains in mind which has adverse effect on the path of progress of the person concerned. He does not teach only moral issues but gives practical advice from the worldly point of view.

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### **11.5 Self Assessment Questions**

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#### **Exercise-1**

Each question in this exercise has been given three alternatives, read the question and choose the right answer from these three alternatives.

1. Alfred belonged to :
  - (a) Anglo-Saxon period
  - (b) Victorian period
  - (c) Elizabethan period
2. 'Ancient Riwle' is a representative work of :
  - (a) Anglo-Saxon period
  - (b) Ancient prose
  - (c) Anglo-Norman period
3. Sir John Mandeville was basically as
  - (a) prose writer
  - (b) essayist
  - (c) translator

4. Fifteenth Century was a period of :
  - (a) great prose writings
  - (b) experiments
  - (c) translations from Latin
5. People developed interest in classical writings of ancient Greece and Rome during
  - (a) Renaissance
  - (b) Elizabethan age
  - (c) Classical age
6. Devotional prose was written in
  - (a) Fourteenth century
  - (b) Fifteenth century
  - (c) Sixteenth century
7. The Puritan preachers re-emerged under :
  - (a) Elizabethan period
  - (b) Church of England
  - (c) Commonwealth
8. Francis Bacon was admitted to Gray's Inn in
  - (a) 1576
  - (b) 1586
  - (c) 1589
9. Francis Bacon represented Cambridge University in Parliament in
  - (a) 1612
  - (b) 1603
  - (c) 1614
10. The first edition of Bacon's 'Essays' was published in :
  - (a) 1603
  - (b) 1596
  - (c) 1597

### **Exercise-2**

Now try to answer the following questions in two to three sentences of your own.

1. What type of writings were produced in early sixteenth century in England?

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2. What do you know about the style of English prose of the sixteenth century?

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3. What was Elizabethan settlement?

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4. What do you know about the early life of Francis Bacon?

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5. What did Bacon write after James the first became the King of England?

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**Exercise : 3**

Choose the correct answer from among the three alternative given below each question:

1. The discovery of truth involves a lot of :

- (a) time and labour
- (b) intelligence
- (c) ancient knowledge

2. Bacon compares truth with the :

- (a) candle light
- (b) moon light
- (c) clear day light

3. Only those who understand truth realise :

- (a) value of truth



- (b) power of knowledge
- (c) human rights
- 4. The tone of the essay 'Of Truth' is :
  - (a) petrarchean
  - (b) baconian
  - (c) didactic

**Exercise : 4**

Answer the following questions in words of your own.

1. Discuss the types of truth you know.

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2. Why do men love false hood ?

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3. Why should one keep away from lie ?

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4. What is good for man's nature ?

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5. Discuss truth in daily life.

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**Exercise : 5**

Choose the correct answer from the three alternatives given below :

1. A man can show his moral superiority over his enemy :

- (a) by taking revenge
- (b) by arriving at a compromise
- (c) by refraining to take revenge

2. One should be annoyed with a person who is :

- (a) selfish
- (b) arrogant
- (c) unreliable

3. A man can be forgiven for a revenge for which Law :

- (a) has punishment
- (b) has no provision of punishment

- (c) has already given punishment
4. Cosimo de Medici ruled during :
- (a) sixteenth century
- (b) fourteenth century
- (c) fifteenth century
5. To reveal own identity to the victim is :
- (a) generous
- (b) selfish
- 0 (c) reliable

**Exercise : 6**

Answer the following questions in your own words :

1. Why should one discourage revenge ?
- \_\_\_\_\_
2. When do we consider revenge allowable ?
- \_\_\_\_\_
3. Discuss public revenges.
- \_\_\_\_\_
4. What does Bacon mean by 'tolerable sort of revenge'?
- \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is the intention behind doing wrong ?
- \_\_\_\_\_

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## **11.6 Answers to SAQs**

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**Exercise : 1**

1. (a) Anglo-Saxon period
2. (c) Anglo-Norman period
3. (c) translator
4. (a) experiments
5. (a) Renaissance
6. (a) Fourteenth Century
7. (b) Church of England
8. (a) 1576

9. (c) 1614

10. (c) 1597

**Exercise : 2**

1. Translations of new testament. The great bible devotional works, sermons, histories, biographies and prose fiction was produced during this period.
2. These writings had style of fluent, educated speech. The prose was naive, unsuited for any heavier burden.
3. The Elizabethan settlement, completed with the establishment of thirty one articles in 1571, produced the church of England.
4. bacon was a protected child in his early childhood. He had great inclination for studies. At the age of thirteen he joined Trinity College and three years after that he joined the Gray's sun to become a lawyer.
5. Bacon wrote "Advancement of Learning" in 1605 and dedicated it to the King.

**Exercise : 3**

1. (a) time and labour
2. (c) clear day light
3. (a) value of truth
4. (c) didactic
5. (b) man

**Exercise : 4**

1. There are basically two types of truth. The truth in religious, philosophical and moral spheres keep on charging. The other type of truth is scientific truth which is based on reason.
2. Men love false hood because the inquiry is difficult, it fetters their thought and there is a natural love for falsehood in human nature.
3. One should keep away from lie because such a person becomes coward and is not able to face his fellow men.
4. It is good for man's nature to be with truth. Because falsehood and lies give pleasure for time being and are harmful in longrun and they also ruin the dignity of man.
5. Truth is honourable and even admitted by those who do not practice it. One should not go for falsehood as it ruins peace of life.

**Exercise : 5**

1. (c) by refraining to take revenge
2. (a) selfish
3. (b) has no provision for punishment

4. (a) sixteenth century
5. (a) generous

### **Exercise : 6**

1. Revenged is to be discouraged because it puts the law out office, is ignoble and ignores the weakness and selfishness of man's nature.
2. Revenge is considered allowable when it supplies the defects of law and is taken openly
3. Public revenges have proved beneficial and fortunate for the persons taking revenge on behalf of public because public's support and sympathy is with him.
4. A revenge can be tolerated or forgiven for a revenge taken for a wrong against which the law of land provides no remedy and punishment.
5. A person does wrong in the hope to get profit, pleasure and some advantage for himself.

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## **11.7 Let Us Sum Up**

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In this unit you have acquired knowledge about literary scenario of Elizabethan age and various literary trends. You have acquired practice in :

- understanding contents, thought, morale and practical advices given by Bacon.
- analysing and appreciating in simple English a given piece of prose writing
- understanding the text and answering the questions in your own words.

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## **11.8 Review Questions**

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1. Bacon's essays come home to man's business and bosom. Discuss with reference to the essays you have read.
2. Comment on the Prose style of Bacon.

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## **11.7 Bibliography**

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## UNIT-12

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### JOHN DONNE : CANONISATION, EXTASIE

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#### Structures

#### 12.0. Objectives

#### 12.1 Introduction

#### 12.2 John Donne and Metaphysical Poetry

#### 12.3 Johan Donne : A Poet of Love

#### 12.4 The Canonisation

##### 12.4.1 Paraphrase

##### 12.4.2 Critical Notes and Explanations

##### 12.4.3 Critical Appreciation

#### 12.5 The Extasie

##### 12.5.1 Paraphrase

##### 12.5.2 Critical Notes and Explanations

##### 12.5.3 Critical Appreciation

#### 12.6 Review Questions

#### 12.7 Bibliography

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### 12.0 Objectives

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After reading this unit, you will be able

- to understand what 'metaphysical poetry' is,
- to know the chief characteristics of 'metaphysical poetry',
- to know about Donne's treatment of love,
- to understand the poem 'The Canonisation',
- to understand the poem 'The Extasie'.

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### 12.1 Introduction

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The age of Donne was an age of transition, standing midway between the age of Shakespeare and the Jacobean age (1572-1631). The age of Donne would effectively and substantially cover the first thirty years of the seventeenth century. There is, however, some overlapping which can not be avoided because literary periods or ages can not be separated chronologically.

It was a period of remarkable literary activity, a sort of prolongation of the Elizabethan age. The revival of learning had influenced not only Italy and Germany but also England. The classics were

studied minutely and from a new angle. The rediscovery of the literature and culture of the past-known as humanism-gave the writers a new outlook on life. Life was a gay game and not a sorry penance. The new ideal man was to be a perfect courtier, a perfect soldier, a perfect writer and, above all, a perfect gentleman. For this, he had to undergo comprehensive training and a rigorous discipline.

During this period, many changes in the political, social and economic domains were being effected. Colonial expansion and increase in industry and trade made people materialistic. The study of the medieval literature developed the minds of the readers. Though education was not so widespread, the common man spared no opportunity of obtaining knowledge from any source. Medieval beliefs held their ground both in Donne and his contemporaries.

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## **12.2 John Donne And Metaphysical Poetry**

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By the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century the great Elizabethan poetry had exhausted itself. Signs of decadence were visible everywhere. There were three traditions that were generally followed - the Spensarian, the Arcadian and the Petrarchian. Everything was conventional and artificial, there was little that was original or remarkable. There was much sugared melody and romantic extravagance, but intellectual emptiness. In the first decades of the 17th century there was a revolt against the outdated and exhausted Elizabethan poetry. As C.S. Lewis puts it, "Metaphysician in poetry is the fruit of the Renaissance tree becoming over-ripe and approaching putrescence."

The leaders of this revolt were Ben Jonson and John Donne. Both of them were forceful personalities who attracted staunch followers and founded schools. The first, Ben Jonson - the founder of the classical school which reached its full flowering in the poetry of Dryden and Pope - was primarily a dramatist. As a poet he profoundly influenced the Caroline lyricists. The other is John Donne. His poetry is remarkable for its concentrated passion, intellectual agility and dramatic power. He is given to introspection and self - analysis : he writes of no imaginary shepherds and shepherdesses but of his own intellectual, spiritual and amorous experiences. His early Satyres, his Songs and Sonnets, his Holy Sonnets, etc. are all different expression of his varied experiences. His poetry is marked with a tone of realism, even cynicism, but it is always forceful and startling. He is the founder of the so-called, "Metaphysical School", of poetry, of which Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and Abraham Cowley are the other leading poets.

Literally 'Meta' means 'beyond' and 'Physics' means, 'Physical nature'. It was Dryden who first used the word, 'Metaphysical' in connection with Donne's poetry and wrote, "Donne affects the metaphysics", and Dr. Johnson confirmed the judgment of Dryden. Eversince the word, 'Metaphysical' has been used for Donne and his followers. However the term is an unfortunate one, for it implies 'a process of dry reasoning, a speculation about the nature of the universe', the problems of life and death, etc. Milton's 'Paradise Lost', Pope's 'Essay on Man', and even Tennyson's 'In memoriam' may be called metaphysical poems for they are concerned with the nature of things. Donne's poetry is not metaphysical in the true sense of the word. A metaphysical poem is long, while Donne's poems are all short. His poetry does not expound any philosophical system of the universe, rather it is as much concerned with his emotions and personal experiences, as any other poetry. No doubt, there is much intellectual analysis of "emotion" and "experience", but this by itself can not be called metaphysical. The poetry of the school of Done is not metaphysical as far as its content is concerned. But as Grierson puts it, "Donne is metaphysical not only by virtue of his scholasticism, but by his deep reflective interest in the experiences of which his poetry is the expression, the new psychological curiosity with which he

writes of love and religion.

### **Metaphysical Imagery and Conceit:**

In other words, Donne's poetry may be called, 'metaphysical' only - in as far as its technique or style is concerned. It is heavily overloaded with conceits which may be defined as the excessive use of overelaborated similes and metaphors drawn from the most farfetched remote and unfamiliar sources. Dr. Johnson defines a conceit as the perception of, "occult resemblances in things apparently unlike." Poets have always perceived similarity between dissimilar objects and used similes and metaphors to convey their perception of that similarity. The peculiarity of the metaphysicals lies in the fact that (1) they use figures of speech excessively, (2) their similes and metaphors are farfetched and are often drawn from unfamiliar sources, (3) their figures are elaborated to the farthest limit, (4) The relationship they perceive are occult. They are not obvious on the face of nature, (5) their images are logical and intellectual rather than sensuous or emotional.

### **Difficulty and obscurity - Condensation**

Similarly, Donne and other metaphysical poets use words which call the mind into play, rather than those which speak to the senses or, "evoke an emotional response through memory" They use words which have no associative value. This intellectual bias affects the forms of their poems and their rhythm. In their 'conceits' they constantly bring together the abstract and the concrete, the remote and the near, the spiritual and the material, the finite and the infinite, the sublime and the common place. Thus Donne draws his imagery from such varied sources as Medieval theology, Scholastic philosophy, the Ptolemaic astronomy of the middle ages, and the concepts of contemporary sciences. His mind moves with great agility from one such concept to another, and it requires an equal agility on the part of the readers to follow him. Hence the difficult nature of his poetry, and hence the charge of obscurity that has been brought against him. Widely divergent elements are "yoked by violence together," (Johnson) and the effect, as even sympathetic critics like Grierson and Joan Bannett have recognised, is often fantastic. The difficulty of the readers is further increased by the extreme condensation and density of Donne's poetry.

### **Fantastic Conceits and Hyperboles**

The fantastic nature of the 'metaphysical conceits' and poetry would become clear, if we examine a few examples: In 'Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,' true lovers, now parted, are likened to the legs of a compass. The image is elaborated at length. The lovers are still spiritually one, just as the head of the compass is one even when the legs are apart. One leg remains fixed and the other moves round it. The lover can not forget the beloved even when separated from her. The two lovers meet together in the end, just as the two legs of the compass are together again, as soon as the circle has been drawn. Similarly in the 'Flea', Donne deduces every kind of consequence from the fact that a flea hops from biting him to suck his mistress's blood. He will not let her kill the creature in which their blood has mingled, and which is, therefore, their bridal bed, "the temple of their wedding". In such passages, even Donne, the greatest of the metaphysicals, lapses into the ridiculous and the fantastic. At other times, he uses equally extravagant hyperboles. For example, he mistakes his beloved to be an angel, for to imagine her less than an angel would be profanity.

### **Language and Versification**

As has already been mentioned above, Donne's poetry is a poetry of revolt against the worn-

out conventions of the day. He seeks for originality and newness, and he achieves it in different ways. He seeks it through the use of farfetched and fantastic conceits. Legouis rightly remarks, 'He will have nothing to do with the easy and familiar mythological imagery; he turns out the company of the gods and goddesses, and rejects the spoils of Greek and Latin poetry.' He uses the 'natural language of men' not when they are 'emotionally excited', but when they are engaged in commerce or in scientific speculations. It is a 'new vocabulary', he uses, a vocabulary with no 'associative value' and entirely different from the poetic language of the Elizabethan. He wants to convey his meanings, exactly and precisely, and searches for verbal equivalents for emotional states, and this search often results in the use of archaic and the strange. We do not find in him any of the 'sugared melody' of the Petrarchans; he violates every known rule of rhyme, meter and versification. As Ben Jonson puts it, "Donne for not keeping of accent deserved hanging." His rhythms give a jar and jolt to the reader; they administer a shock to him and make him think by their very violence.

### **Abrupt, Colloquial openings : Wit**

It is for this very reason that he often begins his poems abruptly, as in 'The Canonisation'.

"For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love".

Elsewhere, he begins on a bitter note:

"When by thy scorne, O' murderess, I am dead" and then proceeds to tell her what terrors his ghost would cause to her after his death. Donne's witticism, too, has a similar purpose, i.e. to startle and surprise. His wit is not merely, "what oft was thought but never so well expressed", but what was, "seldom so thought and never so well expressed." "The king's real and his stamped face", and the passage about the Phoenix in 'The Canonisation', etc., are relevant examples. Donne surprises and arrests attention both by the content and style of his poetry.

### **Unification of Sensibility:**

In Donne's poetry, there is always "an intellectual analysis of emotion." Every lyric arises out of some emotional situation, and the emotion concerned is analysed threadbare. Like a clever lawyer Donne gives arguments after arguments in support of his points of view. Thus in 'Valediction: Forbidding Mourning', he proves that true lovers need not mourn at the time of parting; in the 'Canonisation' he establishes that lovers are saints of love; and in the 'Blossome' he argues against the Petrarchan love tradition. This imparts to his poetry a hard intellectual tone, but it also results in that, "unification of sensibility", for which T.S. Eliot praised the Metaphysical poetry so highly.

Thus, the chief characteristics of Donne's metaphysical poetry may be summarised as follows:

1. It is complex and difficult. Most varied concepts are brought together.
2. It is intellectual in tone. There is an analysis of the most delicate shades of psychological experiences.
3. There is a fusion of emotion and intellect, as there is intellectual analysis of emotions personally experienced by the poet.
4. It is full of conceits which are learned, intellectual and overelaborated.
5. It is argumentative. There is subtle evolution of thought as Donne advances arguments after arguments to prove his point. He is often like a lawyer choosing the fittest arguments for the



case.

6. In order to arrest attention often a poem begins abruptly and colloquially, and unusual rhythms are used, Unusual compound words are also used for the same purpose.
7. It is often dramatic in form. 'The Blossome' is in the form of a dialogue between the poet and his heart which is treated as a separate entity. As has been well said his poetry presents a "drama of ideas." His lyrics are dramatic. A poem of Donne is a piece of drama.

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### 12.3 John Donne : A Poet of Love

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The variety and scope of Donne's love lyrics is truly remarkable. He oscillates between physical love and holy love, between cynicism and faith in love and above all the sanctity and dignity of married life. His earlier love-poems are rather erotic and sensual and deal with the real escapades and intrigues of lovers. Moreover, he is quite original in presenting love-situations and moods. Partly they are based on common experiences of his contemporaries and partly on his own experiences. In the gay and fashionable life of London of his time, Donne had ample opportunities of establishing both casual and lasting love-relationships.

Born at a time when the writing of love poems was both a fashionable and literary exercise, Donne showed his talent in this genre. His poems are entirely different from the Elizabethan love lyrics. They are singular for their fascination, charm and depth of feeling. His contemporaries wrote love-lyrics after the manner of Petrarch and Ronsard. But Donne dallies half-ironically with convention of Petrarch. His love songs are unconventional and original, both in form and content. Here is a blend of sensibility and wit, of joy and scorn, of beauty and repulsion. Look at the scornful anger of the jilted lover:

When by thy scorn, o murderess,

I am dead

And that thou think'st thee free

From all solicitations from me,

Then shall my ghost come to thy bed.

Another peculiar quality of Donne's love poems is its metaphysical strain. Donne does not lay stress on beauty or rather the aesthetic element in passion. His poems are sensuous and fantastic. He goes through the whole gamut of passion from its lowest to its highest forms. Had he had a greater sense of beauty and intensity of feeling, he would have ranked as one of the greatest love poets of the world. His metaphysical wit makes his readers doubt his sincerity and earnestness. Dryden writes: "Donne affects the metaphysics not only in his satires but in his amorous verses where nature only should reign. He perplexes the minds of the fair sex with speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts and entertain them with the softness of love." Tenderness and sentiment are not the qualities to be found in Donne's poetry. The metaphysical strain is evident in his scholasticism, his game of elaborating fantastic conceits, his hyperboles, and paradoxes. Donne uses the common emblem of perfection and intensity of love by means of the circle. In his poem *Love's Growth*, love is symbolised by the growing circles of water stirred by a pebble.

If as in water stirred more circles be,

Produc'd by one, love such additions take.

The lover's feelings resemble, by their harmony, the concentric spheres of the Ptolemaic universe. Love is infinite like God's creation.

Donne in *Love's Infiniteness*, pleads with his beloved that she should give him a part of her heart. After she has given him a part, he demands the whole heart. When she has given him a part, he demands the whole heart. When she has given him the entire heart, he feels that his love must grow and have a hope for the future.

Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,  
It stays at home, and thou with losing sav'st it;  
But we will have a way more liberal,  
Than changing hearts, to join them, so we shall  
Be one, and one another's all.

This is the goal and consummation of love. He then startles and outrages the expectations of his readers. Similarly, in the matter of expression, he is rugged and rhetorical. No doubt by bringing in the personal element, his verses become impressive and arresting:

Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,  
It stays at home, and thou with losing sav'st it;  
  
But we will have a way more liberal,  
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This is the goal and consummation of love. He then startles and outrages the expectations of his readers. Similarly, in the matter of expression, he is rugged and rhetorical. No doubt by bringing in the personal element, his verses become impressive and arresting:

For God's sake, hold your tongue and let me love.  
I long to talk with some old lover's ghost  
Who died before the God of love was born,  
Twice or thrice had I loved thee,  
Before I knew thy face or name.

I am two fools, I know,  
For loving and for saying so,  
In whining poetry.

I fix mine eye on thine and there

Pity my picture burning in thine eye,  
My picture drowned in a transparent tear,  
When I look lower I espy.

Donne's love poems can be divided under three heads-

- (i) Poems of moods of lovers, seduction and free love or fanciful relationship.
- (ii) Poems addressed to Anne More (his wife) both before and after marriage.
- (iii) Poems addressed to noble ladies of his acquaintance and compliments to wives and daughters of citizens.

### **Three strands**

There are mainly three strands in his love poems. Firstly, there is the cynical which is anti-woman and hostile to the fair sex. The theme is the frailty of man-a matter of advantage for lovers who liked casual and extra marital relations with ladies. Secondly, there is the strand of happy married life, the joy of conjugal love in poems like *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* addressed to his wife and *Elegy on His Mistress*- where temporary absence will only whet the appetite of love;

When I am gone, dream me some happiness,  
Nor let thy looks our long-hid love confess.

These poems are dedicated to the peace and fulfillment to be found in a happy marriage. Thirdly, there is the Platonic strand, as in *The Canonization*, where love is regarded as a holy emotion like the worship of a devotee of God. There are, however, certain poems where the sentiment oscillates between the first and the third strands-where sexual love is treated as holy love and vice versa. In some poems the tone is rugged, harsh and aggressive as in *The Apparition*. Much depends on the situation selected and the mood of the poet.

### **Realism**

Donne's treatment is realistic and not idealistic. He knows the weaknesses of the flesh, the pleasures of sex, the joy of secret meetings. However, he tries to establish the relationship between the body and the soul. True love does not pertain to the body; it is the relationship of one soul to another soul. Physical union may not be necessary as in *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*. However, in another poem, 'The Relic', the poet regards physical union as necessary. Such contradictions, however, do not mar the value of his poetry. They only tend to emphasize the dichotomy between the claims of the body and need of the soul.

In spite of the realistic touches and descriptions in the love-poems, Donne does not take pains to detail the beauty and fascination of any part of the female body. Rather he describes its effect on the lover's heart. Here and there, he allows himself freedom to wander over the different parts of female anatomy, but like the earlier poems, he does not dwell on the charms of the lips, eyes, teeth or cheeks of a handsome mistress. It is rather surprising that a poet who is so fond of sex should abstain so totally from the temptation to dwell on the physical structure or charm of any part of the female body.

### **Extra-marital love**

That sex is holy whether within or outside marriage is declared by Donne in his love poems.

If love is mutual, physical union even outside marriage cannot be condemned. Though as a Christian he may not justify extra-marital relationship, as a lover and as a poet, he does accept its reality and joy. He would not scorn such relationship as adultery. What Donne feels is that the love-bond is essential for sexual union. Without love, any act of sex is mean and degrading. However, true love can exist outside marriage, though moralists may sneer at it.

### **Attitude to woman**

Donne does not feel that woman is a sex-doll or a goddess. She is essentially a bundle of contradictions. As such he laughs at her inconstancy and faithlessness. He believes in "Frailty, thy name is woman". His contempt for woman is more than compensated by his respect for conjugal love. At times, he regards the beloved as an angel who can offer him heavenly inspiration and bliss. This twofold attitude to woman—woman as a butterfly, and woman as an angel—depends on the situation and the mood of the poet.

In the poems addressed to his wife—Anne More—the poet deals primarily with the joys of fulfilled and consummated love. Here is a total experience of the triumph of serenity and mutual love which brings with itself a sense of serenity and bliss. Moreover, these poems (*Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* and *A Valediction: of Weeping*) reveal the poet's eternal faith in life. Conjugal love, at its best, is more rewarding and meaningful than weeping in unfulfilled love. The best love poems are, indeed, those which show the fulfillment of a happy married life.

### **Petrarchanism with a difference**

While the Elizabethan love lyrics are, by and large, imitations of the Petrarchan traditions, Donne's love poems stand in a class by themselves. Donne's love poems are entirely unconventional except when he "chose to dally half-ironically with the conventions of Petrarchan tradition". Donne is fully acquainted with the Petrarchan model where woman is an object of beauty, love and perfection. The lover's entreaties to his lady, his courtly wooing, the beloved's indifference and the self-pity of the lover are common themes of Petrarchan poems. Such set themes are treated differently by Donne, because he has no own intimate experience to guide him. His utter realism makes him debunk the idea of woman as a personification of virtue and chastity; woman is made of flesh and blood and she loves sex as much as man. In *The Indifferent*, Donne openly declares that he does not mind the complexion or proportions of any girl. All that he wants is sexual intimacy. However, he establishes a metaphysical relationship between the body and soul—namely that physical love leads to spiritual love as in *The Ecstasy*:

Love's mysteries in souls do grow,  
But yet the body is his book.

Donne is different from Petrarch in his attitude to love. Here is wooing, but it is of a different type. The flea is a marriage bed and a holy temple of love. His courtship is aggressive, compelling and violent; there is no trace of self-pity in it. Rather there is a threat of revenge declared openly by the lover.

Then shall my ghost come to thy bed.

The lover's ghost watching the beloved enjoying with another lover will cause a shiver in the beloved and she herself will turn into a ghost. The theme of death as in *The Relic*, *The Funeral*, and

*The Apparition* is given a realistic and vivid interpretation.

Undoubtedly, Donne adopted the important characteristics of Petrarch, namely his use of images and conceits, and his dramatic approach. He, however, transformed them so rigorously by his intellect that they appear to be quite original. The hyperboles of Petrarch are farfetched while those of Donne are not so. His conceits are not decorative but functional. Take the conceit of the pair of compasses in *A Valediction : Forbidding Mourning*. How factual and how convincing is love that must return to its base after it has gone full circle. Secondly, mark the dramatic way in which the lover addresses the beloved in harsh and rhetorical language:

When by thy. Scorn, O murderess I am dead .....

I am two fools, I know

For loving and for saying so .....

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I

Did, till we lov'd? Were we not wean'd till then?.....

The conceit becomes a blend of levity and seriousness, of mockery and wisdom, of physical passion and higher love.

### **Passion and thought**

The fact is that Donne does not allow his passion to run away with him. He holds it in check with his reason. When the beloved wants to crush the flea who has bitten her, the poet argues with her dissuading her from what he calls triple murder of the lover, the beloved and the flea.

Similarly, Donne moderates the intensity of passion with his life as in *The Canonization*. The lovers will be regarded as saints of love and worshipped accordingly. Donne's achievement lies in wedding thought to emotion, and argument to personal passion. In this connection, Grierson writes: "Donne's love poetry is a very complex phenomenon, but the two dominant strains in it are just these: the strains of dialectic, subtlety of argument and wit, erudite and fantastic; and the strain of vivid realism, and the record of a passion which is not ideal or conventional, neither recollected in tranquility nor a pure product of literary fashion, but love as an actual, and immediate experience in all its moods, gay and angry, scornful and rapturous with joy, touched with tenderness and darkened with sorrow." Dryden, too, comments on the intellectual and meta physical element of his love poetry thus: "He perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy when he should engage their hearts and entertain with softness of love."

### **Supremacy of love**

Mutuality of love is the secret of penance and bliss in conjugal life. Love is not subject to change on account of the passage of time or difference in environment:

Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,

Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

The total fulfillments and glory of love is echoed in *The Sun Rising*:

She is all states,, and all Princes I,

Nothing else is.

In fact true love is the merger of two souls- two bodies with one life:

Our two souls therefore, which are one.

The poems like 'Good Morrow', 'Valediction' and 'Ecstasy' represent oneness of the souls of real lovers-joy of contented passion, where love has been sublimated into holy affection.

### **Donne: an innovator of a new kind of love poetry**

Donne was an innovator of a new kind of love poetry. Elizabethan love poetry was written on the Petrarchan model following the pattern set by the Italian poets like Dante, Ariosto and Petrarch. The love songs and sonnet sequences of Spencer, Sydney, Watson, Davidson and Drummond described the pains and sorrows of love-the sorrow of absence, the pain of rejection, the incomparable beauty of the lady and her unwavering cruelty. They seldom (except some of the finest of Shakespeare's sonnets) dealt with the joy of love, and the deep contentment of mutual passion. Moreover, they made use of a series of constantly recurring images, of rain, of wind, of fire, of ice, of storm and of warfare; comparisons and allusions of Venus and Cupid Cynthia and Apollo etc. as well as abstractions such as Love and Fortune, Beauty and Disdain.

### **Donne's attitude towards love is intellectual**

John Donne was the first English poet to challenge and break the supremacy of Petrarchan tradition. Though at times he adopts the Petrarchan devices, yet the imagery and rhythm, the texture and the colour of the bulk of his love-poetry are different. Moreover, there are three distinct strains in his love poetry-cynical, the Platonic, and of conjugal love. A number of his love poetry-cynical, the Platonic, and of conjugal love. A number of his popular songs as *Go and catch a falling star*, *Send home by my long stray'd eyes to me*, or such lyrics as *Women's Constancy*, *The Indifferent*, *Aire and Angels*. *The Dream*, *The Apparition* and many others, are written in a cynical strain. The love which he portrays is not impassioned, courtly or chivalrie, but intellectual love.

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## **12.4 The Canonisation**

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### **TEXT**

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,  
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,  
My five grey hairs, or ruined fortune flout,  
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,  
Take you a course, get you a place,  
Observe his Honour, or his Grace,  
Or the King's real, or his stamped face  
Contemplate; what you will, approve,  
So you will let me love.

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?

What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?  
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?  
When did my colds a forward spring remove?  
When did the heats which my veins fill  
Add one more to the plaguy bill?  
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still  
Litigious men, which quarrels move,  
Though she and I do love.

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;  
Call her one, me another fly,  
We are tapers too, and at our own cost die,  
And we in us find the eagle and the dove,  
The phoenix riddle hath more wit  
By us; we two being one, are it.  
So to one neutral thing both sexes fit  
We die and rise the same, and prove  
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love.  
And if unfit for tombs and hearse  
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;  
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,  
we'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;  
As well a well wrought urn becomes  
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,  
And by these hymns, all shall approve  
Us canonized for love:  
And thus invoke us; 'You whom reverend love  
Made one another's hermitage;

You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;  
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove

Into the glasses of your eyes  
(So made such mirrors, and such spies,  
That they did all to you epitomize,  
Countries, towns, courts: beg from above  
A pattern of your love!

#### 12.4.1. Paraphrase

**Stanza 1.** The poet wants his friend who tries to discourage him from making love to keep his mouth shut and allow him to continue his love without any hindrance. Just as it is useless for him to rebuke the poet for suffering from diseases like paralysis or gout or baldness or infirmities like old age or his misfortune, in the same way it is equally futile for him to try to dissuade the poet from making love. Instead of wasting time in advising the poet, it would be better for him to improve his position by amassing wealth or cultivate his mind by acquiring knowledge or developing a taste for arts. He may undertake a course of study or secure a position at the court and thereby get a chance of observing the grace and honour of the king. As a courtier, he will watch the real face of the king (see him in his true colour) or he may enter business and make money and thus see the king's image stamped on coins. Let him do what ever he likes but let him not disturb the poet in making love to his beloved.

**Stanza 2.** Alas, none is harmed by his love-making. His sighs have not drowned any merchantship. His tears have not caused any floods, the coldness of his tears has not prolonged the winter season or delayed the advent of spring. The heat of his passion has not added to the list of persons who die of plague. Soldiers continue to fight the wars and the lawyers are busy in their litigation. In spite of his love, the normal life of the world continues as usual (why should then anyone object to his love-making).

**Stanza 3.** The friend will call the poet and his beloved whatever he likes (mad or funny), but whatever they are, is the result of their love-making. The friend may call the poet a fly and the poet's beloved another fly chasing after light. He may call them candles as they both burn themselves out in mutual love. He may compare them with the eagle and the dove because both of them are violent and gentle and prey on each other. Perhaps the legend of the Phoenix would adequately describe the poet and his beloved. Their two sexes match together so perfectly as to form a being of unisex, i.e. after they die, they come to life again in the same form as they were before just as the Phoenix after death arises from its own ashes. Like the mystery of the Phoenix, their mystery of love will command respect.

**Stanza 4.** If the lovers cannot get immortality by their love, they can at least die for it. The story of their love may not be worthy of tombs and monuments, but at any rate it is good enough for the material of poetry. Their love may not be recorded in volumes of history but it will certainly find mention in sonnets and lyrics. Just as the ashes of great men are preserved in an ornamental



urn or in tombs covering an area of half acre, in the same way they will be respected by the world as canonized lovers (saintly lovers). Just as saints are canonized for the love of God, in the same way they will be canonized for the sake of love. Their love is pure and self less.

**Stanza 5.** After the lovers have been accepted as saints of love, people will pray for their blessings as under-

“You are the saints of love who made each other your pilgrimage, for each of you the other was a world in himself or herself. For others love was a furious passion but to you love brought peace and bliss. You saw the reflection of the entire world in each other’s eyes. You performed the miracle of contracting the world (within your eyes). In your eyes you saw the countries, towns and courts and thus saw a more meaningful world. Since you are the saints of love, we pray to God to fashion our love on your pattern so that we may also love as you did”.

### 12.4.2 Critical Notes and Explanations

**Stanza 1.** L. 1. For God’s sake hold your tongue: the poet addresses some friend of his who is trying to dissuade him from making love to his beloved. L.2. Or: either. chide: rebuke. palsy: paralysis. goul: a disease, L.3. My five grey hairs: refers to the approaching old age of the lover. Or ruined fortune flout: the poet does not mind if his friend mock at the ruin of his wealth. L.4. Your state: your position in life. Your mind improve: the poet advises his friend to improve his intelligence by gaining knowledge. L.5. Take you a course: settle down to a career. Place position, job. L.6. Observe: be attentive to L.7. Or the King’s real, or his stamped face: the lover advises his friend either to secure for himself a job at the court so as to see the king very often or to get into some business and amass wealth so as to see the King’s image stamped on coins. L.8. Contemplate: to meditate. approve: do what he likes.

**Stanza 2.** L.9. So... love: his friend should only leave him free to love as he likes. L.10. Alas, alas... my love: Donne suggest here the harmlessness and the innocence of his love which does not cause any injury to anyone. L.11. Sighs: sighs of love: the stormy winds of lover’s sighs. L.12. Who says... his ground: Donne’s tearers, shed out of love, have not flooded any farmer’s land. L.13. When did... remove : Donne says that his colds have never affected seasons by prolonging winter and delaying the coming of spring. L1. 14-15. When did.... plague Bill: Donne says that the heat caused in his veins by his love never led to any disease like the plague and thus add to the number of dead; Bill: lists of the dead. Such lists were daily published those days. L.16. Soldiers find wars: the fighting instinct of soldiers has not been injured the least by Donne’s love making. L.17. Litigious men: clients fond of litigation. Which quarrels more: who stir up quarrels.

**Stanza 4** L.19. Calls us....by love: Donne does not mind what others call him and his beloved. Whatever they are, they are due to the unification caused by love. L.20 Fly: the image implies shortness of life as well as sexual passion. L.21. We are tapers... die: Each of us is a taper, as well as a fly, and each of us is therefore burnt by the other, but the one who kills, kills at his or her own cost: for the tapers are themselves diminishing. Taper. candle. L.22. The eagle and the dove,: symbols of strength and gentleness. L.23. The Phoenix riddle: The Phoenix is a mythical bird. It is said that only one such bird exists at a time and when its life-term is over, it burns itself on burning pyre and then renews itself from its own ashes. L.24. By us: the Phoenix also symbolises the immortality of the love of Donne and his beloved. We two being

one, are it: As the two lovers are united in love, they are Phoenix itself. L.25. So to one.... fit: their sexes fit together so perfectly that they form one being of unisex. L.26. We die and rise the same: In spite of the presence of fleshly desire, their love is faithful and not subject to change: it is constant. Donne speaks of the renewal of physical passion in such a manner that wittily suggests religious mystery.

**Stanza 4** L. 27. And prove.... this love: the lovers show themselves to be beyond the common run of human conduct. They are also equally beyond the grasp of reason as saints are. L.28. We can... by love: the lovers can willingly die for the cause of love if they cannot live by it. L.29-30. And if unfit...fit for verse: even if their love-story is not considered important enough to be carved on tombstones, even if big monuments are not built in their memory, poets would at least sing of their love. Hearse: carriage used for transporting the coffin to the grave. L.31. Piece of Chronicle: history or inscription on a monument. L.32. We will build .. rooms: the lovers will, however, be remembered in poems. L.33. Well wrought urn: A well wrought urn is a beautifully made casket for keeping the ashes of the dead. L.34. The greatest ashes: the ashes of the important people. L. 33-34. As well.. half acre tombs: the sonnets are likened to small well wrought urns, as good for burial as a big monument spread over half an acre of land. L.35. Hymns: lyrics telling their love would be like hymns of the love of devotee for his maker. approve: confirm L.36. Canonized for love; achieve saintly martyrdom for devotion to their love.

### 12.4.3 Critical Appreciation

Love has been an object of fun and hairsplitting with the metaphysical poets. Donne has also dealt with different moods of love and has played with its several fancies and visions. In this poem, however, he has taken a positive and serious view of love. It is a selfless and saintly affection as worthy of respect as worship. Here we find his great devotion to Anne Moore-his beloved-though the marriage marred his career and brought him into disrepute. The main idea is that his love does not interfere with the lives of others and so why should they take exception to it. Donne's passion is physical and the lovers really believe in sexual indulgence. Their bodies become one and so do their souls, as in a religious mystery.'

#### The paradox

Donne treats physical love as if it were divine love. Saints are canonized for their renunciation of the world and its comforts. In the same way, the lovers have renounced the material world. The love of Donne for his beloved causes no damage or injury to the society or to the world. Other people continue to carry on their normal daily chores and duties. The lovers have lost the world but gained more in the world of each other. The lovers are, so to say, dead to the world. They have, therefore, deserved the status of saints. They are the saints whose blessings other lovers will invoke. The lovers are devoted to each other as a saint is devoted to God. Some people may regard it as paradox of Christian Canonization, but there is no doubt that the tone of the poem is both serious and convincing.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

**The debate :** Donne begins his argument with a friend who dissuades him from love-making. He tells him to stop his nonsensical talk and allow him to love. Let his friend regard his love as a natural or hereditary disease. Let his friend mind his own business and look after his own career and fortune.

**Love is harmless:** After all, the poet's love does not cause any harm or damage to anyone. It does not disturb the even flow of social life. His sighs and tears have caused no offence to anyone. People are busy in their own affairs. His profession is love and so why should anyone take objection to it.

**Secret of love:** The poet deals with the secret of love. Love is an association or union of two persons. Human isolation is awful; the lovers find mutual satisfaction in love. They are like flies and tapers which enjoy being consumed to extinction. Like the Phoenix, the lovers are resurrected from their ashes. Both are consumed by the fire of passion and out of this consummation emanates their resurrection. Physical love is elevated to the plane of spiritual love.

**Life beyond death:** The poet and his beloved are prepared to die for love if they cannot live by love. The tale of their death will form the subject of love poets. Their love will be commemorated in lyrics and sonnets. They will attain the status of saints of love. People will copy their love and regard it as a model.

**Martyre-saints:** Lovers will worship the poet and his beloved as the martyrs to love. Lovers will invoke the blessings of these martyr saints. Love will bring them both peace and solace. Like them other lovers will devote themselves entirely to their respective beloveds. Each will find in his beloved the whole soul of the world. The lovers will pray to God to grant them the same kind of true love which the poet and the beloved enjoyed while living in the world.

### CRITICAL COMMENTS

Mark the sudden and dramatic opening line of the poem. The first two stanzas are rhetorical full of contempt and rebuff for those who argue against love. There is a lot of hyperbole. Can 'sighs' turn into 'sea storms' or 'tears' cause floods or the 'heat of passion' cause plagues. Donne uses these metaphors to laugh at the Petrarchan paraphernalia of love. Donne also laughs at two good professions- soldiering and litigation which make fun of love.

Organic imagery is a strong point of the poem. The two lovers moving round each other like flies or again consuming themselves like tapers; or again the images of the eagle and the dove-the violent one preying on the weak, and ultimately the riddle of the Phoenix indicate the whole process of love from courtship to consummation of love. Though they are two, they are one, of the neutral sex like the Phoenix. As the Phoenix is reborn from its ashes, the lovers are reborn (revitalised) after sexual indulgence. In fact, Donne treats physical love like divine love. The canonization which leads to the lovers being regarded as the martyr saints of love will make them a model of love. The 'rage' of love will be transformed into peace. The lovers need no mention in history-books or any monuments or inscriptions. Donne's wit is seen in his mention of the King's face-the real one in the court, the fake one stamped on coins. The lovers' eyes are the mirrors in which each sees the reflection or the image of the other. Each eye contains the whole world with its countries, towns and courts. In short, the poem shows the craftsmanship of Donne at its best.

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## 12.5 The Extasie

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### TEXT

Where, like a pillow on a bed,

A pregnant bank swelled up, to rest

The violet's reclining head,  
Sat we two, one another's best;

Our hands were firmly cemented  
With a fast balm, which thence did spring,  
Oureye beams twisted, and did thread  
Our eyes, upon one double string:

So to' intergraft our hands, as yet  
Was all our means to make us one,  
Asnmd pictures in our eyes to get  
Was all our propagation.

As 'twist two equal armies, Fate  
Suspends uncertain victory,  
Our souls, (which to advance their state,  
Were gone out), hung' twist her, and me.

And whilst our souls negotiate there,  
We like sepulchral statues lay;  
All day, the same our postures were,  
And we said nothing, all the day.  
If any, so by love refined,  
That he soul's language understood,  
And by good love were grown all mind,  
Within convenient distance stood,

He (though he knew not which soul speak,  
Because both meant, both speak the same)  
Might thence a new concoction take,  
And part far purer than he came,

This ecstasy both unperplex  
(We said) and tell yes what we love,  
We see by this; it was not sex,  
We see, we saw not what did move;

But as all several souls contain  
Mixture of things, they know not what,  
Love, these mixed souls both mix again,  
And makes both one, each this and that.

A single violet transplant,  
The strength, the colour, and the size,  
(All which before was poor, and scant)  
Redoubles still, and multiplies.

When love, with one another so  
Interinanimates two souls,  
That abler soul, which thence doth flow,  
Defects of loneliness controls.

We then, who are this new soul, know  
Of what we are composed, and made,  
For, th' atmies of which we grow,  
Are sould, whom no change can invade.

But O alas, so long, so far  
Our bodies why do we forbear?  
They are ours, though they are not we, we are  
The intelligences, they the sphere,

We owe them thanks, because they thus

Did us, to us, at first convey,  
Yielded their forces, sense, to us  
Nor are dross to us, but allay.

On man heaven's influence works not so,  
But that it first imprints the air,  
So soul into the soul may flow,  
Though it to body first repair.  
As our blood labours to beget  
Spirits, as like souls as it can,  
Because such fingers need to knit  
That subtle knot, which makes us man:

So must pure lovers souls descend  
T'affections, and to faculties,  
Which sense may reach and apprehended,  
Else a great prince in prison lies.

To our bodies turn we then, that so  
Weak men on love revealed may look;  
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,  
But yet the body is his book.

And if some lover, such as we,  
Have heard this dialogue of one,  
Let him still mark us, he shall see  
Small change, when we are to bodies one.

#### **12.5.1 Paraphrase**

**Stanza 1.** We, two lovers, each thinking of the other as the best person in the world, sat on the river-bank which was raised high like a pillow to enable the reclining heads of violet flowers to rest on it.

**Stanza 2.** Our hands were firmly grasped and from them a strong perfume emanated. Our eyes met

and reflected the image of each other. It appeared as if our eyes were strung together on a double thread.

**Stanza 3.** Our hands were firmly clasped together and this was the means of bringing us close to each other. Our eyes reflected our images and this was the only fusion of our love.

**Stanza 4.** Just as when two equally powerful enemies fight each other while fate holds the victory in a state of balance, undecided which way to turn the scale, in the same way, our souls, which had left our bodies to sublimate to a state of bliss, hung between the two of us uncertain of their future.

**Stanza 5.** While our souls, communicated with each other in this situation, we lay quiet and motionless like statues built over the monument of the dead. All thought the day our bodies continued to remain in the same position without movement or speech.

**Stanza 6&7.** If any stranger, whose soul had been purified by a similar process had stood beside our souls, and had been capable of understanding the language of the souls his purified mind would have forgotten the existence of the body and enlightened and sharpened the faculties of his mind, such a soul may not have understood the conversation of our souls because both our souls meant and spoke the same thing, but that soul might have undergone a fresh process of purification and felt more refined than before.

**Stanza 8.** Our souls have reached a state of ecstasy which revealed to us what we did not know earlier. We realised that love was not sex experience. We discovered the first time that love really is a matter of the soul and not of the body.

**Stanza 9.** Souls are made of various elements of which we have no knowledge. It is love which brings together two souls and makes them one, though, in reality, the two have separate existence.

**Stanza 10.** When a violet plant is transplanted (removed from one place and replanted in a better soil) it shows a marked improvement in its colour, size and strength. After transplantation it almost doubles itself and also grows more rapidly.

**Stanza 11.** In a similar manner when love brings two souls together it imparts to them a great zeal and life. The stronger (or noble soul) supplements (or removes) the deficiencies of the lesser soul. Love also removes the feeling of loneliness felt by single souls.

**Stanza 12.** As a result of the union of two souls, so to say, a new soul comes into being. This new soul knows of what elements the two souls are composed. It makes us realize that the substances of which we are made are not subject to any change.

**Stanza 13.** Alas, we have so far and so long ignored our bodies. The bodies are ours, but we are distinct from the bodies. We are souls; we are of spiritual substance; we are like heavenly planets while our bodies are the spheres in which we move.

**Stanza 14.** We are thankful to our bodies, because they brought us together in the first instance. Our bodies surrendered their sense in order to enable our love to be spiritual. Our bodies are not impure matter, but they are like an alloy (an alloy when mixed with gold makes it tougher and brighter). The body is useful agent for holy love.

**Stanza 15.** The influence of heavenly bodies on man comes through the air. So when a soul wishes to

love another soul, it can contact it through the medium of the body. Hence a union of souls may need the contact of bodies as the first step.

**Stanza 16.** Just as the blood which is an important constituent of our bodies labours to produce the essence (the semen) which helps in uniting two bodies, in the same way a spiritual love produces a kind of ecstasy which binds the two souls together. This subtle knot of love may not be fully understood.

**Stanza 17.** Just as blood produces elements which brings about the union of sense and soul which constitute a man, in the same way the lover's soul leaves some linking elements like the sense and the bodily faculties to express their love. The sense and faculty of the body come to the aid of the soul, which is like a prisoner. Just as a prince who is imprisoned cannot gain freedom unless somebody comes to his aid, in the same way the senses of the body go to the aid of the lover's soul and secure freedom for it.

**Stanza 18.** We must now turn to our bodies so that weak men may have a test of high love. Love sublimates the soul but it is through the medium of the body that love is first experienced. The body is as important as the soul in the matter of love.

**Stanza 19.** If some lover like us has heard this discourse (made by two souls with one experience) let him look carefully at us. After our pure love when we go back to our bodies he will find no change in us because we shall not revert to physical self again.

### 12.5.2 Critical Notes and Explanations

**Title** 'Ek' means 'out' and 'St' means 'to stand', hence the meaning "standing out". It is a mystical state of trance wherein the soul comes out of the body to have communion with God. The same state of ecstasy is to be found in Words worth's famous poem *Tintern Abbey*. Here is a difference in that lovers' souls come out of their respective bodies only to have communion with each other.

**Stanza 1.** L.2. A pregnant bank swelled up: The two lovers meet near a heap of earth that has swelled up like a pillow on a bed. It is pregnant because it has seed within that would soon bear flowering plants. L.3. The violer's reclining head: The violet is a blue flower symbolising faithful and true love. Reclining head: it grows low near the ground, hence resting its head on the heap of earth. L.4. Sat we .... best: The two lovers who find the greatest joy in each other's company.

**Stanza 2.** L.5. Our hands....cemented : They were holding firmly the hands of each other. L1. 5&6. Cemented with a fast balm: According to medieval science, the living bodies exuded a substance which preserved them from decay. Hence, the grasp of the lovers' hands was tightened by this balm. L1.7-8. Our eye beams..... string : The lovers gaze fixed into each others' eye and the lights from their respective eyes inter-mingled, creating a sense of double string that tied them together.

**Stanza 3.** L.9. So to, intergraft our hands : Grafting of one variety of a plant upon another is a common practice in horticulture which here suggests the physical union of the lovers through their clasped hands. to intergraft : means to incorporate or to join on to something already existing. L.10. Was all..... one : The clasping of the hands was the only means that brought them close to each other. L1. 11-12. And pictures..... propagations : The only act of reproduction between the lovers was



to beget the reflection of each in the other's eyes. Propagations : causing to increase by natural process, to spread from one to another to multiply.

**Stanza 4.** L.13. 'Twist two equal armies : between two equally powerful warring forces. L1 13-14. As, twist..... victory : When two equally strong forces meet, none of them is sure of victory and fate hangs in between. L1. 15-16. Our souls..... and me : Their souls had already left the bodies to rise up to a state of ecstasy and to achieve calm and serenity.

**Stanza 5.** L. 17 Negotiate : confer with each other ; converse like two armies negotiating a truce. L. 18. Sepulchral : lifeless. Sepulchral statues : statues on the tombs of the dead. L. 19. Postures: poses; throughout the day, the two lovers kept sitting in the same position without uttering even a single word.

**Stanza 6.** L. 21. By love refined : elevated, ennobled or purified by love. L.22 That he ..... understood : the real nature of love, who knew that love unites two souls and not bodies, love is spiritual and not physical. L. 23. And By..... mind : who had forgotten his body totally in his love and who was mentally awake. L.24. Within..... stood : stood nearby so as to overhear the dialogue of the two souls.

**Stanza 7.** L1. 25-26. Though he knew..... spoke the same : though such a man could not distinguish between the dialogue of the souls of the lover and the beloved as both meant and spoke the same thing. L.27. A new concoction : he will acquire a new perfection. 'Concoction' is a purification or sublimation by heat. The allusion is to metals and minerals which are refined by heat to a state of purity. Then new 'concoction' will make a new element and enter his soul so that his soul reemerges as an intellectual soul. L.28. And part .... he came : such a man with the capacity to understand the language will depart after a fresh experience and further purify his soul.

**Stanza 8.** L. 29. This.... unperplex : this coming out of the soul and holding converse throws light on love which is a complex thing, a mixture of feeling, understanding, sensation and insight. There are both spiritual and sensual elements in love. Ecstasy enables us to understand these elements and also the very essence of love. L. 30. Tell us that we love : Makes clear to the lovers the true nature and source of their love. L. 31-32. We see by this ..... what did move : The lovers realise now that it was not sexual passion that led them to love each other ; in this new clarity of understanding they find that true love is of the spirit and not of the body.

**Stanza 9.** L. 33. Several souls : separate or distinct souls. L. 34. They know not what: The soul does not know which element predominates. It may be sensation and desire, which are supposed to belong to lower side of life. But the lovers now realise that love is a thing of the soul and not of the body. L1. 35-36. Love.... this and that : the individual soul of the two lovers, already mixed within themselves: 'each this and that' means the spiritual and physical qualities are further 'remixed' by love's alchemy.

**Stanza 10.** L1. 27-40. A single..... multiples : the lovers' souls create a new soul which is likened to a transplanted violet flower. Hence this new soul coming up after grafting, gains in its powers and energies like the grafted violet flower that gains in strength, colour and size.

**Stanza 11.** L. 42. Interinanimates : brings together the two souls and unites them into one ; animates the one with the other. L.43. That ... doth flow : the single revitalized souls that emerges from

the union of two souls in an ecstatic state of love. L.44. Defects.... controls : this soul is superior to the other two and hence free from the faults of any one of them. In this way, they also overcome the sense of loneliness.

**Stanza 12.** L. 45-46. We then... and made : the lovers now realize that they are only soul, and no body. The state of ecstasy not only unites the lovers but also gives them this new realization. L.47. Atonies : components. L. 48. Whom no change can invade: which are not subject to any change in matters of love, i.e., no inconstancy in love. Love residing in the soul and not in the body is unchangeable.

**Stanza 13.** L1. 49-50. But... forbear? : Why do the lovers then abstain from or deny their bodies. After all, the bodies are theirs. The body is the gateway to the bliss and quietude that the soul experiences in a state of ecstasy. Grierson says : “This is one of the most important lyrics as a statement of Donne’s metaphysics of love, the interconnection and mutual dependence of body and soul” L1.51-52. They are ours.... sphere : The lovers’ souls are the ‘intelligences’ while their bodies are the ‘spheres’ within which the intelligences move. The intelligences may be regarded as spiritual being distinguished from sensual being.

**Stanza 14.** L. 53. Them : the bodies. L.54. Did us ... convey : it is because of the body, its beauty etc. that the lovers first begin to love each other. Love, in the beginning, is physical and spiritual love follows upon the physical. L. 55. Forces : Faculties of the body ; senses. L. 56. Dross: rubbish ; useless or worthless materials. Alloy : alloy (a mixed substance)

**Stanza 15.** L. 57. Heaven’s influence : the influence of heavenly bodies. L1. 57-58. On man..... the air: When heavenly influence works on man, it first permeates the air. The argument is that ‘as spiritual forces sometimes need to work through a less pure medium, so a union of souls may require the coupling of bodies’. L1. 59-60. So soul ..... first repair : When love starts working, it first, affects the bodies which are united and then fuses the souls into one another. Thus, the union of bodies must precede the union of souls.

**Stanza 16.** L1. 61-62. As our blood..... as it can : Spirits are the intermediate between bodies and souls. They are related to blood as well as to souls. The souls realise themselves only through spirits and therefore they are dependent on the bodies. L. 63. Because.... knit: It is necessary to hold each other’s hand to activities blood leading to spirit and therefore they are dependent on the bodies. L.63. Subtle: Impalpable, fine.

**Stanza 17.** L. 65-67. So must... faculties : It is necessary for the souls of lovers, though they are out of their bodies in a state of ecstasy, to have dealing with the sense of sight and touch, otherwise they cannot establish contact with each other. ‘Affections’: inclinations, feelings. ‘Faculties’ the dispositions of the body. L 68. a great prince : the souls of the lovers. Prison : the physical bodies of the lovers. Else... lies : Here also Donne affirms the interdependence of body and souls. According to him, if the soul does not fulfil its function of informing and governing the body, it is like a powerful ruler who is a prisoner in his own kingdom. A king who is in prison and cannot maintain his contact with the rest of the world, loses the effective nature of the kind. Similarly, the lovers, however pure and perfect their union of souls, would lose their effective nature, if their oneness does not activate itself in the union of their bodies.

**Stanza 18.** L. 69. To our..... we then : the lovers, therefore, turn to their bodies and their souls descend to affections and faculties. L. 70. Weakmen: weak men in understanding and so unable to follow

the spiritual nature of their love. L.71. Loves mysteries.... grow : it is in the soul, and not in the body that love has its full flowering and richness of growth. 'Mysteries' may stand here for the old sense of 'craft' and 'sacred rites'. L. 72. But yet... book : the secret of love is expressed through the body, and it is only through the body that they can be understood by others. Hence the body is likened to book containing the mysteries of love.

**Stanza 19.** L. 74. dialogue of one : this discourse ; Refer to line 26 "Because both meant, both sake the same". The dialogue of the soul of the lover with that of his beloved. L. 76. Small change : Either a change to sensual love or inconstancy in love. The listener will see little difference between the spiritual reality and the physical manifestation when the lovers have returned to their bodies after ecstasy.

### **12.5.3 Critical Appreciation**

It is a complex and metaphysical poem dealing with the twin aspects of love-physical and spiritual. Some critics like Legouis find in it a plan for seduction with emphasis on the physical nature of love, while others like Helen Gardner find in it an affirmation of spiritual love. In fact, it deals with the relationship of the body and the soul in love.

#### **What is 'extasie'?**

'Extasie' is essentially a religious experience in which the individual soul, ignoring the body, holds converse with Divinity. It is a feelings of trance, of spiritual exaltation, and of Samadhi where the individual has a vision of the divine. Donne applies these feelings to the experience of the lovers and finds that the essence of love is not sex but an overpowering feeling of unity in diversity. In fact, true love is an activity of the soul. A new soul emanates from the two individual souls and makes the lover realise that love is, in its pure essence, spiritual. Donne has also interpreted love in a philosophic way. Love is an idea or a concept concretized through physical enjoyment of sex. He has also interpreted it according to the Platonic concept- the desire of the moth for the star, longing of one soul to seek communication with another. Another idea introduced in the poem has been borrowed from astronomy. Just as heavenly bodies are moved by "intelligences" i.e., angelic spirits, in the same way souls are the motivating forces in human love, though they have no existence of their own. They are linked with the body, which is the overt and apparent machinery for love-making. The soul expresses itself through the body. In other words, the body is a medium used by the soul to achieve the consummation of love. Thus the poem uses a religious and mystical experience to interpret the complexity and depth of secular love.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT**

#### **The physical setting**

The first stanza provides the physical setting of the two lovers. On the bank of a river overgrown with violet flowers, the lovers are quiet, looking into each other's eyes and holding hands firmly. This physical closeness offers a romantic and pastoral setting- their hands cemented in mutual confidence and the eyes as if strung on a thread. This sensually exciting scene is a forerunner to the actual physical union.

The poet compares the two lovers to the two armies. The souls are like the negotiators. They are not committed to either side. Only those who are gifted can understand the dialogue of the two souls, and realize the true nature of love.

### **True nature of love**

The communication of the souls of lovers reveals the true essence of love. Love is not sex-experience. It is rather a union of two souls. Each soul appears to keep its identity and as in horticulture, by transplantation the plant grows stronger and better, the new soul has a great strength and vitality. The fusion of the two souls is the real consummation of love. The new soul is composed of 'atoms' which are beyond decay. Just as the essence of the individual is not the body but the soul, in the same way, the essence of love is not sex but mutual dependence and affection. The body is no dross, but an alloy necessary for pure metals to become stronger. The body is the channel for the souls to inter-communicate with each other.

### **Is love physical or spiritual?**

To this old and complex question, Donne has a satisfactory answer. Love is dependent both on the soul and body. Love has to be concretized. This is possible only through the physical play of love. Donne feels that physical love is enriched by the mutual understanding of the souls of the two lovers. Spiritual love is not possible in a vacuum. Like heavenly beings who influence the actions of men through manifestation, the souls must express themselves through the bodies. The poet feels that an isolated soul is like a captive prince. Souls must return to the bodies and manifest the mystery of love. As from the blood comes strength and vigour which acts as an agent of the soul and binds together elements which go into the making of man, so the body and the sense organs are at the disposal and service of the lovers' souls, otherwise the souls cannot express themselves. The body is the book of the love. Great mystics have also pleaded for the evolution of physical love towards holy or divine love.

Finally, the poet feels that love ripens in the soul. As such, physical love and holy love are complementary. If some lover observes the poet and his beloved, he will hardly find any change in their behaviour when the lovers return to their bodies.

### **CRITICAL REMARKS**

The poet employs an unusual desire through 'extasie' which means 'to stand out'. The souls of the poet and his beloved as it were, stand out of their respective bodies and hold a dialogue revealing the true nature of their love. In a religious 'extasie' the soul holds a communication with God. Here the conversation is not between the soul and God but between two souls. Donne has artistically explained the religious and philosophical belief to throw light on physical and sensuous love. The greatness of the poem lies in reconciling the opposites-physical love with spiritual love, metaphysical belief with the scientific, the abstract with the concrete, the human element with the non-human. The images and the conceits are carefully selected to support the poet's views. The romantic setting at the beginning of the poem sets the mood of physical love- the violet flowers, the holding of hands and the cementing of the balms and the threading of the eye beams. The physical aspect of love must precede the spiritual union. Then comes the image of two armies and the soul acting as negotiator. Then, there are the images of the new soul-emanating out of the two souls-stronger and abler because it is made out of 'atoms'. The inter-dependence of the body and the soul is expressed through metaphors. The souls are moving spirits, while the bodies are the 'sphere' in which the 'intelligences' move. Just as the stars and planets give rise to natural phenomena which affect the fortunes of human beings, in the same way the soul must find expression through the body. Just as the spirits of blood unite the physical and metaphysical in love, so souls express themselves through the five senses in the body. The image of the body as lovers, is very vivid and convincing.

The poet shifts quickly from the physical to the spiritual and therefore this poem has an edge over other metaphysical poems. The very fact that critics disagree about the objective of the poem—seduction or spiritual transport—shows the complexity and the diversity of possible interpretations. On the whole, the critics praise the poet for his excellent performance. Coleridge said : “I would never find fault with metaphysical poems, were they all like this (extasie) or just half as excellent.” James Smith commended the poem in the following words : “Donne does not write about many things; he is content with the identity of lovers as lovers, and their diversity as the human beings in which love manifests itself, the stability and self sufficiency of love, contrasted with the mutability and dependence of human beings ; with the presence of lovers to each other, their physical unity, though they are separated by travel and death, the spirit demanding the succor of the flesh hampering the spirit, the shortcoming of this life, summarised by decay and death, contrasted with the divine to which it aspires.”

For reconciling the dichotomy between the flesh and the sensuous and the sublime, particularly in this poem, Donne deserves credit.

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## 12.6 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have studied John Donne, the founder of the metaphysical school of poetry. His poetry is remarkable for its concentrated passion, intellectual agility and dramatic power.

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## 12.6 Review Questions

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- 1 In what ways is Donne a ‘metaphysical’ poet? Substantiate your answer with reference to the poems in your course.
- 2 Describe Donne as a poet of Love.
- 3 Write critical appreciation of ‘The canonisation’.
- 4 Write critical appreciation of ‘The Extasie’.
- 5 What is metaphysical poetry? What are the chief characteristics of metaphysical poetry?

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## 12.7 Bibliography

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## UNIT-13

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### JOHN DONNE : RELIGIOUS SONNETS

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#### Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Religious Poetry of Donne : Chief Characteristics
  - 13.2.1 Major Religious works
  - 13.2.2 Donne's Handling of the Sonnet form
- 13.3 Religious Sonnet II
  - 13.3.1 Paraphrase
  - 13.3.2 Critical Notes and Explanations
  - 13.3.3 Critical Appreciation
- 13.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.5 Review Questions
- 13.6 Bibliography

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#### 13.0 Objectives

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After reading this unit you will be able to

- understand the religious aspect of Donne's poetry
- know major religious works of Donne
- know importance and Donne's use of Sonnet form
- understand the meaning and analysis of Religious Sonnet II
- understand Chief characteristics of Donne's religious poetry

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#### 13.1 Introduction

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John Donne's religious poetry belongs to the later part of his poetic career. It is believed that his most serious religious poetry was produced after he had been ordained priest (in January 1615). And gloom, despair, frustration, and passion entered his religious poems after his wife had died in 1617. Yet some critics hold that some of his religious poems might have been composed by him much earlier.

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#### 13.2 Religious Poetry of Donne

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##### The Principle of Unity

John Donne is one of the greatest of English religious poets, and the poets of the 17th century

on whom his influence was most deep and lasting were all religious poets. As Joan Bennett tells us this is so because his temperament was essentially religious. A man of religious temperament is constantly aware, constantly perceiving the underlying unity, the fundamental oneness of all phenomena, and the perception of such a relationship, such an inherent principle of unity, is revealed even by the imagery of the earliest poetry of Donne. No doubt Donne's religious poetry belongs to the later part of his career, to the period after his ordination, and the gloom, despair and frustration which resulted from the death of his wife, poverty, and ill-health. The earliest of his religious poems are the sonnet-sequence called 'La Corona' and 'The Litanie'; the best of his religious poetry is contained in the 'Holy Sonnetes', the 'Divine Poems' and 'The three hymns'. The best of Donne's religious poetry was written only during the last phase of his career, but the nature of his imagery, even the early one, clearly indicated that his genius was religious and he was bound to take to religious poetry, and to the pulpit.

### **The element of Conflict and Doubt**

The 'La Corona' and 'The Litanie' are in accord with many aspects of contemporary thought and sensibility, besides constituting a remarkable expression of Donne's own speculation, scepticism and melancholy. But Donne's chief power as a religious poet is shown in the Holy Sonnets and the last hymns. "Only in the Hymn to God the Father do we find an assured faith; elsewhere there is always an element of conflict and doubt or fear." The best of the Holy Sonnets express these struggles with unparalleled force. "There is no essential change of style; Donne can stop to remember that the round world's corners are imagin'd without destroying the power of his vision of Judgment Day; he treats God as a conqueror or a ravisher, or employs the kind of wooing used to his 'profane mistresses'."

### **Variety of Tone and Method**

As in the love poetry, in religious poetry, too, there is a considerable variety of tone and method, ranging from mere debating tricks to a profound urgency and conviction, and sometimes both may be found in the same poem. They best show the characteristic written forcing the emotional intensity:

*Only thou art above, and when towards thee*

*by the leave I can looke, I rise againe;*

*But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,*

*"That not one houre mjyself I can sustaine;*

*That not one houre myself I can sustaine;*

*Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art,*

*And thou like Adament draw mine iron heart.*

As Grierson points out there is no striking difference between Donne's religious poetry and the love poetry, satires and elegies of his early years. All that Donne wrote, whether in verse or prose, is of a piece; the same mind which earlier analysed the experiences of love is at work in the latter religious poetry on a different experience. To be didactic is never the first intention of Donne's religious poems, but rather, to express himself, to analyse and lay bare his own moods of agitation, of aspiration and of humiliation, in the quest of God, and the surrender of his soul to Him. The same erudite and surprising imagery, the same passionate, reasoning strain, meets us in both.

### **The Introspective, Anglican Note**

And as Donne is the first of the 'metaphysical' love poets, he is, likewise, the first of the introspective, Anglican, religious poets of the seventeenth century. Elizabethan and a good deal of Jacobean religious poetry is didactic in tone and intention, Protestant and Calvinist, but not distinctly Anglican. With Donne, appears for the first time in poetry a passionate attachment to those Catholic elements in Anglicanism which repressed and neglected, had never entirely disappeared, and from Donne, Herbert and his disciples inherited the intensely personal and introspective tone to which the didactic is subordinated, which makes a lyric in 'The Temple', even if it be a sermon also, and primarily, a confession or a prayer.

### **The Themes**

The theme of the frailty and decay of this world is generally the subject of Donne's religious poems. Like many of the intellectuals of his day, Donne felt that the times were out of joint, and it seemed obvious that the world was rapidly accelerating in its process of degeneration and decomposition as it approached the end of its course. Other important themes of Donne's religious poems are the insignificance of man himself, the antithesis between the world and the spirit, the transitoriness and unsatisfactoriness of all earthly enjoyments, the pangs suffered by the soul in the imprisoning body. Thus he writes in Second Anniversarie:

And what essentially joy can'st thou expect  
Here upon earth? What permanent effect  
Of transitory causes? Dost thou love  
Beauty? (And beauty worthy'st is to move)  
Poor cousened cousenor, that she, and that thou,  
Which did begin to love, are neither now;  
You are both fluid, change'd since yesterday;  
Next day repairs, (but ill) last days decay.

### **The Personal Element**

Like Donne's love-poetry, his religious poetry also bears an unmistakable stamp of his personality. It is not written in a conventional, didactic style, bringing home to the readers certain religious doctrines. On the other hand, it is highly individualistic and personal as all Donne's poetry is, and it gives expression to his highly complex personality. Leishman remarks, "Donne's best religious poetry is intensely personal; not an exposition of Christian doctrine, but a passionate and dramatic prayer to be delivered from temptations and distractions, to be made single-hearted, to find in God's will his peace". There was always the other worldly element in Donne, a certain detachment from life, or non-attachment to it; but although he increasingly felt that the world was vanity, he could never quite liberate himself from it, and in this oscillation between this worldliness and other worldliness, in this increasing longing to make the unworldly element in himself prevail over the worldly, lies the drama of his religious poetry, poetry which transcends ecclesiastical differences. "If we define religion, in the widest sense, a man's effort to bring his own will into conformity with a transcendent will and purpose which he apprehends and which he believes to be divine, we may say that Donne's poetry is in this widest sense religious,



but only accidentally or incidently Christian.”

### **Stress on Religion in the True Sense**

Indeed, one of the most beautiful passages in Donne’s sermons and several in his letters, where he felt able to express himself more freely, are on those ‘things in which all religions agree’.....Donne is concerned, not with subtleties of doctrine, but with the infinite subtleties of temptation from which he asks to be delivered, with the innumerable wandering by-ways and mazes that would entice him from the straight and narrow path. The religion which gives such passion to his poems is religion in its most primary and fundamental sense; what Donne asks for is purgation, purification, illumination- a directing of heart. We are even more aware of Donne’s complex personality in his religious than in his secular poetry, but the religion of this complex personality is ultimately, for all his learning and his subtlety, very simple. One might almost say that what he longs for is to exchange the complexity of a personality for the singleness and simplicity of a soul.

### **Consciousness of Sin**

According to Helen Gardner, “In moral and psychological terms, Donne’s problem was to come to terms with a world which alternately enthralled and disgusted him, to be the master and not the slave of his temperament”. Like Words worth in his middle years, he came to long for, “arepose that ever is the same”. He did not look to religion for an ecstasy of the spirit which would efface the memory of the ecstasy of the flesh; but for an “evenness” of piety which would preserve him from despair. The struggles and conflicts to which the Divine Poems witness did not lead to the secret heights and depths of the contemplative life, but to the public life of duty and charity which Walton describes. That Donne had to wrestle to the end is clear. Like Dr. Johnson, with whom, in his natural melancholy and as a practical moralist, he has much in common, he remained burdened by the consciousness of his sins and aware of his need for mercy at the judgment.

### **The Parallel with Love-poetry**

Donne’s divine poems are the product of conflict between his will and his temperament. In his love-poetry, he is not concerned with what he ought or ought not to feel, but with the expression of feeling itself. Passion is there its own justification, and so is disgust, or hatred or grief. In his divine poetry feeling and thought are judged by the standard of what a Christian should feel or think. As a love poet, he seems to owe nothing to what any other man in love had ever felt or said before him; his language is all his own. As a divine poet, he cannot escape using the language of the Bible, and of hymns and prayers, or remembering the words of Christian writers. Christianity is a revealed religion, contained in the Scriptures and the experience of Christian souls; the Christian poet cannot voyage alone. The truths of Donne’s love-poetry are truths of the imagination, which freely transmutes personal experience. They are his own discoveries. The truths of revelation are the accepted basis of his religious poetry and imagination has here another task. It is, to some extent, fettered.

### **Moral Intensity**

But although the Divine Poems’ are not the record of discoveries, but of struggles to appropriate a truth which has been revealed, that truth does not, “defeat all Poetry”, but gives us a poetry whose intensity is a moral intensity. Some religious poetry, Herbert’s perhaps, can be regarded as a species of love-poetry; but Donne’s is not of that kind. The image of Christ as Lover appears in only two of his poems- both written soon after the death of his wife. The image which dominates his divine poetry

is the image of Christ as Savior, the victor over sin and death. The strength with which his imagination presents this figure is the measure of his need, and that need is the subject of the finest of his religious poems.

### 13.2.1 Major Religious Works

**I. “La Corona”.** The earliest of Donne’s Divine Poems appears to be ‘La Corona’. ‘La Corona’ is single poem, composed of seven linked sonnets, each of which celebrates a mystery of faith. It is doubtful whether Donne felt there was anything particularly Catholic in concentrating on the Mysteries of the faith, or in addressing his second and third sonnets to the Blessed Virgin, or in addressing St. Joseph in his fourth; but it is also doubtful whether anyone not brought up as a Catholic would have done so.

The ‘La Corona’ sonnets are inspired by liturgical prayer and praise-oral prayer; not by private meditation and the tradition of mental prayer. They echo the language of hymns, which expound the doctrines of the Catholic faith. Instead of the scene of the maiden alone in her room at Nazareth, there is a theological paradox : “The Maker’s maker, and thy Father’s mother”. The scandal of the Cross is presented not by a vivid picture of its actual disgrace and agony, but by the thought that here the Lord of Fate suffered a fate at the hands of his creatures. The petitions with which the last three poems end are petitions which any man might pray. Each is the appropriate response to the Mystery propounded.

It is possible that Donne chose to use the sonnet (a form he had used before this only for eistles), because he wished to write formally and impersonally; to create an offering of beauty and dignity. ‘La Corona’ is perhaps no more than a religious exercise, but it is an accomplished one. The sonnets are packed with meaning, with striking and memorable expressions of the commonplace of Christian belief. The last line of each, repeated as the first line of the next, is both a fine climax and a fine opening. Unlike the majority of Elizabethan sonneteers, Donne has chosen the more difficult form of the sonnet. He follows Sidney in limiting the rhymes of the octave to two, and employs Sidney’s most favoured arrangement of these rhymes in two closed quatrains. He alternates between two arrangements of the rhymes of the sestet.

**II. A Litany.** ‘A Litany’ is the next important Divine Poem. It is less successful than ‘La Corona’, but more interesting. It is a meditation in verse cast into the formal mould of a litany. The stanza employed here is, however, of Donne’s own invention. The poem appears impersonal, but is, in fact, highly personal. It tells us much, though indirectly, of its author’s mind at the time when it was written. It is remarkable for a quality that is rare in Donne’s poetry: sobriety. Although it is the wittiest of the Divine Poems, startling in paradox, precise in antithesis, and packed with allusions, its intellectual ingenuity and verbal audacity are employed to define an ideal of moderation in all things. It analyses temptations with scrupulosity, and shows a wary sense of the distinctions that divide the tainted from the innocent act or motive. Its style cannot be said to be “tormented”. The ideal set forth is simplicity of motive, evenness of piety, and a keeping of the middle path.

‘A Litany’ was written during an illness and in a mood of dejection. There is in the poem an exaggerated stress on the compatibility of the service of God with “this world’s sweet”. This stress perhaps reflects Donne’s need at this time to assure himself that some worldliness may not necessarily be wrong. If we remember the circumstances of his life at Mitcham-his anxiety for his wife whom he had brought to poverty and for the future of his growing family, his inability to find secure employment,

and his broken health-the petitions of 'A Litany' gain in meaning. We see the passionate and hyperbolic Donne, the proud and irritable young man of the Satires and the Elegies, trying to school himself to patience, not rejecting with scorn a world that has disappointed him, but praying that he may accept in a religious spirit what life brings.

In many ways 'A Litany' is the most Anglican of the Divine Poems, and it continually anticipates Donne's leading ideas as a preacher. His own praise of this poem in a letter makes the typical Anglican claim of avoiding both excess and defect: "That by which it will deserve best acceptance is that neither the Roman Church need call it defective, because it abhors not the particular mention of the blessed Triumphers in heaven; nor the Reformed can discreetly accuse it of attributing more than a rectified devotion ought to do." The particular sins which Donne prays to be delivered from are not the traditional sins. There is no trace of the old classification under which the conscience can be examined: sins against God and sins against my neighbour, or the Seven Deadly Sins and their branches. Instead, the sins in 'A Litany' can all be referred back to two general philosophical conceptions: the conception of virtue as the mean between two extremes, and the related conception of virtue as the proper use of all the faculties. Donne anticipates here that ideal of "reasonable piety" which is so familiar later in the century in the writings of the Divines. The poem firmly rejects other-worldliness, and shows an anti-ascetic and anti-mystical bias. It concentrates on "a daily beauty" and the sanctification of ordinary life. It ignores any conception of sanctity as something extraordinary and heroic. It exalts the undramatic virtues of patience, discretion, and a sober cheerfulness.

'A Litany' has many felicities in thought and expression. It has a beauty of temper; it tells us much about Donne's mind; it is historically interesting as an early expression by a writer of genius of a piety characteristic of the Church of England. In spite of these merits, it cannot be regarded as a wholly successful poem. It is an elaborate private prayer, rather incongruously cast into a liturgical form. Donne's letter to Goodyer shows his awareness of the discrepancy between such a "divine and public" name and his "own little thoughts". Indeed, the incompatibility between the material of the poem and the chosen form is too great. But the poem has some of Donne's most sumptuous verse. When merely describing the orders of the Church Triumphant, the angels, patriarchs and apostles, Donne yet manages to convey to his own satisfaction, as sensual as it is spiritual, with the eternal grandeur and power which may be claimed for that Church. Donne's own rapturous contemplation of the great good luck which meant all death is not entirely without envy for one who, alone, could "desirously long to die" without committing sin. *Contemplus mundi* best fits him who, as *creator mundi*, knows and understands those feelings of humanity which prompt the cry

For Oh, to some

Not to be martyrs, is a martyrdom.

After Stanza XIII, the poem passes from a celebration of the Church Triumphant to an account of the Church Militant, man's needs on earth as expressed in prayer. Some of Donne's hardest, clearest, and finest thinking goes into this part of the poem.

**III. Holy Sonnets.** Donne wrote nineteen sacred sonnets besides the 'La Corona' sequence, and it is to these that the general term "Holy Sonnets" usually refers. The problem of when the various sonnets in this group were written is a complex, largely theological, one. Many of them probably belong to that period of doubt and intense thinking about his religion which preceded Donne's entry into the Church. The years 1609-17 are the likeliest for the majority of these sonnets. Most critics have agreed

in regarding the “Holy Sonnets” as superior to La Corona and A Litany. The “Holy Sonnets” as superior to ‘La Corona’ and ‘A Litany’. The “Holy Sonnets” give an immediate impression of spontaneity. The vehemence and anguished intensity of some of these sonnets have been connected with a deepening of Donne’s religious experience.

The “Holy Sonnets” have, for depth of passionate feeling, been compared with the sonnets of Michael Angelo, and also with the religious feeling in the work of Dostoievsky. The love of God which throbs through the sonnets so desperately was never the perfect love that casts out fear-fear that at the last he should find that there is a way to hell even from there gates of heaven. But the final hymns, which were also written during these years, strike a note of peace and confidence.

During his years (1605-1609) at Mitcham, Donne was a prey to what he afterward regarded as the sin of melancholy-at times, the sin of despair. At that time he was also in poor physical health. In Sonnets I, IV, and VI, Donne speaks as if he was not only sick in soul but sick in body:

Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,  
I ran to death, and death meets me as fast,  
And all my pleasures are like yesterday; (I)

Oh my black Soul ! now thou art summoned  
By sickness, death’s herald, and champion; (IV)

And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoin  
My body and soul..... (VI)

In these rather sombre sonnets, the poet seeks strength, grace, and forgiveness from Christ, who is asked to rescue him from the toils of sin. The struggle to leave “the world, the flesh, the devil” is the theme of two more sonnets, II and XIV which suggest not physical sickness but a desire for resignation to God-though again arguing passionately that the author is himself powerless to escape from Satan without active aid. Number II states that the poet is God’s rightful possession which Satan is trying to take away from God. God is asked to take back his creature by force. The line “And Satan hates me, yet is loth to lose me” suggests Donne’s feeling, during the last years of his secular life, that all the world is against him and has rejected him, but that despite this rejection he cannot yet manage wholly to surrender to God of his own will. In this sonnet Christ appears as the sought-for lover and Donne as a temple usurped by the Devil. Sonnet XIV, the splendid “Batter my heart, three person’d God”, uses the same idea and imagery more passionately. Again the image of usurpation occurs:

I, like an usurpt town, to another due,  
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end.

In both these sonnets, II and XIV, Christ is entreated to take full possession, as victor-lover, of the poet’s soul.

Throughout the “Holy Sonnets” runs Donne’s demand for God to become active in Donne’s life. Thus he sees his need for God in terms of that life, and describes it in those terms:

For I,  
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me. (XIV)

Here the idea of God as the lover whose love along with its chastity is a profoundly central image. With the contemporary language of profane love, Donne is able to realise the traditional idea of divine love as a concrete and important experience, in the communication of which he is unequalled by any other English poet.

So, again, the 1617 sonnet on his wife's death (No.XVOO), Donne attributes to God "tender jealousy" of the world, the flesh, and the devil as God's rivals for possession of his soul. Sonnets IX and XII, on the difference between man and the rest of creation in respect of man's power to sin, are rather preoccupied with theological problems, but are not without their personal point of return—particularly Number IX with its tearful appeal:

O God? Oh ! of thine only worthy blood,  
And my tears, make a heavenly Lethean flood.....

These lines are, however, surpassed by the beautiful Sonnet V which is full of the Renaissance wander-lust:

You which beyond that heaven which was most high  
Have found new spheres, and of new lands can write,  
Pour new seas in mine eyes, so that I might  
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,  
Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more.  
We have tears representing regret and regretted melancholy in Sonnet III:  
O might those sighs and tears return again  
Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,  
That I might in this holy discontent  
Mourn with some fruit, as I have mourned in vain:  
In mine idolatry what showers of rain  
Mine eyes did waste ! What griefs my heart did rend !

Here, referring to his profane days, he says that he lavished tears of idle regret and melancholy—a false grief for unworthy objects.

Now this recollection grieves him and he sees that tears wasted on sinful things were themselves a sin. He thus regrets his past which was itself full of false regret. The phrase "in mine idolatry" occurs again in Sonnet XIII, which contains a reference to the poet's profane mistresses.

Donne's greatness as a religious poet lies in his truthfulness, in his having left in his "Holy sonnetes" a personal record of a brilliant mind struggling towards God. He is not afraid to analyse the

appalling difficulties of faith:

I durst not view heaven yesterday : and today  
In prayers, and flattering speeches I court God:  
Tomorrow I quake with true fear of his rod.  
So my devout fits come and go away  
Like a fantastic ague:

Donne is able to put down, exactly and memorably, the waverings of the imperfect, temperamental man. And throughout the “Holy Sonnets”, even for the “black soul”, the love of God is felt as eternally available for rescue. But this love, like the love of profane mistresses, must be sought out, must be courted-not with “flattering speeches” but with all the humility and self-surrender which the seeker can summon.

One other sonnet that deserves mention is the very beautiful No. XVIII, “Show me, dear Christ, thy spouse, so bright and clear”, which is a personal prayer to Christ to let him see the true Church, undivided because indivisible. This one of the three holy sonnets which remained uncopied and unprinted until Edmund Gosse found them at the end of the nineteenth century. It shows clearly that in his heart the ideal, universal Church meant more to Donne than any particular form of Christianity. It is the third satire over again, but what was there set forth with cheerful, debating-society reasonableness as a series of cogent and interesting arguments is now felt as something which can only be prayed for. In the satire Donne was not emotionally involved in the problem; it did not seem urgent:

Seek true religion. O where ? Mirreus  
Thinking her unhous'd here, and fled from us,  
Seeks her at Rome; there, because he doth know  
That she was there a thousand years ago.

But in the holy sonnets the strength of Donne's feeling is expressed in the rising stresses of a passionate plea for perfection and wholeness. England Rome, and Geneva are no longer presented as morality figures, each with its own justification. These local habitations and names become fused in the one figure, whose femininity is characteristically insisted on in the paradoxical conclusion of the sonnet. At last, in the bride of Christ, Donne rejoices in one:

Who is most true, and pleasing to thee, then  
When she is embraced and open to most men.  
The bride of Christ is the mistress of the whole world.

One eminent critic finds a note of exaggeration in the “Holy Sonnets”, and sees this exaggeration not only in the violence of such a colloquy as “Batter my heart” (Sonnet XIV), but also in the strained note of such lines as these:

But who am I, that dare dispute with thee?  
O God ? Oh ! of thine only worthy blood, etc, etc. (Sonnet IX)

At first sight the closing couplet of this sonnet seems the expression of a deep humility; but it cannot be compared for depth of religious feeling with the 'Hymn to God the Father' where, however great the sin is, the mercy of God is implied to be the greater. This critic also points out the note of anguish in these sonnets. The image of a soul in meditation which these sonnets present is an image of the soul working out its salvation in fear and trembling. The two poles between which the soul oscillates are faith in the mercy of God in Christ, and a sense of personal unworthiness that is very near to despair. The flaws in their spiritual temper are a part of their peculiar power. No other religious poems make us feel so acutely the predicament of the natural man called to be the spiritual man. None presents more vividly man's recognition of the gulf that divides him from God and the effort of faith to bridge that gulf.

Donne's art in writing the "Holy Sonnets" was to seem "to use no art at all". His language has the ring of a living voice, admonishing his own soul, expostulating with his Maker, defying death, or pouring itself out in supplication. He creates, as much as in some of the "Songs and Sonnets", the illusion of a present experience, throwing his stress on such words as "now" and "here" and "this". And, as often there, he gives an extreme emphasis to the personal pronouns : "I", "me", "mine". The plain unadorned speech, with its idiomatic turns, its rapid questions, its exclamatory Oh's and Ah's wrests the movement of the sonnet to its own movement. Words, movements, and feeling have a unity in which no element outweighs the other.

### **13.2.2 Donne's handling of the sonnet form.**

Donne exploits to the full the potentialities of the sonnet-form. As in 'La Corona' he keeps to two rhymes in the octave, and varies his sestet, using either cddcee or cdcdee. The formal distinction of octave and sestet becomes a dramatic contrast. The openings of Donne's sestets are as dramatic as the openings of the sonnets themselves : impatient as in

Why doth the devil then usurp in me?

or, gentle as in

Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack;

or, imploring as in

But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space.

Though the turn in each of these is different, in all three there is that sudden difference in tension which makes a change dramatic. Donne avoids also the main danger of the couple tending : that it may seem an after-thought; or an addition, or a mere summary. His final couplets, whether separate or running on from the preceding line, are true rhetorical climaxes, with the weight of the poem behind them. Except for Hopkins, no poet has packed more into the sonnet than Donne. In spite of all the liberties he takes with his line, he succeeds in the one essential of the liberties he takes with his line, he succeeds in the one essential of the sonnet : he appears to need exactly fourteen lines to say exactly what he has to say.

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## **13.3 Religious Sonnet**

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TEXT

As due by many titles I resigne

My selfe to thee, O God, first I was made  
 By thee, and for thee, and when I was decay'd  
 Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine,  
 I am thy sonne, made with thy selfe to shine,  
 Thy servant, whose paines thou hast still repaid,  
 Thy sheepe, thine Image, and till I betray'd  
 My selfe, a temple of thy Spirit divine;  
 Why doth the devill then usurpe in mee?  
 Why doth he steale, nay ravish that's thy right?  
 Except thou rise and for thine owne worke fight,  
 Oh I shall soone despaire, when I doe see  
 That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not chuse me.  
 And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee.

### 13.3.1 Paraphrase

As is proper, by virtue of the many titles that God bears, the poet resigns himself to God. He was first made by and for God. When he fell into wrong ways and thus abused and led into decay the qualities bestowed upon him, God's blood took upon itself the taint. The poet, and mankind, is the son of God, made by God, God made man to shine by His divine glory. The poet is God's servant, for whose mistakes God himself, as Christ, suffered pain and tortures. Man is God's sheep. His image, all till man betrayed the divine trust placed in him, he was a temple for God's divine spirit. The poet asks why the devil replaces God is the heart of man. Why does the devil steal and ravish man's soul, which is, by right, God's? Unless God gets up and decides to fight to save his own work, that is, man, the poet must soon despair, since he sees that God loves mankind but does not love him, while the devil hates him, and yet is not willing to relinquish his hold over him.

### 13.3.2 Notes and Explanation

As due by many titles I resign/My selfe to thee, O God (lines 1-2) - I resign myself to you, O

God, because I belong to you by virtue of many legal rights or entitlements. I am yours, O God, and I surrender myself to you and place myself at your disposal.

First I was made/By thee, and for thee-I was originally made by you and I was meant to serve you and when I was decayed/Thy blood bought that, the which before was thine-And when I was corrupted by sin, you purchased me by the sacrifice of your blood, and in buying me you only took possession of what originally belonged to you. ("Thy blood" here refers to Christ's blood which was shed when he sacrificed himself for the redemption of mankind).

I am thy sonne..... to shine (line 5)- I am your son whom you created that I might shine along



with you. (There is a pun upon the word “son” here. The “sun” shine, thus serving as a revelation of God. The poet is the “son” of God and he may also be regarded as another sun. The poet here refers to the exalted status with which God originally blessed man).

Thy servant, whose paines thou hast still repaid (line 6)- I am your servant, and you have always rewarded me for any labour which I may have undergone in your service.

Thy sheepe, thine Image - I am a sheep, a member of the flock of which you are the shepherd. I am your image because you made man in your own image. (The Bible tells us that God made man in His own image). And till I betray'd/My selfe, a temple of thy Spirit divine-And, till I went astray and became a sinner, I was temple in which your divine spirit resided. In other words, I was holy and sacred in your eyes till I took to a life of sin.

Why doth the devile then usurpe in mee? (line 8.9)-Why does the devil then make bold to overpower me or exercise control over me?

Why doth he... thy right? - Why does the devil steal me from you, when I belong to you? Nay, the devil is not just stealing me; he is taking possession of me by force. (to ravish- to take forcible possession of).

Exept thou rise..... to lose mee (line 11-14) - Unless you rise and put up a fight against the Devil in order to take possession of me, I shall soon give up all hope. It is depressing for me to see that you are not making any effort to possess me when I find that you have a real love for human beings. The irony of my situation is that the Devil hates me and yet is unwilling to relax his hold upon me. You, on the other hand, love me just as you love all other human beings, and yet you make no effort to take possession of me.

### **13.3.3 Critical Appreciation**

This is Sonnet II of Donne's “Holy Sonnets”. It shows the poet's intense desire to devote self whole-heartedly to God, but at the same time it shows the painful struggle that goes on in his mind between this desire and the temptation that sin offers.

The poet is keenly conscious of his indebtedness to God. God made him and, when he was corrupted by sin, he was bought by God through Christ's sacrifice. The poet believes himself to be God's son, God's servant, God's sheep, God's image, a temple for God's Divine Spirit. Why does the Devil then exercise such a strong hold on him? Why does the Devil take by force what actually belongs to God? The poet wants God to use all his power to reclaim him. It is a pity that God loves all mankind and yet does nothing to get the poet back from the Devil's clutches, while the Devil hates the poet and yet does not wish to lose him.

It is clear that the poet does not in any way try to cover up his sinfulness or to put up a pretence of piety. He frankly confesses that he is in the grip of the Devil. But though he tries to get out of the Devil's grip, he fails in his effort and so needs God's active help. He is on the verge of despair because the Devil's hold on him is very tight.

The poet's religious fervour is noteworthy. In calling himself God's son, servant, sheep, etc. he shows his complete surrender to God and his complete humility. His appeal to God for rescue is characterized by perfect sincerity. Nor does he disguise his human frailty in being unable to shake off the Devil's grip which holds him like a vice.

The poem is written in a simple, plain style. There is no metaphysical conceit here, unless it be the use of the word “ravish” to convey the idea of the Devil’s taking forcible possession of the poet. There is no obscurity of any kind in the poem.

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### **13.4 Let Us Sum Up**

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Thus we see that there is no striking difference between Donne’s religious poetry and the love poetry, satires and elegies of his early years. All that Donne wrote, whether in verse or prose, is of a piece; the same mind which earlier analysed the experiences of love is at work in the latter religious poetry on a different experience.

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### **13.5 Review Questions**

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1. Write critical appreciation of Religious Sonnet II.
  2. What are the chief characteristics of Donne’s religious poetry?
  3. Describe major religious works of Donne.
  4. Comment on Donne’s handling of the Sonnet Form.
  5. Describe Donne as a religious poet.
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### **13.6 Bibliography**

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1. Complete Poetry and selected Prose - Nonesuch Press, edited by John Hayward.
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## UNIT-14

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### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : *KING LEAR*-I

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#### Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 William Shakespeare: *King Lear*
  - 14.2.1 Introduction to the Play: *King Lear*
  - 14.2.2 Summary of the Play: *King Lear*
  - 14.2.3 Dramatis Personae
  - 14.2.4 Extracts from the Play
  - 14.2.5 Glossary
  - 14.2.6 Commentary on the Extracts
  - 14.2.7 Model Explanations
- 14.3 Self- Assessment Questions
- 14.4 Answers to SAQs
- 14.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.6 Review Questions
- 14.7 Bibliography

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#### 14.0 Objectives

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After going through this Unit you will be able to

- know about the Elizabethan Age, the life and works of William Shakespeare.
- get a general introduction of *King Lear*; its summary and discussion of the first Act of the play,
- understand Shakespearean tragedy, write explanations and answers in your examinations.

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#### 14.1 Introduction

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As the length of the Unit does not permit to give you the whole play in original, only important extracts from Act I have been given in this Unit. Before studying the important extracts, you should study the background material about the Elizabethan Age and the autobiographical details about the great dramatist William Shakespeare. Summary of the play given in the Unit covers the whole play. Glossary and the commentary on the five important extracts given in the Unit will help you to understand the play without constantly seeking the help of dictionary or reference books.

After going through the original extracts, you should try to answer the self-assessment questions

in your own words. You can tally your answers with those given in the Unit for your help. If you find more time, you should consult the material or books recommended for further reading. That will widen your knowledge. Unit-End Questions are based only on Act I of the play as that is the scope of this Unit.

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## **14.2 William Shakespeare: *King Lear***

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### **14.2.1 Introduction to the Play: *King Lear***

*King Lear* written in 1605-06 is one of the four famous tragedies of Shakespeare; the other three being: *Hamlet*, *Othello* & *Macbeth*. In this play the dramatist has used double plot: the main plot concerns King Lear and his three daughters where as the sub-plot is of the earl of Gloucester and his sons. (Edgar legitimate and Edmund illegitimate). As Shakespeare has not written pure tragedies in the strictest sense as the Greeks did, he has introduced a character, the motley licensed fool, who causes songs and comic scenes. In the end most of the evil characters are punished but the good characters are not rewarded; thus there is no poetic justice in the play. The storm scene presents the storm outside in nature which is terrible. But it is symbolic of the storm which goes there inside the mind of the protagonist King Lear. Unjustified division of property in rashness, docile flattery, suffering at the hands of injustice, illegitimate love & relationships, faithful servant, redemption through suffering are universal themes where in lies the appeal of the play.

### **14.2.2 Summary of the Play: *King Lear***

Lear, King of Britain, has three daughters: Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Goneril and Regan are married to the duke of Albany and the duke of Cornwall respectively. King of France and the duke of Burgundy are suitors for Cordelia. King Lear is a rash, impatient and unwise old man. He intends to divide his kingdom among his daughters according to their love. Goneril and Regan profess extreme love and thus get their shares. Cordelia does not like their disguised hollow flattery and says that she loves the King according to the bond of nature: neither more nor less. Lear in rashness gives away her share also to Goneril and Regan on the condition that he along with his hundred knights shall stay with each daughter in turn. King of France marries Cordelia. Kent, the faithful knight of King Lear, speaks in favour of Cordelia and is banished. Soon Goneril and Regan reveal their heartless character as they grudge the maintenance of their father. They finally turn him out of doors in a storm. The earl of Gloucester shows pity for the King and his eyes are put out by Cornwall, husband of Regan. Gloucester's legitimate son Edgar disguises himself as a lunatic beggar and takes care of his father till the latter's death. Lear goes mad due to his own rage and ill treatment by his elder daughters. He is served by the faithful Kent in disguise. They go to Dover where Cordelia meets them. Goneril and Regan both love Edmund. Due to rivalry, Goneril poisons Regan and commits suicide. Under the leadership of Edmund the English forces defeat the French and consequently Lear and Cordelia are put in prison. Later Cordelia is hanged by order of Edmund. Lear dies of grief, Edgar exposes Edmund's treachery. Gloucester also passes away. Kent is ready to serve his master in heaven. Albany who does not co-operate his wife Goneril in her ill treatment to her father is left to rule over the Kingdom.

### **14.2.3 Dramatis Personae**

LEAR, King of Britain.

KING OF FRANCE.

DUKE OF BURGUNDY.

DUKE OF CORNWALL.

DUKE OF ALBANY.

EARL OF KENT.

EARL OF GLOUCESTER.

EDGAR, Son of Gloucester.

EDMUND, Bastard Son to Gloucester.

CURAN, a Courtier.

OSWALD, Steward to Goneril.

Old Man, Tenant to Gloucester.

Doctor.

Fool

An Officer, employed by Edmund.

A Gentleman, Attendant on Cordelia.

A Herald.

Servants to Cornwall.

GONERIL,

REGAN, Daughters of Lear.

CORDELIA,

Knights of Lear's Train, Officers, Messengers, Soldiers, and Attendants.

#### **14.2.4 Extracts from the Play**

##### **Extract I Act I (Sc. i) ll 36-106**

Senate. Enter LEAR, CORNWALL, ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN,  
CORDELIA, *and* Attendants.

**Lear.** Attend the Lords of France and Burgundy, Gloucester.

Glo. I shall my liege.

[Exeunt GLOUCESTER AND EDMUND.]

Lear. Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.

Give me the map there. Know that we have divided.

In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent

To shake all cares and business from our age,  
 Conferring them on younger strengths, while we  
 Unburden'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,  
 And you, our no less loving son of Albany,  
 We have this hour a constant will to publish  
 Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife May be prevented now.  
 The princes, France and Burgundy,  
 Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,  
 Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,  
 And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,-  
 Since now we will divest us both of rule,  
 Interest of territory, cares of state-  
 Which of you shall we say doth love us most?  
 That we our largest bounty may extend  
 Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,  
 Our eldest born, speak first.

Gon. Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;  
 Dearer than eye sight, space, and liberty;  
 Beyond what can be valu'd, rich or rare;  
 No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;  
 As much as child e'er lov'd, or father found;  
 A love that makes breath poor and speech unable;  
 Beyond all manner of so much I love you.  
 Cor.[Aside.] What shall Cordelia do? Love, and be silent

Lear. Of all these bounds, even from this line to this  
 With shadowy forest and with champains rich'd,  
 With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,  
 We make thee lady; to thine and Albany's issue  
 Be this perpetual. What says our second daughter,  
 Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

Reg. I am made of that self metal as my sister,

And prize me at her worth. In my true hears  
I find she names my very deed of love;  
Only she comes too short; that I profess  
Myself an enemy to all other joys  
Which the most precious square of sense possesses  
And find I am alone felicitate  
In your dear highness; love.

Cor. [Aside.] Then, poor Cordelia!  
And yet not so; since, I am sure, my love's  
More richer than my tongue.

Lear. To thee and thine, hereditary ever,  
Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom,  
No less in space, validity, and pleasure,  
Than that confer'd on Goneril. Now, our joy,  
Although our last, not least; to whose young love  
The vines of France and milk of Burgundy  
Strive to be interest'd; what can you say to draw  
A third more opulent than your sisters ? Speak

Cor. Northing, my lord

Lear. Nothing ?

Cor. Nothing.

Lear. Nothing will come of nothing : speak again.

Cor. Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave  
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty  
According to my bond; nor more nor less.

Lear. How, how, Cordelia ! mend your speech a little,  
Lest you may mar your fortunes.

Cor. Good my lord,  
You have begot me, bred me, lov'd me: I  
Return those duties back as are right fit,  
Obey you, love you, and most honour you.

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say  
They love you all ? Haply, when I shall wed,  
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry  
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:  
Sure I shall never marry like my sisters, To love my father all.

**Extract II     Act I (Sc.i) ll 142-159**

Kent            Royal Lear,  
Whom I have ever honour'd as my king,  
Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd,  
As my great patron thought on in my prayers,-  
Lear            The bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft.  
Kent            Let it fall rather, though the fork invade  
The region of my heart: be Kent unmannerly  
When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man ?  
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak  
When power to flattery bows ? To plainness honour's bound  
When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state;  
And in thy best consideration, check  
This hideous rashness: answer my life my judgment,  
Thy youngest daughter does not love the least;  
Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound  
Lear            Reverbs on hollowness Kent, on thy life, no more.  
Kent            My life I never held but as a pawn.  
To wage against thine enemies; nor fear to lose it,  
Thy safety being the motive.  
Lear            Out of my sight!

**Extract III     Act I (Sc. i) ll 253-312**

France.        Fairest Cordelia, that art most rich, being poor;  
Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despis'd  
Thee and thy virtues here I seize upon:  
Be it lawful I take up what's cast away.



Gods, gods! 'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect  
My love should kindle to inflam'd respect.  
Thy dowerless daughter, king, thrown to my chance,  
Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France:  
Not all the dukes of waterish Burgundy  
Shall buy this unpriz'd precious maid of me.  
Bid them farewell, Cordelia, though unkind:  
Thou lovest here, a better where to find.

Lear. Thou hast her, France; let her be thine, for we  
Have no such daughter, nor shall ever see  
That face of hers against, therefore be gone  
Without our grace, our love, our benison,  
Come, noble Burgundy.

[Flourish. Exeunt LEAR, BURGUNDY, CORNWALL, ALBANY,  
GLOUCESTER, and Attendants.]

France. Bid farewell to your sisters.

Cor. The jewels of our father, with wash'd eyes  
Cordelia leaves you : I know you what you are;  
And like a sister am most loath to call  
Your faults as they are nam'd use well our father:  
To your professed bosoms I commit him:  
But yet, alas ! stood I within his grace,  
I would prefer him to a better place.  
So farewell to you both.

Reg. Prescribe not us our duties.

Gon. Let your study  
Be to content your lord, who hath receiv'd you  
At fortune's alms; you have obedience scanted,  
And well are worth the want that you have wanted.

Cor. Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides:  
Who covers faults, at last shame them derides.

Well may you prosper !

France. Come, my fair Cordelia.

[Exit FRANCE and CORDELIA.]

Gon. Sister, it is not little I have to say of what most nearly appertains to us both. I think our father will hence to night.

Reg. That's most certain, and with you; next month with us.

Gon. You see how full of changes his age is; the observation we have made of it hath not been little: he always loved our sister most; and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly.

Reg. 'Tis the infirmity of his age ; yet he Hath ever but slenderly known himself.

Gon. The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then, must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-engrafted condition, but, there withal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them.

Reg. Such unconstant starts are we like to have from him as this of Kent's banishment.

Gon. There is further compliment of leave taking between France and him. Pray you, let us hit together: if our father carry authority with such dispositions as he bears, this last surrender of his will but offend us.

Reg. We shall further think on' t.

Gon. We must do something, and i' the heat.

[Exeunt.]

**Extract IV Act I (Sc.ii) ll 115-149**

Glo. These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects. Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide : in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked between son and father. This villain of mine comes under the prediction; there's son against father: the king falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders, follow us disquietly to our graves. Find out this villain, Edmund; it shall lose thee nothing: do it carefully. And the noble and true hearted Kent banished! his offence, honesty! 'Tis strange !

[Exit]

Edm. This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, - often the surfeit of our own behaviour,-we make guilty of our disasters the sun,

the moon, and the stars; as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treacherous by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in , by a divine thrusting on: an admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon's tail, and my nativity was under *ursa major* ; so that it follows I am rough and lecherous. 'Sfoot ! I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on my bastardizing. Edgar –

**Extract V     Act I (Sc.iv) ll 129-208**

Fool.            [ To KENT.]   Sirrah, I'll teach thee a speech.

Lear.            Do.

Fool.            Mark it, nuncle :-  
  
                  Have more than thou showest,  
  
                  Speak less than thou knowest,  
  
                  Lend less than thou owest,  
  
                  Ride more than thou goest,  
  
                  Learn more than thou trowest,  
  
                  Set less than thou throwest;  
  
                  Leave thy drink and thy whore,  
  
                  And keep in a door,  
  
                  And thou shalt have more  
  
                  Than two tens to a score.

Kent.    This is nothing, fool.

Fool.            Then 'tis like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer,  
  
                  You gave me nothing for' t. Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?

Lear.            Why, no, boy ; nothing can be made out of nothing.

Fool.            [To KENT.] Prithee, tell him, so much the rent of his land comes to: be will not believe a fool.

Lear.            A bitter fool !

Fool.            Dost thou know the difference, my boy, between a bitter fool and a sweet fool?

Lear.            No, lad ; teach me.

Fool.            That lord that counsell'd thee

To give away thy land,  
 Come place him here by me,  
 Do thou for him stand:  
 The sweet and bitter fool  
 Will presently appear ;  
 The one in motley here,  
 The other found out there.

Lear. Dost thou call me fool, boy ?

Fool. All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou wast born with.

Kent. This is not altogether fool, my lord.

Fool. No, faith, lords and great men will not let me; if I had a monopoly out, they would have part on't, and ladies too: they will not let me have all fool to myself; the'll be snatching. Nuncle, give me an egg, and I'll give thee two crowns.

Lear. What two crowns shall they be?

Fool. Why, after I have cut the egg i' the middle and eat up the meat, the two crowns of the egg. When you clovest thy crown i' the middle, and gavest away both parts, thou borest thine ass on thy back o'er the dirt: thou hadst little wit in the bald crown when thou gavest thy golden one away. If I speak like myself in this, let him be whipped that first finds it so.

Fools had ne'er less grace in a year;  
 For wise men are grown foppish,  
 And know not how their wits to wear,  
 Their manners are so apish.

Lear. When were you wont to be so full of songs, sirrah?

Fool. I have used it, nuncle, ever since thou madest thy daughters thy mothers; for when thou gavest them the rod and puttest down thine own breeches,  
 Then they for sudden joy did weep  
 And I for sorrow sung,  
 That such a king should play do-peep,  
 And go the fools among.  
 Prithee, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy fool to lie: I would fain learn to lie.

Lear. An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped

Fool. I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are: they'll have me whipped for speaking true, thou'lt have me whipped for lying; and sometimes I am shipped for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind o' thing than a fool; and yet I would not be thee, nuncle; thou hast pared thy wit o' both sides, and left nothing' the middle: here comes one o' the parings.

### 14.2.5 Glossary

#### Extract I

darker	- serious
conferring	- giving
son	- son-in-law
amorous	- full of love
sojourn	- visit
wield	- express
champains	- open courts, plains & fields
perpetual	- forever
felicitate	- make happy
ample	- big, large
validity	- value, worth
France	- King of France with famous vineyards
Burgundy	- the duke of Burgundy with rich pastures
strive	- make effort
interest	- concerned, interested
opulent	- rich, wealthy
bond	- relation, duty or obligation as a daughter
mend	- correct
mar	- ruin, destroy
haply	- perhaps, perchance

#### Extract II

shaft	- arrow
hideous	- bad looking
rashness	- taking wrong decision in haste, impulsiveness, hot-headedness

reverbs - echoes back

### **Extract III**

forsaken - deserted, left without help

despised - hated

dowerless - without dowry

waterish - watery district of France to which Burgundy belong, hence a watery or paltry fellow

benison - blessing

loath - unwilling

bosoms - hearts

alms - charity

plighted - intricate, folded

derides - mocks, laughs scornfully at

appertains - concerns

infirmity - instability of mind.

slenderly - imperfectly

imperfections - faults

long-engrafted - deeply confirmed

therewithal - in addition, besides

waywardness - self-willingness, irregularity in behaviour

choleric - angry

dispositions - natural tendencies, inclinations

### **Extract IV**

portend - foretell, foreshadow

scourged - afflicted, punished

sequent - result

mutinies - open revolts against constituted authorities

prediction - foretelling

machinations - plots, intrigues

foppery - foolishness

surfeit - bad result

knaves	- unprincipled or dishonest men, rogues
evasion	- act or means of avoiding
whoremaster man	- lecherous, person
goatish	- love for last
compounded	- made sexual relations
dragon's tail	- lunar eclipse
Ursa Major	- the Great Bear (the northern constellation)
lecherous	- extremely lusty
'sfoot	- God's foot

### **Extract V**

sirrah	- sir
nuncle	- uncle
trowest	- think, believe
dost	- do
motley	- multi-coloured
clovest	- break, cut, divide
thou borest dirt	- reverses the proper order of things
foppish	- foolish
apish	- fantastical
breeches	- rifle or gun, here it means authority
bo-peep	- game of hiding and suddenly appearing
prithee	- pray you
marvel	- be surprised
pared	- cut off, shaved off

## **14.2.6 Commentary on the Extracts**

### **Extract I**

This is from the opening scene of the play, which is very important from thematic as well as structural point of view. The important characters are introduced. Lear is rash, Goneril and Regan are hollow and empty-hearted, Cordelia is truthful, frank and virtuous. To avoid strife after Lear's death, the kingdom is divided. The evil daughters get the whole divided between them. Cordelia is warned to think again in her response otherwise she will remain dowerless, discarded by her father. All this wrong division and rashness lead to Lear's catastrophe in the end.

## **Extract II**

This is a small part of the opening scene where Kent, the faithful knight of Lear, turns into a rebel in order to check rashness of Lear. He explains that the two elder daughters are evil and Cordelia, is virtuous. For favoring Cordelia Kent is banished from the kingdom.

## **Extract III**

King of France marries Cordelia, the dowerless but virtuous daughter of Lear. As Cordelia rightly says that time shall unfold the treacherous behaviour of Goneril and Regan, the two evil daughters of Lear criticize the infirmity of his age & rashness even during his best and soundest time. The scene depicts the changed behaviour of Goneril and Regan after getting divisions of the kingdom.

## **Extract IV**

This begins with a speech of Gloucester who is beguiled by his illegitimate son Edmund. He holds the lunar and solar eclipses for all the topsy-turvy happenings in the world. But in his soliloquy Edmund rejects the theory of heavenly influence upon the world. He calls it a foppery of the world to blame the stars for our misdeeds. He cites his own example. The extract throws light upon the major characters of the sub-plot and shows the parallel between the incidents of both the plots.

## **Extract V**

It depicts the roll of Fool in *King Lear*. He is motley licensed fool to comment upon the foolish actions of the king in an ironical and satirical way. He uses Metaphors to explain hollowness of King's authority. His comments in prose and songs are bitter pieces of advice to the king. He uses wit & humour to cause a comic effect through his speeches.

### **14.2.7 Model Explanations**

a) *Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.*

This is an extract from William Shakespeare's famous tragedy *King Lear*. This is part of the opening scene where Lear asks his daughters how much they love him so that he may divide his kingdom accordingly.

In response to Cordelia's frank and curt reply Lear becomes angry and warns Cordelia. Lear asks her to mend her response so that she may not ruin her future by getting nothing from his kingdom. Lear is in hideous rashness and wants to impress her with his authority.

This extract throws light upon Lear's hideous rashness which is his tragic flaw and leads him to catastrophe. Anger and power have blinded him to divide his kingdom in proportion to artificial love shown to him. He fails to recognize virtue and cannot differentiate good from evil.

b) *Thy dowerless daughter .... a better where to find.*

This is an important extract from Act I (Sc.i) of the famous tragedy *King Lear* written by the well-known Elizabethan dramatist William Shakespeare. Lear has banished his youngest daughter Cordelia in response to her free and frank reply to Lear's question. One of the suitors of Cordelia thinks that she herself is dowry and thus marries her for her virtues.

King of France is to Lear that he has accepted Cordelia as his queen though she may be



dowerless. Cordelia is so precious that the duke of burgundy is not worth her. He assures Cordelia to get a better world there in France though it is unkind to bid farewell to her present relatives.

The extract reflects upon the characters of Lear, Burgundy, Cordelia and King of France. Burgundy demands dowry and loses Cordelia. Lear makes Cordelia dowerless in rashness. Cordelia is dowry herself and is taken away as queen by King of France.

c) *These late eclipses..... between son and father.*

These lines have been taken from Act I (Sc.ii) of *King Lear* written by William Shakespeare. These lines are spoken by the earl of Gloucester to his illegitimate son Edmund who has planned to oust Edgar, the virtuous, faithful and legitimate son of Gloucester. Gloucester expresses his anguish over the misunderstanding caused by Edmund.

Science and reasoning power may interpret the eclipses of the sun and the moon in the different way but, according to Gloucester, they are definitely harmful for human beings. In the opinion of Gloucester coolness in love, mistrust in friendship, division among brothers, mutinies in cities, discord in countries, treason in palaces and breaking of relationship between father and son are the effects of the recent solar and lunar eclipses.

People have a tendency to blame stars if anything wrong happens in their life and Gloucester does the same. He cannot see through the intrigues of Edmund, as Lear is tricked by his two elder daughters. The main plot and the sub plot in the play are parallel and thus, the heads of the families in both the plots are intrigued by evil characters. Later on Gloucester has to lose his eyes for believing Edmund. He stumbles when he has eyes.

d) *Nuncle, give me an egg .... two crowns.*

This extract is a part of Act I (Sc.iv) of *King Lear* written by the famous Elizabethan dramatist William Shakespeare. Fool in *King Lear* provides comic effect but he is not a fool at all. He is licensed fool and comments upon the foolishness, impatience and rashness of the protagonist in ironical and satirical way.

King Lear has divided his kingdom between his two elder heartless, hollow daughters and discarded the third virtuous and youngest daughter Cordelia. Now the two evil daughters wield the real authority and Lear is not allowed to have even hundred knights. Fool who accompanies Lear and is faithful to him provides mirth through his satirical comments. He equates Goneril and Regan to important part of an egg that is of some worth. Lear is metaphorically equated with the two outer parts, which are hollows of an egg as he has not real power now.

The extract reflects upon the characters of the main plot namely Lear, Goneril, Regan and Fool. Fool is witty and licensed. His comments and advice upon the situation are always full of wisdom but satirical and ironical. This is a good example of Fool's role in the play.

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### 14.3 Self-assessment Questions

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#### Extract I

1. What is the thematic importance of this extract?
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2. Comment upon the structural importance of this extract.

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3. Why has the king called the meeting for?

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4. Who gets benefited from the division of kingdom?

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5. How does the king react hearing Cordelia's answer.

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**Extract II**

6. Why does faithful Kent rebel against the king?

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7. What is the effect of Kent's appeal?

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**Extract III**

8. Explain the paradoxical statements of King of France about Cordelia.

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9. Comment on the attitude of Goneril and Regan towards the king at the end of this extract.

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**Extract IV**

10. Whom does Gloucester blame for cold relations, mutinies, divisions, discord and treason?

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11. What are Edmund's views about the influence of heavenly bodies?

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12. What are the salient features of Fool?

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13. What is the importance of this extract?

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#### 14.4 Answers to SAQs

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##### Extract I

1. Shakespeare had devised his opening scenes in a very important way. The theme of division of kingdom among his three daughters on the basis of love towards their father comes up in the very opening scene. Most of the important characters are introduced in this scene of the play. It throws light on the characters of King Lear, the two elder evil daughters, the third virtuous daughter, the faithful knight Kent. Lear's rashness, division of kingdom, discarding of Cordelia and banishment of Kent lead him to catastrophe.
2. The play is made of double plot. Important characters of both the main plot and the sub plot are introduced in this extract namely Lear, Gloucester, Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, Edmund, Cornwall and Albany.
3. The king has called the meeting for a very serious purpose. He is growing old and intends to divide his kingdom among his three daughters to avoid future struggle after his death. He wants to give the shares according to their love towards him.
4. Goneril and Regan get benefited from the division of kingdom. Each gets half of the kingdom with the help of flattery though they are hollow and empty-hearted. Cordelia, the youngest and the most virtuous daughter, does not get anything because she cannot flatter the king.

5. Lear's warns Cordelia to rethink and mend her answer otherwise she will get nothing from his kingdom. He expects an answer full of flattery from Cordelia also.

#### **Extract II**

6. Kent rebels and becomes unmannerly because he sees injustice being done at the hands of the king. Lear has given his all to his two elder daughters who perform flattery. He has made his virtuous daughter Cordelia dowerless. Kent exposes the hideous rashness of the king & hollowness of the two elder daughters.
7. Lear has gone mad and is not ready to listen to the good advice given by Kent. Rather Kent is banished from the kingdom.

#### **Extract III**

8. While explaining Cordelia's character, King of France uses paradoxes. He says that Cordelia is poor in property but rich in virtues. She is forsaken by her family but chosen by France. She is disliked by her family but loved by France, she is dowerless on one hand but queen of France on the other, she loses her relations at Lear's court but finds better relations in France.
9. Goneril and Regan are very critical of Lear's attitude though they have got the whole kingdom. They talk about the infirmity of his age, rashness even during the best and soundest of his time and banishment of Kent. They are planning to do something in the heat of the occasion.

#### **Extract IV**

10. He blames the solar and lunar eclipses for that. He believes that the heavenly bodies affect the destinies of nations and individuals.
11. He does not believe in the effect of heavenly bodies upon the working of a nation, society and individual. He thinks it is merely foppery of the world to blame stars for our own misdeeds.

#### **Extract V**

12. Fool in *King Lear* keeps company with the protagonist of the main plot. He is motley, likes good food, sings, uses metaphors in his speeches. His language is witty and comic. He calls King Lear *Nuncle*. His remarks upon the wrong doings of Lear are pertinent, satirical, ironical and frank. He is licensed fool. He can advise the king in his own way.
13. Shakespeare's tragedies are not pure tragedies in the strictest sense of the Greek drama. They have elements of mirth between serious scenes. Mirth is caused by Fool through such scenes. His wit and satire are pertinent. Comic relief to the pent up feelings of the audience or readers is supplied through such scenes in the play.

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### **14.5 Let Us Sum Up**

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In this Unit you have studied about the Elizabethan Age, the short life history and fame of William Shakespeare. The introduction and summary of the play and commentary on the extracts must have helped you to understand the play. Sample explanations must have enabled you to write your answers for the purpose of examination.

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## 14.6 Review Questions

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1. Comment on the importance of the opening scene in *King Lear*.
2. Write a character sketch of King Lear on the basis of Act I.
3. Write a character sketch of Fool on the basis of Act I.
4. Act I in *King Lear* foreshadows all the important issues of the play. Discuss.
5. Ending of Act I in *King Lear* depicts the reversal in attitude of the two elder daughters of the king towards their father and vice-versa. Comment.
6. What is a soliloquy. Comment on Edmund's soliloquy at the beginning of Act I Sc.-II.

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## 14.7 Bibliography

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## UNIT-15

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### WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE : KING LEAR - II

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#### Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 William Shakespeare: *King Lear*
  - 15.2.1 About the Author: William Shakespeare
  - 15.2.2 Extracts from the Play
  - 15.2.3 Glossary
  - 15.2.4 Commentary on the Extracts
  - 15.2.5 Model Explanations
- 15.3 Self- Assessment Questions
- 15.4 Answers to SAQs
- 15.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.6 Review Questions
- 15.7. Bibliography

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#### 15.0 Objectives

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Through this Unit we aim at teaching you

1. *King Lear* from Act II to Act V with the help of important extracts.
2. how Shakespeare has used storm in nature representing the storm in the mind of the protagonist.
3. how Lear and Gloucester learn during the heath scenes and redemption takes place.
4. what happens to the good and evil characters in the end.

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#### 15.1 Introduction

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As the scope of the Unit does not allow to give you the remaining play, only important extracts from Act II to Act V given in original for discussion so that you may understand the whole play. Glossary, commentary on the given extracts and model explanations will help you to understand the extracts and the complete play. But you must develop the habit of consulting the material mentioned for further reading. You should try the SAQs and tally your answers with those given for your help in 13.6. The matter may be expressed in your own words. Unit-End Questions are a form of exercise work for you which you should attempt after studying all the five Acts of the play.

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## 15.2 William Shakespeare: *King Lear*

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### 15.2.1 About the Author: William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) is one of the most important dramatists, man of the theatre and poet of the Elizabethan Age. He was born at Stratford-on-Avon. He attended Stratford Grammar School for his early education. Less is known about his early life. A few years after his marriage, he left for London. And that proved to be a turning point in his life.

He has written 154 sonnets, adding new themes e.g. immortality and friendship. His sonnets are famous as Shakespearean sonnets or English sonnets as they are different from Petrarchan or Italian sonnets in theme, structure and rhyme scheme. He has written many history plays but his romantic comedies and tragedies won him fame. He has not only written comedy and tragedies but a new form of drama tragi-comedy has been written which is completely different from Greek drama. He has ignored the unities of place and time and has used double plots in many of his plays. His characters are individual as well as type. He is not for an age but for all time. It will be appropriate to quote Dryden from *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*:

*He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there.*

Ben Jonson said that Shakespeare knew “small Latin and less Greek”. Comparing Shakespeare with the other writers who adhered to rules and norms for writing a correct and regular play Dr. Samuel Johnson says:

*The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden, accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of Shakespeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches and pines tower in the air; interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity. Other poets display cabinets of precious rarities, minutely finished, wrought into shape, and polished unto brightness. Shakespeare opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in inexhaustible plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals.*

### 15.2.2 Extracts from the Play

#### Extract I      Act II(Sc.iv) ll 267-289

Reg.	What need one ?
Lear.	O! reason not the need ; our basest beggars. Are in the poorest things superfluous: Allow not nature more than nature needs,



Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady;  
 If only to go warm were gorgeous,  
 Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,  
 Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But, for true need,-  
 You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!  
 You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,  
 As full of grief as age ; wretched in both !  
 If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts  
 Against their father, fool me not so much  
 To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,  
 And let not women's weapons, water-drops,  
 Stain my man's cheeks ! no, you unnatural hags,  
 I will have such revenges on you both  
 That all the world shall – I will do such things, –  
 What they are yet I know not, - but they shall be  
 The terrors of the earth. You think I'll weep ; No, I'll not weep:  
 I have full cause of weeping, but this heart  
 Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws  
 Or ere I'll weep. O fool ! I shall go mad.

**Extract II     Act III(Sc.ii) ll 1-59**

SCENE II – Another Part of the Heath.

Storm still.

Enter LEAR and Fool

Lear.	Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow; You cataracts and hurricanes, spout Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks! You sulphurous and thought-executing fires, Vaunt couriers to oak cleaving thunderbolts, Singe my white head ! And thou, all shaking thunder, Strike flat the thick rotundity o'the world! Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once
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That make ingrateful man !

Fool. O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain water out o'door. Good nuncle, in, and ask thy daughters blessing; here's a night pities neither wise man nor fool.

Lear. Rumble thy bellyful ! Spit, fire! Spout rain!  
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:  
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;  
I never gave you kingdom, call'd you children,  
You owe me no subscription: then, let fall  
Your horrible pleasure; here I stand, your slave,  
A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man.  
But yet I call you servile ministers,  
That have with two pernicious daughters join'd  
Your high engender'd battles against a head  
So old and white as this. O ! O! 'tis foul.

Fool. He that has a house to put his head in has a good head-piece.  
The cold piece that will house  
Before the head has any,  
The head and he shall louse;  
So beggars marry many.  
The man that makes his toe  
What he his heart should make,  
Shall of a corn cry woe,  
And turn his sleep to wake.  
For there was never yet fair woman but she made mouths in a glass.

**Enter KENT.**

Lear. No I will be the pattern of all patience;  
I will say nothing.

Kent. Who's there?

Fool. Marry, here's grace and a cod-piece;  
That's a wise man and a fool.

Kent. Alas ! sir, are you here ? things that love night.

Love not such nights as these ; the wrathful skies  
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark,  
And make them keep their caves. Since I was man  
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,  
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never  
Remember to have heard; man's nature cannot carry  
The affliction nor the fear.

Lear. Let the great gods,  
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,  
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,  
That has within thee undivulged crimes,  
Unwhip'd of justice; hid thee, thou bloody hand;  
Thou perjur'd, and thou similar of virtue  
That art incestuous; caitiff, to pieces shake,  
That under covert and convenient seeming  
Hast practis'd on man's life; close pent-up guilts,  
Rive your concealing continents and cry  
These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man  
More sinn'd against than sinning.

**Extract III    Act IV(Sc.i) ll 18-37**

Glo. I have no way, and therefore want no eyes  
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen,  
Our means secure us, and our mere defects  
Prove our commodities. Ah! Dear son Edgar,  
The food of thy abused father's wrath;  
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,  
I'd say I had eyes again.

Old Man. How now ! who's there ?

Edg. [Aside.] O gods! Who is 't can say, 'I am at the worst?'  
I am worse than e'er I was.

Old Man. 'Tis poor mad Tom.

Edg. [Aside] And worse I may be yet; the worst is not,  
 So long as we can say, 'This is the worst'

Old Man. Fellow, where goest ?

Glo. Is it a beggar man?

Old Man. Madman and beggar too.

Glo. He has some reason, else he could not beg.  
 I' the last night's storm I such a fellow saw,  
 Which made me think a man a worm: my son  
 Came then into my mind; and yet my mind  
 Was then scarce friends with him: I have heard more since.  
 As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;  
 They kill us for their sport.

**Extract IV     Act IV(Sc.vi) ll 154-185**

Lear. What! art mad ? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. look  
 with thine ears: see how yond justice rails upon yon simple thief. Hark,  
 in thine ear: change places; and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which  
 is the thief?  
 Thou hast seen a farmer's dog bark at a beggar ?

Glo. Ay, sir.

Lear. And the creature run from the cur ?  
 There thou mightest behold the great image of authority; a dog's obey'd  
 in office.  
 Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!  
 Why dost thou lash that whore ? Strip thine own back;  
 Thou hotly lust'st to use her in that kind  
 For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.  
 Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;  
 Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,  
 And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;  
 Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it.  
 None does offend, none, I say none; I'll able 'em:  
 Take that of me, my friend, who have the power

To seal the accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes;  
And, like a scurvy politician, seem  
To see the things thou dost not. Now, now, now, now;  
Pull off my boots; harder, harder; so.

Edg. [Aside.] O ! matter and impertinency mix'd;  
Reason in madness!

Lear. If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes;  
I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester:  
Thou must be patient; we came crying hither:  
Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air:  
We waul and cry. I will preach to thee: mark.

**Extract V      Act V(Sc.iii) ll 8-25**

Lear. No, no,no,no! Come, let's away to prison;  
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:  
When thou dost ask me blessing. I'll kneel down,  
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues  
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,  
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;  
And take upon's the mystery of things,  
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,  
In a wall'd prison, packs and sets of great ones  
That ebb and flow by the moon.

Edm. Take them away.

Lear. Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,  
The gods themselves throw incense. Have I caught thee?  
He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,  
And fire us hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes;  
The gougeres shall devour them; flesh and fell,  
Ere they shall make us weep : we'll see 'em starve first.

Come.

**Extract VI    Act V(Sc.iii) ll 307-328**

Lear.            And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life !

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,

And thou no breath at all ? Thou'lt come no more,

Never, never, never, never, never !

Pray you, undo this button: thank you sir.

Do you see this ? Look on her, look, her lips,

Look there, look there !

Edg.            He faints! – my lord, my lord!

Kint.           Break, heart ; I prithee, break.

Edg.           Look up, my lord,

Kent.           Vex not his ghost : O! let him pass; he hates him

That would upon the rack of this tough world

Stretch him out longer.

Edg.           He is gone, indeed.

Kent.           The wonder is he hath endur'd so long:

He but usurp'd his life.

Alb.           Bear them from hence. Our present business.

Is general woe. ( To KENT and EDGAR] Friends of my soul, you twain  
Rule in this realm, and the gor'd state sustain.

Kent.           I have a journey, sir shortly to go;

My master calls me, I must not say no.

Alb.           The weight of this sad time we must obey;

Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

The oldest hath borne most: we that are young,

Shall never see so much, nor live so long. [Exeunt, with a dead march]

### 15.2.3 Glossary

**Extract I**

gorgeous                    -    splendid, magnificent

wretched                   -    miserable, unhappy

women's weapons	- tears
water drops	- tears
hags	- ugly old women, witches
ere	- before

## **Extract II**

heath	- open, flat waste tract of land covered with shrubs
cataracts	- violent downpour of rain
hurricanes	- water-spouts
spout	- issue, come in jet form
drenched	- wet completely
steeple	- church towers
sulphureous	- causing flames, burning, fire and lightning
vaunt-couriers	- fore runners, precursors
cleaving	- breaking, separating
singe	- burn up
rotundity	- roundness
moulds	- shapes
germens	- seeds of life
court-holy water	- flattery or fair words
rumble	- roar
tax	- charge, blame
subscription	- obedience, submission
servile	- slavish
pernicious	- destructive, ruinous, fatal
head-piece	- head covering, brain
cod-piece	- worthless thing
gallow	- frighten, terrify
affliction	- grief, sorrow
pothor	- turmoil, disturbance
undivulged	- hidden, unrevealed
perjured	- swearing falsely

incestuous	- unchaste
caitiff	- base, despicable cowardly person
covert	- concealed, secret
rive	- burst open
summoners	- officers who summon offenders to court

### **Extract III**

stumbled	- blindly walked into trouble
wrath	- anger
wanton	- naughty
sport	- fun

### **Extract IV**

rails	- makes noise
yon	- that
hark	- listen
handy-dandy	- take which you like
cur	- dog
beadle	- a parish officer having the authority to punish the small offenders
usurer	- one who takes interest on the money lent
cozener	- cheat
tattered	- torn
furred	- made of fur
lance	- weapon with long wooden shaft & pointed steel head.
rags	- torn clothes
[a pigmy straw doth	- easily assailable
pears it ]	
scurvy	- mean
impertinency	- nonsense
wilt	- will
waul	- wail, cry loudly

### **Extract V**

gilded butterflies	- court gallants
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packs and sets	- confederacies and parties
that ebb and flow	- that change like the changes of the moon
incense	- fragrance (here special favour )
devour	- eat

#### **Extract VI**

poor fool	- refers to Cordelia
prithce	- pray you
vex	- worry, trouble
twain	- two
gored	- bleeding

### **15.2.4 Commentary on the Extracts**

#### **Extract I**

Goneril and Regan have reduced the number of knights in service of King Lear. In their opinion he does not need even five knights. Lear reasons out the need of superfluous things for man otherwise there is no difference between man and beast. He curses his daughters for bringing him to this plight and requests gods to give him patience. He has full cause of weeping but he will not weep. He will take revenge against Goneril and Regan. The extract shows the real characters of Goneril and Regal in reducing the authority of their father. Lear's character improves through such incidents.

#### **Extract II**

This extract depicts a violent storm in which Lear, Fool and Kent found themselves on the heath. Lear justifies the cruelty of the storm as the elements of nature are not his daughters to whom he has given his kingdom. Fool tries to make him quiet with his witty remarks. Lear wants nature to punish the enemies of society. He feels that he has caused less pain to others whereas he is wronged more. The storm symbolizes the storm in the mind of Lear as well as an upheaval in the moral world order.

#### **Extract III**

This extract presents Gloucester and his disguised son Edgar on the heath. Gloucester has lost his eyes and is helped by Old Man. Old Man introduces Edgar to Gloucester as a beggar and mad man. Gloucester regrets upon what he has done to Edgar on the instigation of Edmund. He becomes more philosophical about human life. He says that human beings are easily killed by gods as flies are killed by naughty boys. The theme of redemption, justice and victimization prevails in this extract.

#### **Extract IV**

Lear recognizes Gloucester near Dover and is ready to provide his own eyes to him if he can weep his grief. He comments upon the role of wealth and authority in going scot-free ever after committing crimes. Poor are punished mercilessly for small offences. Lear preaches Gloucester to have patience as human life begins and ends with crying. Edgar notices rightly mixture of reason and madness

in Lear's mind. This is an important extract as it links and interweaves the main plot and the sub-plot of the play more closely by bringing Lear and Gloucester closer. We can compare and contrast the grief of the two at the hands of their progeny.

### **Extract V**

This extract depicts what happens in the British camp near Dover after the victory of Edmund. Edmund orders the officers to take Lear and Cordelia to the prison. On suggesting that Lear should consult his two elder daughters under the circumstances, Lear turns down Cordelia's request & is ready to go to the prison with a brave heart. He refuses to surrender even before trying circumstances. He rejoices at the sacrifice done by Cordelia and says that nothing can separate them now. This reflects that Lear's character has much developed during heath scenes.

### **Extract VI**

This is a part of the last scene of the play. Cordelia is hanged as per the orders of Edmund. Lear's anguish over the death of his virtuous daughter Cordelia turns him into madness. He questions why his daughter has no life, whereas even the meanest beast like a dog or horse or rat has life. Kent requests not to vex Lear's ghost and he makes himself ready to follow his master in heaven to serve him there. The burden of the state falls on Albany. This extract presents the denouement of the play, which is rapidly achieved. The scene presents most of the characters that appear at the beginning of the play also. Thus the wheel is come full circle. The scene can be compared with the ending of *Hamlet* where Horatio and Fortinbras discuss in the manner of Albany & Edgar in *King Lear*.

## **15.2.5 Model Explanations**

a) *O! reason not the need ..... cheap as beast's.*

This is an extract from Act II (Sc.iv) of *King Lear* written by the famous Elizabethan dramatist William Shakespeare. Goneril and Regan, the two elder evil daughters of Lear, have got his kingdom divided between them. Now they are not ready to take care of their father. He is not allowed to keep knights as, they think, there is no need of them for the king. King Lear justifies his needs in these lines.

Lear says that there should be no particular reason for a king to have knights. Even the poorest beggars have something extra. If human beings are not allowed to have something more than needed, their life will be worst than the beasts.

This extract reflects upon the characters of Goneril and Regan. Even after getting their shares of kingdom, they are not ready to look after their father.

b) *I am a man ..... against than sinning.*

This extract is a part of heath scenes where Lear defies the role of nature elements like wind, rain and lightning in torturing him. He has given nothing to them whereas he has given his whole kingdom to his elder daughters. His elder daughters are more cruel than the storm at heath. Lear raises the question of injustice being done to him.

Lear accepts his mistake in banishing Kent and discarding Cordelia. But he feels that greater injustice is being done to him by his two daughters and other enemies. He has to suffer more at the hands of nature also.

This extract depicts the feeling of the protagonist. His character develops and redemption takes

place at the heath. Time and again he speaks against power and authority. The theme of justice permeates the play.

c) *As flies to..... their sport.*

This extract appears in Act IV (Sc.i) of *King Lear*, one of the most famous tragedies in English Literature written by William Shakespeare. The Chief character of the sub-plot, Gloucester is not happy with the type of suffering Lear and he himself have to bear.

He says that naughty boys kill flies out of fun. They have no ill intention even. In a similar way, gods kill human beings without reason or rhyme. There is no justice in this world.

Shakespeare has not depicted even poetic justice in his tragedy. Good characters suffer for no fault, crime, sin of their own. They have to pay a high price to set order in society or they are easily befooled by tricky enemies.

d) *Thou must be patient ..... waul and cry.*

This extract appears in Act IV (Sc. vi) of *King Lear*, written by the famous Elizabethan dramatist William Shakespeare. Consoling Gloucester, Lear says that there is too much suffering in this world.

Lear consoles Gloucester and asks him to be patient though Lear himself has not been the pattern of patience. According to Lear this world is full of sorrow for human beings. Human beings come into this world crying and go from this world crying. So crying is the consistent phenomenon in this sorrowful world.

The lines express a universal truth. But Lear's character has developed through suffering and grief. At this stage, he takes such incidence with a brave heart. The lines are ironic as Lear himself has not been patient. Many a time he has asked for patience for himself. The division of kingdom and banishment of Kent are examples of his rashness and impatience.

e) *No, no, no.....of thee forgiveness.*

These lines are an extract from Act V (Sc. iii) from *King Lear* a famous tragedy written by William Shakespeare. These lines are spoken by Lear in response to Cordelia's views to ask for help from the two elder daughters when Lear is imprisoned by Edmund.

Lear does not agree with Cordelia that they should approach Goneril or Regan for any kind of help. He shows his boldness of character and denies any kind of help very emphatically. He is ready to go to prison with Cordelia. In prison Cordelia will ask the king for blessings whereas he himself will ask her for forgiveness.

We can observe that redemption and development in Lear's character has taken place in heath scenes. He is completely changed. He is not rash, impatient or blind to tricks of rogues now. He readies himself to face difficulties with a brave heart. The repetition of 'no' is emphatic. He is ready to ask for forgiveness from the child whom he has made dowerless.

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### 15.3 Self-assessment Questions

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#### Extract I

1. Why does not Lear want to have reason for the need?

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2. What prayer does Lear make to gods for himself?

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**Extract II**

3. What does heath represent?

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4. What does storm symbolize?

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5. Why does Lear defy the storm?

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**Extract III**

6. How did Gloucester stumble when he could see?

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7. Discuss the simile used in the extract.

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**Extract IV**

8. How can a man look with his ears?

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9. What are Lear's views about justice?

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10. What does Edgar mean by "reason in madness"?

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**Extract V**

11. How does Lear plan to pass his time in prison?

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12. What is reaction of Lear when he along with Cordelia is imprisoned by order of Edmund?

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13. Why does Lear not ask for forgiveness from his two elder daughters?

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**Extract VI**

14. How does Lear express his grief over Cordelia's death?

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15. What is Kent's reaction on Lear's death?

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## 15.4 Answers To SAQs

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**Extract I**

1. Lear believes that there cannot be any proper reason for superfluous things. Even beggars and his own daughters have superfluous things. If human beings are not allowed to have superfluous things, their lives will be equal to those of beasts.
2. He prays to gods to give him patience so that he may bear grief given by his daughters in old age.

**Extract II**

3. Heath represents a deserted place where the elements of nature have a free play. It is a place for redemption and improvisation for Lear. Lear's character develops at the heath.
4. The storm at heath symbolizes the mental storm going in the mind of Lear as well as the upheaval in moral world. The question of justice becomes a part of it.
5. Lear defies the storm as the elements of nature rain, wind etc. are not his daughters to whom he has given his kingdom. These elements of nature owe him nothing. Moreover, nature can establish rule of justice against the vices of human beings. That is why he asks rain, lightning and wind to punish the wrong doers. He cannot expect nature elements to pay regard to his

authority.

### **Extract III**

6. Gloucester stumbled when he had eyes because he discarded his virtuous and legitimate son Edgar. Edmund deceived Gloucester easily and instigated against the faithful son Edgar.
7. Gloucester uses a simile to depict the helplessness of human beings. He says that human beings are killed easily without any rhyme or reason by gods as flies are killed by naughty boys. The theme of injustice in this world prevails in the play. This hints why Cordelia and Lear die in the end.

### **Extract IV**

8. If a man has lost his eyes as Gloucester has done, he can use his ears and guess with the help of the sound. Sound can help in recognizing the person. Lear means a man can do without his eyes also.
9. Lear says that strict punishment is given to those who are poor and have no authority. Powerful and rich people do not get any punishment for their wrong deeds.
10. Edgar in disguise of a beggar notices Lear's mental condition, his views about justice, power and wealth. Edgar says that Lear's mind has got matter and impertinency mixed. Lear looks mad but he has the reasoning power.

### **Extract V**

11. He plans to pass his time in prison with pleasure. They will play, sing, tell tales and laugh upon the evil characters. They will listen to the ups and downs happening at the court.
12. He wants to face these circumstances with a brave heart. He does not ask for any help from his evil daughters. He will not weep and beg for forgiveness.
13. Lear has developed his character through storm. He has become more patient and morally sound. Redemption has taken place at the heath.

### **Extract VI**

14. Lear expresses his grief on Cordelia's death by putting a big question mark on the justice of this world. A dog, rat or a horse can have life but not his virtuous daughter Cordelia who has sacrificed so much. His *No, no, no* & *Never, never, never* express his emotions of extreme grief & insanity. He faints and dies in the end.
15. Kent advises that Lear's ghost should not be vexed. Lear has suffered much already & therefore, his life should not be prolonged in this world. Rather Kent readies himself to serve his master in heaven.

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## **15.5 Let Us Sum Up**

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In this Unit you have studied the important extracts from Act II to Act V. As the play is the same so the background to the Elizabethan Age, introduction to the play & summary of the play have already been studied under various headings. The commentary on the extracts and the model explanations must have helped you to understand the play and by now you must have achieved the objectives of

this Unit.

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### 15.6 Review Questions

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1. Write an essay on the salient features of the Shakespearean tragedy.
2. Discuss the plot construction of the play *King Lear*.  
or  
What is the significance of the sub-plot in *King Lear*?
3. Lear says “I am more sinned against than sinning” Discuss.
4. Discuss the role of Fool in *King Lear*.
5. Write a character-sketch of Cordelia.
6. Write a character-sketch of King Lear.
7. Write a character-sketch of Kent.
8. Discuss the symbolic value of the heath or the storm scenes in the play.
9. What do you understand by *poetic justice* ?Is there any poetic justice in *King Lear*?
10. Edgar is a sort of male Cordelia to the sub-plot. Discuss.
11. Discuss the role played by Goneril and Regan.

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## UNIT-16

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### SHAKESPEARE : AS YOU LIKE IT-I

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#### Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 A Brief History of English Drama up to Shakespeare
- 16.3 Some Facts about Elizabethan Theatre
- 16.4 Shakespeare's greatness as a Playwright
- 16.5 Shakespearean comedy : Chief Characteristics
- 16.6 A brief Act-wise and Scene-wise Summary
- 16.7 Some Important Explanations
- 16.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.9 Review Questions
- 16.10 Bibliography

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#### 16.0 Objectives

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After reading this unit, the students will be able to:

- know the life and time of Shakespeare
- understand the progress of British drama
- important features of Elizabethan Theatre
- understand the Chief Characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy
- to know a brief story of the play

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#### 16.1 Introduction

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Shakespeare is by far the greatest name in English literature. Yet his biography is, "built upon doubts and thrives upon perplexities". Only the barest outlines are known for certain. We only know that the world's greatest dramatist was born in April 1564, at *Stratford-on-Avon*, in the country of Warwick. His mother, Mary Arden, came of a noble family and his father, John Shakespeare, was a prosperous farmer, wool and timber merchant, and butcher of the village. He also took keen interest in municipal affairs and rose to the position of justice of the peace and High Bailiff of the town. He was often involved in litigation, and our dramatist, as the eldest son, must have frequently assisted him, and in this way acquired that legal knowledge which has surprised his readers.

About the age of nine he was admitted to the Grammar School of the village. Tradition has it that he was not a good student, and it was only reluctantly that he crawled, like a snail, to school, where

he learned, “*Small Latin and less Greek*”. He often played truant, took part in the village games which received honourable mention in his plays. The landscape round about his native village is beautiful and it must have made a deep impression upon the boy, for the memory colours many of his best nature-pieces scattered all up and down his works. His, “astonishing store of natural knowledge” has been praised by all his critics.

When he was hardly nineteen years of age, he contracted an imprudent marriage with Anne Hathaway, some eight years his senior. On the basis of some passages in his dramas, critics have tried to show that the marriage was an unhappy one, but nothing can be concluded for certain. Only six months later was born his eldest daughter, Susanna, and in 1585 the marriage was blessed with twins, Hammet and Judith. About this very time, Shakespeare left Stratford for London to seek his fortunes there.

It is said that at first he got only mean employment and worked as a holder of horses at the doors of some London theatres. He passed his dramatic apprenticeship, “working at the odd jobs given to him by the theatrical companies, dining at the ordinary of taverns, gazing on courtly processions and spectacles, seeing new types of characters and hearing new stories day by day” (Raleigh). Then he tried his hand at acting and was soon a successful actor. The coarse and worthless plays of the time disgusted him, and he began his dramatic career by re-casting existing plays and changing them beyond recognition. He was an intelligent and observant man, the theatre-managers were soon impressed by him, and his rise was rapid.

The success of his “*Venus and Adonis*,” 1593, which he dedicated to the Earl of Southampton brought him into the notice of the royalty, and thenceforth, he constantly enjoyed court favours and soon reached the top of the ladder of fame. He had much practical ability and managed his business well. In 1597, we hear of his purchasing a big house, New Place, at Stratford, and thereafter almost every year, as long as he worked in London, he visited his native place. He had great love for his native village and visited it regularly, till he retired from the stage and settled there as a gentleman of means.

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## **16.2 A Brief History of English Drama up to Shakespeare**

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The history of English drama dates from the eleventh century. The earliest dramatic representation in English is believed to have been the performance of a Latin play in honour of St. Katherine, at Dunstable in 1110. By the time of the Roman conquest (1066), a form of religious drama, originating from the rich symbolic ceremonial of the Church had already established itself in France, and as a matter of course it soon found its way into England. Its purpose was directly didactic or instructional; it was the work of priests who used it as the means of conveying the truths of their religion to the illiterate masses. To begin with, the Church had this drama completely under control; performances were given inside the church buildings themselves; the priests were the actors; and Latin was the language employed. This form of drama was known as the Miracle or Mystery Play. The material for mystery plays was drawn from the Bible, and these mystery plays expanded the mysteries connected with religion. Miracles consisted of the stories of saints in whose honour they were acted. As the mystery or miracle plays increased in popularity and on great occasions larger and larger crowds came to witness the performances, it became necessary to remove the stage from the interior of the building to the porch. Later, it was taken from the porch into the churchyard and finally from the church premises altogether to the village green or the city street. Laymen at the same time began to take part in the performances, and soon they superseded the priests entirely. Also, the vernacular tongue, first French, then English, took the

place of Latin.

This religious drama in England reached its height in the 14th century, from which time onwards at the festival of Corpus Christi in early summer, miracle plays were presented in nearly all large English towns in great connected sequences or cycles. These Corpus Christi plays were also known as “collective mysteries” and they exhibited the whole story of the fall of man and of man’s redemption. Their performances were arranged by the trading guilds of different towns. Four of these cycles have come down to us complete: (1) The Chester Cycle of 25 plays (2) The Coventry Cycle of 42 plays (3) The Wakefield Cycle of 31 plays (4) The York Cycle of 48 plays. Each of these begins with the world and the fall of man and, after dealing with such prophetic themes as the Flood, the sacrifice of Isaac, and the exodus from Egypt, goes on to represent the last scenes in the life of Christ - the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension - and closes with the Last Judgment. In literary quality these plays are of course crude but here and there they touch the note of pathos and the note of tragedy, while the occasional dramatic sense. These religious performances lasted well into the 16th century and there is good reason to think that Shakespeare must have witnessed one at least of those which, during his boyhood, were still being, given at Coventry. (Hamlet’s advice to the players not to “out-Herod Herod” recalls the declamatory and rhetorical style of the Herod of the old miracle plays).

The next stage in the history of English drama is the morality play. This, like the miracle play, was didactic in purpose; but its characters, instead of being taken from the Bible or from the legends of the saints, were personified abstractions. All kinds of mental and moral qualities appeared on the stage as characters in the play - Perseverance, Free Will, the Five Senses, the Seven Deadly Sins, good and bad Angels, etc. Among such personifications, there was generally a place for the Devil who had held a prominent position in the miracle plays. A later introduction of much importance was a so-called Vice, who was a humorous personification of evil taken on the comic side. This was the recognized fun-maker of the piece. This character often scored a tremendous popular success by jumping on the Devil’s back, sticking thorns into him, beating him with a stick, and making him roar with pain. He is especially interesting as the direct fore-runner of the clown of the Elizabethan stage.

Interlude was a late product of the dramatic development of the morality play. The interlude was a short dramatic piece of a satiric rather than of a religious or ethical nature, and in tone and purpose far less serious than the morality proper. This form grew up early in the 16th century and is rather closely associated with the name of John Heywood (1497-1580), who for a time was court musician and general provider of entertainment to Henry VIII. His Four P’s, a dialogue in which a Palmer, Pardoner, a Potheary, and a Pedlar exchange racy stories and finally enter into competition as to which of them can tell the biggest lie, is the most amusing specimen of its class. The interludes were often acted by household servants or retainers and are important as developing the custom of a nobleman of wealth having a band of more or less well-trained actors dependent on him. In the latter part of Elizabeth’s reign, when the drama proper was full-grown, we find theatrical companies calling themselves the “Earl of Leicester’s Servants”, the “Queen’s Players”, and so on.

These early experiments in play-writing are of great importance historically, because they did much to prepare the way for the regular drama. It was, however, under the direct influence of the Renaissance (i.e. the revival of learning) that the English comedy and tragedy alike passed out of these preliminary phases of their development into forms of art. Men went back to the classics for inspiration and example in the drama as in all other fields of literary enterprise, though it was the work of the Latin, not of the Greek, playwrights, that they took as their models. At first the comedies of Plautus and

Terence, and the tragedies of Seneca were themselves acted at the universities, and on special occasions, elsewhere. Then came Latin imitations, and in due course these were followed by attempts to fashion English plays upon the pattern of the originals. In such attempts English writers learned many valuable lessons in the principles of dramatic construction and technique. The first real English comedy, *Roister Doister*, was written in 1550 by Nicholas Udall, head-master of Eton, for performance by his school-boys. It has five acts in the Latin style and deals in an entertaining manner with the wooing of Dame Custance by the vainglorious hero, his various misadventures, and the pranks of Mathew Merrygreek, the jester. Though greatly indebted to Plautus and Terence, it shows the influence of the older humours of the miracle plays and the moralities. The first real English tragedy, *Gorboduc*, reproduces the form and spirit of Senecan tragedy. It was written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton in 1561 for representation before the members of the Inner Temple at their Christmas festivities. This first English tragedy was the first English play to use blank verse which had been introduced into English poetry only a few years before.

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### 16.3 Some Facts about the Elizabethan Theatre

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The Elizabethan theatres were primitive concerns, large wooden sheds, partly thatched with rushes, a flagstaff on the roof, and surrounded by a trench. They stood along the bank of the Thames and gave rise to a good deal of vexation to quiet citizens in the neighbourhood. Around these play-houses, in the afternoons, the narrow winding streets were so crowded by noisy, frivolous groups of people that business suffered in the shops, processions and funerals were obstructed, and perpetual causes of complaint arose.

In spite of objections by the residents, and bitter criticism by the Puritans, theatres multiplied rapidly. In 1633 there were nineteen permanent theatres in London which for a town of 300,000 inhabitants sufficiently indicate the keen interest taken in the drama.

The private theatres were designed on the model of the Guild Halls; the public theatres on the model of the Inn Yard. The private theatres were more luxurious, being fully roofed and seated. In the public theatres, on the other hand, the auditorium, as in ancient Greece, was open to the sky, only the stage being roofed. The fashionable part of the house was on the stage itself. There sat the royal patrons of the theatre, Essex and Southampton, with their friends. Here also sat the dramatic poets of the time to whom was accorded a free pass. Most important of all from our point of view were the shorthand writers, in the pay of piratical booksellers, who took down the dialogue, under pretence of criticizing it, and thus preserved for posterity many plays that otherwise would have been lost.

No women ever appeared on the stage, and very few women went to see the performances. The theatre was far too rough a place for decent women. The Queen summoned the players to Court on special occasions; and Shakespeare's company often gave a "Command" performance. Hence in some of the plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* flattering allusions are made to the Queen.

By Shakespeare's day, painted scenery had appeared. Thus the stage was no longer colourless or dull. It was hung with tapestries and curtains which affected the emotional response of the audience. The actors wore splendid clothes, largely inherited from noblemen; music, fireworks, guns, and thunder were all used to suggest atmosphere and to give colour to eye and ear. There were contrivances for descents from heaven and for mounting aloft; there was the pageantry of processions and tableaux; and

there were properties which could be used to represent imaginary scenes. The audience was expected to imagine a lot, and to respond to an aesthetic experience as the result of seeing a stage and the properties representing imaginary scenes in which actors created character and incident by making the words of an author come alive.

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## 16.4 Shakespeare's Greatness as a Playwright

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Two theories have been offered to explain the greatness of Shakespeare. The romantic critics hold that in him "all came from within" and that we owe his plays to the overmastering power of his genius alone. Practical and unimaginative men, however, assert that in Shakespeare "all came from without". He lived in play-loving age, he studied the crowds, gave them what they wanted and simply reflected their own thoughts and feelings. Probably the truth of the matter lies between these extreme views. Of the greatness of his genius there can be no question, but his genius was certainly shaped and enriched by external influences. Two outward influences were most powerful in developing his genius—the little village of Stratford, and the great city of London. In Stratford he learned to know the natural man in his natural environment; in London he learned to know the social and the artificial man in the most unnatural of surroundings.

However, Shakespeare's greatness and pre-eminence as a dramatist are universally recognized. But wherein does this pre-eminence lie? There is, indeed, hardly any glory of Shakespeare's drama which might not be matched by some other play of the period. Every element in Shakespeare's dramas might, in isolation, be matched by the best of his contemporaries. What is distinctive about Shakespeare is his combination of all the gifts which were scattered in the works of other playwrights of his time. He is superior to others by his many-sided curiosity and the extreme diversity of his talent. His genius was flexible to a marvellous degree. He adapted himself to the most diverse material and seemed to use it all with equal skill and enthusiasm. Into his narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* he poured all his love for lyrical beauty and command of rhymes, while his plays cover and, indeed, go beyond every dramatic classification hitherto known—national history, tragedy, comedy, romances, and fairy plays. But these categories do not suffice to show the variety of even his early plays. The word comedy includes plays so different as *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Comedy of Errors*; one being a fantasy consisting of sparkling dialogue, fire-works and word-play, and the other being a farce with an involved plot. No two of his dramas of English history have the same shape or a like movement. His great tragedies *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet* are differentiated by such astonishing variety of kind, presentment, and dramatic movement that hardly any one formula fits them all. This diversity is to be found every where in Shakespearean drama. He shows equal aptitude for the tragic and the comic, the sentimental and the burlesque, lyrical fantasy and character-study, portraits of women and of men.

Besides his variety, Shakespeare's capital gift was certainly that he could depict characters, both historical and imaginary, with a surpassing vividness. This power he wielded easily, naturally, spontaneously, without ever giving an impression of effort. From the beginning there is life in all his characters, but as he advanced towards maturity his characters came to be more boldly outlined and more complex. His characters differ in sex, age, state of life, virtues and vices, but all of them are alike in being alive. Their parts may be short, they may have to speak only some twenty lines of verse, but they are made unforgettable. He created a multitude of living characters such as have never been created by any other writer. His characters are at once living and true. Whether good or bad, whether

moving among the realities of history or among the most romantic happenings, his characters possess an unfailing humanity, and a striking realism: Rosalind, Portia, Juliet, Cleopatra, Caesar, Brutus, Orlando, Shylock, Falstaff, Touchstone, not to mention the great tragic heroes-indeed the catalogue is endless.

Shakespearean drama is as much epical as romantic. His six dramas of English history and three Roman tragedies, together with *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth* (which are based on legendary chronicles accepted as genuine history by him and his public) form such a whole as is found nowhere else, and constitute the solid bulwark of Shakespearean drama. The plays devoted to national history most plainly connect his work with the old religious drama, of which the original object was not mere pleasure but instruction and moral improvement. His theme in these historical plays is country instead of faith. He imparts knowledge of history as those old poets taught religion. These plays are a continuous history of England over a long period, the whole fifteenth century. Foreign war with its triumphs and disasters, years of prosperity and of misery, glory and shame, princes heroic and mean; all succeed each other in his plays, painted impartially for a public enabled at once to marvel and to learn. Shakespeare keeps this breadth when he leaves London for Rome, and Holinshed for Plutarch. Although no longer inspired by patriotism, he is inspired by the great names of ancient times-Coriolanus, Brutus, Julius Caesar, Antony, Cleopatra. His first care still is to breathe new life into famous men and great events. He succeeds in representing the past with a human truth so deep and with life so intense that his work has become complementary to that of the scholar. With him historical drama reaches its climax in such scenes as that in which the Roman mob, after applauding Brutus, is almost immediately turned against him by the moving eloquence of Antony, so that men weep at the sight of Caesar's body and cry out death to the conspirators.

It would be wrong to identify Shakespeare with any of his characters. His supremacy lies in this - that he could see and understand so much of life, could pierce the heart of so many passions, without falling a prey to any aspect of life; so that we say of him that he is universal, and we dare not say what was his personality. Every phase of feeling lay within the scope of Shakespeare's understanding and sympathy. There is no point of morals, of philosophy, of the conduct of life that he has not touched upon, no mystery of human nature that he has not penetrated. Life and death, love, wealth, poverty, the prizes of life and the way we gain them; the characters of men and the influences and forces which affect them; on all these questions Shakespeare has enriched the world with his thought. In his plays we find pure mirth, bright and tender fancy, airy satire, ardent passion, questionings into the deep and terrible mysteries of life. In almost every play we have the most diverse elements, the high and the low, the great and the little, the noble and the base, the sad and the merry, brought under the dominance of one dramatic purpose. In Jonson's words, Shakespeare "was not of an age, but of all time". So astonishingly wide spread is his glory, that it might also be said that "he was not of a land, but of all lands." Free of every theory, accepting all of life, rejecting nothing, uniting the real and the poetic, appealing to the most various men, to a rude workman as to a wit, Shakespeare's drama is a great river of life and beauty.

Another element of the greatness of Shakespeare is the perfect naturalness of his dialogue. Shakespeare is a master of dramatic dialogue. As De Quincey says, "every form of natural interruption; every form of hasty interrogative and ardent reiteration when a question has been evaded; every form of scornful repetition of the hostile words; every impatient continuation of the hostile statement; in short, all modes and formulae by which anger, hurry, irritation, scorn, impatience, and excitement are expressed-these are plentiful in Shakespeare's dialogue as in life itself. And how much they can add to the realistic effect of his drama is quite evident".

Shakespeare had an amazing genius for words. He shows unrivalled powers of expression. The beauty of words, the aptness and originality of phrases, the wealth of striking similes and metaphors, the felicities of language, the richness and sweetness of verse-these are found in his plays to an astonishing degree. There is on every occasion such a multitudinous flow of words and images from Shakespeare's mind as nothing seems able to stop. Indeed, the foremost dramastist of his age was also the foremost poet. The union of dramatic and lyric elements in the plays is perfect, absolute, and beyond analysis. Beauty comes of the perfection of the style and the versification, the variety of the images, and the accompanying music. There is a triumphant blending of words, metaphors, and lyrical passion in his blank verse. In the capital scenes of the great tragedies-the dialogue of Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet's soliloquies, the scene of the awakening of Othello's jealousy, of Lear's passionate railings, or Macbeth's hallucinations-Shakespeare's mastery of the grand style is unmistakable. Shakespeare possessed in a superlative degree the faculty of compressing thought into language so memorable and so final that he is the most often quoted of all English writers. Indeed, his command over the resources of the language was unique; his vocabulary runs to some 15,000 words while that of Milton contain scarcely more than half that number.

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## 16.5 Shakespearean Comedy : Its Chief Characteristics

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A comedy is often rather crudely defined as a dramatic composition with a happy ending. It has also been defined as a play aiming at the production of laughter, more laughter and nothing but laughter. A Shakespearean comedy has both these elements, it has a happy end and it also makes us laugh. Follies and affectations are exposed and ridiculed, and the treatment is gentle and sympathetic, as it should be in a comedy. However, before we proceed to examine its characteristics in detail, let us first consider the various types of comedy and attempt a suitable classification of the comedies of our dramastist.

(a) *The Classical Comedy.* A comedy, like the drama in general, may be of two types-Classical and Romantic. The classical comedy follows the rules of dramatic composition as laid down by the ancient Greek and Roman masters; its models are the classic dramatists like Plautus, Terence and Aristophanes. The more important of these rules are (1) observance of the three unities of time, place and action (2) The strict separation of the comic and the tragic, or the light and serious elements (3) Realism. It deals with the everyday, familiar life of ordinary people, and (4) Its aim is corrective and satiric. Some human folly, weakness, or social vice is exposed and ridiculed. It laughs at people and not with them. The most noted exponent of the Classical Comedy in England was a younger contemporary of Shakespeare Ben Jonson. His comedy mirrors the life of the times, he depicts and satirises a number of follies of his age, his purpose being to,

*Strip the ragged follies of the time,*

*Naked, as at their birth, and with a whip of steel,*

*Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs.*

(b) *Romantic Comedy* - The Shakespearean Comedy, on the other hand, is a Romantic Comedy. It grew out of national tastes and traditions. The dramatist does not care for any rules of literary creation, but writes according to the dictates of his fancy. The three unities are carelessly thrown to the wind. There is a free mingling of the comic and the tragic, the serious and the gay, for Shakespeare instinctively realised that life is a mingled yarn of joys and sorrows, and it would be unnatural to separate

them. Its aim is not corrective, or satiric, but innocent, good natured laughter. Follies, are no doubt, exposed and ridiculed, but the laughter is gentle and empathetic, and there is no moral indignation, or the zeal of a reformer. The dramatist sympathises even when he laughs. We laugh with people and not at them. In the words of Charlton, "The Shakespearean Comedy is not satiric, it is poetic, it is not conservative; it is creative. The way of it is that of imagination rather than that of pure reason. It is an artist's vision, not a critic's exposition."

Shakespeare's comedies may best be classified as follows, and the classification reveals the way in which his comic genius evolved:

**(1) Early Boisterous Comedies**

*Love's Labour Lost, The Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, and A Midsummer Night's Dream.* These comedies are immature and farcical. They are full of, 'wit and word play, puns and conceits.' Humour is often coarse and cheap.

**(2) Joyous, or "Sunny" Comedies.**

This group includes, among others, *The Merchant of Venice. As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing and Twelfth Night.* In these comedies Shakespeare's comic genius comes to full flowering. Love and music are their very essence, and the atmosphere is one of fun and merry-making throughout. They are rich in the comic spirit which manifests itself at various levels. The glittering heroines of these comedies-Viola, Rosalind, Celia and Beatrice-have been loved and admired by all readers of Shakespeare.

**(3) Painful, Dark, or Somber Comedies**

*Measure for Measure, All is Well that Ends Well and Troilus and Cressida* are the important comedies of this group. In the words of E. Albert, these comedies, "reflect a cynical, disillusioned attitude to life, and a fondness for objectionable characters and situations. In them the dramatist displays a savage desire to expose the falsity of romance and to show the sordid reality of life." All the materials and methods of Shakespeare's tragedies are to be found dispersed in these comedies.

**(4) The Later Comedies or Dramatic Romances**

*Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest.* Towards the close of his career, and after his tragic period, the playwright again returned to comedy, but comedy so unlike the former kind, that the plays of this group are referred to, not as comedies, but as Dramatic Romances. They have their own peculiar features which distinguish them sharply from the earlier comedies. Hence they merit a separate treatment.

**The Romantic Setting**

The Shakespearean Comedy is Romantic not only in the sense that it does not observe the classical rules of dramatic composition, but also in the sense that it provides an escape from the sordid realities of life. "The world of a Shakespearean Comedy," says Raleigh, is a, "rainbow world of love in idleness." The action takes place in some distant far off land, and not in the familiar, everyday England. The dramatist transports us on the wings of his imagination to the forest of Arden, to the shores of Illyria, to Messina, to Navarre or to an ancient forest in Greece. Though critics have tried to locate these lands,



they exist nowhere but in the imagination of the poet. In this land of romance and enchantment, the inhabitants have no other business but that of love-making. "The intensities and realities of life shimmer into smoke and film in that delicate atmosphere." Except in the *Merchant of Venice* and the *Comedy of Errors*, which open on a public mart, nobody ever goes to business or even thinks of business. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reaches the very height of romanticism owing to the presence of the fairies, bright, beautiful, idealised beings of Shakespeare's poetic fancy.

### **Confrontation of Realism and Romance**

In this world of romance, realism enters by a few deft and subtle touches. Indeed, the mingling or confrontation of romance and realism is one of the salient features of the comedy of Shakespeare. The characterisation is realistic. His personages are ordinary human beings, and incidents are such as are possible in common, everyday life. The poet may soar high but his feet are always solidly fixed on the earth. There is a confrontation of the romantic mainplot with a realistic subplot. In the idyllic *As You Like It*, there is the realistic Jacques to remind us of the ingratitude of man which is more painful than winter wind and the frozen sky. In *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the homely Bottom and his companions are constant reminders of the reality of life. In *Twelfth Night* the Malvolio-episode and the wise comments of the Fool serve the same purpose. The setting is poetic and romantic, but it is skilfully related to real life. In this connection Charlton comments : "The world of Shakespeare's comedy is romantic, poetic, and imaginative; but it is by no means unsubstantial and fantastic. The forest of Arden is no conventional Arcadia. Its inhabitants are not exempt from the penalty of Adam. Winter, rough weather, the season's differences, the icy fang and churlish chiding of the winter's wind, invade Arden as often as they invade this hemisphere of ours." And comments Alardyce Nicoll "Characters and scenes alike are viewed through magic easements which transform reality. The settings are all imaginative-an unknown island, Arden, Illyria or Venice-each one conceived in the glow of strong and beautiful fancy. Yet all are related to real life. There are contemporary figures and contemporary fashions in *Love's Labours Lost* and the songs, of the Cuckoo and the owl in this very play are reminders of the hardships of seasons : Bottom and his companions mingle with the fairies: Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew are companions of Viola and Olivia; Dogberry and Verges of Hero and Beatrice," Costard and Dull of the Princess of France and the king of Navarre.

### **The Theme : Love in all Its Manifestations**

A Shakespearean comedy is a story of love, ending with the ringing of marriage bells. Not only are the hero and the heroine in love, but all are in love, and so in the end there is not one marriage but a number of marriages. The entire atmosphere is surcharged with love. In *Love's Labours Lost* there are four pairs of lovers and they fall in love at first sight. The line of Marlowe, "who ever loved that loved not at first sight" is perfectly applicable to Shakespeare's lovers. Their love is engendered in the eye at first sight. Says Raleigh in this connection, "the summons is as inevitable and unforeseen as that of death " it comes to all, clown and courtier, wayward youth and serious maiden, leading them forth on the dance of love through that maze of happy adventure which is Shakespeare's comedy." This desire of the eyes is exhibited in many beautiful and fanciful guises, transforming itself into passion or caprice, and leading its victims to unexpected goals. This youthful love has no commerce with reason. It is high fantastical. It can lead to Titania's infatuation for an ass, so that we agree with Helena when she says:

*Things base and vile; holding no quantity,*

*Love can transpose to form and dignity.*

The true and constant love which is not, 'Time's Fools', and which does not alter when it alteration finds, ennobles, uplifts and inspires both the lover and the beloved. Each tries to outshine the other, as Beatrice and Benedick do in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and each seems to have greater strength, charm or wit, when in the presence of the object of love, than otherwise. Rosalind is at her most charming when talking to Orlando, Portia more poetic in the company of Bassanio, Olivia gay only before Viola (disguised); Beatrice more witty when faced with Benedick", and the ladies of France outshine their lovers in the Civil war of words. "Love is the means of all human fulfilment and the source of all natural fruition."

### **Music, the Food of Love**

Since 'music is the food of love'. Shakespearean Comedy is intensely musical. Music and dance are its very life and soul, *Twelfth Night* opens with music which strikes the key-note of this merry tale of love. Several exquisite songs are scattered all over *Love's Labour Lost*. Similarly, there are references to the facts human suffering, disease and death. *As You Like It*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, too, abound in music. In the end, there is always music dance and merry-making with Hymen, the god of love, presiding. Indeed, Shakespeare is prodigal in the provision of light-hearted mirth and revelry in his comedies. It is only in the latter and darker comedies, when the dramatist's mind was centred on tragic themes that this musical spirit takes on a graver and more serious turn. Thus in *Measure for Measure* we hear music only once i.e. in the idyllic song of Mariana in the mooted grange.

### **The Fool : His Role and Significance**

This all pervasive spirit of mirth gains much from the presence of the Fool, or some clownish characters when the dramatist introduces into all his love tales. Consterd and Moth, Bottom and his companions, the musical Feste, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby, Touchstone, Dogberry and Verges, come readily to mind to all readers of Shakespeare. Besides contributing fun and humour to the play, they inter-link the main and the sub-plots, and provide a running commentary on character and action. Sometimes the Fool is not really a fool, but the wisest character of the play. For instance, Touchstone's acid comments are replete with much practical wisdom.

### **True Love : Difficulties in Its Way**

'The course of true love never did run smooth' wrote Marlowe, and the remark is particularly applicable to Shakespeare's love-tales. Difficulties soon come in the way of the lovers. Misunderstandings arise, or there is the hostility of parents, friends of other relatives, and consequently, there are much tears and sighs, before the final union takes place. Thoradilke rightly remarks, "The course of true love for each couple is crossed by separation, misunderstanding, disguises, magic, and perhaps the temporary unfaithfulness of soul or the other one and ladies must pass through adventures, combats and risks to final "Lover's reunion."

### **The Role of Chance and Goddess Fortune**

But all these complications, all these difficulties, which beset the path of the hero and the heroine are unexpectedly and unaccountably removed. Things turn up by chance at the right moment and all ends well. It is as if some unseen power, some friendly God, watches benignly over the lovers and helps them when they stand in need of it. As in the Tragedies, so in the Comedies. Fate takes a hand in the human action. But says Raleigh, "Fate in the realm of comedy, appears in the milder and more

capricious character of Fortune, whose wheel turns again and again and vindicates the merry heart.” This fortune of the comedies, or “Circumstance, the mirthful God,” as Dowden would have it, is a kindly and sympathetic being who only enjoys a bit of fun, like Puck or Ariel, at the expense of poor mortals, but is never unfavourable to them. Often it assumes a supernatural form, as in *Mid-Summer Night’s Dream*, “sporting, not malevolently, with human weakness.” It is by the intervention of this kindly goddess, that all the ships of Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* return home safe just at the right moment, that Sebastian arrives at the scene just in time to save Viola from a bloody duel, that the love tangle in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* is satisfactorily resolved, and that Dogberry and Verges in *Much Ado* overhear the villainous plot and expose it. As Viola puts it,

*“O Time, thou most untangle this, not I;*

*It is too hard a knot for me to untie.”*

Fate or fortune does it all, not the puny mortals. “*Love’s Labour Lost*” is the only play of our dramatist in which there are no such complications.

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## 16.6 A Brief Act-Wise and Scene-Wise Summary

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### ACT-I, SCENE-I

#### **Orlando’s Complaint Against His Eldest Brother, Oliver**

The play opens with a dialogue between Orlando and Adam. Orlando is the youngest son of the late Sir Rowland de Boys, while Adam is a servant who has served the family for many years and is still in their service. Orlando confides his troubles to Adam. Orlando is not being treated properly by his eldest brother Oliver who had been charged by his late father to look after Orlando and educate him properly. Another son of the late Sir Rowland is studying at the university and is being properly looked after by Oliver. It is only against Orlando that, for some strange reason, Oliver harbours an antipathy. Orlando now complains to Adam that his education has sadly been neglected by Oliver, and that he is being treated by Oliver as no better than an ox. Oliver is looking after his horses with greater care than he is looking after Orlando. As a consequence of this ill-treatment, Orlando is now in a rebellious mood. He tells Adam that his spirit has begun to mutiny against his eldest brother (namely Oliver).

#### **Oliver’s Hostility Towards Orlando**

While Orlando is thus talking to Adam, Oliver appears on the scene. Orlando bluntly tells Oliver that Oliver is not discharging the responsibility with which their late father had entrusted him. Oliver, in a fit of rage, slaps Orlando, whereupon Orlando seizes Oliver by his neck and threatens to give him a thrashing because Oliver has, besides slapping him, called him a villain. Oliver is no match for Orlando in physical strength because Orlando is a very stout and robust young man. In response to Orlando’s demand, Oliver promises to give him some portion of the thousand crowns which Sir Rowland had bequeathed to him by his will. Thereupon Orlando releases Oliver. Orlando and Adam then leave, while Oliver in a soliloquy decides to teach Orlando a lesson and also to withhold the thousand crowns which is Orlando’s share of the family property.

#### **Duke Senior, Banished By the Usurper, Frederick**

Charles, a wrestler in the pay of Duke Frederick, now pays a visit to Oliver. In reply to a

question by Oliver, Charles says that Duke Senior, who was the rightful ruler of the kingdom, had been deposed by his younger brother, Frederick. Frederick has usurped Duke Senior's dominion and has assumed all the powers and the authority which belonged to Duke Senior. Duke Senior is now living in exile in the company of three or four devoted lords who have voluntarily gone with him, and whose lands and property have also now passed into the hands of the usurper, namely, Duke Frederick. However, Duke Senior's daughter by the name of Rosalind is still living at the court, because Duke Frederick's daughter Celia is deeply attached to Rosalind, and because Duke Frederick has for this reason allowed Rosalind to stay on at the court and keep company with Celia. Charles also tells Oliver that Duke Senior and his companions are now living in the forest of Arden and are leading a carefree life just as the old outlaw, Robin Hood, used to live merrily with his companions.

### **Oliver's Hope that Charles Would Kill Orlando**

Charles has something more to tell Oliver. A wrestling match is to be held on the following day in the presence of Duke Frederick; and Charles has come to know that Oliver's youngest brother Orlando wishes to participate in that match in order to test his strength against Charles. As Charles entertains some regard for Oliver, he tells Oliver to advise his brother Orlando to withdraw his name from the wrestling contest because Charles is to fight for his prestige and his reputation, and because he would not therefore show any mercy to any contender. Charles says that he intends to break the bones of anyone who comes forward to wrestle with him in this prestigious contest. Oliver perceives a golden opportunity in what Charles has told him. He therefore takes up the position that his brother Orlando is a jealous rival of Charles's, and that Charles has every right to deal with Orlando as he may deem fit. In fact, Oliver instigates Charles against Orlando, so that Charles should actually break Orlando's bones and may even give him such severe blows as to kill him. After Charles has left, Oliver in a soliloquy expresses the hope that Charles would put an end to Orlando's life in the wrestling contest which is to take place on the following day. Oliver also admits in this soliloquy that his brother enjoys a lot of popularity, while he himself is for some reason or the other disliked by people. However, he is hopeful that the professional wrestler, Charles, would settle the whole affair to Oliver's satisfaction.

## **ACT-I, SCENE-II**

### **Celia's Consoling Words to Rosalind**

Rosalind, the daughter of the banished Duke, is feeling melancholy, while Celia is trying to cheer her up. Celia says that Rosalind should regard Duke Frederick as her father and should not therefore feel depressed. Celia also says that, after the death of Duke Frederick, she would restore the dukedom to Rosalind because Celia is fully aware of the fact that Rosalind's father has unjustly and wrongfully been banished by Duke Frederick.

### **Celia's and Rosalind's Complaint Against Lady Fortune**

The two girls then decide to play some game as a kind of pastime. Rosalind asks what Celia thinks of the game of falling in love. Celia replies that a girl might play the game of love as long as she does not fall seriously in love and does not bring disgrace to herself by some sort of indiscretion. Celia then suggests that they should sit down and rail against Lady Fortune who often bestows her favours upon undeserving persons. Rosalind agrees that Lady Fortune is certainly a blind woman who is especially unjust that she bestows beauty upon those women who are unchaste, and bestows chastity upon those who are ugly to look at.

### **Touchstone, a Professional Fool or Jester**

Touchstone now appears on the scene. Touchstone is the court-jester in the pay of Duke Frederick. In other words, he is a professional fool. On seeing him, Celia says that Lady Fortune has sent this man here so that she and Rosalind may be able to poke fun at him. Celia expresses the view that Touchstone is a whetstone for her wit and for Rosalind's wit. Touchstone tells Celia that her father has summoned her. Touchstone also now gets an opportunity to make a couple of witty remarks in which he ridicules one of the courtiers of Duke Frederick.

### **Three Wrestlers, Already Defeated By Charles**

Le Beau, a courtier, comes and informs the two ladies that the wrestling contest is in progress and that the court wrestler, Charles, has already thrown three contenders to the ground and, in fact, broken their ribs. All the three defeated wrestlers, who are brothers, now lie on the ground in a most miserable condition, with their father lamenting their sad fate. It is now the turn of Orlando to fight the court wrestler.

### **Rosalind's and Celia's Sympathy for Orlando**

Duke Frederick, accompanied by a few of his courtiers, now arrives. He is followed by Orlando, Charles, and some attendants. Orlando is ready to fight Charles. Everybody thinks that Charles would easily defeat Orlando, and might break his ribs also. Duke Frederick tries to dissuade Orlando from fighting Charles, but Orlando is not afraid of the court wrestler. Rosalind and Celia are also moved to pity when they come to know that Orlando, a handsome young man, is going to risk his life by fighting the court wrestler who is undoubtedly a man of great strength. They too try to dissuade Orlando from fighting Charles, but Orlando replies that there is no room for him in this world and that, if he gets killed by Charles, it would not matter much. Evidently, Orlando is fed up with life, and would not mind being killed by Charles. In any case, two ladies offer their good wishes to Orlando.

### **Duke Frederick's Hostility Towards Orlando**

In the contest which now follows, Charles is thrown down to the ground by Orlando in a matter of minutes. In fact, Charles swoons because of the blows which he has received from Orlando. Everybody is surprised at the outcome of the contest. Duke Frederick would like to congratulate Orlando on his achievement but, when he learns that Orlando is the son of the late Sir Rowland, he loses his temper with Orlando. Duke Frederick had always regarded Sir Rowland as his enemy, even though everybody else had held Sir Rowland in great esteem. Sir Rowland had been a favourite of Duke Senior; and Duke Frederick therefore now feels indignant with Orlando.

### **Rosalind in Love; Orlando Too in Love**

Duke Frederick leaves in a mood of annoyance. Rosalind now feels most favourably inclined towards Orlando because Rosalind's father had been very favourably disposed Orlando's late father. In fact, Rosalind has fallen in love with Orlando. It is a case of love at first sight. She takes off her chain from her neck and gives it as a reward to Orlando. Orlando too has fallen in love with Rosalind. When the two ladies have gone away. Le Beau comes and advises Orlando to take suitable measures for his safety, because Duke Frederick is feeling much annoyed with him and might do him some harm. Le Beau further tells Orlando that Duke Frederick is now feeling angry with Rosalind also. Duke Frederick

has come to know that Rosalind is becoming more and more popular with the people who are feeling sympathetic towards her because her father had wrongfully been banished from his dominions. Duke Frederick would now like to get rid of Rosalind also. As for Orlando, he inwardly deplors the fact that he must now go back to his tyrannical brother's house where he has been living. He had expected to be rewarded by Duke Frederick but he was only incurred Duke Frederick's displeasure.

### **ACT-I, SCENE-III**

#### **Rosalind's Confession of Her Love to Celia**

Rosalind is again in a melancholy mood, this time because she is in love. Celia is surprised at Rosalind's having fallen in love so suddenly. She asks Rosalind if the latter has really fallen into so strong a liking for the late Sir Rowland's youngest son. Rosalind replies that her father, the banished Duke, had dearly loved Orlando's father, and that, therefore, it is only logical that she should dearly love Orlando.

#### **Duke Frederick's Order of Banishment Against Rosalind**

Duke Frederick comes in the company of a few of his lords, He is in an angry mood. He abruptly tells Rosalind that she must get ready to quit his court. Both Rosalind and Celia are astonished to hear these words. Rosalind asks what fault she has committed. Duke Frederick says that she is a traitor, and that he cannot allow her to remain at his court. Duke Frederick describes Rosalind's father also as a traitor. Rosalind says that, in the first place, her father was never a traitor and that, secondly, treason is not something which a son or a daughter inherits from their father. Celia now intervenes to defend Rosalind. But Duke Frederick tells Celia that she should keep quiet. Celia says that there is a deep attachment between her and Rosalind and that, if Rosalind is a traitor, then she (Celia) too is a traitor. Celia says that she and Rosalind have been sleeping together, rising from bed at the same time, studying together, playing together, eating together, and going everywhere together like Juno's swans. Duke Frederick says that Rosalind is a very cunning girl, and that her charm of manner, her very reserve, and her calmness in the face of misfortune have won her the sympathy of the people. Duke Frederick further says that, in Rosalind's presence, Celia's own virtues and accomplishments have been eclipsed. It would, therefore, be in Celia's own interest if Rosalind leaves the court. Celia says that her father should banish her (Celia) also, because she cannot live without Rosalind. Duke Frederick does not soften and categorically orders Rosalind to leave his court within ten days, and not be seen anywhere within twenty miles of his palace.

#### **Celia's and Rosalind's Plan to Flee From the Court**

After Duke Frederick has gone away, Celia says that her father's order banishing Rosalind means that she (Celia) has been banished too. Celia says that she will never allow herself to be separated from Rosalind. She assures Rosalind that she would go with her. When Rosalind asks whither they would go, Celia replies that they would go to the forest of Arden and join Duke Senior who is believed to be living there. Rosalind says that for two ladies like them to travel without a male companion would be a very hazardous undertaking because "beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold." Celia says that she would hide her beauty by putting on mean clothes and smearing her face with some brown paint. She suggests that Rosalind should also, in a similar manner, hide her beauty. Rosalind, however, says that, as she is a very tall girl, she could successfully disguise herself as a man. She would put on a man's clothes; she would wear a short sword on her thigh; she would carry a spear in her hand; and, in short, she would appear to be man in every respect. She would give herself the

name of Ganymede (which actually was the name of the boy-servant of the supreme god, Jove). Celia says that she would give herself the name of Aliena (which means a “stranger”). Rosalind now suggests that, if they are to flee from the court, they should take Touchstone, the “clownish fool”, with them. Celia says that Touchstone would do anything for her sake, and that she can therefore prevail upon Touchstone to go with them. Celia also suggests that they should take all their jewellery and their gold with them. They would be fleeing from the court “to liberty, and not to banishment,” says Celia.

## **ACT-II, SCENE-I**

### **Duke Senior’s View of His Life in the Forest of Arden**

The scene now shifts to the forest of Arden where we meet Duke Senior and the lords who had gone voluntarily into exile with him. Duke Senior asks his comrades if they have not yet become fully accustomed to their life in the forest, and if they do not find this life sweeter than the artificial display of life at the court. Duke Senior says that here in the forest they are certainly exposed to the cold and icy winds of winter, but that these winds may be compared to honest counsellors who do not flatter them but who frankly remind them of their human infirmities. Duke Senior says that they are certainly facing hardships in the forest, but that hardships are a blessing in disguise. “Sweet are the uses of adversity”, says Duke Senior. He compares adversity to the toad which is ugly and venomous, but which at the same time carries in its head a precious jewel having certain medicinal properties. Duke Senior further says that he and his companions are leading a quiet life, away from crowded public places, and that here in the forest they find “tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything”. One of the lords by the name of Amiens fully agrees with Duke Senior’s remarks.

### **Duke Senior, Also a Usurper, According to Jaques**

Duke Senior now suggests that they should get ready for the hunt and should kill a few deer for their meat. At the same time, Duke Senior deplors the fact that the deer, who are the native dwellers of the forest, should be wounded and killed with arrows from the bows of the hunters. One of the lords thereupon says that the melancholy Jaques feels much grieved by the fact that Duke Senior and his companions are in the habit of killing the deer who live in their own natural abode. Jaques is of the view that Duke Senior is as much a usurper as his brother Duke Frederick is. Duke Frederick has usurped the dominions of Duke-Senior, while Duke Senior has usurped the dominions of these deer who live in this forest.

### **Jaques’s Meditations Upon a Wounded Animal**

On one occasion, says this lord, Jaques had seen a wounded deer shedding tears and letting his tears fall into the stream in the forest. Jaques had also seen a herd of deer jumping and running past this wounded deer, but paying no attention to their wounded comrade. Jaques had there upon commented upon this spectacle in a moralizing vein. Jaques had said that the deer was weeping into the stream in the same ways as rich people leave their wealth to those who are already rich. Rich people write their wills by which they leave their estates and property to those who already have enough property of their own. In the same way the wounded deer was pouring his tears into a stream which was already full of water. And the herd of the deer behave in the same manner in which over-prosperous people behave towards those who are in distress. Many human beings, who are enjoying prosperity, pay no heed to those who are facing financial difficulties. In this way Jaques had spoken in severe and harsh terms about mankind, and had criticized and condemned people whether living in the country, in the city, or

at the court. Jaques had also strongly condemned Duke Senior and Duke Senior's comrades for shooting arrows at the deer, and wounding or killing them in the deer's own native dwelling-place. After having heard this account, Duke Senior says that he would like to have a talk with Jaques when Jaques is in this moralizing mood because at such times Jaques's mind is full of weighty ideas.

## **ACT II, SCENE II**

### **Duke Frederick in an Indignant Mood**

This scene takes us back to Duke Frederick's court. Duke Frederick is shocked to find that his daughter and his niece have fled from home without anybody having detected their departure. He thinks that some of his courtiers must have connived at the flight of the two girls, and might even have aided them. One of his courtiers tells him that the court-jester, Touchstone, is also missing, and that this fellow must also have gone with the two princesses. This courtier also says that, in his opinion, the two princesses had fled in the company of young Orlando who had defeated the court-wrestler Charles in a contest, and who had won high praise from the two girls. Duke Frederick thereupon orders his men to look for Orlando and says that, in case they cannot trace Orlando, they should bring Orlando's brother Oliver to him, so that he may question that man regarding the whereabouts of Orlando.

## **ACT-II, SCENE-III**

### **Orlando's Life in Danger**

Having won the wrestling contest in which he had overthrown Charles, Orlando now returns to his brother's house where Adam, the servant, informs him that his success in the wrestling match had greatly upset his brother Oliver who has therefore decided to devise some method of putting an end of Orlando's life. At first Oliver had thought that Orlando would be killed by Charles in the wrestling contest; but, having learnt that Orlando had emerged as the winner in the wrestling contest, Oliver has now decided to set fire to the house when Orlando is sleeping inside so that Orlando may be burnt to death. Adam has overheard Oliver confiding his plans to someone; and now Adam conveys this whole information to Orlando. Adam warns Orlando against sleeping in his house, and advises him to look for some other dwelling. Adam says that, in case Oliver fails to kill Orlando by setting fire to Orlando's dwelling, he would devise some other method of doing so. Orlando feels non-plussed on hearing about Oliver's wicked plans. He asks Adam what he should do under the circumstances. How should he now earn his living? Should he become a beggar or should he become a robber? As no respectable course of action seems open to Orlando, he tells Adam that he would have to risk his life by sleeping in the usual place. Adam, however, repeats his warning to Orlando, and firmly opposes the desperate course of action which Orlando has in mind. Adam then places his whole life's savings at Orlando's disposal. Adam says that he has got five hundred crowns which he has saved from his wages over the long period of time during which he had served Sir Rowland. Adam had saved all this money for his old age but now, finding Orlando in great distress, he offers the entire amount to him and also offers his services to his young master in addition to the cash. Orlando is greatly struck by the faithfulness of Adam and pays him a glowing compliment on his generosity and his spirit of service. Orlando says that Adam has in him the spirit of service and devotion which servants used to have in olden times, but which the servants of the present times do not have at all. At the same time Orlando compares himself to a rotten tree which, far from bearing any fruit, cannot yield even a blossom. What Orlando means is that he would not be able to make any return to Adam for the offer of money and service which Adam has made to Orlando. But Adam does not want any return; and so he tells Orlando



not to waste any time but to flee from this place. Adam promises to serve Orlando till his last breath with sincerity and loyalty. Adam has lived in this household from the age of seventeen; and now his age is eighty. But Adam would no longer like to live in a house where the eldest brother has become bitterly hostile to his youngest brother. And so Orlando and Adam depart from the city where they had been living till now.

## **ACT-II, SCENE-IV**

### **Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone in the Forest of Arden**

Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone have arrived in the forest of Arden in accordance with their plan. Rosalind is disguised as a man, and has taken the name of Ganymede. Celia has now assumed the name of Aliena. Having covered a long distance, all the three are feeling extremely tired. However, Rosalind thinks it her duty to offer comfort to Celia because Rosalind is disguised as a man and because it is man's duty to comfort and console "the weaker vessel". "Doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat", says Rosalind. Touchstone jokingly says that he is really a fool to have accompanied the two ladies to the forest of Arden because, when he was at home, he was in a more comfortable place.

### **Shepherd, Silvius, in Love With the Shepherdess Phebe**

Just then two shepherds, an old one by the name of Corin, and the other a young man by the name of Silvius, appear on the scene. The two men are conversing with each other in solemn tones. They have not noticed the presence of Rosalind, Celia, and Touchstone who are sitting nearby, and who can overhear their conversation. Silvius tells Corin that he is over head and ears in love with the shepherdess Phebe, but that she does not care for him. Corin says that he can understand Silvius's feelings because he too had been in love when he was young. Silvius says that Corin cannot understand or appreciate his passion for Phebe because Corin, being now an old man, cannot put himself in Silvius's position. Silvius's wretched condition moves Rosalind to sympathy. In fact, Silvius's misery as a lover reminds Rosalind of her own passion for Orlando. We recall that Rosalind had fallen in love with Orlando at first sight. Now, when Rosalind speaks of her own love for Orlando, Touchstone makes fun of her.

### **Touchstone's Mocking Account of His Own Love**

Touchstone now says that he has been reminded of the time when he himself was in love. He had once gone to meet his beloved Jane Smile at the time of the night, and had carried his sword with him. On arriving at Jane Smile's house, he had realized that he had a rival. His rival in love was no other than his own sword. Feeling greatly annoyed to find his rival also at his beloved's house, he had broken his sword upon a stone in order to teach his rival a lesson. Touchstone also says that his passion for Jane Smile had made him kiss the wooden bat with which she used to beat her clothes when washing them, and that he had also kissed the cow's udder from which Jane Smile's pretty but rough hands had drawn milk. Actually Touchstone, by talking in this manner, is making fun of the absurdities which people in love often commit. He concludes this speech of his by saying that true lovers often run into strange capers and that, just as everything in nature is subject to death, so is every being created by nature liable to commit the most absurd actions under the influence of the passion of love. Rosalind heartily agrees with Touchstone's view that those, who are in love, do often perform preposterous actions in their become bitterly hostile to his youngest brother. And so Orlando and Adam depart from the city where they had been living till now.

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### **Rosalind and Celia to Settle Down in the Forest of Arden**

Rosalind then accosts the old shepherd Corin and asks him if it is possible for her and her companions to find shelter and food in this forest. Corin says that he is only a servant to the man who owns a lot of property in the forest and who is also the owner of the flock of sheep which he (Corin) has to feed and look after. He further tells Rosalind that his master wishes to sell his property including

his cottage and his flock of sheep, and that young Silvius is the prospective buyer. Rosalind and Celia then say that they would themselves like to buy this property because they would like to settle down here in this forest. They also offer to engage Corin to look after the property which they would buy, and they promise to pay him high wages than he is getting at present.

### **Jaques's Melancholy Disposition**

As we have already noted, Duke Senior is living in the forest of Arden in the company of a few of his lords who had voluntarily accompanied him into exile. These lords include Amiens and Jaques. In this scene we find Amiens, Jaques, and a few others talking among themselves. Amiens sings a song which greatly pleases Jaques who asks Amiens to continue singing. Amiens says that his song is optimistic, and that it is likely to put Jaques into a melancholy mood. Jaques replies that he can suck melancholy out of a song as a weasel sucks eggs. What Jaques means is that he is by nature a melancholy man, and that he would like to deepen his natural melancholy by listening to Amiens's singing. Jaques also says that he would thank Amiens for his song even though he regards the act of thanking as a piece of hypocrisy. Jaques says that, when a man pays a compliment to another man, it seems to Jaques as if two apes have met and are grinning at each other. Jaques further says that, when any man thanks him heartily, he feels as if he had given a penny to that man, and that the recipient had in return offered his thanks to him like a beggar who has received some alms.

### **A Song, Composed By Jaques**

Amiens then informs Jaques that Duke Senior had been looking for him (Jaques) all day. Jaques replies that he had been trying to avoid Duke Senior all day. Jaques further says that Duke Senior's company is not welcome to him because the Duke is a very disputatious man. Amiens then resumes singing his song. Having heard Amiens's song, Jaques recites a few verses which, he says, he had composed on the previous day. While Amiens had sung a song in which he had praised the life of hardship in the forest, Jaques's verses are a condemnation of people who give up a comfortable life in the city in order to face the hardships of forest life. After having recited his verses Jaques says that he would now try to sleep and that, if he cannot sleep, he would curse all the first-born of Egypt, meaning that he would curse the eldest child of every Egyptian family because, according to the Biblical account, all the eldest children of all the families in Egypt had died, causing their parents to lament their deaths and making it impossible for anybody to have any sleep.

## **ACT-II, SCENE-VI**

### **Adam, Exhausted and Extremely Hungry**

Orlando and Adam, having departed from the city in quest of security, arrive in the forest of Arden. The long journey has completely exhausted Adam who, as we have already noted, is an old man of eighty. Adam is on the verge of fainting, and he tells Orlando that he can walk no further. Adam's predicament is all the more serious because he has had no food during the journey and is now extremely hungry. Orlando tries to comfort Adam, and says that he would try to get some food from somewhere for Adam. He urges Adam to cheer up and asks him to wait patiently for a little while so that he may go and bring him something to eat. He promises not to let Adam die of starvation.

### **Jaques, Composed of Discords, According to Duke Senior**

Duke Senior and his companions have assembled to eat their meals. But there is no sign of Jaques. Duke Senior asks what could have happened to Jaques, and why he is not present here to

partake of the meal. One of the lords tells Duke Senior that Jaques was here only a little while ago and had been enjoying Amiens's singing. Duke Senior says that Jaques is a man composed of discords and that such a man cannot enjoy singing. However, if Jaques has suddenly developed a love of music, it is something most unexpected and most astonishing.

### **Jaques, Feeling Much Pleased at Having Met Touchstone**

Just then Jaques appears on the scene. Duke Senior asks him where he had been all this time. Jaques replies that he had met a fool, a motley fool, in the forest. Jaques says that the fool had been basking in the sun, and had been railing against Lady Fortune in strong terms. Jaques had wished a good morning to the fool, whereupon the fool had said that he should not be called a fool till heaven had made him rich. (The fool to whom Jaques is referring is no other than Touchstone whom Jaques has met by chance in the forest. Touchstone has told Jaques that Fortune favours only fools and that, for this reason, a man should be called a fool only when Fortune has made him rich). Touchstone had also told Jaques that time keeps passing without a pause, and that, hour by hour, a man grows older and older, or riper and riper, and that in this way a man's whole life is spent till he dies and begins to rot. On hearing the fool talk in this wise manner, Jaques had felt much amused and had laughed a good deal. In fact, Jaques had laughed for one whole hour without any break. Jaques refers to Touchstone as a noble fool and as a worthy fool, and says that the proper clothes for a man to wear are the motley clothes of a fool.

### **Jaques's Desire to Have a Jester's Freedom in Talk**

In reply to Duke Senior's question as to who this fool was, Jaques replies that this fool (whom he had met in the forest just by chance) had been a courtier at one time, and that this fool had expressed the view that, if ladies are young and beautiful, they somehow become conscious of their youth and beauty. Jaques says that the brain of this fool (namely, Touchstone) is packed with knowledge and information which he had gathered through his powers of observation, and which he now expresses in a disjointed and disconnected manner. Jaques then says that he himself would like to play the same role of a professional fool which Touchstone had been playing. Jaques further says that it is now his ambition to wear a motley coat and thus to become a professional jester. Jaques goes on to say that, if he becomes a professional jester like Touchstone, he would enjoy unlimited freedom in his talk. He would then be in a position to criticize anybody and everybody. He would have as much freedom to mock at others as the wind has to blow upon people and things. When a professional fool ridicules people for their follies and their vices, nobody feels offended because they know that the fool is a privileged man having unlimited freedom to make jokes and expose people to ridicule. In fact, a man who is being ridiculed by a fool should pretend as if the fool is not talking about him but about somebody else. A sensible man is he who never shows any awareness of the fact that the fool is mocking at him or at any folly of his. Jaques further says that, if he were given this unlimited freedom to attack people with his witty remarks, he would be able to reform the world and would be able to cleanse the diseased body of the world. However, Duke Senior says that, instead of reforming the diseased world and ridding it of its vices, Jaques would be adding to the evil of the world because Jaques has, in his time, been a libertine or a dissolute man and because, while speaking in connection with the vices of other people, Jaques would inevitably mention those evils and vices in which he himself had been indulging at one time. By thus mentioning such evils and vices, Jaques would be acquainting his listeners with certain evils and vices of which they are at present absolutely ignorant and of which they have never heard till now.

### **Jaques's Criticism of People's Extravagance in Spending Money**

Jaques takes no notice of the adverse remarks which Duke Senior has made about him. On the contrary, Jaques goes on to say that, as a jester, he would condemn people's habit of living beyond their means and dressing themselves in costly clothes which they cannot afford. He says that people spend so much money in order to make a display of their luxurious living that they ultimately exhaust all their means and thus reduce themselves to poverty. Jaques says that he would make satirical remarks about city-woman who spend as much money on their clothes as members of a royal family do. No particular city-woman would be justified in resenting his criticism of such extravagance because he would not be criticizing any particular city-woman but would be criticizing city-woman in general. A sensible man, according to Jaques, is one who does not apply a jester's words of condemnation to himself but pretends that the jester's satirical remarks do not concern him at all, even if he knows that he is really the target of the jester's satirical remarks.

### **Orlando's Threatening Attitude Towards Duke Senior**

At this point Orlando bursts in upon the assembled lords and, with his sword drawn, warns them against touching their food till he and his aged companion (namely, Adam) have first been fed. Duke Senior asks who he is and whether he is adopting this threatening attitude because of his low breeding or whether it is some pressing necessity which compels him to behave in this manner. Orlando explains that there is an aged man who had come to the forest of Arden with him, and who is now on the verge of death on account of sheer hunger and fatigue. Duke Senior urges Orlando to bring his old companion here so that both of them may be provided with as much food as they wish to have. Duke Senior says that none of them would touch the meal before them till Orlando and his companion have been fed. When Orlando has gone to bring Adam to this spot, Duke Senior tells his lords that they are not the only miserable persons in the world and that this world is a wide and universal theatre on the stage of which there are all sorts of wretched and unhappy persons playing their respective roles.

### **The Seven Sub-Divisions of a Man's Life**

Now Jaques, taking his cue from the remark that Duke Senior has made, describes the whole world as a stage and all the men and women in this world as merely actors. Each man, says Jaques, first appears in this world and ultimately makes his exit from here after playing various roles on the stage of the world's theatre. The life of a man, says Jaques, may be divided into seven parts. At first there is the infant, mewling and puking in the nurse's arms. Then there is the whining school-boy with his books and his bright morning face, who goes to school slowly and unwillingly. Then there is the lover, sighing like a furnace, and reciting a love-poem which he has addressed to his mistress and in which he has praised her beauty. Then there is the soldier who has picked up all sorts of strange oaths from foreign countries, and who keeps a beard resembling the whiskers of a leopard. The soldier is very sensitive to insult and is therefore rash in quarrelling with people. He seeks military glory even though, in doing so, he risks his life on the battle-field. Then there is the magistrate, with his round belly filled with chicken-meat, with his stern eyes and a beard of formal cut. The magistrate is full of wise proverbs which he illustrates with oft-repeated examples. The sixth age in the life of a man is that of the lean and slippered dotard, wearing spectacles, and stockings which are too loose for his shrunken legs. The final part in human existence is that of the old man who has lost his teeth, his eyesight, his sense of taste, and his memory, and who is now as feeble as a child. In fact, extreme old age may be described as a second childhood because, in this period of his life, a man is utterly helpless and is dependent on

others.

### **Orlando Doubly Welcome to Duke Senior's Banquet**

Orlando now returns, bringing Adam with him. Duke Senior cordially invites both the men to the banquet and asks them to eat. Duke Senior also requests a song from Amiens. Amiens sings a song in which he refers to the cruelty of the winter wind and in which he speaks about human ingratitude which is even more cruel than the icy wind. Friendship, says Amiens in his song, is just a false pretence, and loving is mere folly. The freezing air is not so cruel as is a man's behaviour in forgetting a friend. Most friendship is feigning, and most loving is mere folly. While Amiens is singing his song, and while Adam is eating the food before him, Orlando tells Duke Senior that he is the late Sir Rowland's son. Duke Senior feels very pleased to learn Orlando's identity because Sir Rowland had been a very intimate friend of Duke Senior. Orlando is now doubly welcome to Duke Senior's banquet.

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### **16.7 Some Important Explanations:**

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1. *She is too subtle for thee, and her smoothness,  
Her very silence, and her patience.  
Speak to the people, and they pity her.  
Thou art a fool; she robs thee of thy name,  
And thou wilt show more bright and seem more virtuous  
When she is gone. Then open not thy lips.  
Firm and irrevocable is my doom  
Which I have pass'd upon her; she is banished.*

#### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As you Like It*, are a speech by Duke Frederick to his daughter Celia. Duke Frederick has suddenly decided to banish Rosalind, the daughter of Duke Frederick's brother who has already been banished from the kingdom of Duke Frederick. Celia protests against her father's decision. In these lines, Duke Frederick tries to convince Celia that it is in Celia's own interest that Rosalind be banished from the kingdom.

#### **Explanation**

Duke Frederick says that Rosalind is too cunning for Celia because Rosalind is using all possible methods to win the hearts of the people and in this way to push Celia into the background. The Duke says that Rosalind's apparent charm, her habitual silence and her calm feeling of resignation to her condition—all these touch the hearts of the people, so that they feel sympathetic towards her. Duke Frederick further says that Celia is a fool not to realize that Rosalind's presence at the court serves only to eclipse Celia's good name and Celia's prestige. Celia would appear to be brighter and more admirable because of her virtues after Rosalind has left the kingdom. Duke Frederick therefore urges Celia to keep quiet, saying that the sentence which he has passed against Rosalind is firm and cannot be withdrawn. His sentence, he says, is that Rosalind must quit his kingdom and go into exile.

## Critical Comments

These lines throw a lot of light on the character of Duke Frederick. He is a most unscrupulous man who has already usurped his brother's dukedom and installed himself as the head of the State. These lines show that he is a heartless and cruel man who feels no shame at all in banishing an innocent and helpless girl. Now we can understand how brutal he must have been in his treatment of his brother. He has completely misunderstood the character of his niece, Rosalind, whom he accuses of evil designs and crookedness. By this speech he makes himself even more odious in our eyes than he was before.

2. *Are not these woods*

*More free from peril than the envious court?*

*Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,*

*The seasons' difference, as the icy fang*

*And churlish chiding of the winter's wind.*

*Which when it bites and blows upon my body*

*Even till I shrink with cold, I smile, and say*

*This is not flattery. These are counsellors*

*That feelingly persuade me what I am'.*

## Context

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As you Like It*, are part of a speech by Duke Senior to the lords who have accompanied him into exile. Duke Senior has become accustomed to his life in the forest, with all its hardship.

## Explanation

The Duke asks his lords if they do not agree with him in his view that these woods are more free from danger than the court with its jealousies and rivalries. Here, in the forest, they are none the worse for having to endure the punishment which was originally imposed on their first ancestor, Adam. Adam was the first man whom God created. Having created him, God allowed him to live a life of perfect ease and comfort in the Garden of Eden. But when Adam disobeyed one of God's commands, God expelled Adam, and also his female companion Eve, from there, thus exposing them both to all the climatic changes and hardships of earthly existence. Adam's punishment consisted in the change of seasons on the earth because, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve enjoyed eternal spring. The Duke goes on to say that, here in the forest, they have undoubtedly to endure the icy sting and the severe buffetings of the winter wind. When this icy wind blows upon the Duke's body, piercing his flesh and bones, the Duke begins to shrink with cold. But even then the Duke only smiles, and points out that the wind and the cold are at least frank and free from hypocrisy, because they are making him conscious of what he actually is and are not trying to produce in him any wrong impression about his bodily strength and endurance. The elements are not hiding their severity under any false show of warmth. Thus the cold winds of winter do not follow the example of the courtiers who falsely flatter their sovereign. On the contrary, these cold winds are like true and wise advisers who make him realize, with all his bodily senses, his actual physical limitations and his frailties.

## Critical Comments

These lines contain a vivid picture of the intensity and severity of the wintry cold which human beings have to endure when they do not have sufficient protection against the cruelty of weather conditions. Duke Senior here effectively conveys to us the hardships which he is experiencing in the forest by having been exposed to the changes of seasons.

“The icy fang and churlish chiding of the winter’s wind” make him shrink with cold! At the same time these lines show Duke Senior’s determination and spirit of endurance in the face of the hardships which he is experiencing. This is Duke Senior’s first speech in the play; and it greatly raises him in our estimation because he does not grumble and complain against fate, and does not curse his luck. Here he shows his spirit of resignation to his fate. This speech shows Duke Senior’s cheerful acceptance of the great change which has taken place in his style of living. There is also in this speech an implied condemnation of the character of the courtiers who flatter their sovereign by painting him in over-bright colours and giving him an exaggerated notion of his own greatness and worth. While the courtiers are hypocritical, the winter’s cold winds are reliable counsellors who tell a ruler that he is just a human being and suffers from all the human weaknesses.

3.     *Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,  
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;  
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.*

## Context

These lines are part of a speech made by Duke Senior to his comrades in Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It*. Duke Senior tells the lords, who have accompanied him into exile, that, having spent a long time in the forest of Arden, they have become accustomed to all the hardships of life here. He tells them that the cold winds of winter are free from all hypocrisy because they do not mince matters and because they do not try to throw a veil upon the human weaknesses of Duke Senior and his comrades.

## Explanation

Duke Senior tells his comrades that adversity or misfortune has its bright side. Most welcome are the advantages of misfortune and suffering, say Duke Senior. He compares misfortune to the toad which is ugly and poisonous but which at the same time carries in its head a precious jewel having medicinal and healing properties. Like the sting of the toad, life’s misfortunes are also painful; but like the jewel in the head of a toad, those misfortunes also bring many benefits to human beings. Living in the forest of Arden, far away from the crowds of people, Duke Senior and his comrades can hear the trees speaking to them in a language of their own. Likewise, they can find in the flowing streams much wisdom of the kind which people generally draw from books. The stones in this forest preach moral lessons to them. Thus, they find some good in everything in this forest. In short, Duke Senior emphasizes the beneficial side of his life in forest, and tries to convince his comrades that there is every reason for



them to appreciate their life here. (According to a general belief of time, the toad carried in its head a precious stone which possessed a great healing power. Thus, although the toad's bite was regarded as poisonous, yet the toad had its value in so far as it could yield a stone having medicinal powers. In the same way, misfortunes certainly bring misery to human beings; but misfortunes have their bright side also because they offer certain compensations to human beings).

### **Critical Comments**

These lines throw a lot of light upon the character of Duke Senior. Here we become keenly aware of the big contrast between Duke Senior and the usurper Duke. Duke Senior has been able to adjust himself to his life of hardship and misery in the forest of Arden. Here he speaks very much like a philosopher. We admire his spirit of endurance and his spirit of resignation to his misfortunes. The simile which these lines contain is most effective in conveying the idea which the Duke wishes to express. The line, "Sweet are the uses of adversity", reads like a proverb; in fact, this line has become famous and is often quoted, because it contains a profound truth. The two closing lines of this speech are also memorable because of the eloquent manner in which they express the idea. Duke Senior finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything. Actually, the whole of this passage is remarkable for its compactness of style and pregnancy of meaning.

4.     *Thus most invectively he pierceth through  
The body of country, city, court,  
Yea, and of this our life, swearing that we  
Are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what's worse,  
To fright the animals and to kill them up  
In their assign'd and native dwelling-place.*

### **Context**

These lines are part of a speech by the First Lord in Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*. The First Lord is speaking to Duke Senior and telling him how Jaques had moralized upon the spectacle of a wounded deer groaning and shedding tears because of the pain which his wound was causing him. The First Lord says that Jaques had compared the wounded stag to a man who is reduced by circumstances to a state of bankruptcy, and who is then forsaken even by those who were his very close friends in the days when he was rich and prosperous. In short, the spectacle of the wounded deer had provided Jaques with an opportunity to bring out the insincerity, artificiality, and hypocrisy of the people in this world.

### **Explanation**

The First Lord says that Jaques had denounced, in the bitterest possible terms, the whole structure of social life in the countryside, in the city, and at the court. Jaques had also declared on oath that Duke Senior and his companions were mere intruders who had unjustly taken possession of this wood and who were living there like dictators. Jaques had said that, even worse than the tyrannical way of the life of Duke Senior and his comrades, was the fact that they were all the time scaring away the animals of the forest and were also slaughtering the animals wholesale. According to Jaques, the forest was the native abode of those animals, and this abode had been allotted to them by Nature as their

habitat. Therefore, in the opinion of Jaques, Duke Senior and his companions had absolutely no right to disturb the life of the native animals of the forest; and they were behaving in a most autocratic and selfish manner by terrorizing and killing those animals.

### **Critical Comments**

These lines throw much light on the character of Jaques. Jaques is a kind of philosopher; but he is a cynical philosopher. He is a philosopher in the sense that he reflects and meditates upon all the happenings and events which he witnesses; and he is cynical because he looks always at the dark side of things. This particular speech shows that Jaques is very critical of Duke Senior and Duke Senior's way of life. Jaques has found fault with Duke Senior on the ground that Duke Senior is an invader who is driving out the native dwellers of the forest and killing them. Now, to some extent, Jaques is right; but there is another side to Duke Senior's life in the forest. Duke Senior has himself been driven away from his kingdom by a usurper; and he has to live somehow. As for killing the animals in the forest, it cannot be avoided because Duke Senior and his companions have somehow to feed themselves, and because they can obtain the meat of these animals only by killing them.

5.     *O good old man, how well in thee appears  
The constant service of the antique world,  
When service sweat for duty, not for meed.  
Thou art not for the fashion of these times,  
Where none will sweat but for promotion,  
And having that, do choke their service up  
Even with the having; it is not so with thee.  
But poor old man, thou prun'st a rotten tree,  
That cannot so much as a blossom yield,  
In lieu of all thy pains and husbandry.*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are a speech by Orlando to his servant, Adam. As Orlando is in danger of being killed through the contrivances of his brother Oliver, the servant Adam puts all his life's savings at Orlando's disposal and suggests that Orlando should quit his brother's house and take shelter somewhere else. Adam also offers to accompany Orlando wherever Orlando may decide to go.

### **Explanation**

Orlando tells the good old man, namely Adam, that in him appears the spirit of loyal service of the ancient times. In olden times, servants used to work and toil from a sense of duty, and not in order to earn rewards. Adam's character, says Orlando, is entirely different from the character of the servants of these times. In these times nobody is prepared to toil except to gain advancement in life; and, having gained advancement, servants cease to render the kind of service by which they had been able to gain that advancement. Such is not the case with Adam. At the same time, Orlando tells the poor old man that he (Adam) is merely trimming a rotten tree which will not yield even a blossom, much

less any fruit, in return for all the pains and labour which Adam is going to bestow upon that tree. Orlando means to say that Adam is offering help to a man who is totally bankrupt and who can make no return to Adam at all for all the devotion and loyalty which Adam is going to bestow upon him (Orlando).

### Critical Comments

These lines are a rich tribute from a master to a servant who has grown grey in the service of an aristocratic family. Adam has displayed a rare spirit of selfsacrifice by offering his life's savings to Orlando; and Orlando is quick to express his appreciation of Adam's spirit of service, and his admiration for Adam's loyalty. Orlando's remark regarding the behaviour of servants of olden times and the servants of present times are thoroughly convincing. And, if Orlando had been living in the twenty first century, he would have simply been shocked to find that there are no longer any household servants available and that, if there are any servants still available, they are of the most treacherous and deceitful kind, who would go to the length not only of robbing their masters but also of murdering them. These lines show also the contrast between Orlando and Oliver. Oliver treated Adam in a most contemptuous manner, calling him a dog; but Orlando shows a great consideration for the feelings of Adam, and treats him with great affection. Furthermore, these lines contain a very appropriate simile, comparing Orlando to a rotten tree which cannot yield even a blossom, no matter what pains are taken to nourish that tree.

6. *I remember when I was in love I broke my sword upon a stone, and bid him take that for coming a-night to Jane Smile; and I remember the kissing of her batler; and the cow's dugs that her pretty chopt hands had milked; and I remember the wooing of a peascod instead of her from whom I took two cods, and giving her them again, said with weeping tears, "Wear these for my sake". We that are true lovers run into strange capers; but as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in love mortal in folly.*

### Context

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are a speech by Touchstone. Touchstone has accompanied Rosalind and Celia into exile. In the forest of Arden they all overhear a rustic lover by the name of Silvius speaking about his love for the shepherdess Phebe to an old man by the name of Corin. Rosalind thereupon says that, on hearing this rustic fellow speak about his love, she has been reminded of her own love (for Orlando). Touchstone thereupon makes the speech quoted here.

### Explanation

Touchstone says that, after hearing the rustic fellow speak of his love, he too has been reminded of his own youthful love-affair. He recalls that he had been in love with a girl called Jane Smile. He says that, being in love with that girl, he had become furious on seeing a rival visiting that girl's house at the time of night. His rival, he says, was no other than his own sword which he had carried with him to her house. Imagining his sword as his rival in love, he became so angry that he broke the sword by striking it against a stone. He then told the broken sword that his purpose in breaking it was to punish his rival for having dared to visit his beloved Jan smile at the time of night. Touchstone then goes on to describe another absurd action which, he says, he once committed. Under the influence of his passion of love he had kissed the wooden bat which his beloved had held in her hand while beating the clothes

she was washing. He had also kissed the cow's udder which his beloved's pretty, but coarsened, hands milked. Then Touchstone recalls yet another absurdity which he had committed as a love. In the absence of his beloved, he had one day begun to make love to a plant, imagining that the plant represented his beloved. It was a plant which bore pea-cods. He had taken two pods from the plant and then, with tears flowing from his eyes, had given them back to the plant, entreating the plant to wear those pods for his sake, just as country-lovers were in the habit of giving pea-pods to their mistresses to wear as a good omen. Touchstone concludes this speech by saying that people like him, who fall truly in love, indulge in fantastic pranks; and that, just as everything in nature is subject to death, so is every creature, who has been created by nature and who falls in love, liable to commit the most preposterous absurdities. By this remark, Touchstone means that just as death is a condition of life, so folly is a condition of love. He, who falls in love, is sure to commit follies and absurdities under the influence of his passion of love, Love, indeed, blinds a man to the realities of life and carries him into the regions of fantasy.

### **Critical Comments**

This speech by Touchstone is a good illustration of the kind of humour and wit in which Touchstone specializes. Of course, Touchstone never himself committed those absurdities which he describes here and which he claims to have committed. He is merely poking fun at those lovers who, under the influence of their passion of love, commit all sorts of absurdities; and Touchstone very shrewdly invents certain situations of his own to expose the absurdities which lovers commit. Thus, Touchstone by this speech tries to knock out the bottom of what is known as romantic passion.

7. *Well then, if ever I thank any man I'll thank you, but that they call compliment is like th' encounter of two dog-apes. And when a man thanks me heartily, me thinks I have given him a penny and he renders me the beggarly thanks.*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are a speech by Jaques. Jaques makes this speech in reply to Amiens' agreeing to sing a song in compliance with Jaques's request to do so.

### **Explanation**

Jaques says that, as a mark of his appreciation of Amiens's agreeing to sing a song, he would thank Amiens, even though he does not ordinarily thank anybody. However, in thanking Amiens, he has his reservations. He does not wish to thank Amiens whole-heartedly, because this practice of thanking others and receiving thanks from others is not really liked by Jaques. Jaques says that, in his opinion, an exchange of compliments between two men is like a chance meeting of two monkeys who just grin at each other, and do nothing more. Jaques says that, when a man thanks him enthusiastically, he gets the impression that he has given a penny in charity and that the man has, in return, thanked him, just as a beggar thanks anyone who gives him alms. Thanking another man is thus a formality which is performed by someone who has received a favour, however trivial the favour may be.

### **Critical Comments**

This speech throws much light on the character of Jaques. Almost all the speeches which Jaques makes in the course of the play show him to be a cynic. Jaques always looks at the dark side of life.

He is a kind of philosopher; but he always takes a cynical view of things. For instance, he disapproves of even the act of thanking because he feels that there is no real sincerity of feeling behind this act. In social life, people often exchange compliments; but Jaques regards this exchange of compliments as a practice to be scorned. He compares two men, who exchange compliments, to two apes who happen to meet and who then merely grin at each other. Now, the exchange of compliments certainly has some grace about it, though we cannot deny that there is an element of hypocrisy in it also. But it all depends upon a particular man's disposition whether to regard the exchange of compliments as an act of grace or as an act of mere hypocrisy. Jaques is inclined to treat human nature and its manifestations cynically.

8.     *It is my only suit,  
provided that you weed your better judgements  
Of all opinion that grows rank in them  
That I am wise. I must have liberty  
Withal, as large a charter as the wind,  
To blow on whom I please, for so fools have;  
And they that are most galled with my folly,  
They must must laugh.*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are part of a speech by Jaques. Having met Touchstone, Jaques has felt much impressed by Touchstone's manner of commenting upon human life and human nature. Jaques expresses to Duke Senior his delight at having met Touchstone, the fool who is dressed in the motley clothes of the professional clown. Jaques says that motley is the best apparel for a man, and that he himself would also like to wear a motley suit so that he may enjoy the same unlimited freedom to express his thoughts and ideas as Touchstone enjoys.

### **Explanation**

Jaques says that motley is the only kind of apparel which he would like to wear. However, in order that he may be able to perform the function of a fool, his listeners must first get rid of the true opinion which at present they hold about him. At present, whatever he says, is taken seriously by his listeners. But this attitude of theirs about him has to be removed from their minds just as any wild and unwanted growth is pulled out from a corn-field. After Jaques has put on a fool's apparel, he must be treated as a fool and he must be given the authority to express himself freely. He must then have unrestricted freedom to criticize, and to mock at, anybody he chooses, just as the wind has complete freedom to blow on anybody it likes. Furthermore, those persons, who feel most hurt by his foolish-seeming verbal attacks, must laugh the most at those remarks. The very persons, who feel wounded by his sharp sarcasms, should laugh, thus pretending that those sarcasms were not aimed at them.

### **Critical Comments**

These lines reveal Jaques's character as a cynical observer of human life. Jaques wishes to enjoy the same freedom of expression as Touchstone, the professional jester, enjoys. Just as Touchstone has the right to criticize, and mock at, anybody and everybody, so Jaques would also like to be given

the same privilege of attacking anybody and every body by his witty remarks. Thus, Jaques wants to be recognized as a licensed critic of society; and he also wants that his listeners should not betray any signs of embarrassment when they find themselves being made the targets of his sarcastic remarks. It would be in the interest of his victims themselves to pretend that they are not the targets of his verbal attacks.

9.     *He that a fool doth very wisely hit  
Doth very foolishly, although he smart,  
Not to seem senseless of the blow. If not,  
The wiseman's folly is anatomized  
Even by the squand'ring glances of the fool.*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are part of a speech by Jaques. Speaking to the Duke Senior, Jaques says that he would like to emulate the example of Touchstone who, as a professional jester, has the right to criticize, and mock at, anybody and everybody he wishes to attack in his characteristic witty manner. Jaques would like to put on the professional fool's motley clothes, so that he may go about exposing people's follies and absurdities without being taken to task by them. At the same time, Jaques wants that his victims should not give any sign at all that they have felt hurt by his sarcastic remarks, even if they are actually feeling sorely hurt.

### **Explanations**

Jaques says that the man, who is very justly attacked by a professional jester, would be behaving very foolishly if he does not pretend to be completely unaware of the taunt which was directed against him, even if inwardly he is feeling deeply hurt. If such a man does not put up this pretence, he merely exposes his own reality, so that people will come to know that the professional jester had him in mind when making his sarcastic remarks. If such a man does not put up this pretence, then his defects would get dissected and be thus revealed to others by the random sarcasms of the jester. What Jaques means to say is that a man would certainly feel hurt by a satirical attack upon him by a jester but that such a man should outwardly behave in such a way as to create an impression that he is not in the least affected by what the fool is saying or has said.

### **Critical Comments**

This speech by Jaques shows that he is a subtle and acute kind of thinker. He is fully conscious of the constructive role which a professional jester can play by making all sorts of critical and sarcastic remarks about persons in whom he detects certain follies or certain objectionable tendencies. A professional fool brings to the notice of people those defects of character and those objectionable tendencies which he has observed in certain individuals. At the same time, Jaques points out an important psychological truth of human nature. He says that the victim of the sarcastic remarks of a professional fool should not show that he is the man whom the jester or the fool had in mind while making those critical and sarcastic remarks. If the victim shows that he is feeling hurt by those remarks, then the people would come to know that he is the man whom the jester has attacked; and in this way the victim would merely be exposing the reality about himself.

10. *Invest me in my motley. Give me leave  
To speak my mind, and I will through and through  
Cleanse the foul body of th' infected world,  
If they will patiently received my medicine.*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are part of a speech which Jaques makes while talking to Duke Senior. Jaques has felt much impressed by the talk of Touchstone whom he has met in the forest. Jaques, reporting to Duke Senior his meeting with Touchstone, says that he himself wants to play the same role as Touchstone plays as a professional fool. Jaques says that he would like to wear the fool's motley suit, so that he can freely comment upon people, and expose their defects of character and their objectionable tendencies and activities.

### **Explanation**

Jaques says that, if he is given the freedom to express himself without any restraint or inhibition, he would be able to remove from this world all its wickedness and vice. Jaques claims that he would then be able to purify this world of all its evil. His only condition is that people should willingly receive his medicine, which will consist in his mocking and sarcastic remarks about those who are wicked and vicious. People would surely be cured of their vices if they pay heed to his sarcastic remarks which would be intended by him to pierce them and cause them to search their hearts and their actions.

### **Critical Comments**

These lines show Jaques's belief in the reformatory function of satire. A professional fool makes certain mocking comments upon certain individuals; and these comments make his listeners laugh. When the victim realizes that he has been attacked by the professional fool, he feels inwardly hurt. Such a man may then inwardly make up his mind to reform himself and may try to get rid of the evil in him. Thus the professional fool's satirical remarks bring about a change in the victim of his satirical remarks. Jaques now wishes to play the role of a professional fool. He asserts that, if he is given the same freedom to attack people with his satirical remarks which a professional fool has, he would play this role even more effectively. If given unlimited freedom of speech, he would satirize the follies and the vices of people in general, and also of particular individuals, so that the final result of his sarcastic comments on them would be to cure them of those follies and vices. Thus Jaques wishes to reform the world of its evils and vices. The instrument of his reform would be satirical and sarcastic comments, by means of which he would make his listeners conscious of their objectionable and nefarious activities. His satirical comments would act as a spur and as a goad to evil men to shed their evil character.

11. *Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin,  
For thou thyself hast been a livertine,  
As sensual as the brutish sting itself,  
And all th'embossed sores and headed evil  
That thou with licence of free foot hast caught  
Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world.*

## **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are a speech by Duke Senior to Jaques. Jaques has said that he would like to put on the motley clothes of a professional fool so that he may freely criticize the evils prevailing in society, and may thus be able to reform the whole world of the vices which at present infect and afflict the world. Duke Senior thereupon makes the speech quoted here.

## **Explanation**

Duke Senior says that, if Jaques is given the authority to comment freely upon the world in general and also upon particular individuals, Jaques would be committing the most mischievous and odious kind of sin. Outwardly, Jaques would be rebuking the wickedness which prevails in the world; but in actual fact Jaques would be adding some more evils to those which already exist. Duke Senior's reason for this view is that Jaques has himself been a dissolute man in his life. According to the Duke, Jaques has been as lecherous in his life as the strong urge of sexual desire itself is. Having had complete freedom to wander about, Jaques has indulged in all kinds of sensual pleasure. Duke Senior says that Jaques has been leading an altogether lawless and anarchic life so far as sexual pleasure is concerned. Therefore, if now Jaques becomes a professional jester and begins to talk about the sins prevailing in this world, he would, through his remarks about other people, pour forth into society all the vicious habits and dangerous vices of which he had himself been guilty in the past. Jaques would then attribute to other people all those vicious habits and lascivious actions which he had himself been committing; and thus Jaques would begin to acquaint people with certain forms of sinful behaviour about which at present they have no knowledge at all. He would in this way add to the corruption which already exists. He would be injecting vicious desires into the minds of innocent people and thus corrupting them.

## **Critical Comments**

This speech by Duke Senior paints the past life of Jaques in the blackest colours. If Duke Senior is to be trusted, and there is no reason at all to think that Duke Senior is telling a lie, then Jaques has been the most immoral of men in his past life. If this speech gives us a correct idea of the past life of Jaques, then we are driven to the conclusion that Jaques has been guilty of having led a most licentious and loose life. But, in the play itself, Jaques appears to us as a noble-minded man who is deeply distressed by the injustice which prevails in the world and by the immorality which poisons human life. This means that there is a great disparity between what Jaques used to be and what Jaques has now become. He was a great libertine once; but he has now become an almost saintly character, even though he is deeply cynical. Of course, there is nothing unbelievable about the change which has come over Jaques. There are numerous examples, in history as well as in fiction, of wicked persons reforming themselves and becoming good ones. Apart from that, we do perceive the truth in Duke Senior's view that Jaques, by his criticism of the world, would add to the corruption already existing. We can very well believe that Jaques would imagine other people also leading the same kind of immoral and irresponsible life as he himself had been leading. It is natural for anyone to imagine others suffering from the same vices of which he had himself been guilty once. We must therefore recognize the fact that Jaques might, on one hand, reform some people by his criticism; and might, on the other hand, make certain other people acquainted with the vices of which at present they may not be aware of. This speech by Duke Senior shows also that the Duke can become very blunt, almost offensive, if occasion demands, though normally he is a very polite and gracious kind of man.



12. *Why who cries out on pride,  
That can therein tax any private party?  
Doth it not flow as hugely as the sea,  
Till that the weary very means do ebbe?  
What woman in the city do I name,  
When that I say the city-woman bears  
The cost of princes on unworthy shoulders?  
Who can come in and say that I mean her;  
When such a one as she, such is her neighbour?*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are part of a speech by Jaques. Speaking to Duke Senior, Jaques says that he has met a fool in the forest and that he felt much impressed by the wisdom of that fool. Jaques then says that he too would like to wear a fool's motley apparel. In this connection, he says that, as a fool, he would be in a position to criticize and ridicule anybody and everybody without offending any particular individual.

### **Explanation**

Elaborating his point, Jaques says that, if in the garb of a jester he were to condemn an ostentatious display of the lavishness of people, he would not be offending any particular individual. In other words, no particular individual would take offence at his general condemnation of the extravagance and lavish expenditure of money by people in general. Jaques goes on to say that all the people try to make a show of their luxurious living and their extravagant spending of money. People indulge in excessive spending of money to such an extent that their basic means and resources get exhausted. People continue to spend money extravagantly in order to create an impression of their affluence, till the money which feeds this style of life is exhausted. Next, Jaques says that if he were to criticize city-women for wearing expensive clothes which only members of the royal family can afford to wear, then he would not be criticizing any particular woman in the city. Therefore no city-woman would be able to turn to him angrily and accuse him of having criticized her. No city-woman would have a complaint against him for the simple reason that his remarks would be applicable to her neighbour also because her neighbour also spends money lavishly to dress herself above her status.

### **Critical comments**

These lines show Jaques to be a kind of moralist. Like Touchstone, Jaques too has observed social life closely and minutely. Like Touchstone, Jaques too has meditated upon the manners and the behaviour of people in general. Like Touchstone again, Jaques too is a critic of life. However, while Touchstone is a laughing philosopher, Jaques is a cynical philosopher. While Touchstone is a tolerant censor of human life, Jaques is an impatient and intolerant critic of social life. In these particular lines, Jaques censures people for living above their means. The word "pride" in the first line here means an ostentatious display of one's life-style.

## Critical Comments

These lines show Jaques to be a kind of moralist. Like Touchstone, Jaques too has observed social life closely and minutely. Like Touchstone, Jaques too has meditated upon the manners and the behaviour of people in general. Like Touchstone again, Jaques too is a critic of life. However, while Touchstone is a laughing philosopher, Jaques is a cynical philosopher. While Touchstone is a tolerant censor of human life, Jaques is an impatient and intolerant critic of social life. In these particular lines, Jaques censures people for living above their means. The word “pride” in the first line here means an ostentatious display of one’s life-style.

13. *Or what is he of basest function*

*That says his bravery is not on my cost,*

*Thknking that I mean him, but therein suits*

*His folly to the mettle of my speech?*

*There then ! How then? How then? What then? Let me see wherein*

*My tonue hath wrong’d him : if it do him right,*

*Then he hath wrong’d himself; if he be free,*

*Why then my taxing like a wild’-goose flies*

*Unclaime’d of any man.*

## Context

These lines, taken from Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It*, are part of a speech by Jaques. Jaques has met Touchstone in the forest of Arden, and he then tells Duke Senior of this meeting. Jaques has felt much impressed by the wisdom of Touchstone who is by professin a fool or a jester. Jaques now says to Duke Senior that he too would like to wear the motley clothes of a fool so as to be able to criticize and mock at people. The remarks of a fool or a jester are not resented by people. Besides, as a fool, Jaques would criticize and condemn people in general terms, and would not single out particular individuals for his criticism.

## Explanation

Jaques says that, when he criticizes people for living above their means, nobody would be able to apply that criticism to himself only. No man engaged in even the most menial occupation would come and take Jaques to task by saying that his fine clothes were not purchased with Jaques’s money. No such man would be in a position to come to Jaques and allege that Jaques had that man particularly in mind while criticizing people for dressing themselves in expensive and costly clothes which they cannot really afford.

If any man does come to Jaques and does complain that Jaques had that man particularly in mind, that man would merely be confirming the fact that he really had been dressing himself above his social position. In such a case than man would really deserve the words of condemnation spoken by Jaques. But otherwise nobody in particular would really have any cause of complaint against Jaques for talking critically about peopole in general. Nobody would be justified in finding fault with Jaques for his criticism of the people, because no particular individual would be able to accuse Jaques of having done

any injury to him personally. If Jaques's criticism is applicable to any particular individual, then that individual himself is to blame, because he must actually have been guilty of the extravagance which Jaques has condemned. And, if that particular individual is completely free from any guilt of this kind or of any other similar fault, then Jaques's satirical condemnation would be entirely off the mark so far as that individual is concerned. No particular individual would therefore have any legitimate complaint against Jaques.

### **Critical Comments**

These lines show Jaques to be a close observer of social life and a sort of moralist. He has observed people's tendency to live above their means; and he has noticed people spending more money on their clothes than they can afford. He has felt that very displeased with the tendency of people to live extravagantly and to spend money lavishly on their clothes. He would like to remedy this situation; and in order to do so he would like to have the freedom to criticize and condemn people who live above their means. At the same time he would not like to offend any particular individual. He can therefore achieve his purpose only if he wears motley clothes like Touchstone, and if he is granted the same freedom to criticize and condemn people jokingly in Touchstone's manner.

14.     *And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard  
Jealous is honour, sudden, and quick in quarrels  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth.*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are part of a famous speech by Jaques. Addressing Duke Senior and others in the forest of Arden, Jaques describes this world as a stage on which all the men and women are merely actors who have their exits and their entrances. Each man in the course of his earthly life plays seven roles, says Jaques. In the lines before us two of these seven roles in the life of a man are described.

### **Explanation**

At the third stage in the course of his earthly existence, a man plays the role of a lover. The lover heaves deep sighs like a furnace which gives out thick smoke from its burning coals. The lover carries with him a song which he has composed to express the disappointment of his love and which also contains a tribute to the beauty of his beloved's eyebrows. Next comes the soldier, who is full of foreign oaths which he has picked up in the course of his travels to foreign countries. The soldier keeps a beard resembling a leopard's whiskers. He is very sensitive to insult because he has a keen sense of honour. He is very prompt in executing his resolves. And he is rash in picking up quarrels. He waits for opportunities to win military glory, even though this glory is short-lived and even though the winning of this glory involves courting danger and facing artillery-fire.

## Critical Comments

In these lines we have very vivid pictures of the experiences which the lover and the soldier undergo. The words and phrases used in these lines are very appropriate and very effective in conveying the speaker's views about the experience of love and the character of the soldier. "Sighing like furnace" is, indeed, a very original and effective way of conveying to us the sighing of a lover. Similarly, the soldier's ambition to become famous by his military exploits is effectively conveyed by the phrase, "seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth." It is also to be noted that Jaques dwells chiefly upon the seamy aspect of each role which a man plays in the course of his life, because Jaques is a cynical philosopher.

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## 16.8 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have acquainted you with the life and time of Shakespeare and the progress of British drama during his times. Besides important features of Elizabethan theatre and the chief characteristics of Shakespearean comedy have also been dealt with. A brief story of the play and some extracts have helped you form a critical understanding of the play.

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## 16.9 Review Questions

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1. Write about the life of William Shakespeare.
2. Write a note on English Drama before Shakespeare.
3. Write a short note on Elizabethan Theatre.
4. What are the Chief Characteristics of Shakespearean comedy.
5. Explain the following passages with reference and context:
  - i) *She is too subtle for thee, and her smoothness,  
Her very silence, and her patience.  
Speak to the people, and they pity her.  
Thou art a fool; she robs thee of thy name,  
And thou wilt show more bright and seem more virtuous  
When she is gone. Then open not thy lips.  
Firm and irrevocable is my doom  
Which I have pass'd upon her; she is banished.*
  - ii) *Are not these woods  
More free from peril than the envious court?  
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,  
The seasons' difference, as the icy fang  
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind.*

*Which when it bites and blows upon my body  
Even till I shrink with cold, I smile, and say  
This is not flattery. These are counsellors  
That feelingly persuade me what I am'.*

- iii) *O good old man, how well in thee appears  
The constant service of the antique world,  
When service sweat for duty, not for meed.  
Thou art not for the fashion of these times,  
Where none will sweat but for promotion,  
And having that, do choke their service up  
Even with the having; it is not so with thee.  
But poor old man, thou prun'st a rotten tree,  
That cannot so much as a blossom yield,  
In lieu of all thy pains and husbandry.*

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## **16.10 Bibliography**

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1. As You Like It edited by A.W. Verity.
2. As You Like It edited by H.H. Furness.
3. As You Like It edited by Stanley Wood and Rev. F.Marshall.
4. The Living World of Shakespeare by John Wain.
5. Shakespeare. His World and His Art by K.R.S. Iyengar.
6. Shakespeare by Allardyce Nicoll.

## UNIT-17

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### SHAKESPEAR: AS YOU LIKE IT-II

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#### Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 *'As You Like It'* as a Romantic Comedy
- 17.2 Main Characteristics of the Play
- 17.3 The Pastoral Element
- 17.4 Element of Melodrama in the Play
- 17.5 The Heroines of Shakespeare's Comedies
- 17.6 A Brief Actwise and scene wise Summary
- 17.7 Some Important Explantions
- 17.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.9 Review Questions
- 17.10 Bibliography

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#### 17.0 Objectives

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After reading this unit, the students will be able to

- understand how *'As You Like It'* is a Romantic Comedy.
- understand the main Characteristics of the Play.
- know the Pastoral Element in the Play.
- know othe element of Melodrama in the Play.
- understand the importance of Heroines in Shakespeare's Comedies.

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#### 17.1 *'As You Like It'* as a Romantic Comedy

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The elements of romance and comedy have been blended together by Shakespeare. The only feature common between them is love. Love reigns supreme in the comedies of Shakespeare *'Love comforteth like sunshine after rain.'*

The love between Rosalind and Orlando is real and genuine. "The strength of the play lies in this that it is into the heart of this love making that Shakespeare is able to introduce, without cynicism, his most exquisitely balanced piece of irony, at once sympathetic and detached."

Orlando. 'Then in mine own person I die'

Rosalind 'No faith, die by attorney....

*Troilus had his brains dash'd out with a Gvection club; yet he did what he could to die*

*before, and he is one of the patterns of love, Leander he would have liv'd many a fair year; though Hero had turned nun, if it had not been for a hot mid Summer night.'*

And there is another type of love, how perverse it is! Phebe jilts Silvius and falls deeply in love with Rosalind (Ganymede). Oliver suddenly awakens love in Celia (Aliena), Orlando does not recognise Rosalind (Ganymede). And Touchstone is foolishly making foolish love with poor Audrey. And look at the Phebe's rebuke to Silvius.

*Thou tell' st me there is murder in mine eye  
Tis pretty, sure and very probable  
That eyes, that are the frail' st and softest thing.  
Who shut their coward gates on atomies  
Should be called tyrants, butchers, murderers."*

"The basic recognition underlying Shakespeare's golden comedies is that love, however romantic, exists to make bedfellows and fill cradles; the multiple marriage at the end, bringing the courtly characters to their destined pairing off and also propelling the Dresden figures of Phoebe and Silvius into a human relationship at last, is completed by the earthly coupling of Audrey and Touchstone, and Jaques is wrong as usual when he predicts that their 'loving voyage is but for two months victuall'd'".

There are four types of love in the play. Even Touchstone the fool falls in love. Love is the centre of gravity of the play. "As a lyrical comedy of romantic love in a simple moral context whose basic pattern derives from folklore or at least from popular imagination working on a literary tradition, *As You Like It* stands supreme."

In order that love may have fair play and develop, there is created in the play a congenial atmosphere, and a background suitable to it. There is the forest of Arden where love may run smoothly. In such a place there are no obstacles to love. Orlando writes poems on the bark of trees in praise of his sweet heart, Rosalind, and hangs them on the trees. And Rosalind teaches him how to woo. And because music is the food of love, there are so many lovely lyrics sung by Amiens.-

*Under the greenwood tree  
Who loves to lie me  
and  
Blow, blow, thou winter wind  
Thou art not so unkind  
As man's in gratitude*

So everything romantic is there in a play. There is a love story, the distance of time and space, a heroine and a hero, and a fool, and magic atmosphere and songs.

But Jaques is there who satirizes the romance of the play, And the satire of the play is, after all, as much against as for the romantic ideals that the play sets out to expound. Touchstone always reminds of the realities of life. Yet he loves too. So romance and realism meet together. Shakespeare has devised a plot which deals with the lives of the upper class as the chief part of the action, and has

included scenes from the lives of ordinary people. There is contrast no less than duplication. Two stories run parallel to each other. Love, revelry, jealousy, greed, revenge and lust for power, which should seem incredible are believed by the spectators when they find these things repeated in high as well as the low class.

On the one hand the different kinds of love affairs heighten the romance, on the other hand they keep the extravagance of romance within limits. The love story of Silvius and Phebe heightens the romance of Orlando and Rosalind. After listening to the frantic love of Silvius Rosalind says, "Alas, poor shepherd! searching of thy wound, I have by hard adventure found mine own." Yet the love affair between Touchstone and Audrey coldly disparages the warmth of love in the hearts of Rosalind and Orlando. Touchstone loves, if not ugly, plain looking Audrey. He is ready to marry her without any romantic tinge. He wants his marriage to be solemnised by a bogus priest and is ready to desert her as soon as he marries her. This is most unromantic and realistic. All this keeps the enthusiasm of romance into reasonable bounds. On the one hand there are high families. The dukes are there. Their loves are remote and romantic. On the other hand there are Touchstone, Jaques. Audrey and others belonging to the low class and are realistic picture of society. On the one hand there is exuberant imagination, on the other hand there are firm grasp of reality and humour and mirth. And all these mingle together in one whole. '*As You Like It*' is therefore a romantic comedy. The fact that its theme is inspired by the reaction against urban life naturally makes *As You Like It* a comedy as well as a romance.

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## 17.2 Main Characteristics of the Play

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It is a characteristic of Shakespeare's comedies to include an element that is irreconcilable. It strikes a slightly discordant note. It casts a slight shadow and questions the perfection of the comic vision. The discordant note is struck in most of the comedies. There are Kill-Joys though they are prevented from doing the harm they wish. Shylock's baffled exit and Don John's flight to Messina leave the stage clear for lovers and well-wishers. The villains have to be left out of the party at the close. In *Twelfth Night* Malvolio cries in impotent fury, 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you.' He questions the whole comic scheme.

### 1. The Discordant Note in '*As You Like It*'

'It is characteristic of the delicacy of *As You Like It* that its solitary figure, its outsider, Jaques, does nothing whatever to harm anyone, and is perfectly satisfied with himself and happy in his melancholy.' Not only this. His melancholy is a source of pleasure and amusement to others. The Duke treats him as virtually a court entertainer. He is a natural butt for Orlando and Rosalind.

Anyone in the play can put him down and feel the better for doing so.

### 2. Christian Ideal of Love and Kindness

Another characteristic of the play is the Christian ideal of love and kindness, Pity and gentleness sweeten the romantic love. "in this fantasy world, in which the world of our experience is imagined, this element finds a place with others, and the world is shown not only as a place where we may find happiness, but as a place where both happiness and sorrow may be hallowed. The number of religious references in *As You Like It* has often been commented on,



and it is striking when we consider the play's main theme. Many are of little significance and it would be humourless to enlarge upon the significance of the 'old religious man' who converted Duke Frederick, or of Ganymede's 'old religious uncle'. But some are explicit and have a serious, unforced beauty:

Orlando's appeal to outlawed men -

*'If ever you have look'd on better days*

*If ever where bells have knoll'd to Church'*

And there is Adam's prayer

*He that doth the ravens feed*

*Yea, providently cateers for the sparrow,*

*Be comfort to my age'.*

There is Corin's recognition, from St. Paul, that we have to find the way to heaven by doing deeds of hospitality. Hymen speaks solemnly-

*'Then is there mirth in heaven*

*When earthly things made even*

*Atone together.'*

### **3. Largeness, Variety and Amplitude**

The play is characterised by largeness rather than by intensity. The most remarkable thing in *As You Like It*, says Sen Gupta in *Shakespearean Comedy* is the amplitude and variety of its portraiture. It exhibits a many-sided world which includes the court as well as the forest, four pairs of lovers who have their own ways of wooing, shepherds and courtiers, philosophers and fools, treacherous brothers and faithful servants. The largeness of this world is enhanced by the presence of the vaster forces of Nature which form a fitting background to the pastoral romance. It is indeed a colourful world that Shakespeare has created. It is so wide that it pleases every one. There is God's plenty here and we may take it as we like it.

### **4. The Temper of the Play**

The temper of the play is so perfect, its poetry so mellow and so golden, says E.K. Chambers, that the critic would fain hold his hand in fear that he shall but seem in his curiosity to have rubbed off the marvellous dust from the wings of butterfly. Here Shakespeare launches triumphantly upon the high tide of romance. *As You Like It* is romance incarnate. According to David Daiches this is the most popular of Shakespeare's comedies. It represents the ripest fruits of his imagination in its happy golden phase. It is the perfection of romantic comedy in English.

### **5. A Comedy of Dialogue rather than a Comedy of Incident**

The play is crowded, with many incidents-the quarrel between the brothers, the wrestling scene, the banishment of Orlando and Oliver, rude interruptin of Orlando upon the duke, fight with the tigress and many other sensational incidents. Yet as far as possible Shakespeare has avoided incidents. He has chosen only these incidents which help develop the love of Rosalind and

Orlando, and bring about the happy re-union of all. Moreover characters are illustrated by dialogue rather than by action. Orlando's fight with the lioness is informed to us by words alone. And so there are many incidents informed by words alone. The main characters of the play, and the themes of love, reconciliation and contentment could not have been represented by incidents. Dialogue, which presents the contrast between the different characters and portrays the different scenes of life, is for Shakespeare's purpose more powerful than incident. It is not what is done, says Hazlitt, but what is said, that claims our attention.

## 6. Sweetest and Happiest

It is one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's comedies, "Upon the whole", says Dowden, "*As You Like It* is the sweetest and happiest of all Shakespeare's comedies., No one suffers, no one lives an eager intense life; there is no tragic interest in it as there is in *The Merchant of Venice*, as there is in *Much Ado About Nothing*." It is mirthful; but the mirth is sprightly, graceful and exquisite. There is nothing of the rollicking fun of Sir Toby here. The wit of Touchstone is not mere clownage, nor has it any indirect serious significance. It is a dainty kind of absurdity. And Orlando in the beauty and strength of early manhood, and Rosalind with 'a gallant curtle axe upon her thigh, a boar spear in her hand', yet the bright, tender loyal womanhood within, these are figures which quicken and restore our spirit. The music in the play inspires our hearts. The songs are neither noisy nor superficial. They are full of cheerful note and do not express the deep passion and sorrow of the world.

Shakespeare when he wrote this idyllic play was himself in the Forest of Arden. He had ended one great ambition-the historical play, and not yet commenced his tragedies. It was a resting-place. He sends his imagination into the wood to repose. Instead of the courts and camps of England, and the embattled plains of France, here was this wood land scene, where the palm tree, the lioness, and the serpent are to be found; possessed of a flora and fauna that flourish in spite of physical geographers. There is an open-air feeling throughout the play. The dialogue catches freedom and freshness from the atmosphere. After the trumpet tones of Henry the Fifth comes the sweet pastoral strain, so bright, so tender. Must it not be all in keeping? Shakespeare was not trying to control his melancholy. When he needed to do that, he confronted his melancholy very passionately and looked it full in the face. Here he needed refreshment, a sunlight tempered by forest bough, a breeze upon his forehead, a stream murmuring in his ears.

## 7. A Comedy of Leisure

We see always the shady dark-green landscape in the background, and breathe in imagination the fresh air of the forest. This is the comedy of leisure. The hours here are measured by no clocks. There is no duty and toil. The woodland joy and the simple life are made the anyone of the world's pain. Adversity becomes sweetness "Who doth ambition shun.....come hither, come hither."

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### 17.3 The Pastoral Element

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Pastoral is an urban form. Theocritus was the father of this kind of poetry. In Renaissance when the classical literature was revived the pastoral convention became a symbol of an ideal state of society where simplicity, innocence and happiness should reign. The Golden age became synonymous with the pastoral era. People dissatisfied with the present conditions found it sweet to imagine the perfection of

the happy past. Thus it became a heaven for those living the artificial sophisticated life in the cities. It became the literary point of view. It became a fashion to glorify the life of simple shepherds.

“It is written by civilized and learned poets who see a poignant contrast between the artificiality of their own way of life and the natural simplicity of the country man’s. They do not of course, wish to change places with the country man and undertake his rude toil, or exchange their own refinement for his simplicity : but they are aware of the serious considerations involved in the comparison. The shepherd, who appears to the townsman’s eye to enjoy an idyllic life meditating and playing on his pipe, has always typified rustic simplicity and wisdom.” Most of the Elizabethan poets, dramatists and story writers were writing pastorals. But Shakespeare excels all of them “*As You Like It* does for the Elizabethan drama what the long string of pastoral poets Spenser and Sidney, Lodge and Greene, Drayton and Browne, and the rest, had already done, or were still to do, for Elizabethan lyric.”

### **Pastoral Convention in *As You Like It***

*As you Like It* is a pastoral drama. All the characteristics of the pastoral are there in plenty in the play. Rosalind and Celia are disguised as shepherd and shepherdess. In the guise they spend their days leisurely. They while away their time in talking and wooing. Then there are genuine shepherd and shepherdess Silvius and Phebe whose only job in life is to woo. They have the golden age before them. The background is the natural sceneries where love can run smoothly. The Forest of Arden is a dreamland where everything is ideal, happy and congenial.

“The seriousness and range of Shakespeare’s exploration of pastoral attitude, in *As You Like It*, is shown by the fact that when he came to twine together the various traditions of pastoral he did not forget this one : the conversation piece between Touchstone and the aged Corin.”

### **Shepherd and Shepherdesses**

The life in the forest of Arden centres round the shepherds disguised as well as genuine. Rosalind and Celia have disguised themselves as shepherd and shepherdess and pass their lives like the simple rustic man and maiden. They have bought a cottage and a farm and live with the farmers. Then there are Silvius and Phebe. They are genuine rustic shepherd and shepherdess and repeat the romantic element.

### **The Pastoral Background**

All those who are exiled take refuge in the forest of Arden. In the pastoral life of the forest there lies purifying and healing power. It provides a relief for those tormented in the court life. It promotes a kind of escaping for, at least, a temporary period. But “even though the escape is only brief or temporary, during that period we have the means of experiencing the pristine virtues of innocence, simplicity and unsophisticated, candid relations between people. Our moral and spiritual natures are revived and refreshed, and we are better prepared to come back to the rude realities of the actual life around us.

The pastoral setting of sheep cote and forest glade has a freshness about it. It is like the wood in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a healing place. Truth and recognition are to be found there. Like Prospero on the island, in *The Tempest* the Duke and his followers have spent a life of meditation. They have been in contact with the simple scheme of things. There are no super natural beings in this forest but there are many customs and rituals. One such custom is the ceremony of dressing up the successful hunter in the horns and skin of the animal and bringing him to the Duke. This reminds us of the deeds

of Robin Hood.

### **Golden Age**

Shakespeare *As You Like It* has created a world of such beauty which can be attainable only in the golden age. He has created a dreamland in the forest of Arden where we feel to be happy. We feel to be there in this forest. Such peace and happiness were possible only in a pastoral world where shepherdesses used to play on the flutes, and roamed and gossiped and loved.

### **Yet It is Not the Perfect Pastoralism**

We have the pastoral convention in the play. But it is not only pastoral life. The play is also a criticism of pastoral element. Nicoll says, "The play is a pastoral yet it ridicules pastoralism; once more we move delicately among the world of human convention, of reality and of the ideal". Shakespeare has used the pastoral convention. But he was not going to please the Elizabethans without any reservations as Lodge and others did. In this connection John Wain has said, "Pastoral was a form much enjoyed by the Elizabethans, and Shakespeare would have pleased his audience if he had adopted its conventions without criticism or reservation, as Lodge had adopted its conventions without criticism or reservation, as Lodge had done in *Rosalynde*, the novel which gave him his basic story. In fact, of course, he gave them something more complex: an entertainment which at the same time revelled in pastoral and quizzed it." The pastoral sceneries are there in the forest of Arden. But the Duke and his followers leave the forest as Prospero left the island. They abandon the forest and go back to their life at the court. Their dreams realized they wake to the reality of life. This certainly is the play's comment on the value of the pastoral. The pastoral life is not all happy. Silvius is jilted by Phebe. Touchstone like a rustic marries a slut. Their life is humdrum matter of fact. There is no embroidery in such pastoral life. And there is not only Touchstone. There is Jaques too. And there are others too in other plays. They always return to the real life. The pastoral is a fantasy which cannot sustain for long.

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## **17.4 Element Of Melodrama In The Play**

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Before deciding whether *As You Like It* is a melodrama or not we should know what melodrama is, and what are its essential elements and characteristics.

Melodrama is a low type of play which abounds in improbable, unexpected and sensational incidents. Generally a melodrama ends happily and is full of songs. There is generally no progress or development of the plot, events do not come out of events. There is no relation between cause and effect. The characters are not round. They are flat, and do not convince us. Now let us see whether we find these elements in the play or not.

### **Melodramatic Elements in the Play**

*As Your Like It* is full of improbable and sensational elements. They shock us by surprise. In the first scene of the first Act the quarrel between two brothers Orlando and Oliver is quite sensational. The marvellous victory of Orlando over the mighty courtwrestler Charles is unexpected. It is just a marvel. Orlando possesses the strength of a giant. Moreover though he is not sent to any school or university, he is polished, disciplined, and cultivated like a graduate coming fresh from the Oxford or the Cambridge university. He is chivalrous and romantic. He is thus essentially a conventional hero embellished with all the heroic qualities.

That Duke Frederick is dictated by his whim, and suddenly banishes Rosalind in the interest of

his daughter is no less unexpected. His ill-behaviour with Orlando because he is the son of his father, and with Rosalind because she is the daughter of her father, is sudden, unexpected and therefore unconvincing.

In the forest of Arden Orlando's theatrical manner in which he draws his sword and forbears all from eating is a picture of sensational melodrama. The appearance of a lioness and a snake in the idyllic Arden is not less surprising. A critic expressed his surprise with the words 'A lioness in the forest of Arden!' The unexpected events that pass and bring together two brothers who forget their differences are such as are narrated in fiction. 'The ruse adopted by Rosalind herself, disguised as a man offering to satisfy all the lovers..... is highly sensational.' The play ends happily. The suddenness with which Duke Frederick takes sudden decisions impelled by caprice makes his character unconvincing. All these elements taken together show that *As You Like It* is a melodrama.

#### ***As You Like It* is not a melodrama**

But it is one thing to say that a play is full of melodramatic elements and quite a different thing to say that the play is a melodrama. *As You Like It* abounds in melodramatic elements, but it is not essentially a melodrama. One of the important elements of the melodrama is that its characters are flat. But it is the last thing to expect from Shakespeare. Shakespeare is master delineator of character. Though the character of Duke Frederick may seem unconvincing., yet it is also explained by his whimsicality. And yet what one will say about the masterpiece sketches of such characters as Rosalind and Orlando, and his inventions like Touchstone and Jaques. Moreover there is no unity of action in a melodrama. But *As You Like It* has the unity of action. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. Events issue forth from the events. Though there is a lot of marvel, yet there is the relation between cause and effect. We therefore conclude that though *As You Like It* is full of crude and raw melodramatic events, it is not essentially a melodrama. It is a perfect work of art.

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## **17.5 The Heroines Of Shakespeare's Comedies**

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### **Shakespeare's Heroines : Immense Variety**

In his works, Shakespeare has treated of every shade and type of womanhood, ranging from Miranda, representing simplicity and innocence, at one extreme, to Cleopatra, the eternal courtesan, at the other. Much has been written to eulogise his penetrating insight into the female mind and ear. Various attempts have been made to classify his heroines on the basis of some dominant traits by scholars like Dowden and Mrs. Jameson. But all such classifications, as Schlegel showed, are unsatisfactory, for shades of character easily melt into each other, and various faculties and powers overlap and blend. This is so because his women are highly individualised, even when they do stand for some particular type. For example, if Portia is intellectual, so are Hermoine and many others.

### **Ruskin's View : Its Applicability to the Comedies**

Everyone is familiar with Ruskin's sweeping generalisation that, "Shakespeare has no heroes; but only heroines." The remark is applicable only to his comedies; it is certainly not true of his tragedies and histories. The tragic heroines are helpless, pathetic figures, eclipsed by the towering personality of the hero; Ophelia, Desdemona and Cordelia are all helpless, pathetic figures. Cleopatra, the Egyptian coquette is the only exception to this general rule; she, of course, is a match, in every way, to the great and majestic Antony, the descendant of Hercules. A similar condition of things obtains in the English Histories. In the rough struggle of interests, parties, and nations, with the country torn within itself, or

given over to foreign strife, the women are defrauded of their rightful share of joy and happiness. The histories offer, says Gordon” & harsh and unfavourable soil for the characteristic virtues and brighter graces of women.” The atmosphere of these stories of royal wars at home and abroad is not conducive to female happiness. A woman is most happy when she presides over her family and gets the tender affection and loving attention of her dear ones. This is identity to the women of the history plays of our dramatist. The women of the English History plays are all pathetic figures, playing second fiddle to Man, dissatisfied with their lives for one reason or the other.

### **Heroines of Comedies : Practical and Resourceful**

But affairs are entirely different in the comedies. “All lectures on Shakespearan comedy”, says Gordon, “tend to become lectures on his women.” A number of fluttering heroines, bright, beautiful and witty, move across the canvas, and what is more they always hold the front of the stage. “The world of a Shakespearean comedy is a world made safe for women”, a world in which a girl can prosper and, “come to flower”. It is a world in which, “the masculine element drops its voice” and recedes into the background. “When any real business has got to be done”, says Gordon, “It is the woman who does it.” “They are almost all practical” says Raleigh, “impatient of mere words, clear-sighted as to ends and means. They do not accept premises to bend the conclusion, or decorate the inevitable with imaginative loadings.” Rosalind, Portia, Viola, though they are rich in witty and eloquent discourse, are frank and simple in thought. They are never deceived by their own eloquence and never forget the ends they have to achieve. When Antonio’s life has got to be saved, it is Portia who rises to the occasion, displays marvellous resourcefulness, energy, determination, practical ability, while her Lord and Master can do nothing but stand helplessly and talk. Viola shows remarkable strength of purpose and single-mindedness, and succeeds where others before her have failed. She woos his lady even though it is a barful strife for her.

### **Their Superiority to Men**

“Shakespeare’s men cannot, as a class, compare with his women for practical genius.” Their imagination often masters and disables them. While Orsina remains at home passively enjoying the luxury of love, Viola courts his lady for him, and brushes aside the obstacles in her way. It is Beatrice who incites Benedick to a duel. Women, says Gordon “the heart and head sway equal.” In his women alone, “will you find that perfect harmony which is the basis and first condition of a happy life.”

### **Essentially Feminine : Instinctive and Impulsive**

These women of Shakespeare, says Raleigh, “act not on thought but on instinct, which once it is accepted admits of no argument.” The subtlety and breadth of Shakespeare’s knowledge of feminine instinct cannot be over-praised. His beautiful female creations all derive their beauty and charm from their instinctive response to the needs of the moment. When faced with some barriers that fill this sorry world of ours, Celia instinctively tells her cousin, “If we walk not in the trodden paths, our very petticoats will catch them.” Rosalind reacts instinctively to the sight of a blood-stained handkerchief and cries in the right feminine manner “I would, I were at home.” Volumina is inspired by natural feeling of a mother when she says,

*“Thou hast never in thy life,  
Showed thy dear mother any courtesy,  
When she, poor hen, fond of no second brood,*

*Has clucked thee from the wars, safely home,*

*Loaded with honour.”*

These women of Shakespeare, “have knowledge, shrewdness, wit and courage, without ceasing to be wholly feminine and objects of desire.” (Gordon).

### **Simple and Frank-hearted**

The dramatist’s female characters win the hearts of the readers by their very simplicity and intensity. Words are with them the vehicles of sentiment, and never of reflection. They speak on the impulse of the moment, and simple, unadorned truth comes out of their lips, they are at one with themselves and entertain no divided counsels. There is no Hamlet-like conflict within their souls; they are not given to brooding thought or, “noble inaction.” “They are in the man” says Raleigh, “either good or bad. The middle region of character where mixed motives predominate, belongs chiefly to the men.” These heroines of Shakespeare’s Comedy, have the certainly and ease in action, the Prince of Denmark coveted. “Their wit is quick and searching; but it is wholly at the command of their will, and is never employed to disturb or destroy.”

### **Their Love : True and Self-sacrificing**

Shakespeare’s women shine out at their most brilliant when ennobled and uplifted by love. Beatrice seems to have greater charm, vivacity and wit when in the presence of Benedick; Rosalind is at her most charming when talking to Orlando, Portia more poetic in the company of Bassanio, and Olivia gay only before Viola. This love of theirs is true love, and every fixed mark which does not alter when it alteration finds. They are more constant in love than men. Helena and Hermia remain faithful and firm even in the magic atmosphere of the enchanted wood near Athens. The vagaries of their lovers fail to move them. Their love is self-sacrificing; witness the self-surrender of Portia to Bassanio, her lord and master. They are generally speaking, quiet, shy and modest in the expression of their passion. The hesitancy of Silvia, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the shy speech of Portia, to Bassanio, or of Beatrice to Benedick. But when the occasion demands it, as it does from Helena in *All is Well that Ends Well*, they can be quite bold and forward in the pursuit of the object of their desire. Love transforms and emboldens them. As Mrs. Jameson shows, whatever courage and heroism they have is not inborn in them; they derive it through their affections and sensibilities. “Under influence of love”, writes Raleigh “delicate girls, brought up in seclusion and luxury, put on hose and doublet and allow their defaulting lovers to the wild wood, or to the court of a foreign potentate.”

### **Passionate and Intense**

Their love is passionate, intense, all physical; it is never ascetic or Puritanical. “Shakespeare’s Heroines”, comments J.W. Leavers, “are quite lacking in the saintly qualities of the Petrarchan mistress. Far from raising their lover’s thoughts above base desires, Rosalind teaches Orlando how to woo, and Juliet reciprocates Romeo’s ardour so frankly that he promptly forgets the chaste attractions of his former lady.” But the physical basis of their love does in no way make them less pure, chaste or modest. In Masculine disguise, they have often to pass through very ticklish situations, but they are ever watchful of their honour, and never compromise it even a whit. Hermia does not hesitate to elope with Demetrius, but makes him keep his distance. Never are the lovers allowed to cross the bounds of propriety.

## **Chaste and Virtuous**

These women may be young, un-conventional, and warm-blooded, but they are also always chaste and virtuous. Their virtue lights their path through the surrounding darkness of evil. Praising Shakespeare's heroines, Hudson writes, "Virtue is with them a discipline as well as a joy; a strong upright will is the backbone of it, and a healthy conscience is its keeper", and continues, "next to the Christian religion, humanity has no other so precious inheritance as Shakespeare's divine-gallery of womanhood." Helena, Portia, Rosalind, Viola, Isabella, etc.,-what a wealth and assemblage of moral beauty. They are all divinely good and virtuous, and all, equally, divinely unconscious of their own good and virtue.

## **Some Short-Comings**

Though the note of praise is more persistent and frequent, the women of Shakespeare have also come in for some criticism. First, fault has been found with them for their occasional jests and remarks considered improper for the fair sex. In this connection, it may be noted that in the age of Shakespeare, ladies of even the noblest families used stronger language in their letters and day to day conversation, than is ever used by any female character of the dramatist. Secondly, it has been pointed out that his range of femininity does not include women of wit and humour there is no female comic character like Falstaff among his gallery of womanhood. The dramatist was right in not painting any such character, for it would have been a monstrous caricature, gross and unnatural. Witty women there are, but wit is not all of them, it is only part of them, the other part of them, consists of the usual virtues of real, natural women. Thirdly, critics, like Cibber and Machenzie, have expressed the opinion that his female characters are inferior to his men. But Mrs. Jameson in her spirited defence of his heroines maintains that if at all they are inferior, they are so only in prominence or in power. "As a matter of fact, in Shakespeare the male and female characters bear precisely the same relation to each other as they do in nature and in society." The women never equal men in passion. Otherwise, in truth, in variety, and in effectiveness, they are in no way inferior to his men.

## **Conclusion**

We may conclude with the words of Gordon : "Shakespeare was a great student of women, and his portraits of women have never been surpassed. He has women of all ranks and ages-from the queen to the dairymaid-and from fifty to fifteen. The best of artists have their limits; but in this bright, particular region Shakespeare would appear to have had none.

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## **17.6 A Brief Actwise And Scene Wise Summary**

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### **ACT III, SCENE I**

#### **Oliver's Property Seized By Duke Frederick**

Back at Duke Frederick's court, Oliver is brought by Frederick's officials and is interrogated by Frederick regarding Orlando's whereabouts. Oliver does not know where Orlando has gone. But Duke Frederick is not prepared to listen to any excuses which Oliver may make, Duke Frederick is under the impression that Oliver is trying to throw dust into his eyes. Oliver says that he never loved his brother Orlando in his whole life, whereupon Duke Frederick says that in that case Oliver is doubly a villain. Duke Frederick then orders his officials to seize the entire property and wealth of Oliver and says that, if Oliver fails to produce his brother Orlando before him within twelve months, Oliver's entire property would be forfeited.



## **ACT-III, SCENE-II**

### **Orlando's Verses in Praise of Rosalind**

As we have noted before, Orlando had fallen in love with Rosalind at first sight just as she too had fallen in love with him at first sight. Now, in the forest of Arden, Orlando, having nothing else to do, goes about, hanging on the trees verses which he has written in praise of the beauty and virtue of Rosalind. He walks about, carving Rosalind's name on the bark of trees and hanging poems praising Rosalind's charms on tree-trunks. He then looks up at the sky and invites the moon-goddess to take a look at the verses which he has composed in honour of Rosalind.

### **Touchstone's Reaction to the Life of a Shepherd**

After Orlando has gone away, Corin and Touchstone appear on the scene. Corin and Touchstone have by now become quite friendly with each other. Corin asks whether or not Touchstone likes a shepherd's life. Touchstone replies that a shepherd's life has its attractive side, but it also has its unattractive features. Touchstone says that he likes this life because it affords solitude, but that he does not like it because it is a lonely life. He likes this life because it is spent in the fields, but he does not like it because he misses the court and therefore finds this life to be tedious. As it is a frugal life, it suits his disposition; but as this life does not offer an abundance of goods, it goes much against his inclinations.

### **A Long Talk Between Corin and Touchstone**

Now Touchstone asks Corin if he has any philosophical ideas in his head. Corin replies that he knows that the more sick one becomes the more uncomfortable he feels; and that a man, who is short of money, who does not have any means of livelihood, and who has no contentment, is without three good friends. Corin also knows that the property of rain is to wet and of fire to burn; that an abundance of grass fattens sheep; that a great cause of the night is the absence of the sun; and that, if a man has no natural wit in him and has not been brought up and educated properly, he belongs to an illiterate and ignorant family. Touchstone then asks Corin if he had ever been at the court. When Corin replies that he had never been at the court, Touchstone says that in that case Corin is a damned fellow who may be compared to an egg which has been roasted on one side only. Touchstone says that, if Corin has never gone to the court, he has never seen good manners; that, if Corin has never seen good manners, then Corin's manners must be wicked; and, if Corin's manners are wicked, then Corin would surely be damned. Corin replies that, what are known as good manners at the court, are regarded as absurd manners in the countryside, just as the behaviour of a countryman is regarded as absurd by the people at the court. Touchstone then makes a few more remarks, pointing out that Corin is an unintelligent fellow with a shallow mind. Ultimately Corin says that he is no match for Touchstone because Touchstone has the wit of a courtier. Touchstone says that Corin is an utterly inexperienced man who can be cured of his stupidity by God only means of a surgical operation. Corin replies that he is a true labourer, that he eats the bread which he earns by toil, that he envies no man's happiness, that he feels glad to witness other people's blessings, and that his greatest joy lies in seeing his ewes graze and his lambs suck. Touchstone thereupon says that Corin is guilty of the sin of bringing the male sheep and the female sheep together for the purpose of copulation. In fact, Corin acts as a pimp on behalf of the male sheep, says Touchstone.

### **Touchstone's Criticism of Orlando's Verses**

Rosalind appears with a sheet of paper which she found hanging on a tree. Reading through

the contents of this paper, she finds that the verses written on it contain praises of her beauty and virtue. Hearing these verses, Touchstone says that he can write such verses continuously over a period of eight years without pausing, except at meal-times and at night when he has to sleep. He further says that the verses, which she has read out, are devoid of rhythm. Touchstone then gives an example of the kind of verses which he would write. In these verses he makes fun of Rosalind. For instance, one of his verses reads as follows.

Sweetest nut hath sourest rind,  
Such a nut is Rosalind.

Rosalind says that she found those verses on a tree; and Touchstone thereupon says that the tree has yielded bad fruit.

### **A Conversation Between Rosalind and Celia About Orlando**

Celia now appears. She too has found a sheet of paper hanging on a tree and has brought it with her. She reads out the verses on this sheet of paper, and finds that the subject of these verses is the beauty and virtue of Rosalind. According to the writer of these verses, Rosalind possesses all the virtues which heaven can bestow on women. Rosalind had been credited in these verses with having the beauty of Helen but not Helen's unfaithfulness, having Atalanta's swiftness, possessing Lucretia's modesty, and having Cleopatra's majesty. The writer of these verses has proclaimed that he will live and die as Rosalind's slave. Rosalind, finding that she is the subject of so many verses which some unknown man has composed, says that she had never been so berhymed since the time of the philosopher Pythagoras, when she had been an Irish rat. She then asks Celia who could have written these verses in praise of her. Celia says that the man, who has written these verses, is one who wears a chain which at one time Rosalind herself used to wear. Rosalind asks who this man is. Celia tries to evade this question. Rosalind becomes impatient and asks, with the greatest vehemence, who the writer of these verses is. Celia says that the writer of these verses has really done something wonderful. Rosalind now becomes even more impatient and says that, although she is apparelled like a man, she still has the impatient disposition of a woman. Any more delay in Celia's telling her the identity of the writer of these verses would make her most miserable, says Rosalind. At last Celia tells her that Orlando is the man who has written these verses and hung them on trees. Rosalind receives this piece of information in a state of great excitement. She feels overjoyed to know that Orlando too has come to the forest of Arden, but at the same she feels sorely unhappy because she is dressed like a man and has also to behave like a man. She then asks Celia several questions pertaining to Orlando, and she demands a prompt reply. Celia says that she can reply to these questions in one word only if she had the huge mouth of a giant. However, Celia satisfies some part of Rosalind's curiosity by telling her where she had seen Orlando and how he was dressed. When Celia tells Rosalind that Orlando was dressed and equipped like a hunter, Rosalind says that he has come into the forest to kill her heart.

### **An Encounter Between Orlando and Jaques**

When the two cousins are thus talking, Orlando and Jaques appear on the scene. The two girls hide themselves and overhear the conversation between the two men. Orlando and Jaques have met in the forest by chance and have entered into a dialogue. Eventually Jaques thanks Orlando for the latter's company, but at the same time says that it would have been better if he had not met Orlando. Orlando then also thanks Jaques for Jaques's company, but says at the same time that he is thanking

Jaques only out of courtesy and not because he is really feeling thankful to him. Jaques then says that Orlando should not mar the trees in the forest by writing love-songs on their bark. Orlando says that Jaques should not mar his verses by reading them in the wrong spirit. Jaques asks if Rosalind is the name of Orlando's sweetheart. Orlando replies in the affirmative. Jaques says that he does not like her name. Orlando says that there was no intention to please Jaques when Rosalind was given this name. Jaques admires Orlando's wit and says that most probably Orlando's wit is made of Atalanta's heels. Jaques then suggests that he and Orlando should sit down and rail against the world because of all its misery. Orlando replies that he is not prepared to chide anyone in this world except himself because he suffers from the maximum number of faults and therefore deserves to be scolded more than anybody else. Jaques says that Orlando's worst fault is that he is in love. Orlando replies that he would not exchange this fault with Jaques's best virtue. Finally, Jaques addresses Orlando as "Signior Love" and bids him farewell, whereupon Orlando addresses Jaques as "Monsieur Melancholy" and bids him adieu.

### **The Different Speeds at Which Time Passes**

Jaques now goes away; and Rosalind approaches Orlando in order to enjoy some fun at his cost. As we know, she is disguised as a man; and therefore she feels no hesitation in accosting Orlando. She whispers to Celia that she would now play some tricks upon Orlando. She then asks Orlando what hour of the day it is. Orlando says that there are no clocks in the forest, and that therefore he cannot tell the hour. Rosalind says that there seems to be no lover in the forest because, if there had been a lover in the forest, he would have known the hour. A lover sighs and groans every minute, and is therefore in a position to calculate the passing of time. She then goes on to tell Orlando, in reply to his various questions, that time passes at different speeds with different persons. For instance, she says, time passes at a very slow speed with a young maiden who is going to be married. Every single day before her marriage seems to a maiden to be as long as a year. Rosalind then says that time passes easily and in a leisurely manner with a priest who knows no Latin and with a rich man who is not suffering from the gout. The priest, who knows no Latin, sleeps soundly because he does not have to study learned books; and the rich man, who is not suffering from any pain in his joints, lives happily because he feels no pain. Time passes very swiftly with a thief who is being taken to the gallows to be hanged. Time stands still with lawyers during the vacation because the lawyers have nothing to do during the vacation and are not therefore aware of the passing of the time.

### **Some Fictions Invented by Rosalind**

Orlando is greatly amused by Rosalind's description of the different speeds at which time travels. (We should not here forget that Rosalind is dressed like a man and that Orlando really thinks her to be a man). Orlando now asks Rosalind (who has the name of Ganymede) where she lives. Rosalind replies that she lives with her sister (Aliena), on the outskirts of the forest, "like fringe upon a petticoat". She also tells him that she was born in this very forest and had been educated by religious-minded uncle of hers. Her uncle, she says, was thoroughly acquainted with court manners and also with the art of wooing. Her uncle, had fallen in love and had known the bitterness of disappointment in love. She further says that her uncle used to talk against women and against falling in love. Rosalind also says that she is thankful to God for not having been born a woman because, if she had been a woman, she would have been suffering from many of the faults which her uncle used to enumerate. (Once again, it may be pointed out that Rosalind is dressed like a man and that she is talking to Orlando as if she were a man. Orlando naturally regards her as a man, and carries on the conversation with her as if she were really a man. This situation on the stage would be very amusing indeed, because the audience

knows that Orlando is mistaken in thinking that he is talking to a man).

### **Orlando to Woo Ganymede As if Ganymede Were Rosalind**

Orlando asks which principal faults Ganymede's (or Rosalind's) uncle had found in women. Rosalind replies that there were no principal faults because all the faults pointed out by her uncle were equally serious. She then goes on to say that there is a young man in this forest who has been marring the trees by carving the name of Rosalind on their bark and has also been hanging love-poems on them. She says that, if she could meet that young man, she would inform him that he is suffering from the fever of love. Orlando says that he is the young man who is suffering from the fever of love, Rosalind says that she does not find any of the symptoms of the fever of love in him. A lover generally has sunken cheeks, a neglected beard, and a tendency to avoid meeting people. A lover, she says, goes about with his sleeves unbuttoned, with the laces of his shoes untied and, with his stockings ungartered. She says that Orlando does not show any of these marks of a lover. Orlando says that he swears by the white hand of Rosalind that he is really in love with that girl. Rosalind then says that love is a kind of madness, and that a lover deserves to be confined to a dark house and whipped in order to be cured of the madness of love. However, she claims that she can cure Orlando of this madness by other means. She says that she can cure Orlando of the madness of love if he meets her daily and wooes her as if she were his own Rosalind. When she is being wooed by him, she would behave just as a woman being courted by her lover behaves. Sometimes she would pretend to hate him; sometimes she would seem to accept him as her lover; sometimes she would weep for him; and sometimes she would reject him and insult him. And in this way she would cure him of the fever of love. Orlando agrees to follow the prescribed procedure. Thus, it is decided that Orlando would meet Ganymede daily and would plead his love as if Ganymede were his Rosalind.

### **ACT-III, SCENE-III**

#### **Touchstone Courting a Goat-Herd, Audrey By Name**

Touchstone has developed a friendship with a goat-herd by the name of Audrey. Audrey is a simple minded village girl, and Touchstone tells her that he would help her in looking after her goats. Touchstone says that he finds himself here with Audrey and her goats in the same way as the ancient fanciful Roman poet Ovid found himself among the Goths after having been banished from his native land. It so happens that Jaques is also present nearby at this time, and is overhearing the conversation between Touchstone and Audrey. Audrey says that she is a chaste woman, though not a beautiful one. Touchstone replies that, if a chaste woman were beautiful also, the combination would make her excessively sweet. Chastity combined with beauty would produce the same effect as honey combined with sugar does. Touchstone now tells Audrey that the vicar of the next village, Sir Olivier Martext, would soon be coming to this place in order to unite him and her in marriage.

#### **Touchstone's Marriage, Postponed at Jaques's Advice**

A few minutes later, Sir Oliver Martext arrives in accordance with his appointment with Touchstone. Sir Oliver Martext asks who would give this woman away in marriage. Touchstone replies that he does not want that anybody should gift away this woman to him. Sir Oliver Martext thereupon says that no marriage is lawful if the bride is not given away in marriage by her guardian. Jaques now steps forward and offers to give away the woman in marriage to Touchstone. At the same time, Jaques tells Touchstone that the marriage ceremony should be performed in a decent manner, and that it does

not become a dignified man like Touchstone to get married as if he were a beggar in the forest. Besides, says Jaques, there should be a well-qualified priest to perform the marriage ceremony, because this particular priest would not perform the ceremony in a proper manner. Touchstone inwardly thinks that it would be much better if a regular ceremony of marriage were not performed, because in that case he would be able to forsake his wife if, after some time, he begins to feel tired of her. However, at the advice of Jaques, Touchstone dismisses the priest, saying that he does not need the priest's services. Jaques assures him that he would have Touchstone married in a ceremonious manner by a proper priest.

### **ACT-III, SCENE-IV**

#### **Celia Teasing Rosalind With Reference to Orlando**

Rosalind is feeling melancholy because Orlando has not come to make love to her as had been agreed upon by them both. She tells Celia that she feels like weeping because Orlando has not come. Celia teases Rosalind by saying that Orlando is a hypocritical lover. Celia also informs Rosalind that Orlando is working as an attendant on Duke Senior in the forest. Rosalind says that she had met Duke Senior on the previous day and had entered into a conversation with him. Duke Senior had asked her about the family to which she belonged, and she had replied that she came from a family which was as noble as the family to which Duke Senior himself belonged. (We should keep in mind the fact that Rosalind is still disguised as a man and that, when she met Duke Senior, she did not reveal her real identity to him. In other words, Rosalind did not tell Duke Senior that she was his daughter in the disguise of a man, but had just told him that she came from as good a family as the one to which he himself belonged). Celia then says, again in a teasing manner, that Orlando is a brave man, that he writes brave verses, that he speaks brave words, that he swears brave oaths, and that he breaks his oaths bravely.

#### **Rosalind, Eager to Witness a Love-Scene**

Corin comes and tells Rosalind and Celia that the shepherd Silvius is pleading his love to Phebe who is behaving scornfully towards him. Rosalind expresses a desire to witness that scene of love-making, because the sight of lovers is a source of much satisfaction to those who are themselves in love and who happen to witness a love-scene.

### **ACT-III, SCENE-V**

#### **Phebe's Contemptuous Treatment of Silvius**

Corin takes Rosalind and Celia to another part of the forest where Silvius is pleading his love to Phebe and is being treated by Phebe with contempt. Rosalind and Celia hide themselves and overhear the conversation between Silvius and Phebe. Silvius says that Phebe is even more cruel towards him than an executioner is towards the man who is to be executed. Phebe replies that she has no intention to execute Silvius and that Silvius is mistaken in thinking that she can kill him with her eyes. She says that eyes are a human being's most delicate organs, and that Silvius is therefore wrong in describing her eyes as tyrants, butchers, and murderers. Silvius says that Phebe would realize the truth of his words when she herself falls in love with somebody some day. Phebe thereupon says that Silvius should not come near her till that day.

#### **Phebe in Love With Ganymede**

At this point Rosalind steps forward, and rebukes Phebe for treating her lover Silvius in a

contemptuous manner. She then turns towards Silvius and scolds him for tolerating Phebe's insulting attitude and for unduly flattering Phebe by praising her looks. Phebe is so struck by the handsome appearance of Rosalind, who is disguised as a man, that she falls in love with her (Rosalind). Here is another case of love at first sight, though Phebe does not have the least notion that the young man, who calls himself Ganymede, is actually a woman. As Phebe now speaks to Rosalind in amorous tones and looks at Rosalind with an amorous expression in her eyes, Rosalind rebukes Phebe and, still posing to be a man, rejects Phebe's love. Rosalind then urges Phebe not to discard her lover Silvius, but to respond to his love.

### **Phebe to Write a Love-Letter to Ganymede**

After Rosalind, Celia, and Corin have gone away, Silvius again pleads his love to Phebe. However, Phebe has fallen in love with Ganymede (or Rosalind who is disguised as a man). Phebe now decides to write a love-letter to Ganymede. She tells Silvius that he can enjoy her company but that he should not expect her love. Silvius says that he would be satisfied with her company even if she does not respond to his love. Phebe then inwardly decides to make use of Silvius as a messenger who would carry her love-letter to Ganymede (or Rosalind).

### **ACT-IV, SCENE-I**

#### **Jaques, Mocked at By Rosalind**

Jaques and Rosalind meet in the forest by chance. Rosalind says that she has heard that Jaques is a melancholy kind of man, Jaques admits that he is melancholy by nature. He then tells Rosalind (who is disguised as a man by the name of Ganymede) that he has neither the scholar's melancholy nor the musician's melancholy, nor the courtier's melancholy, nor the soldier's melancholy, nor the lawyer's melancholy. He says that his melancholy is composed of many ingredients, and that it is largely a product of his varied meditations in the course of his travels. Rosalind says that, if he has been travelling, he has every reason to be melancholy, because he must have sold his lands and property to raise funds for his travels and must therefore have become financially poor. She also says mockingly that, in order to prove that he has travelled a lot, he should speak his native language with a foreign accent, that he should wear his clothes in the manner of foreigners, that he should speak disparagingly of his own country, and that he should scold God for having given him a face and features which resemble those of his country men.

#### **Rosalind's Reaction to Orlando's Mock-Wooing**

Jaques now leaves Rosalind; and Orlando appears on the scene. Orlando says that he is only an hour late in keeping his promise to meet Ganymede. Rosalind says that, if a man is late in coming to meet his beloved even by the fraction of a minute, he is no true lover. Orlando apologizes to her for being late. Rosalind then invites Orlando to woo her in accordance with the arrangement which they had both decided upon at their first meeting. (The arrangement was that Orlando would regard Ganymede as his beloved Rosalind, and would woo Ganymede in order ultimately to be cured of the fever of love). Rosalind says that she is in a holiday mood and is likely to accept Orlando's love. Orlando says that he loves his Rosalind so intensely that, in case she does not respond to his love, he would die. Rosalind says that this world is almost six thousand years old but that in all this time not a single man has ever died in the cause of his love. Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but no man has ever died of love, she says. Even Troilus and Leander did not die of love, as is generally

believed by people. After the two have talked for a little more time in the same vein, Orlando says that he has to go and attend upon the Duke at dinner-time but that he would come back to Ganymede in about two hours. Rosalind allows Orlando to go, saying that if he gets late in returning to her even by one minute, she would think him to be a false lover. When Orlando has gone, Rosalind tells Celia that she is passionately in love with Orlando, and that her love is as deep as the Bay of Portugal.

#### **ACT-IV, SCENE-II**

##### **A Deer, Killed By One of Duke Senior's Lords**

One of Duke Senior's lords has killed a deer. Jaques makes fun of this lord by saying that he deserves to be honoured like a Roman conqueror and that the dead deer's horns should now be planted upon the lord's head to serve as a garland of victory. Jaques then asks another lord to sing a song even if he cannot sing it tunefully. The second lord thereupon sings a song the subject of which is the killing of a deer.

#### **ACT-IV, SCENE-III**

##### **Silvius, Surprised By the Contents of Phebe's Letter to Ganymede**

Rosalind and Celia are waiting for Orlando who had promised to come by two o'clock. There is no sign of Orlando yet. Silvius arrives with a letter for Rosalind. This letter has been sent by Phebe to Ganymede with whom Phebe had fallen in love, thinking Ganymede to be a man. The letter, which Silvius has brought, contains a message of love from Phebe. However, Phebe had given Silvius the impression that she had written a reproachful letter to Ganymede (or Rosalind) because Ganymede had spoken to her rudely. Rosalind opens the envelope and reads out the letter. The letter is written in verse; and the verses express Phebe's passionate love for Ganymede. Silvius is surprised to learn that the letter, which was supposed to be a rebuke to Ganymede, is actually a love-letter. Celia, after hearing the contents of the letter, expresses her sympathy for Silvius towards whom Phebe is not only indifferent but scornful. Rosalind intervenes to say that Silvius deserves no sympathy because he is in love with a woman who is making use of him as a mere tool. Rosalind describes Silvius as a "tame snake" without any self-respect. She then sends her reply to Phebe's letter. Her reply is that, if Phebe wants Ganymede's love, she should respond to the love of Silvius.

##### **Oliver in the Forest of Arden**

Orlando's eldest brother, Oliver, now appears unexpectedly on the scene. Rosalind and Celia have never met Oliver before, and do not therefore recognize him. Oliver says that he has been sent to them by Orlando who had an appointment with Ganymede for two o'clock, and who had not been able to keep his appointment. Orlando also hands over a blood-stained handkerchief to Rosalind. Rosalind and Celia feel puzzled by Oliver's words, and also by his handing over to Rosalind a blood-stained handkerchief. They ask Oliver to be more explicit. Oliver thereupon gives to Rosalind and Celia an account of what had happened after Orlando had parted from Ganymede and Celia.

##### **Oliver's Strange Account of Events to Ganymede and Celia**

After leaving Rosalind and Celia, Orlando was going to attend upon the Duke when, on the way, he saw a man lying asleep under an old oak tree. Orlando also saw a green and golden snake which had coiled itself round that sleeping man's neck. Hearing the noise of footsteps and seeing somebody approaching, the snake had instantly uncoiled itself and had slipped away into a bush. Behind

that bush lay a lioness with her eyes fixed upon the sleeping man. The lioness was apparently waiting for the sleeping man to get up, so that she could then attack him and drink his blood. The lioness was waiting for the man to wake up because it is the habit of this royal beast never to attack any creature who is dead or who appears to be dead. On approaching the man who lay asleep under the tree, Orlando saw, to his utter surprise, that this man was no other than his own brother, Oliver. Now, Orlando had every reason to let the lioness attack Oliver and kill him. But, being generous and forgiving by nature, Orlando fought with the lioness and succeeded in killing the beast. In this way Orlando was instrumental in saving the life of his brother Oliver, who had been thoroughly antagonistic towards Orlando and who had been responsible for Orlando's going into exile. Oliver had then told his whole story to Orlando, and Orlando had greatly been moved by Oliver's account of the manner in which he had been expelled by Duke Frederick. Both the brothers had thereupon shed tears of sorrow and of joy. Oliver then went on to tell Ganymede and Celia that Orlando had suffered a wound in his fight with the lioness, and that Oliver had dressed the wound. The handkerchief, which Oliver had brought, had become stained with Orlando's blood; and Orlando had sent this handkerchief to Ganymede as evidence of the fact that he had got wounded and had therefore not been able to keep his appointment with Ganymede.

### **Ganymede's (or Rosalind's) Fainting Fit**

On hearing this story, and especially on learning that Orlando had suffered a wound. Ganymede (or Rosalind) now faints. Celia feels alarmed by Rosalind's fainting, and tries to revive her. Soon Rosalind recovers her consciousness and tells Oliver that she had only pretended to have fainted. She also asks Oliver to convey the fact of her feigned swooning to Orlando. Actually, of course, Rosalind had actually swooned. Her swoon was by no means a feigned swoon. But, as she is still disguised as a man, she tells Oliver that she had only pretended to swoon. She adopts this attitude because she does not want Oliver to know her real identity at this stage. In any case, we now find that Oliver too has arrived in the forest of Arden, and that Orlando is now fully reconciled with him. Despite Oliver's past antagonism towards him, Orlando has been instrumental in saving Oliver's life from the clutches and the claws of a lioness.

### **ACT-V, SCENE-I**

#### **Audrey's Rustic Suitor, Dismissed By Touchstone**

In an earlier scene, Jaques had prevailed upon Touchstone to postpone his marriage till a better priest than Sir Oliver Martext could be found to perform the marriage ceremony. Audrey is getting impatient because of the delay in the marriage. Touchstone, however, tries to console her and to assure her that they would get married soon. At the same time there is a fellow by the name of William who claims that Audrey had promised to marry him. William now comes and repeats his claim. Touchstone, finding that William is a humble and silly rustic, begins to poke fun at him. Touchstone subjects William to a close cross-examination, his object being merely to enjoy some fun at William's cost. Among the questions which Touchstone asks William is whether William is a wise fellow. William replies that he certainly has a pretty wit, meaning that he is wise enough. Touchstone thereupon says that a fool always thinks himself to be wise while a wise man thinks himself to be a fool. Touchstone then goes on to inform William that he (Touchstone) is the man, and not William, who would marry this woman, namely Audrey. He then asks William, in his own clownish manner, to give up his claim to Audrey and to quit this spot, threatening at the same time to put an end to William's life if William persists in his claim to



marry Audrey. Audrey endorses what Touchstone has said, whereupon William departs.

## **ACT-V, SCENE-II**

### **Oliver and Celia in Love With Each Other**

Oliver informs his brother Orlando that he (Oliver) had fallen in love with Celia (or Aliena) as soon as he had seen her, and that Celia too had fallen in love with him. Of course, Oliver does not know the true identity of Celia. Orlando expresses his surprise that Oliver does not know the true identity of Celia. Orlando expresses his surprise that Oliver and Celia should have fallen in love with each other upon such a small acquaintance. Of course, even Orlando does not know the true identity of Celia, just as he does not know the true identity of the young man who calls himself Ganymede. Oliver confirms that he and Aliena have fallen in love with each other suddenly and upon a small acquaintance. He now seeks Orlando's support for his wish to marry Aliena. Oliver also says that he now has no wish to return to the city, and that he would transfer the entire property of their late father to Orlando. Oliver says further that, after getting married to Aliena, he would settle down here in the forest of Arden and lead a shepherd's life. Orlando readily gives his consent to Oliver's marrying Aliena, and says that the marriage should take place on the very next day, and that he would invite Duke Senior and Duke Senior's companions in the forest of Arden to the marriage.

### **Ganymede's (that is, Rosalind's) Account of How Aliena and Oliver Had Fallen in Love With Each Other**

Oliver goes away to inform Aliena about Orlando's consent to his marrying her. Ganymede (that is, Rosalind) now comes to see Orlando who had been wounded by the lioness when he had attacked her to save Oliver's life. When Rosalind expresses her concern because of the wound that Orlando had received during his fight with the lioness, Orlando says that he has certainly been wounded but that he has been wounded by the eyes of a lady. Rosalind says that she had fainted on hearing about the wound that Orlando had received. (We should not forget that even at this time Rosalind is disguised as a man). Orlando then refers to the suddenness with which his brother Oliver had fallen in love with Aliena. Rosalind says that Oliver and Aliena had fallen in love with each other as suddenly as two rams start fighting with each other. She says that their falling in love was as swift as Julius Caesar's swift conquest of a territory which he had gone to invade but which had surrendered to him as soon as he had arrived there. Caesar had then written to the Roman Senate: "I came, I saw, and I overcame." In the same way Aliena and Oliver had no sooner sighed than they asked one another the reason; they had no sooner come to know the reason than they decided to get married. And now, says Rosalind, they are so deeply in love with each other that even clubs cannot part them.

### **Ganymede's (that is, Rosalind's) Assurance to Orlando**

Orlando says that Aliena and Oliver would be getting married on the following day. Then he says that his brother is a lucky man, while he himself (that is, Orlando) is feeling heart-heavy at the thought that his own love for Rosalind remains unfulfilled. Rosalind thereupon consoles him with the assurance that at the very time, when Oliver marries Aliena, Orlando would marry Rosalind. She says that, since the age of three years, she has been receiving instruction from a most learned magician and that by now she herself has become a successful magician. By the power of her magic, she can so arrange matters that Orlando would get married to Rosalind on the following day. She then asks him to go and make the necessary arrangements for his own marriage, in addition to his brother's marriage.

### **Ganymede's Promise to Unite the Lovers**

Silvius and Phebe now appear on the scene. Phebe tells Rosalind (or Ganymede) that it was most ungentlemanly on Ganymede's part to have revealed the contents of her letter to Silvius. Ganymede replies that Silvius is a very faithful man and is sincerely in love with Phebe. Phebe says that she is in love with Ganymede; and Orlando then says that he is in love with Rosalind. Rosalind (or Ganymede) say that she is in love with no woman. Silvius says that his love for Phebe is all passion, all adoration, all humbleness, and all purity. Phebe says that her love for Rosalind is also entirely of the same kind. Rosalind (or Ganymede) says that they should now stop talking in this manner. She compares their talk to the howling of Irish wolves against the moon. She then tells all the three (Orlando, Phebe, and Silvius) that she would somehow fulfil their desires on the following day. She gets a promise from Phebe that, in case Phebe refuses to marry Ganymede, she would agree to get married to Silvius.

### **ACT-V, SCENE-III**

#### **Touchstone's Dislike for a Song Sung By Two Pages**

Touchstone assures Audrey that he would marry her on the following day. Audrey says that it is her inmost desire to get married and become a woman of the world, meaning that she is very anxious to become a housewife. Two of Duke Senior's boy-servants come and sing a song in compliance with Touchstone's wish. It is a song about a lover and his sweetheart who were going to get married in the season of spring, when the birds sing and sweet lovers think of their love. At the end of the song, Touchstone says that there was not much substance in this song, and that even the tune of the song was not very sweet or melodious. Touchstone tells the boys that it was indeed a foolish song. He asks them to go and mend their voices.

### **ACT-V, SCENE-IV**

#### **Promises, Elicited By ganymede From Duke Senior and From Others**

Arrangements for the marriage of Oliver and Aliena have been made, and Duke Senior has duly been informed of the developments. Orlando has also told Duke Senior that the young man by the name of Ganymede has promised to bring Rosalind, and to have her married to him (Orlando). Rosalind (still disguised as a man by the name of Ganymede) now arrives in the company of Silvius and Phebe. Rosalind asks Duke Senior if he would bestow his daughter Rosalind on Orlando in case she is produced before him. Duke Senior gives his whole-hearted consent to Orlando's marrying Rosalind in case Rosalind is brought here. Orlando also gives his full consent to marry Rosalind in case she appears here. Ganymede (or Rosalind) then makes Phebe repeat her promise that, in case Phebe refuses to marry Ganymede, she would have no objection to marrying Silvius. Ganymede next urges all of them to fulfil their promises when the time comes. Ganymede (or Rosalind) then leaves in the company of Aliena (or Celia) for a little while.

#### **The Resemblance Between Ganymede and Rosalind**

Duke Senior tells Orlando that the appearance and features of this shepherdboy, namely Ganymede, seem to resemble those of his daughter Rosalind. Orlando says that he too had perceived this resemblance and had at one time thought that this shepherd-boy was Duke Senior's son but that he had dismissed the notion because this boy had told him that he was forest-born, and that he had been taught and tutored by his uncle who was a great magician living in the forest.

### **Touchstone, Presented to Duke Senior**

Touchstone and Audrey then appear on the scene, and Jaques says that a pair of fools have arrived. Jaques now introduces Touchstone to Duke Senior, saying that this man is the motley fool whom he had met very often in the forest. Jaques also tells Duke Senior that this fool claims that he had been a courtier at one time. Touchstone says that he had undoubtedly been a courtier at one time. To prove the truth of his claim, Touchstone says that he had participated in the dances at the court, that he had known how to flatter a lady, that he had been dealing with friends in a diplomatic manner, that he had been outwardly very amiable in his dealings with his enemies, that he had ruined three tailors by having failed to pay their bills, and that he had had four quarrels and had come very close to fighting a duel as a result of one of those quarrels.

### **Touchstone's Choice of Audrey as a Wife For Himself**

Touchstone then says that he is going to marry Audrey who is a poor and ugly virgin, but who is his exclusive property. He goes on to say that he has decided to marry a woman whom no other man would marry. She may be ugly, but she is honest (or chaste). Having heard Touchstone talk in this manner, Duke Senior says that Touchstone is a very quick-witted man who talks in a pithy style.

### **Avoiding a Fight By the Use of the Word "If"**

Jaques now asks Touchstone how Touchstone had avoided the duel to which he has just referred. Touchstone thereupon describes the stages by which a quarrel deepens and becomes more and more serious. In his case also the quarrel, which had taken place between him and another courtier, had assumed serious proportions till it had reached the stage of what might be called the "Lie Circumstantial". Fortunately, the quarrel had not gone beyond this stage to the "Lie Direct". Touchstone then says that even when a quarrel has reached the last stage, namely, the Lie direct, an actual fight may still be avoided by the use of the word "if". On one occasion, says Touchstone, even seven magistrates, with their combined wisdom, had failed to put an end to a quarrel between two courtiers; but that, when the two quarrelling men actually faced each other, one of them made use of the word "if", and the quarrel was then immediately settled. One of the quarrelling men had thus made use of the word if: "if you said so, then I also said so". At this, the two quarrelling men had shaken hands and had become sworn brothers. Thus, says Touchstone, the word "if" is a peace-maker.

### **Touchstone a Wise Fool**

Jaques now asks Duke Senior if Touchstone is not a unique fellow; and Duke Senior makes the following comment upon Touchstone: "He uses his folly like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit." What Duke Senior means to say is that Touchstone is like a hunter who uses a dummy horse as a cover and who, from behind this cover, aims his arrows of wit at his victims. In other words, Touchstone uses the label of a fool for himself but that he talks very wisely.

### **The True Identity of Ganymede and Aliena, Revealed**

Rosalind and Celia now return in their own persons. In other words, they are no longer disguised as Ganymede and Aliena. They are escorted by Hymen, the god of marriages. Hymen tells Duke Senior that he has brought the Duke's daughter Rosalind from heaven and that Duke Senior should now unite her with Orlando in marriage. Rosalind, addressing Duke Senior, says that she gives herself to him because she belongs to him. Then she addresses Orlando, and says that she gives herself to him because she belongs to him also. Both Duke Senior and Orlando feel amazed and bewildered

to see Rosalind. Phebe now realizes the fact that the young man who called himself Ganymede is actually a woman by the name of Rosalind. Hymen now speaks again in order to clear the confusion in the minds of Duke Senior, Orlando, and the others. Having explained the facts, Hymen tells the various couples that they should get ready to be united in wedlock. The various couples are Orlando and Rosalind; Oliver and Celia; Silvius and Phebe; and Touchstone and Audrey. Hymen says that a wedding is the supreme gift which Juno, the queen of the gods, bestows upon human beings. A song is then sung in honour of marriage and the god of marriages. Duke Senior is now a very happy man not only because he has got his daughter Rosalind but because his niece (Celia) has come with Rosalind. He tells Celia that she is as welcome as his own daughter. Phebe tells Silvius that she would not go back upon her word, and that she would certainly marry him now in view of his constancy in love.

### **Some Unexpected Developments**

At this point a young man by the name of Jaques de Boys appears. He tells the gathering that he is the second son of the late Sir Rowland de Boys and that he has brought some news. He tells the company that Duke Frederick had assembled an army to invade the forest of Arden with the intention of putting an end to the life of Duke Senior who has been living in the forest and attracting more and more followers. However, having arrived in the forest, Duke Frederick had by chance met a saintly old man with whom he had entered into a discussion. The words of the saintly old man had profoundly influenced Duke Frederick's mind with the result that Duke Frederick had not only given up all thoughts of attacking Duke Senior but had decided to renounce the world and worldly life altogether. As a consequence of this decision by Duke Frederick, the dukedom would now be restored to Duke Senior, and the property of Duke Senior's followers would also be restored to them. Likewise, Oliver's estate would also be restored to Oliver.

### **Wedding gifts for Oliver and Orlando**

Duke Senior cordially welcomes Sir Rowland's second son (whose name is also Jaques, the full name being Jaques de Boys). Duke Senior says that Jaques de Boys has really brought good news, and that the information brought by him means that he has brought excellent wedding gifts for his two brothers (Oliver and Orlando). Oliver would get back his estate, while Orlando, as Duke Senior's son-in-law, would inherit Duke Senior's dominions which are going to be restored to Duke Senior. Duke Senior then informs all his followers that they would duly be rewarded for having kept company with him in his evil times. He asks them all now to celebrate the occasion with music and dancing.

### **Jaques to Go and Join Frederick**

Jaques, the philosopher, now asks the other Jaques (Sir Rowland's second son) if Duke Frederick has really decided to become a hermit and to renounce the life of the court, Jaques de Boys confirms what he had previously said. Jaques thereupon says that he would go and meet Duke Frederick because, in his opinion, one can get many ideas and much matter for discussion from persons who get converted from a worldly life to a life of withdrawal from the world. Jaques, the philosopher, then offers his good wishes to all the four couples who are going to get married, though at the same time he tells Touchstone that Touchstone's marriage would hardly last for two months. Finally, he announces his decision to leave them all in order to go and join Frederick who has become a hermit. Duke Senior tries to stop Jaques from going away, but Jaques's mind is made up. When Jaques has left, Duke Senior asks all the others to resume their celebrations and their rejoicing.

## The Epilogue

Rosalind now appears on the stage alone. She tells the audience in the theatre that she stands before them in order to speak the words of the epilogue. She says that actually a good play needs no epilogue just as good wine needs no advertisement or publicity but that a good play may be made to seem better with the help of an epilogue. She then calls upon all members of the audience including the ladies and the gentlemen, to express a good opinion about the theatrical performance which they have witnessed; and she also calls upon them to applaud the performance with cheers and with clapping. At the same time she tells the audience that actually she is not a woman but a young boy who had assumed and played the role of a woman called Rosalind.

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### 17.7 Some Important Explanations

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1. *Love is surely a madness, and I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too.*

#### Context

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are speech by Rosalind to Orlando in the forest of Arden. Rosalind is at this time disguised as a man, so that Orlando does not know the real identity of the person to whom he is talking. Orlando has been writing verses in praise of the beauty and virtue of Rosalind, and has been hanging those verses on the trees in the forest. He now tells Rosalind (who is disguised as a man having the name of Ganymede) that he is truly and deeply in love with Rosalind.

#### Explanation

Rosalind says that love is wholly a madness and that, in her opinion, a lover deserves to be treated exactly as a madman is treated. In order to rid a madman of his madness, he was in those days confined to a dark room and was then whipped. It was thought that by being thus treated a madman would regain his original sanity. A lover, says Rosalind, should also be confined to a dark room and then whipped if he is to be rid of the madness of love. However, this treatment is not being actually employed in the case of lovers; and the reason why lovers are not being thus punished and cured is that the madness of love is almost universal, so that even those, who have to carry out this kind of punishment and treatment, are themselves in love. When the magistrates and the doctors are themselves sick, who would sit in judgment upon and who would cure them of their sickness?

#### Critical Comments

This is one of the many witty speeches which Rosalind makes in the course of this play. Rosalind has a brilliant and fertile wit which becomes apparent to us in her conversations with Touchstones, with Jaques and, above all, with Orlando. Almost every remark which she makes in the course of her conversation with these persons shows her sparkling wit. In this particular speech, she describes love as purely a kind of madness, and she says at the same time that love is a madness from which almost everybody in this world suffers. The treatment which she prescribes for the madness of love is also very amusing.

2. *I'll graff it with you, and then I shall graff it with a medlar. Then it will be the earliest fruit i' th' country; for you'll be rotten ere you be half ripe, and that's the right virtue of the medlar.*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play, *As You Like It*, are part of a speech by Rosalind. Rosalind has found some verses which had been hung on a tree by her lover. When she reads out those verses to Touchstone, he expresses the view that the verses have indeed been badly composed. Rosalind says that she found them on a tree; and Touchstone mockingly says that the tree has yielded bad fruit. Thereupon Rosalind makes the speech quoted here.

### **Explanation**

Rosalind says that she would graft this fruit (namely the verses which she found hanging on a tree) with Touchstone, and that afterwards she would graft this fruit with the fruit known as the "medlar". After having been thus grafted, the resultant fruit would prove to be the earliest in the whole country. The true quality of the fruit called the medlar is that it becomes rotten before it is half-ripe; and the same, according to Rosalind, is the case with Touchstone because he too is a meddler (because he is man who pokes his nose into matters which do not concern him). Thus will this fruit eventually resemble Touchstone. The fruit known as the medlar is not eatable until it becomes soft by over-ripening. In fact, this fruit does not really ripen till it becomes nearly rotten. Therefore, if the fruit, which Rosalind has found on a tree in the form of these verses, is grafted with Touchstone's forwardness, it would become the earliest fruit in the country. and it would also become rotten before it is half ripe. Touchstone too would become a rotten fellow even before he attains full maturity.

### **Critical Comments**

This speech is one of the numerous examples of Rosalind's wit in this play. Rosalind, in most of her speeches, gives evidence of her fertile and ready wit. Touchstone made a witty reply by saying that the tree has yielded bad fruit. In fact, Touchstone's remark is a sarcastic one. To Touchstone's remark, Rosalind makes an equally sarcastic reply in which she refers to Touchstone as a meddler or a man who unduly pokes his nose into affairs which do not concern him. Apart from that, there is a pun upon the word "meddler". A meddler means one who unduly interferes in other people's affairs; and the word "medlar" (spelt differently but having the same sound and pronunciation) is the name of a certain fruit. Rosalind's remark amuses us because of this pun. However, to understand and appreciate the wit of this remark, the reader must understand the meaning of the word "graft" and should also be acquainted with the kind of fruit which the medlar is. The ordinary reader may find some difficulty in understanding how a medlar becomes rotten before it is half-ripe. From the ordinary reader's point of view, therefore, this speech is not a very happy example of Rosalind's sparkling wit.

3. *Good my complexion! Dost thou think though I am caparisoned like man I have a doublet and hose in my disposition? One inch of delay more is a South Sea of discovery. I prithee tell me who is it quickly, and speak apace. I would thou couldst stammer, that thou mightst pour this concealed man out of thy mouth, as wine comes out of a narrow-mouthed bottle; either too much at once or none at all. I prithee take the cork out of thy mouth, that I may drink thy tidings.*

## Context

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are a speech by Rosalind to Celia in the forest of Arden. Celia knows the identity of the man who has been carving the name of Rosalind on the trees, and who has also been hanging verses in praise of her beauty and virtue on the trees. Rosalind is very eager to know who this lover of hers is, though she does have some vague notion of his identity. Celia does not immediately come out with the name of the man who has been writing these verses. Rosalind becomes impatient and appeals to Celia not to keep her waiting.

## Explanation

Rosalind swears by her feminine complexion and says that, although she is wearing masculine clothes (namely a coat and a pair of breeches), she has not acquired masculine nature. She is certainly disguised as a man, but she is still a woman so far as her temperament and nature are concerned. Even one more second of delay in Celia's telling her who the writer of these verses is, will seem to Rosalind to be as long and as frustrating as a voyage to the Pacific Ocean. Rosalind therefore entreats Celia to tell her quickly who that man is; and she urges Celia to speak promptly. She then expresses the wish that, if Celia is unable to speak, she had at least possessed the power to stammer, so that she could then have uttered the name of that man in a halting manner just as wine comes out in a halting manner out of a bottle which has a narrow mouth. Wine comes out from such a bottle either too much at a time or not at all. Rosalind says that Celia's mouth too is like the mouth of such a bottle, and that Celia is keeping her mouth shut with a cork, as it were. If Celia were to remove the cork from her mouth, the name of that man will come out; and Rosalind would receive the name in the same way as a man drinks the wine which comes out of a bottle when the cork is removed.

## Critical Comments

This speech by Rosalind is an excellent example of her wit. Rosalind has a fertile and ready wit which shows itself in many of the speeches she makes in the course of this play. The main idea in this speech is that Rosalind is feeling very impatient to know the name of the man who has written those verses in praise of her beauty and virtue. But his idea has been expressed by her in a most amusing manner. Though she is disguised as a man, she has not acquired a man's patient disposition, says Rosalind. Then she adds: "One inch of delay more is a South Sea of discovery." To speak of delay in terms of distance and not in terms of time is really amusing. Then the metaphor in which an inch of delay is described as a South Sea of voyaging or exploration is also very amusing. And, next the comparison of Celia's mouth with a corked bottle is amusing too.

4.     *You foolish shepherd, wherefore do you follow her  
Like foggy South puffing with wind and rain?  
You are a thousand times a properer man  
Than she a woman. 'Tis such fools as you  
That makes the world full of ill-favour'd children.  
'Tis not her glass but you that flatters her,  
And out of you she sees herself more proper  
Than any of her lineaments can show her*

## Context

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are a speech by Rosalind to Silvius in the forest of Arden. Having overheard Silvius's futile pleading of his love to the unresponsive and callous Phebe, Rosalind steps forward and rebukes Phebe for her haughty attitude towards Silvius. Then she turns to Silvius and, in the lines before us, she rebukes him for pursuing a woman who does not care for him at all.

## Explanation

Rosalind, who is disguised as a man, says that Silvius is a fool in running after Phebe and sighing and groaning like the south-west wind which blows forcefully, laden as it is with mist and rain. She says that Silvius is himself a thousand times more handsome as a man than Phebe is as a woman. Rosalind then goes on to say that it is fools like Silvius who marry such ordinary and plain-looking girls as Phebe and fill the world with ugly children. It is not the mirror which shows any beauty in Phebe, says Rosalind. It is Silvius himself who finds in Phebe the beauty which Phebe does not possess at all; and it is therefore Silvius's own fault that Phebe has begun to regard herself as more beautiful than her face and features really show her to be.

## Critical Comments

This speech shows Rosalind's essentially sympathetic nature. Finding Phebe to be totally unresponsive to the entreaties of Silvius, Rosalind is filled with sympathy for the frustrated lover. She therefore rebukes not only the woman but also the lover who is chasing a heartless woman. However, we must here also recognize the fact that Rosalind is unduly harsh in her criticism of Phebe. Phebe is undoubtedly a pretty shepherdess; but Rosalind speaks about Phebe's looks in a most disparaging manner. Rosalind could certainly scold Phebe for her callousness; but Rosalind cannot justly describe Phebe as an ugly woman who would give birth to ugly children.

5. *Men are April when they woo, December when they wed. Maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives. I will be more jealous of thee than a Barbary cock-pigeon over his hen, more clamorous than a parrot against rain, more new-fangled than an ape, more giddy in my desires than a monkey. I will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain, and I will do that when you are disposed to be merry. I will laugh like a hyen, and that when thou art inclined to sleep.*

## Context

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are a speech by Rosalind to Orlando. Rosalind is disguised as a young man; and in that disguise she has prevailed upon Orlando to treat her as his beloved and plead his love to her as if she were actually his beloved. In accordance with that arrangement, Orlando makes love to her; and she, in her response to his assertions of love, speaks wittily as if she did not believe his professions of love.

## Explanation

When Orlando says that he would love her for ever and a day, she replies that he would love her only for a day and not for ever. She then goes on to say that men are false lovers. Men are as gay



as is spring-time, when they are courting their beloveds; but they become as gloomy and dreary as the season of winter is, after they have got married. Rosalind further says that, in the same way, girls are as merry as summer-time, when they are yet maidens; but that those very girls become sullen and scornful when they get married. Thus the attitude of both men and women undergoes a great change after marriage. Before marriage they are all full of passion and ardour, but after marriage they tend to become indifferent to their marriage partners. Rosalind then describes how she would behave when she gets married to her lover. She says that, after marriage, she would feel more jealous over her husband than an African male pigeon becomes over his hen. She would become more noisy than a parrot against the threat of rain. She would become more fond of novelty than an ape and more inconstant in her desires than a monkey. She would weep for no reason at all, like the statues of Diana (the goddess of hunting and of chastity), which seem to be weeping endlessly because of the water which keeps flowing from their eyes. She would weep especially when her husband is in a jovial mood. Also, she would laugh loudly and boisterously like a hyena; and she would do so when her husband is feeling inclined to sleep. Thus, after marriage, she would behave in such a way that her husband would feel most irritated and annoyed by her irrationality and capriciousness.

### **Critical Comments**

This speech is one of Rosalind's most brilliant ones in the whole play. Rosalind is here trying to explode the myth of romantic and idealistic love. There is no doubt at all that, before marriage, men and women feel most passionate towards each other but that, in course of time, they become indifferent to one another. Rosalind has stated this idea in a most exquisite manner in terms of April, December, and May. And then her description of how a wife behaves towards her husband in course of time also corresponds to the facts of life. A wife is always jealous, and very often she is unduly jealous. A wife's desires too are always changing. Furthermore, a wife often annoys her husband by her irrational behaviour and by her capricious conduct. All these facts of life have been stated by Rosalind in language which is most appropriate, and by means of similes and metaphors which are most striking. "More new-fangled than an ape"; and "more giddy in my desires than a monkey" - these are indeed excellent and realistic comparisons. Similarly, the picture of a statue of Diana weeping in the fountain is most vivid too. All in all, this is one of the most memorable speeches by Rosalind.

6. *A poor virgin sir; an ill-favoured thing sir; but mine own; a poor humour of mine sir; to take that that no man else will. Rich honesty dwells like a miser sir, in a poor house, as your pearl in your foul oyster.*

### **Context**

These lines, taken from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, are part of a speech by Touchstone to Duke Senior. Touchstone has met Jaques in the forest of Arden and has had friendly conversations with that melancholy philosopher. Jaques now introduces Touchstone to Duke Senior. Touchstone is going to marry the village girl, Audrey; and in the lines before us Touchstone tells Duke Senior about his intention to marry her.

### **Explanation**

Pointing to Audrey, Touchstone tells Duke Senior that Audrey is poor and ugly but that he has the consolation of knowing that she belongs to him, and only to him. He then goes on to say that it

was just a whim of his to decide that he would marry a woman whom no other man was prepared to marry. He further says that Audrey is a chaste woman even though she lives in a poor, humble cottage, just as a most precious pearl dwells inside an ugly shell-fish.

### Critical Comments

This is one of Touchstone's most amusing speeches. Here Touchstone ridicules the woman whom he is going to marry, but there is no ill-will behind this ridicule. He frankly says that Audrey is a poor and ugly virgin but that he finds comfort in the thought that she belongs solely to him. Then he speaks in a patronizing manner about Audrey. He says that he has decided to marry a woman whom no other man would have married. His compensation in marrying her is that Audrey is a chaste woman. He then makes use of two very appropriate similes to illustrate his point. This speech by Touchstone shows that, as a court-jester, he was most fitted for the role that he was required to perform at the court. He must indeed have kept the monarch in a state of good humour by his joviality and by his sarcasms. It is, indeed, amusing for us to hear Touchstone speaking about Audrey in disparaging terms, especially when he refers to her as "as ill-favoured thing". Lovers generally speak about their sweet-hearts in glowing terms but this lover speaks about his fiancée in prosaic, and almost insulting, terms.

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## 17.8 Let Us Sum Up

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The two units on *As You Like It* must have given you a penetrative insight into the famous romantic comedy by *The Bard on Avon*.

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## 17.9 Review Questions

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1. Describe 'As You Like It' as a Romantic Comedy.
2. What are the main characteristics of the Play 'As You Like It'.
3. Discuss the Pastoral Element in 'As You Like It'.
4. Discuss the importance of heroines in Shakespeare's comedies.
5. Explain the following passages:
  - i. *Love is surely a madness, and I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too.*
  - ii. *I'll graff it with you, and then I shall graff it with a medlar. Then it will be the earliest fruit i' th' country; for you'll be rotten ere you be half ripe, and that's the right virtue of the medlar.*
  - iii. *Good my complexion! Dost thou think though I am caparisoned like man I have a doublet and hose in my disposition? One inch of delay moire is a South Sea of discovery. I prithee tell me who is it quickly, and speak apace. I would thou couldst stammer; that thou mightst pour this concealed man out of thy mouth, as wine comes out of a narrow-mouthed bottle; either too much at once or none at all. I prithee take the cork out of thy mouth, that I may drink thy tidings.*

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## UNIT-18

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### **SOCIO-CULTURAL HISTORY : RENAISSANCE TO THE JACOBAN AGE**

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#### **18.0 Objectives**

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In this unit you are going to be told.

- about the term Renaissance,
- about the social & cultural history of this period,
- Elizabethan Poetry & prose and Drama,

- Shakespeare, the father of English Drama, and
- sonnet and pastoral elegy.

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## 18.1 Introduction

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In this unit you are going to study literary, social and cultural history from the accession of the *Queen, Elizabeth* to the throne to the death of James I. This period is known as the Golden Period in the history of English literature. The period extends from 1558 the year when *Queen Elizabeth* ascended on the English throne to 1625, the year of the death of James I. During this period literature reached to a great height. This period is known as *Renaissance* which means new awakening and the revival of learning. The term Renaissance is usually applied to the revival of arts and letters in Europe under the influence of Greek learning the renewed Greek literature began. The Renaissance thus enlightened the human mind engulfed in the darkness of the Middle Ages. All round victory of the Queen, decay of churches, bad days for feudalism, discovery of gun power, discoveries through navigation of Indians and the influence of the scholars coming back from Greece and Italy were the factors responsible for the Renaissance in England. Drama was the main poetic form which flourished during the Elizabethan period. Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare, John Webster, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton were the most prominent dramatists of this age. Sir Philip Sydney, Edmund Spenser, Thomas Watson were the main poets of this age. Bacon, father of English Essay also belonged to this age. In this unit the main events, the important movements and the life history of the main literary figures are focused upon. You should read the books suggested at the end of the chapter for a detailed knowledge on this period.

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## 18.2 Renaissance

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Renaissance is a Latin word which means wonder. It was used for the first time in Rome during the reign of Emperor Augustus. From 1552 to 1599 in England prevailed a literary atmosphere, known as Renaissance. The Renaissance was in essence an intellectual rebirth. It showed itself in efforts of the individual to free himself from the rigid institution of the middle ages, feudalism and the Church, and to assert his right to live, to think and to express himself in accordance with a more secular and flexible code. Renaissance's gifts to the present world were to the problem of gaining mastery through the wealth of statecraft, of discovering its secrets through exploration and scientific experiments, heightening its enjoyment through art and literature. In the words of Tillyard: "Renaissance was a manifestation of new life, an outburst of virtuous floridity after cramping restraints and withering asceticism of the middle ages."

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## 18.3 The Main Characteristics of the Age

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The Elizabethan Age was an era of peace, of economic prosperity, of stability, of liberty and of great explorations. In the Age of Elizabeth all doubt seems to vanish from English history. After the reigns of Edward and Mary, with defeat and humiliation abroad and persecutions and rebellion at home, the accession of a popular sovereign was like the sunrise after a long night, and, in Milton's word, we suddenly see England, "a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks." Elizabeth, with all her vanity and consistency, steadily loved England and England's greatness; and that she inspired all her people with the unbounded patriotism which exults in Shakespeare, and with the personal devotion which find a voice in the Faery Queen. Under her

administration the English national life progressed by gigantic leaps rather than by slow historical point of its development. The influence of Renaissance reached England at the end of the fifteenth century. A number of social, political, religious and national forces nurtured and strengthened it in England. The Renaissance in England covers a pretty long span of time, which is divided in to the following three periods:

- (i) The Early Renaissance (1516-1558)
- (ii) The Age of Elizabeth (1558-1603)
- (iii) The Jacobean Age (1603-1625)

It is possible to indicate only a few general characteristics of this great age which had a direct bearing upon its literature.

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## 18.4 Influence of Renaissance on The Elizabethan Age

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**Religious Toleration:** - This was largely due to the Queen's influence. The frightful excesses of the religious war known as the Thirty Year's War on the Continent found no parallel in England. Upon her accessions Elizabeth found the whole kingdom divided against itself; the North was largely Catholic, while the Southern countries were as strongly Protestant. Scotland had followed the Reformation in its own intense way, while Ireland remained true to its old religious traditions, and both countries were openly rebellious.

The court, made up of both parties, witnessed the rival intrigues of those who sought to gain the royal favour. It was due partly to the intense absorption of men's minds in religious questions that the preceding century, though an age of advancing learning, produced scarcely any literature worthy of the name. Elizabeth favored both religious parties, and presently the world saw with amazement Catholics and Protestants acting together as trusted counselors of a great sovereign. The defeat of the Spanish Armada established the Reformation as a fact in England and at the same time united all Englishmen in a magnificent national enthusiasm. For the first time since the Reformation began, the fundamental questions of religious toleration seemed to be settled, and the mind of man, freed from religious fears and persecutions, turned with a great creative impulse to other forms of activity. It is partly from this new freedom of the mind that the Age of Elizabeth received its great literary stimulus.

**The Translations: Their Number and Their Influence:** Although the great Renaissance period came to be markedly original, its literature had its rise among a multitude of ancient and foreign influences. The rich soil was fertilized by a deep layer of translations. By 1579 many of the great works of ancient and modern times had been translated in to English, almost all of them by 1603, the end of Elizabeth's reign. Some of these translations formed current reading and some became as popular as the best writings of English authors. There were certain of them which had an influence equal to that of the masterpieces of the age.

**Social Peace and Contentment:** It was an age of comparative social contentment, in strong sense. The rapid industrialization provided employment to two thousands of people. Increasing trade brought huge wealth to England, and this wealth was shared by the people. A system was developed for the betterment of poor people. The taxes were imposed on rich to support poor unemployed. The increase of wealth, the improvement in living the opportunities for labor, the new social content, these also are factors which help to account for the new literary activity.

**Adventures and Sprit of Exploration:** The spirit of adventure and exploration fired the imaginations of writers. The Drama flourished in this age, for drama progress in an era of action and not of speculations. It is an age of adventure, of unbounded enthusiasm springing from the new lands of fabulous riches revealed by English explores. Drake sails around the world, shaping the mighty course which English colonizers shall follow through the centuries; and presently the young philosopher Bacon is saying confidently, "I have taken all knowledge for my province." The mind must search farther than the eye; with new, rich lands opened the new worlds. Hakluyt's famous *Collection of Voyages*, and Purchas, His Pilgrimage, were even more stimulating to the English imagination than to the English acquisitiveness. While her explorers search the new world for the Fountain of Youth, her poets are creating literary works that are young forever. Cabot, Drake, Frobisher, Gilbert, Raleigh, Willoughby, Hawkins,—a score of explorers reveal a new earth to men's eyes, and instantly literature creates a new heaven to match it.

**Italianism:** Among the foreign influences one was incontestably dominate that of Italy. Elizabethan literature, which came to be the expression of the national genius, had its birth in Italianism. The word may seem too narrow when the large number of French works then circulating in England are considered, and also the influence exercised by Spain, especially through the medium of the chivalrous romances - *Palmerin*, *Amadis* and Montemayor's famous *Diana* were all done in to English by Anthony Munday before the end of the century — and through the picaresque romance *Lazarillo de Torms*, which was translated in 1576. Since, however, France and Spain were themselves impregnated with Italian culture, the English were Italian culture, the English were apt to find Italy even in what these other countries produced. And in these year Italian books, like the journey to Italy, were the great matter in England. Of more consequence to the development of drama and the novel in English were the tales of the *novellieri*, the short stories told so dramatically, vivaciously, and skillfully by Boccaccio, Cinthio, Bandello, Straparola, and their like. It is not easy to imagine how English drama would have been nourished without these comic or tragic and often licentious stories, these tales of pleasure, love, violence, blood, and tears. The meeting between the English and the Italian spirit which had already enriched Chaucer's poetry brought a Wealth of splendor to sixteenth -century England.

**Influence of Humanism:** With the advent of Renaissance the ascetic ideal of Middle Ages was replaced by humanism and the ideal of the enjoyment of life. The Hellenic or the Greek view of life, known as humanism, remarkably influenced English literature. The Greek attitude towards life was gay and full of meaning. Through the works of Greek writers Englishmen learnt that life was to be enjoyed. The conception of man as "crown of the creation" is the key factor in all Renaissance literature. Marlowe, Shakespeare, Spenser, Bacon and many other poets, dramatists and writers of this period were ardent humanists. Their writings are suffused with the glorification of man and human life. Humanism gave birth to individualism and worldliness. The plays of Marlowe, the poetry of Spenser and the prose of Bacon are the finest expressions of individualism during this period.

**The Invention of the Printing Press:** The invention of the printing which took place in Germany gave a new impetus to the revival of learning. The classical literature became easily accessible to the people and they came under the influence of humanism. Caxton's printing press was set up in 1476. It provided books abundantly to the people of England and rendered remarkable service to them. Caxton and his successors printed ancient classics and their translations. Thus, they helped in the dissemination of the spirit of humanism.

**Influence of the revival of Classical Learning:** The classical revival of learning influenced

the content, style and technique of literature. Plato's influence is remarkable. The Platonic doctrine that poets are divinely inspired was well known even to the common man. The doctrines of Symposium influenced Spenser's Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. They influenced almost all the courtly writers of the period. Plat's republic encouraged new ways of thinking and inspired More's Utopia and Bacon's New Atlantis. The sonnet and the blank verse are the two imported meters which were used with artistic adroitness and excellence in Elizabethan literature. Various poetic genres, writes Leegouis,"in which the ancients and the moderns had won distinction — pastorals, epics, comedies, tragedies, lyrics of every kind, every kind of prose romances, criticism, history and philosophy "were skillfully and successfully attempted. The writers of this period aimed at producing a literature that will surpass the literatures of ancient Greece and Rome.

**The Renaissance Spirit of Rational and Scientific Quest:** The Renaissance also fostered the spirit of questioning, of rational and scientific quest for truth. Reason had been put forth as the best guiding factor in human life. Reason wedded to liberty and a sense of responsibility flouted authority if it obstructed the free development of human personality. This marks the beginning of a scientific outlook. The realization of the characteristics of Nature and the power of God were sought for through reason." Make an appeal to the reason of man "became the ideal of many writers." Bacon is the high priest of this attitude. He developed the inductive method of research. The spirit of rational inquiry is at the very root of his major works. Ben Jonson also represents the rational and free approach. The theme of the paradise Lost is the fall of man due to his refusal to obey reason.

**Conclusion :** To sum up the Age of Elizabeth was a time of a intellectual liberty, of growing intelligence and comfort among all classes, of unbounded patriotism, and of peace at home and abroad. For a parallel we must go back to the Age of Pericles in Athens, or of Augustus in Rome, or go forward a little to the magnificent court of Louis XIV, when Corneille, Racine, and Moliere brought the drama in France to the point where Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson had left it in England half a century earlier. Such an age of great thought and great action, appealing to the eyes as well as to the imagination and intellect, finds but one adequate literary expressions ; neither poetry nor the story can express the whole man,— his thought feeling, action, and the resulting character; hence in the Age of Elizabeth literature turned instinctively to the drama and brought it rapidly to the highest stage of its development.

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## 18.5 The Elizabethan Poetry

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1. **Elizabethan Poetry (1568-1603)** The poetry of the Elizabethan Era represents the spirit of the age and is suffused with the spirit of conquest and self-glorifications, humanism and vigorous imagination, emotional depth and *aerial* graces.
2. **High Conception of Poetry :** Poetry was considered as a dignified and elevated form of literary expression. Sidney says : "Of all science is our poet the Monarch." Sublimity was deemed to be the essential quality of a poet. Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare had the immense power to exalt and sublimate the readers of poetry.
3. **The Spirit of Independence :** The poetry of this period is remarkable for the spirit of independence. The poets refused to follow set rules of poetic composition. They did not observe set rules of grammar and prosody. Consequently, new poetic devices and new linguistic modes of expression developed. Flexibility and pliability in prosody resulted in good artistic results. Phonetic value of words in lyrics was recognized new stanza forms were introduced.



4. **Varied Poetical Forms :** All varieties of poetic forms —lyric, elegy, eclogue ode, sonnet, madrigal etc. were successfully attempted.
5. **Main Division of Poetry :** The following main divisions of poetry existed during the Elizabethan period :

**Love Poetry:** The love poetry is cauterized by romance, imaginations and youthful vigor. Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Spenser's *Amoretti*, Daniels's *Delia*, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonais* are some memorable love poems of this period.

**Patriotic Poems:** The ardent note of patriotism is the distinctive characteristic of Elizabethan poetry. Warner's *Abbie's England*, Daniel's *Civil Wars of York and Lancaster*, Drayton's *The Barons War* and the *Ballad of Agincourt* are some remarkable patriotic poems.

**Philosophical Poetry:** The fire and strength of people becoming inward, resulted in a graver and more thoughtful national life. The tragedies of Shakespeare represent this aspect of national life. Brooke's poems on Human Learning, On Wars, On Monarchy and On Religion have philosophical learning's.

**Satirical Poems:** It came in to existence after the decline of imaginative vigor towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. Donne's *Satires* and Drummond's *Sonnets* are some fine examples of this type of poetry.

**Originality:** The poetical production was not equal to the dramatic but it was of great and original beauty. The passion for poetry was absorbing, and the outcome of it was equal to expectation. The early Italian and classical influences were completely absorbed and the poetry of this period depicts the typical British character and temperament. Edward Albert writes: "The native English genius, having absorbed the lessons of foreign writers, adds to them the youth and ardor of its own spirit. The result is a fullness, freshness and grandeur of style unequalled in any other period of our literature. There are the lyrics and allegories of Spenser; the poems, dramas and lyrics of Shakespeare ; and the innumerable miscellanies, poems and plays of other writers. The style is as varied as the poem, but the universal note is the romantic one of power and wonder."

**Jacobean Poetry :** Jacobean is the adjective of the word James, King James reigned in England from 1603 to 1625. All the poet's who were born from 1603 to 1625 have been called in literary chronology the Jacobean poets. Among the chief poets of this age are Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, Abraham Cowley and Andrew Marvell. Jacobean age is a part of the Shakespeare age but this was the period of decline, Elizabethan inspiration was waning, its subject matter was getting exhausted and a tendency to imitations was setting in among the rising generation. Poetry had grown self-conscious. The earlier ardor and easy enjoyment of colors and words were on they wane. Poets became more moral or religious. While literature acquired more substance, it became less capable of facile, light-hearted joy. Poetry had crept under the shadow of the approaching civil conflicts, of the strengthened and menacing Puritanism.

### 18.5.1 Main Poets Of The Age

**Edmund Spenser :** Of Spenser's early life and parentage we know little, except that he was born in East Smithfield, near the tower of London, and was poor. His education began at the Merchant Tailor's School in London and was continued in Cambridge, where as a poor sizar and fag for wealthy

students he earned a scant living. Here in the glorious world that only a poor scholar knows how to create for himself he read the classics, made acquaintance with the great Italian poets, and wrote numberless little poems of his own. Though Chaucer was his beloved master, his ambition was not to rival the *Canterbury Tales*, but rather to express the dream of English chivalry, much as Ariosto had done for Italy in *Orlando Furioso*. After leaving Cambridge (1576) Spenser went to the north of England, on some unknown work or quest. Here his chief occupation was to fall in love and to record his melancholy over the lost Rosalind in the *Shepherd's Calendar*. Upon his friend Harvey's Leicester, then at the height of royal favor, and the latter took him to live at Leicester House. Here he finished the *Shepherd's Calendar*, and here he met Sidney and all the queen's favorites.

In 1580, through Leicester's influence, Spenser, who was utterly weary of his dependent position, was made secretary to Lord Grey, the queen's deputy in Ireland, and the third period of his began. He accompanied his Irish rebellion, and was given an immense estate with the castle of Kilcolman, in Munster, which had been confiscated from Earl Desmond, one of the Irish leaders. His life here where according to the terms of his grant he must reside as an English settler, he regarded as lonely exile:

My luckless lot,  
That banished had myself, like weight forlore,  
Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.

After nearly sixteen year's residence he wrote his *View of the State of Ireland* (1596), his only prose work, in which he submits a plan for "pacifying the oppressed and rebellious people."

**Spenser's Works :** *The Faery Queen* is the great work upon which the poet's fame chiefly rests. The original plan of the poem included twenty-four books, each of which was to recount the adventure and triumph of a knight who represented a moral virtue. Each of the Virtues appears as a knight, frightening his opposing vice, and the poem tells the story of the conflicts. It is therefore purely allegorical, not only in its personified virtues but also in its representation of life as a struggle between good and evil. In its strong moral element the poem differs radically from *Orlando Furioso*, upon which it was modeled. Spenser completed only six books, celebrating Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy. We have also a fragment of the seventh, treating of Constancy ; but the rest of his book was not written, or else was lost in the fire at Kilcolman. The first three books are by far the best ; and judging by the way interest lags and the allegory grows incomprehensible, it is perhaps as well for Spenser's reputation that the other eighteen books remained a dream.

**Argument of the Faery Queen :** From the introductory letter we learn that the hero visits the queen's court in Fairy Land, while she is holding a twelve —day's festival. On each day some distressed person appears unexpectedly, tells a woeful story of dragons, of enchantresses. Or of distressed beauty or virtue, and asks for a champion to right the wrong and to let the oppressed go free. Sometimes a knight volunteers or begs for the dangerous mission; again the duty is assigned by the queen; and the journeys and adventures of these knights are the subjects of the several books. The first recounts the adventures of the Redcross Knight, representing Holiness, and the lady Una, representing Religion. Their contests are symbolical of the world wide struggle between virtue and faith on the one hand, and sin and heresy on the other. The second book tells the story of Sir Guyon, or Temperance; the third, of Britomart, representing Chastity ; the fourth, fifth, and sixth, of Cambel and Triamond (Friendship), Artegall (Justice), and Sir Calidore (courtesy). Spenser's plan was a very elastic one and he filled up

the measure of his narrative with everything that caught his fancy,—historical events and personages under allegorical masks, beautiful ladies, chivalrous knights, giants, monsters, dragons, sirens, enchanters, and adventure enough to stock a library of fiction.

**Poetical Form :** For the Faery Queen Spenser invented a new verse form, which has been called since his day the Spenserian stanza. Because of its rare beauty it has been much used by nearly all our poets in their best work. The new stanza was an improved form of Ariosto's *ottava rima* (i.e. eight —line stanza ) and bears a close resemblance to one of Chaucer's most musical verse forms in the "Monk's Tale." "Spenser's stanza is in nine lines, eight of five feet each and the last of six feet, riming ababbcbcc.

**Minor Poems :** Next to his masterpiece, the *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) is the best known of Spenser's poems: though, as his first work, it is below many others in melody. It consists of twelve pastoral poems, or eclogues, one for each month of the year. The themes are generally rural life, nature, love in the fields ; and the speakers are shepherds and shepherdess. They are written in various styles and meters, and show plainly that Spenser was practicing and preparing himself for greater work. Other noteworthy poems are *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, a satire on society ; *Astrophel, an elegy on the death of Sidney*; *Amoretti*, or sonnets, to his Elizabeth; the marriage hymn; *Amoretti*, or sonnets, to his Elizabeth; the marriage hymn, *Epithalamion*, and four *Hymns*, On Love, Beauty, Heavenly Love, and Heavenly Beauty. There are numerous other poems and collections of poems, but these show the scope of his work and are best worth reading.

**Importance of the Shepherd's Calendar :** This first published work of Spenser is noteworthy in at least four respects : first, it marks the appearance of the first national poet in two centuries ; second it shows again the variety and melody of English verse, which had been largely a tradition since Chaucer; third, it was our first pastoral compositions modeled on Spenser, and as such exerted a strong influence on subsequent literature; and fourth, it marks the real beginning of the outburst of great Elizabethan poetry.

**Characteristics of Spenser's Poetry :** The five main qualities of Spenser's poetry are ( 1 ) a perfect melody ; (2) a rare sense of beauty; (3) a splendid imagination, which could gather into one poem heroes, knights, ladies, dwarfs, demons and dragons, classic mythology, stories of chivalry, and the thronging ideals of the Renaissance, all passing in gorgeous procession across an ever—changing and ever—beautiful landscape; ( 4 ) a lofty moral purity and seriousness; ( 5 ) delicate idealism, which could make all nature and every common thing beautiful. In contrast with these excellent qualities the reader will probably note the strange appearance of his lines due to his fondness for obsolete words, like *eyne* ( eyes )and *shend*( shame), and his tendency to coin others, like *mercify*, to suit his own purposes. It is Spenser's idealism, his love of beauty, and his exquisite melody which have caused him to be known as "the poets' poet."

### 18.5.2 Minor Poets

Though Spenser is the one great non-dramatic poet of the Elizabethan Age, a multitude of minor poets demand attention of the student who would understand the tremendous literary activity of the period. Nearly two hundred poets are recorded in the short period from 1558 to 1625, and many of them were prolific writers.

**Thomas Sackville ( 1536—1608 )** Sir Thomas Sackville, Earl of Dorset and Lord High

Treasure of England is generally classed with Wyatt and Surrey among the predecessors of the Elizabethan Age. In imitation of Dante's *Inferno*, Sackville formed the design of a great poem called *The Mirror for Magistrates*. Under guidance of an allegorical personage called Sorrow, he meets the spirit of all the important actors in English history. The idea was to follow Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and let each character tell his own story ; so that the poem would be a mirror in which present rulers might see themselves and read this warning : Who reckless rules right soon may hope to rue. *Complaint of the Duke of Buckingham*. These are written in the rime royal, and are marked by strong poetic feeling and expressions. Unfortunately Sackville turned from poetry to politics, and the poem was carried on by two inferior poets, William Baldwin and George Ferrers. Sackville wrote also, in connection with Thomas Norton, the first English tragedy, *Ferrex and Porrex*, called also *Gorboduc*, which will be considered in the following section on the Rise of the Drama.

**Philip Sidney (1554—1586)** Sidney, the ideal gentleman, the Sir Calidore of Spenser's *Legend of Courtesy*, is vastly more interesting as a man than as a writer, and the student is recommended to read his biography rather than his books. His life expresses, better than any single literary work, the two ideas of the age,—personal honor and national greatness. As a writer he is known by three principal works, all published after his death, showing how little importance he attached to his own writing, even while he was encouraging Spenser. *The Arcadia* is a pastoral romance, interspersed with eclogues, in which shepherds and shepherdess sing of the delights of rural life. Though the work was taken up idly as a summer's pastime, it became immensely popular and was imitated by a hundred poets. *The Apologia for Poesies* (1595), generally called the *Defense of Poesies*, appeared in answer to a pamphlet by Stephen Gosson called *The School of Abuse* (1579), in which the poetry of the age and its unbridled pleasure were denounced with Puritan thoroughness and conviction. The *Apologie* is one of the first critical essays in English; and though its style now seems labored and unnatural, — the pernicious result of Euphuism and his school, — it is still one of the place and meaning of poetry in any language. *Astrophel and Stella* is a collection of songs and sonnets addressed to Lady Penelope Devereux, to whom Sidney had once passage, containing more poetic feeling and expressions than the songs of any other minor writer of the age.

**George Chapman (1559 ?—1634)** : Chapman spent his long, quiet life among the dramatists, and wrote chiefly for the stage. His plays, which were for the most part merely poems in dialogue, fell far below the high dramatic standard of his time and are now almost unread. His most famous work is the metrical translation of the *Iliad* (1611) and of the *Odyssey* (1614). Chapman's Homer, though lacking the simplicity and dignity of the original, has a force and rapidity of movement which makes it superior in many respects to Pope's more familiar translation. Chapman is remembered also as the finisher of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, in which, apart from the drama, the Renaissance movement is seen at perhaps its highest point in English poetry. Out of scores of long poems of the period, *Hero and Leander* and the *Faery Queen* are the only two even slightly known to modern readers.

**Michael Drayton (1563 —1631)** : Drayton is the most voluminous and, to antiquarians at least, the most interesting of the minor poets. He is the Layman of the Elizabethan Age, and vastly more scholarly than his predecessor. His chief work is *Polyolbion*, an enormous poem of many thousand couplets, describing the towns, mountains, and rivers of Britain, with the interesting legends connected with each. It is an extremely valuable work and represents a lifetime of study and research. Two other long works are the *Barons' Wars* and the *Heroic Epistle of England*; and besides these were many minor poems. One of the best of these is the 'Ballad of Agincourt,' a ballad written in the lively meter

which Tennyson used with some variations in the “Charge of the Light Brigade, ‘ and which shows the old English love of brave deeds and of the songs that stir a people’s heart in memory of noble ancestors.

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## 18.6 Elizabethan Prose And Its Characteristics

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The Age of Renaissance was also conspicuous for the remarkable development of prose, which was variously written with great stylistic and linguistic excellence. The varied interests of the time were well represented in its prose literature. Bacon inaugurated essay writing, which became the most celebrated prose genre; Religious and theological prose found its finest expressions in Hooker’s *Ecclesiastical Polity* and *The Authorized Version of the Bible* ; history was cultivated by Raleigh, Foxe, Bacon and Raphael Holinshed ; Richard Hakluyt pioneered travel literature ; and the development of literary criticism by Sidney and Ben Jonson showed the interest of the people in the forms and principles of literature. The character writers began a genre which contributed to the development of English. Although novel was not written during this period the vogue of prose romances which *Sidney’s Arcadia* began, was a prologue to the efflorescence of English novel during the eighteenth century. In order to properly understand the magnificent growth of prose we should analyze and evaluate the development of various prose genres of this period.

**Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626)** Francis Bacon was an eminent political philosopher his time and the first English essayist. Bacon was the son of Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Seal, and the learned Ann Cook, sister -in-law to Lord Burleigh, greatest of the queen’s statesman. From these connections, as well as from native gifts, he was attracted to the court, and as a child was called by Elizabeth her” Little Lord Keeper.” At twelve he went to Cambridge, but left the university after two year, declaring the whole plan of education to be radically wrong and the system of Aristotle, which was the basis of all philosophy in those days to be a childish delusion, since in the course of centuries it had “produced no fruit, but only a jungle of dry and useless branches.” Bacon was a great political philosopher, cynical at the same time, worldly wise and a keen observer of the society in which he was living. He believed that the hidden life of a man could be more pleasure giving than the open life of him, which could easily be studied and criticized by the outsiders.

**Bacon’s Works** Bacon a versatile thinker and writer, wrote both in Latin and English. He thought that his Latin works become immortal, while his English works would not last long. It is sheer irony that Bacon is rebreeding today by dint of his English works, while his Latin works have fallen into oblivion.

**Latin Works :** His Latin works to be fashioned into a fast scheme, which he called *Instauratio Magna*, expounding his classical theories. It was laid out on the following plan, but it was scarcely half finished.

*De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623 ) : This treatise, in which the English work on The Advancement of Learning is embodied, gives a general summary of human knowledge.

*Novum Organum* (1620 ) : It explains the new logic or the inductive method of reasoning, upon which his philosophy is founded.

*Sylva Sylvarum* : It was left incomplete. It was designed to give a complete view of what we call Natural Philosophy and Natural History.

*Scala Intelectus* : Only a few opening pages are available.

*Prodromi* : Only a few fragments were written.

*Philosophia Secunda* : It was never written.

### **English Works :**

**Essays:** Bacon's Essays, ten in number, appeared in 1597. The second edition (1621) and the third edition (1625) raised the number to thirty-eight and fifty-eight respectively. They are on familiar subjects and they represent the meditations of trained and learned mind. They contain utilitarian wisdom and are written in lucid, clear and aphoristic style. Bacon began the volume of essay writing in English.

**Scientific and Philosophical prose :** *The Advancement of Learning*, which contains the substance of Baconian philosophy, appeared in 1605. It was in this book that Bacon offered the memorable division of knowledge into history, poetry and science. He investigated the present state and future prospects. *The Advancement of Learning* is memorable not only in the history of science and philosophy, but also in the history of English prose.

**History : In the History of Henry VII** (1622), Bacon deals with the subject scientifically, basing his account on facts and leaving the facts to speak for themselves. His work, however, is more a biography than a history, but is undoubtedly considered as the first modern history, chronologically as well as by reason of its stylistic merit. It presents an impartial character history of a British King. Its style is natural, racy and straightforward.

***New Atlantis*** (1626) : It was left incomplete due to his death in 1626. It is a philosophical romance modeled on More's Utopia. As a work of fiction, it is in the ancestry of English novel.

Bacon was the "wisest, brightest, and meanest of mankind." Bacon was the man who was never the true friend of any body and who could criticize a man the other day boldly, whom he appreciated a day before vehemently and his counsel, in favour and then against the Earl of Essex, his most generous friend, is the best example of the fact. He was thus the meanest man in his private life and could even accept gifts and bribes. His Latin works display that he was the brightest as an innovator of the prose style and as a writer of the essays he was the wisest of all. His eloquence, philosophy and statesman were unchallenged in his time.

Bacon's essays are epigrammatic and aphoristic and are used by common people as proverbs. His work and essays might have been to guide the foolish King James I, yet, some of his essays are of a paramount importance to a common man, as they are full of worldly wisdom. Essays such as *Of Study*, *Of Expense*, *Of Discourse*, *Of Love* and many others have the instructions for the common people. He gave his idea on almost every subject and branch of life and study religion, science, theology and politics. And if one follows the instructions given by Bacon, he can become the most successful man in this world.

**Ben Jonson (1573-1637)** Ben Jonson, the great dramatist and poet, wrote aphoristic essays which are compiled in *The Timber or Discoveries* (written about 1630 and printed posthumously about 1641). His essays are moral and critical. Jonson's style is noticeable for lucidity, terseness and strength. In epigrammatic quality he rivals Bacon. Jonson's style is free from the vice of enthusiasm and he can treat a subject in a plain and simple way.

**John Selden (1584— 1654)** John Selden's *Table Talk* (polished in 1689) abounds in sharp, somewhat acid-natured aphorisms, exhibiting rough common sense though little imagination

and foreshadowing the later Essay. As a practitioner of aphoristic essay he stands next to Bacon and Ben Jonson.

**Richard Hooker (1554? —1600 ):** In strong contrast with Bacon is Richard Hooker, one of the greatest prose writers of the Elizabethan Age. His one great work is *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, a theological and argumentative book; but, entirely apart from its subject, it will be read wherever men desire to hear the power and Stateline of the English language. Here is a single sentence, remarkable not only for its perfect form but also for its expression of the reverence for law which lies at the heart of Anglo—Saxon civilization :

**Sidney and Raleigh :** Among the prose writers of this wonderful literary age there are many others that deserve passing notice, though they fall far below the standard of Bacon and Hooker.

**Sir Philip Sidney (1554—1586),** who has already been considered as a poet, is quite as well known by his prose works, *Arcadia*, a pastoral romance, and *The Defense of Poesie*, one of our earliest literary essays. Sidney, whom the poet Shelley has eulogized, represents the whole romantic tendency of his age; while Sir Walter Raleigh (1552—1618 ) represents its adventurous spirit and activity. The life of Raleigh is an almost incomprehensible mixture of the poet, scholar and adventurer. Raleigh's chief prose works are the *Discoveries of Guiana*, a work which would certainly have been interesting enough had he told simply what he saw, but which was filled with colonization schemes and vision of an El Dorado to fill the eyes and ears of the credulous ; and *The History of the World*, written to occupy his prison hours. The history is a wholly untrustworthy account of events from creation to the downfall of the Macedonian Empire. It is interesting chiefly for its style, which is simple and dignified, and for the flashes of wit and poetry that break into the fantastic combination of miracles, traditions, hearsay, and state records which he called history.

**John Foxe (1516—1587 )** Foxe will be remembered always for his famous *Book of Marlyrs*.

**Camden and Knox :** Two historians, William Camden and John Knox, stand out prominently among the numerous historical writers of the age. *Camden's Britannia* (1586 ) is a monumental work, which marks the beginning of true antiquarian research in the field of history ; and his *Annals of Queen Elizabeth* is worthy of a far higher place than has thus far been given it. John Knox, the reformer, in *his History of the Reformation in Scotland*, has some very vivid portraits of his helpers and enemies.

**Hakluyt and Purchas :** Two editors of this age have made for themselves an enviable place in our literature. They are Richard Hakulyt (1552? —1616 ) and **Samuel Purchas (1575 ?—1626 )**. Hakulyt was a clergyman who in the midst of his little parish set himself to achieve two great patriotic ends,,——to promote the wealth and commerce of his country, and to preserve the memory of all his countrymen who added to the glory of the realm by their travels and explorations. His principal *Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*, in three volumes appeared first in 1589, and a second edition followed in 1598—1600. The first volume tells of voyages to the north ; the second to India and the East ; the third, which is as large as the other two, to the New World. No other book of travels has so well expressed the spirit and energy of the English race, or better deserves a place in our literature. His first famous book, *Purchas*, His pilgrimage, appeared in 1613, and was followed by *Hakluytus Posthumous*, or Purchas His pilgrimage, in 1625.

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## 18.7 The Elizabethan Drama

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General Trends in Pre -Shakespearean Drama : There was little cohesive development in pre

Shakespearean drama. The period that followed the production of *Gorboduc* was a period of great confusion in English drama. On the one hand, the Scenecan or the classical pattern, of which Sackville and Norton's tragedy had been an example, was favored by those who believed that a really artistic drama could be created through the faithful imitation of the ancient models. The classical drama had three main characteristics: (1) it prescribed vigorously the unity of subject and tune and, therefore, implied total separation of comedy and tragedy. A tragedy ought to be pure tragedy, that is, it should strictly avoid the inclusion of the light and humorous episodes. A comedy should be pure comedy, that is it should have no tragic element in its compositions; (2) the three unities of time, place and action should govern the construction of a play; (3) there was little or no dramatic action. On the other hand, there was the native drama upon which the classical form had little influence and which was just struggling to establish itself. The native drama which had the support of the popular taste was romantic in character and did not adhere to the aforesaid classical conventions. It, first, makes free use of variety in tone and theme, and allows the blending of tragic and comic incidents and characters in the same play; secondly, it repudiates the three unities of time, place and action; thirdly, it is essentially a drama of action, nearly everything that happens is represented on the stage.

### **18.7.1 Theatre and the Stage**

The development of drama during the Age of Shakespeare was greatly influenced by the establishment of the private and the public theatres. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, dramatic activity was in full swing. The number of audiences day by day increased. Hence, the idea of establishing permanent theatres took shape. The first playhouse in London was erected in the year 1576 in Shoreditch, well out of the reach of civic authorities. During the next thirty years at least seven regular theatres and a dozen or more innyards, permanently fitted for performances, were established in the city of London and its immediate suburbs. The Theatre, the Rose, the Globe, the Swan, the Fortune were built in the Shoreditch area or on the Bankside. The Blackfriars was the only theatre within the city. Theatres were of two kinds. First, the private theatres, which were roofed in and lit by artificial light, were attended by a better class audience. Blackfriars, Salisbury Court and Drury Lane were famous private theatres. Secondly, the public theatres were open to the sky and performances took place in broad daylight. All classes of contemporary society intermingled in yard or galleries. The university wits—Kyd, Nash, Lyly, Peele, Greene and Marlowe—completely revolutionized English drama and made it a suitable medium for the expression of the genius and temperament of their age. They brought the English drama to a point where Shakespeare began to experiment upon it. Let us now consider the contribution of the university wits to the remarkable development of the British drama.

### **18.7.2 The University Wits**

Commenting on the contribution of the "University Wits" to the British drama, Nicoll writes: "The classicists had form, but no fire, the popular dramatist had interest but little sense of form. Drama, that is to say, was struggling between a well-formed chill and a structureless enthusiasm. The great merit of the University Wits was that they came with their passion and poetry, and their academics training, to unite these two forces, and thus to give Shakespeare a pliable and fitting medium for the expression of his genius.

**John Lyly** (1554-1606), who is now known chiefly as having developed the pernicious literary style called *euphuism*, is one of the most influential of the early dramatists. His court comedies are



remarkable for their witty dialogue and for being our first plays to aim definitely at unity and artistic finish.

**Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*** : is a landmark in English drama, or the rather the melodrama, of passion, copied by Marlowe and Shakespeare. This was the most revised again and again, and Ben Jonson is said to have written one version and to have acted the chief part of Hieronimo. It is a Senecan play adopted to popular requirement Kid made it thrillingly effective.

**Robert Greene** (1558—1592) plays the chief part in the early development of romantic comedy, and gives us some excellent scenes of English country life in plays like *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. (1589) We find a mingling of three worlds : World of magic, world of aristocratic life, and world of country life.

**George Peele**(1557-1596): Peele's work consists of *The Arraignment of Paris* (1581), *The Battle of Alcazar* (1594), *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward the I*, *The Love David and Fair Bethsabe* and *The Old Wives 's Tales* (1595 ).

*Robert Greene* (1558-1592): Greene wrote *The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (1587 ), *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1589 ) and *The Scottish History of James the IV* (1591).

**Thomas Lodge** (1558-1625): Thomas Lodge's *The Wounds of civil war* contains hardly anything that is new. He does not rise above mediocrity. Lodge, who has decided power over the lyric and a charm in his fiction, gave practically nothing to the theatre.

**Thomas Nash** (1558-1625 ) : He was a pamphleteer and story writer. He also tried his hand at drama. He collaborated with Marston in his *Dido and in The Isle of Dogs*.

**Christopher Marlowe** (1564-1593) Christopher Marlowe, the son of a Canterbury shoemaker and a clergy-mans daughter, was born in February 1564. Educated in the King's School and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, he graduated in 1584. He was regarded as a candidate for Holy Orders, but he refused to take them. In 1587 Marlowe was awarded the M.A. degree. His vast knowledge is seen in his plays.

**Marlowe's Works** : During the short span of his life, Marlowe reoriented British drama by imparting to it a new mould, technique, conception and versification. Below is given an analysis of his plays:

*Tamburlaine* (1587—88) : Marlowe' first play *Tamburlaine* marks a bold departure from the morality tradition. Although *Tamburlaine* is deficient in humor, in the portrayal of female characters and plot construction, it for the first time gave a tragic protagonist in the character of *Tamburlaine*, and introduced blank verse for dramatic writing.

*Dr. Faustus* (published in 1587) : It comes after *Tamburlaine* in order of time, as it shows development in Marlowe' s dramatic art and style. In *Faustus*, Marlowe's conception of tragedy matures.. *Dr. Faustus* has the passion of attaining power infinite through knowledge. To attain his desired mission, Faustus falls into the temptations of evil and does not care even for his conscience. Ultimately evil consume him. Faustus is a true tragic hero who faces downfall and ultimately death due to one fatal flaw in his character, that is, over ambition.

*Edward II* (1593 ) : It is the first historical play in English. It is a drama of more sustained

power and of greater dramatic excellence. It is the most flawless of Marlowe's plays, though not the most magnificent. Like *Dr. Faustus*, it is not a collection of unconnected scenes, it is a complex and organic whole, working up by natural stages to a singularly powerful climax.

*The Jew of Malta* (1592) : It foreshadows the world of Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and Shakespeare's Shylock.

*The Tragedy of Dido, the Queen of Carthage* (1594) : In *Dido*, Nashe is openly named on the title page as a sharer in the work.

*The Massacre of Paris* (1596) : It is regarded as the crudest work of Marlowe. The material is weakly arranged and the characters are poorly drawn.

**Conclusion** : Marlowe, the Columbus of the new literary world “, emancipated English drama from classical notions of stiff decorum, and by doing so, opened up infinite possibilities to the dramatist. He gave drama passion and poetry. Marlowe first taught the art of designing tragedies on a grand scale. Marlowe made blank verse a suitable medium for dramatic expression. To employ blank verse, instead of rhyme, for the romantic drama was the first step in the revolutions he brought about. Marlowe was the first to divide the drama into acts and Scenes, and thus to impart to it structural coherence. He also introduced a new class of heroic subjects eminently fitted for dramatic subjects. He molded characters and formed a vigorous conception of tragedy in English and paved the way for the full blossoming of Shakespeare's dramatic genius.

### 18.7.3 Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Shakespeare was born on or about April 23, 1564, at Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire. His father John Shakespeare was a prosperous tradesman, and seems to have followed the occupations of a butcher, a glover, and a farmer. He may have attended the grammar school of the town, but Ben Jonson, a competent scholar and contemporary of Shakespeare, affirmed that he knew “small Latin and less Greek “. However, he had a vast store of knowledge. By dint of his genius and by living in a society in which every kind of information was available, Shakespeare became an accomplished man. In 1586 or 87 Shakespeare left his native town and came to London at the age of twenty two. At this time the University Wits had renovated English drama. Shakespeare too soon turned to the stage, and became, first, an actor, and then, a playwright. About 1610 Shakespeare left London for Stratford, where he stayed in his house, known as the New Place. Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616.

Shakespeare's thirty seven plays can be divided into five groups : comedies, tragedies, tragic-comedies or romances, histories, and Roman plays.

**Shakespeare's Comedy** : The purely romantic comedy is a continuation of the pre- Shakespeare tradition. Characters and plot are a mingling of realism and fantasy. Shakespeare's fancy, half-emotional and half intellectual, sheds its own light on character and scene. The serious comedies, are half tragic and half-playful. They may be considered as leading the way towards the fuller romantic tragic-comedy. In the category of realistic comedy, more closely associated with Ben Jonson. The feminine roles are as important as the masculine. The heroine is often superior to the hero in comedies ; a tragedy is essentially a play with single hero. Love is the theme of Shakespearean comedy. often more than one pair. One pair is always superior to the others. Prevailing note is that of mirth and laughter. Sometimes the borderline between romance and comedy is very thin. The plot is subordinate to character, but chief pleasure is derived from certain of its figures. Shakespeare's comedies are a blend of observation and

imagination ; fact and fiction. Music is an essential feature of the world of Shakespearean comedy. All the types of music delighted the Elizabethan. It sometimes acts as a kind of commentary on the situation. Several of Shakespeare's comedies introduce a Fool or clown, who is often a great asset to the play. He is drawn partly from life and partly from literature. He provides laughter by his wit, he bears no integral relation to the main plot. Shakespeare's comic plots have the usual three phases of Exposition, Tangle, and resolution. The first act is the Exposition. The next three acts develop a complication, the fifth act effects a Resolution, satisfactory to all parties. His prominent comedies are *Love's Labour Lost* *The Comedy Of Errors- As You Like It, The Merchant Of Venice*.

**Shakespeare's tragedies:** Shakespeare's tragedy is ultimately concerned with only one character—the hero. All the four chief tragedies are named after the principal figure. None of the tragedies has love for its theme. Shakespeare's tragic hero is not an ordinary mortal. But his rank or gifts raise him above the characters. and what happens to him is of public importance. Shakespeare's tragic hero is a man of many qualities but with one flaw that causes his ruin. In Greek tragedy the characters are the victims of an implacable Destiny. Their doom is decreed before hand, and they cannot escape it. They embark upon a course by which their ruin is eventually assured. That course may be directed by two influences beyond their control -the influence of the supernatural and the play of chance. The choice in each case, however, remains with the hero, who can resist these influences if he so chooses. Shakespeare's tragedies violate the classical unities. In Shakespearean tragedy, the violent and vivid action on the stage has its counterpart in the inner conflict in the hero's mind. The presentation of this inner conflicts is a difficult task for the most accomplished actor. Thus the demands it makes on the tragic actor are as formidable as, any made in the past. Even a soliloquy must nowadays be made to reveal character. The capital difficulty of the modern tragic actor's art is to achieve the required consistency of character. The action of these plays does not take place in any real world. The atmosphere is almost that of a fairy tale. From time to time, we are brought back to what is solid and recognizable. The character is either types or has not strong personalities of the earlier plays. Artificiality replaces the earlier fidelity to character. The supernatural is prominent; this again distinguishes from the earlier comedies, in which every thing remains on the human plane. The dialogue is characterized by the excessive use of speeches to make the action clear to the audience. The main tragedies of Shakespeare are Macbeth, King Lear, Hamlet and Othello. They are very remote from any natural exchange of information. A decline is also noticeable in the style.

#### **18.7.4 Shakespeare's Historical Plays**

The aim of Shakespeare, as of the other Elizabethan dramatists, in writing chronicle plays was to represent as many as possible of the famous events of a single reign. He might, and did, tamper here and there with chronology but he must, in the main follow history. It is in the non-historical scenes, like those devoted to Falstaff that we see the dramatist's genius at its richest and most prodigal. The main subject of the chronicle play was character and motive as factors in history, the central personage of the play is studied closely and intimately in all his aspects and more than once we are shown him as a troubled, lonely human being, bent by the weight of the responsibilities he has to bear. There is a fundamental difference between the English historical plays and the major tragedies. In the first, the theme is success or failure in attaining practical objectives in the material world. In the tragedies the problems are of a spiritual order. The material for Shakespeare's historical plays was derived, from the Chronicles of Holinshed. His occasional departures from historical fact, are not seriously misleading.

### 18.7.5 Shakespeare's Roman Plays

One of the Renaissance in England was the growth of interest in classical life and literature. It was easy for the English to identify themselves with the Roman plays, whose occupation of Britain had left so firm an impression on their life. Shakespeare treated his sources in Plutarch biographies in much the same way as he treated the chroniclers when he was writing historical plays. He followed the main outlines, but he amplified, omitted, or reconstructed at his own will. He did not overload his plays with classical terms and allusions. The Roman plays are structurally tragedies; they are not histories like the English chronicle plays. Their main theme is the ruin of a noble soul. Roman plays are finer in proportion and dramatic construction than the English history plays. The main Roman plays are Pericles, Cymbeline, and the Winter's Tale.

#### Causes Of the Decline of Drama In Post -Shakespearean England

Drama in post -Shakespearean England began to decline and lost the wide catholicity of appeal which distinguished Shakespearean drama. The main causes which led to the decline of drama are given below :

**Exhaustion of Creative Spirit :** The early dramatists in England wrote to please their audiences. The drama rose in England because the patriotic people wanted to see something of the stirring life of the times reflected on the stage. As there were no papers or Magazines in those days, people came to the theatre not only to be amused but to be informed. Shakespeare catered to the needs of the people and gave them what they wanted.

**Changed Atmosphere:** Quickly though insensibly, the temper of the nation suffered eclipse. The high hopes and the ardency of the reign of Elizabeth saddened into a profound pessimism and gloom into that of James. Its causes are broad enough. The uprising of Puritanism and the shadow of impending religious strife darkened the temper of the time. The age of action, which is the soul of drama, was gone. All these changes affected drama. The decline of moral values gave unpleasant themes to drama, the themes of incest, sexual infidelity, murder and horror.

**Loss of National Appeal :** While Beaumont and Fletcher were writing, the theatre was gradually but surely losing its hold on the lower and middle classes. In the historical plays of Shakespeare the spirit of the age had found full expression, Shakespeare had spoken for all classes, and all classes had been among his audiences. But first Ben Jonson, though still making in his great comedies a strong popular appeal, began to speak more particularly to the classically educated with his classical allusions and fluencies, and then Beaumont and Fletcher wrote their plays for courtiers, and with their wit gallantry, their talks of intrigue and their insidious indecency, expressed the gentleman view of life, not the national view. The playwrights, who were confined to a narrow class, lost the wide national appeal.

**Pathos and Sentimentality:** Sentiment in the plays of decadent dramatists, particularly in those of Beaumont and Fletcher usurps the place of action and character -portrayal. Eloquent and moving speeches and fine figures are no longer subservient to the presentation of character in action, but are set down for their own sake. Beaumont and Fletcher cultivate ardency. They make their subject not their master but their plaything, or an occasion for the convenient exercise of their own powers of figure and rhetoric.

*Decline in Technique and Blank Verse :* The post Shakespearean drama is decadent from the viewpoint of technique. Beaumont, Fletcher and others used those variations and licenses with which

Shakespeare in his later plays diversified the blank verse without restraint or measure.

### 18.7.6 Ben Jonson (1573-1637)

Born in Westminster about the year 1573, Ben Jonson was educated at Westminster School. His father died before his birth and he had to adopt the trade of his stepfather who was a bricklayer. It did not satisfy him for long, and Ben Jonson became a soldier, serving in the Low Countries. From this he turned to acting and writing plays. On the accession of James I in 1603 the fashion for pictures que pageants, known as masques, came into existence. Ben Jonson skillfully and industriously supplied this demand. later plays diversified the blank verse without restraint or measure.

He commanded great respect and in 1617 he was created poet to the King. His best work was produced between 1603-1615. At the close of James' reign Ben Jonson was considered ruler of English Literature. Jonson's works show the unity of aim underlying his work. All his plays are neoclassic in spirit and aim at reforming and instructing society and individuals. Jonson's first comedy, *Every man in his humor* (1599), is a key to all his dramas. The word 'humor' in his age stood for some characteristic whim or quality of society. Jonson gives to his leading character some prominent humor, exaggerates it, as the cartoonist enlarges the attention that all other qualities are lost sight of ; which is the method that Dickens used later in many of his novels. *Every Man in his Humor* was the first of three satires. Its special aim was to ridicule the humors of the city. The three best known of Jonson's comedies are *Volpone*, (1605) or *the Fox*, *The Alchemist*, and *Epicoene, or the Silent Woman*. *Volpone* is a keen and merciless analysis of a man governed by an overwhelming love of money for its own sake. *The Alchemist* is a study of quackery on one side and of gullibility on the other, founded on the medieval idea of the philosopher's stone, and applies as well to the patent medicines and get-rich-quick schemes of our day as to the peculiar forms of quackery with which Jonson was more familiar. In plot and artistic construction. *The Alchemist* is an almost perfect specimen of the best English drama. *Epicoene, or the Silent Woman*, is a prose comedy exceedingly well constructed, full of life, abounding in fun and unexpected situations.

**Beaumont and Fletcher :** The work of these two men is so closely interwoven that, though Fletcher outlived Beaumont by nine years and the latter had no hand in some forty of the plays that bear their joint names, we still class them together, and only scholars attempt to separate their works so as to give each writer his due share. Unlike most of the Elizabethan dramatists, they both came from noble and cultured families and were university trained. Their work, in strong contrast with Jonson's is intensely romantic, and in it all, however coarse or brutal the scene, there is still, as Emerson pointed out, the subtle "recognition of gentility

*Beaumont* (1584-1616 ) was the brother of Sir John Beaumont of Leicestershire. From Oxford he came to London to study law, but soon gave it up to write for the stage. *Fletcher* (1579-1625) was the son of the bishop of London, and shows in all his work the influence of his high social position and of his Cambridge education. The two dramatists met at the Mermaid tavern under Ben Jonson's leadership and soon became inseparable friends, living and working together. Of their joint plays, the two best known are *Philaster*; whose old theme, like that of *Cymbeline* and *Griselda*, is the jealousy of a lover and the faithfulness of a girl, and *The maid's Tragedy*. Concerning Fletcher's work the most interesting literary question is how much did he write of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, and how much did Shakespeare help him in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

**John Webster :** Of Webster's personal history we know nothing except that he was known

as a dramatist under James I. His extraordinary powers of expression rank him with Shakespeare; but his talent seems to have been largely devoted to the blood -and -thunder play begun by Marlowe. His two best known plays are *The White Devil* (pub.1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (pub.1623). The latter, spite of its horrors ranks him as one of the greatest masters of English tragedy.

**Thomas Middleton** (1570 ?—1627 ) : Middleton is best known by two great plays, *The Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*. In poetry and diction they are almost worthy at times to rank with Shakespeare's plays ; otherwise, in their sensationalism and unnaturalness they do violence to the moral sense and are repulsive to the modern reader.

**Thomas Dekker** (1570—?) : Dekker is in pleasing contrast with most of the dramatists of the time. All we know of him must be inferred from his works, which show a happy and sunny nature, pleasant and good to meet. The reader will find the best expression of Dekker's personality and erratic genius in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* a humorous study of plain working people, and *Old Fortunate*, a fairy drama of the wishing hat and no end of money.

Massinger, Ford, Shirley : These three men mark the end of the Elizabethan drama. Their work, done largely while the struggle was on between the actors and the corrupt court, on one side, and the Puritans on the other, hows a deliberate turning away not only from Puritan standards but from the high ideals of their own art to pander to the corrupt taste of the upper classes.

**Philip Massinger** (1584 —1640 ) was a dramatic poet of great natural ability ; but his plots and situations are usually so strained and artificial that the modern reader finds no interest in them. In his best comedy, *A new Way to Pay Old Debts*, he achieved great popularity and gave us one figure, Sir Giles Overreach, which is one of the typical characters of the English stage. His best plays are *The Great Duke of Florence*, *The Virgin Martyr*, and *The Maid of Honor*.

*John Ford* (1586-1642 ?) and *James Shirley* (1596-1666) have left us little of permanent literary value, and their works are read only by those who wish to understand the whole rise and fall of the drama. Probably his best play is *The Broken Heart* (1633). Shirley was given to imitations of his predecessors, and his very imitation is cartelistic of an age which had lost its inspiration. A single play, *Hyde Park*, with its frivolous, realistic dialogue, is sometimes read for its reflection of the fashionable gossip talk of the day. Long before Shirley's death the actor said, "Farewell ! Othello's occupation's gone. " Parliament voted to close the theaters, thereby saving the drama from a more inglorious death by dissipation.

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## 18.8 Self Assesment Questions

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1. What are the causes of the advent of Renaissance in England ?

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2. Why was only Drama a favorite during the Renaissance in England ?

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3. What do you understand by the term Renaissance in English Literature ?

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4. What are the main Characteristics of the Elizabethan Age ?

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5. What is the difference between Renaissance & Humanism ?

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6. What are the main features of Elizabethan Poetry ?

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7. What is Jacobean Poetry? What are its main features ?

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8. Who are the main Elizabethan Poets ?

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9. What are the characteristics of Edmund Spenser's poetry ?

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10. What are the main works of Edmund Spenser ?

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11. Who were the 'University wits' ?

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12. Why have they been so named ?

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13. What was the main contribution of the University Wits to English Drama ?

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14. What do you learn about Bacon, the man from his essays ?

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15. Bacon was the “wisest, brightest, and meanest of mankind “. Discuss ?

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16. Describe the practical value of Bacon’s essays to a layman ?

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17. Who succeeded Shakespeare ?

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18. Name the most famous plays of Webster ?

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### 18.9 Answers to SAQs

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1. All round victory of the queen, decay of Churches, bad days for Feudalism, discovery of Gun powder, discoveries through navigation of India and influence of the scholars coming back from Greek and Italy made the Renaissance inevitable in England.
2. There was all-round victory of the queen and as the victory is mostly celebrated by dramatic performances, so Drama flourished abundantly period.
3. Sir, the word Renaissance (a Latin word) means ‘ wonder ‘. It was used, for the first time, in Rome during the reign of Emperor Augustus. From 1552 to 1599, in England prevailed a literary atmosphere, known as Renaissance. In this period, the English literature especially poetry was inspired by a fervor of aesthetic and roman beauty. What the Italian painters depicted through their wonderful paintings was done by English poets, till Spenser. Spiritual

unity became the central doctrine of the Renaissance literature in England.

4. The Elizabethan age was an era of peace, of economic prosperity, of stability, of liberty and of great explorations. In this age of Elizabeth all doubt seems to vanish from English history.
5. Renaissance includes and means all sort of development and reveals where humanism means only the revival of classical literature, wherein self—assertion was the chief principle.
6. Sir, the main trend of the Elizabethan poetry is the Renaissance spirit, which pervades the poetry of Spenser and his fellow Elizabethan poets. Second important characteristic of the poetry of this period is lyricism and the last secret of its popularity is the introduction of ballad and sonnet.
7. All the poet's who were born from 1603 to 1625 have been called in literary chronology the Jacobean poets. Among the chief poets of this age are Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, Abraham Cowley and Andrew Marvell. Jacobean inspiration was waning, its subject matter was getting exhausted and a tendency to imitations was setting in among the rising generations.
8. Edmund Spenser, Sidney, Walter Raleigh and Thomas Nash.
9. The five main qualities of Spenser's poetry are (1) a perfect melody ; (2) a rare sense of beauty; ( 3) a splendid imagination, which could gather into one poem heroes, knights, ladies, dwarfs, demons and dragons, classic mythology, stories of chivalry, and the thronging ideals of the Renaissance,—all passing in gorgeous procession across an ever—changing and ever—beautiful landscape ; ( 4 ) a lofty moral purity and seriousness ; ( 5 ) delicate idealism, which could make all nature and nature and every common thing beautiful. In contrast with these excellent qualities the reader will probably note the strange appearance of his lines due to his fondness for obsolete words, like *eyne* ( eyes )and *shend*( shame), and his tendency to coin others, like *mercify*, to suit his own purposes. It is Spenser's idealism, his love of beauty, and his exquisite melody which have caused him to be known as “the poets' poet.”
10. The Faery Queen, Shepherd's Calendar, Mother Hubbard's Tale, Astrophel.
11. George peele (1558-98), Robert Greene (1558-92), Thomas Nash (1567-1601)' Thomas Lodge (1558-1625) and Thomas Kyd (1558-1625) are known as ‘University Wits ‘.
12. Because all of them were the graduates who belonged to the University and were active playwrights. They revised old plays and then worked together to write more plays, with heroic style and tragic story.
13. Peelewas the author of the famous chronicle of king Edward the first. His style was violent and fluent and had humor and fair amount of pathos. He emancipated drama from classical notion of strict decorum, opening infinite possibilities to the dramatist. He translated Ovid's ‘Amores’ called the Elegies. He used ‘Blank Verse’ and invented ‘run-on’ lines and paved the way for Shakespeare.
14. Bacon was a great political philosopher, cynical at the same time, worldly wise and a keen observer of the society in which he was living. He believed that the hidden life of a man could be more pleasure giving than the open life of him, which could easily be studied and criticized by the outsiders.
15. Bacon was the man who was never the true friend of any body and who could critics a man

the other day boldly, whom he appreciated a day before vehemently and his counsel, in favour and them against the Earl of Essex, his most generous friend, is the best example of the fact. He was thus the meanest man in his private life and could even accept gifts and bribes.

16. Bacon's essays are epigrammatic and aphoristic and are used by common people as proverbs. His works and essays might have been to guide the foolish King James I, yet, some of his essays are of a paramount importance to a common man, as they are full of worldly wisdom. Essays such as 'Of Study,' 'Of Expense,' 'Of Discourse,' 'Of Love' and many others have the instructions for the common people. He gave his idea on almost every subject and branch of life and study religion, science, theology and politics. And if one follows the instruction given by Bacon, he can become the most successful man in this world.
17. George Chapman, Beaumont, Fletcher, Webster and Tounneur etc. were the successors of Shakespeare.
18. The most famous play of Webster is *Duchess of Malfi*.

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### 18.10 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have studied

- about Renaissance and its meaning,
- about Elizabethan age,
- about Shakespeare and his plays,
- about the characteristics of their unity.

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### 18.11 Review Questions

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1. Discuss the main characteristics of poetry in the Elizabethan Age.  

Or

How does poetry reflect the Spirit of the Age in Shakespearean England ?
2. Discuss the two styles of Bacon's essays ?
3. Discuss the development of Elizabethan prose ?
4. "Bacon is the wisest, the brightest and the meanest of mankind ". Do you agree with this opinion and why ?
5. Discuss the cause of the decline of drama after Shakespeare.
6. Discuss the characteristics of Shakespearean comedy.

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### 18.12 Bibliography

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2. A history of English Literature by Legous and Cazamian.
3. Sampson, George, A concise Cambridge history of English literature.