Master of Arts

(English)

Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama

Semester-I

Author- Dr. Parul Sharma

SURESH GYAN VIHAR UNIVERSITY

Centre for Distance and Online Education
Mahal, Jagatpura, Jaipur-302025

EDITORIAL BOARD (CDOE, SGVU)

Dr (Prof.) T.K. Jain
Director, CDOE, SGVU

Ms. Hemlalata Dharendra
Assistant Professor, CDOE, SGVU

Ms. Kapila Bishnoi
Assistant Professor, CDOE, SGVU

Mr. Ashphak Ahmad
Assistant Professor, CDOE, SGVU

Dr. Manish Dwivedi
Associate Professor & Dy, Director, CDOE, SGVU

Mr. Manvendra Narayan Mishra
Assistant Professor (Deptt. of Mathematics)
SGVU

Published by:

S. B. Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.

WZ-6, Lajwanti Garden, New Delhi: 110046

Tel.: (011) 28520627 | Ph.: 9625993408

Email: info@sbprakashan.com | Web.: www.sbprakashan.com

© SGVU

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or copied in any form or by any means (graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information retrieval system) or reproduced on any disc, tape, perforated media or other information storage device, etc., without the written permission of the publishers.

Every effort has been made to avoid errors or omissions in the publication. In spite of this, some errors might have crept in. Any mistake, error or discrepancy noted may be brought to our notice and it shall be taken care of in the next edition. It is notified that neither the publishers nor the author or seller will be responsible for any damage or loss of any kind, in any manner, therefrom.

For binding mistakes, misprints or for missing pages, etc., the publishers' liability is limited to replacement within one month of purchase by similar edition. All expenses in this connection are to be borne by the purchaser.

Designed & Graphic by : S. B. Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.

Printed at :

INDEX

Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama (Paper – 3)

Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to understand:

Unit I

- Understand the historical and cultural context of the Elizabethan era, including the impact of Renaissance humanism, religious tensions, and the scientific advancements of the time.
- Analyze the characterization of Doctor Faustus and other key figures, exploring the psychological depth of the characters and their motivations.
- Explore the religious and moral themes in the play, examining Faustus's pact with the devil, questions of free will, and the consequences of hubris.

Unit II

- Develop advanced skills in analyzing Shakespearean drama, understanding the play's language, themes, and dramatic techniques.
- Analyze the complex characters in "Hamlet," particularly Hamlet himself, exploring their motivations, conflicts, and psychological depth.
- Understand the historical and cultural context of the Elizabethan era, including political tensions, religious conflicts, and the intellectual climate that influenced Shakespeare's writing.

Unit III

- Understand the historical and cultural context of the Jacobean era, including social norms, class distinctions, and the intellectual climate that influenced Jonson's writing.
- Examine the structure of the play, including acts, scenes, and comedic elements.
- Identify and interpret key literary elements, such as humor, satire, and character types.

Unit IV

- Identify and interpret key literary elements, such as symbolism, foreshadowing, and complex characterizations.
- Understand the historical and cultural context of the Jacobean era, including political, religious, and social influences that shaped the playwright's perspective.
- Examine how "The Duchess of Malfi" engages with political themes and moral dilemmas, including issues of tyranny, corruption, and the abuse of power.

Unit V

- Develop skills in analyzing Jacobean drama, understanding Middleton and Rowley's use of language, dramatic techniques, and thematic elements.
- Understand the historical and cultural context of the Jacobean era, including social norms, class distinctions, and the intellectual climate that influenced the playwrights' writing.
- Analyze Middleton and Rowley's use of language, including their prose style, poetic elements, and the interplay between different characters' linguistic styles.

ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN DRAMA
SYLLABUS

UNIT I
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE
About Author, Doctor Faustus

UNIT II
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
About Author, Hamlet

UNIT III
BEN JONSON
About Author, Volpone

UNIT IV
JOHN WEBSTER
About Author, The Duchess of Malfi

UNIT V
THOMAS MIDDLETON
About Author, The Changeling, The Changeling Themes

UNIT I

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

STRUCTURE

NOTES

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After completion of this unit, student will be able to:

- Know about Christopher Marlowe the famous play writer.
- Learn about his one of the famous plays "Doctor Faustus".

1.2 ABOUT AUTHOR

Christopher Marlowe, also known as **Kit Marlowe** (26 February 1564 – 30 May 1593), was an English playwright, poet and translator of the Elizabethan era. Marlowe is among the most famous of the Elizabethan playwrights. Based upon the «many imitations» of his play Tamburlaine, modern scholars consider him to have been the foremost dramatist in London in the years just before his mysterious early death. Some scholars also believe that he greatly influenced William Shakespeare, who was baptised in the same year as Marlowe and later succeeded him as the pre-eminent Elizabethan playwright. Marlowe was the first to achieve critical reputation for his use of blank verse, which became the standard for the era. His plays are distinguished by their overreaching protagonists. Themes found within Marlowe's literary works have been noted as humanistic with realistic emotions, which some scholars find difficult to reconcile with Marlowe›s «anti-intellectualism" and his catering to the prurient tastes of his Elizabethan audiences for generous displays of extreme physical violence, cruelty, and bloodshed.

Events in Marlowe's life were sometimes as extreme as those found in his plays. Differing sensational reports of Marlowe's death in 1593 abounded after the event and are contested by scholars today owing to a lack of good documentation. There have been many conjectures as to the nature and reason for his death, including a vicious bar-room fight, blasphemous libel against the church, homosexual intrigue, betrayal by another playwright, and espionage from the highest level: the Privy Council of Elizabeth I. An official coroner's account of Marlowe's death was revealed only in 1925, and it did little to persuade all scholars that it told the whole story, nor did it eliminate the uncertainties present in his biography.

Marlowe was reputed to be an atheist, which held the dangerous implication of being an enemy of God and the state, by association. With the rise of public fears concerning The School of Night, or "School of Atheism" in the late 16th century, accusations of atheism were closely associated with disloyalty to the Protestant monarchy of England.

Some modern historians consider that Marlowe's professed atheism, as with his supposed Catholicism, may have been no more than a sham to further his work as a government spy. Contemporary evidence comes from Marlowe's accuser in Flushing, an informer called Richard Baines. The governor of Flushing had reported that each of the men had

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

"of malice" accused the other of instigating the counterfeiting and of intending to go over to the Catholic "enemy"; such an action was considered atheistic by the Church of England. Following Marlowe's arrest in 1593, Baines submitted to the authorities a "note containing the opinion of one Christopher Marly concerning his damnable judgment of religion, and scorn of God's word". Baines attributes to Marlowe a total of eighteen items which "scoff at the pretensions of the Old and New Testament" such as, "Christ was a bastard and his mother dishonest [unchaste]", "the woman of Samaria and her sister were whores and that Christ knew them dishonestly", "St John the Evangelist was bedfellow to Christ and leaned always in his bosom» (cf. John 13:23–25) and «that he used him as the sinners of Sodom". He also implied that Marlowe had Catholic sympathies. Other passages are merely sceptical in tone: "he persuades men to atheism, willing them not to be afraid of bugbears and hobgoblins". The final paragraph of Baines's document reads:

These things, with many other shall by good & honest witness be approved to be his opinions and Comon Speeches, and that this Marlowe doth not only hould them himself, but almost into every Company he Cometh he persuades men to Atheism willing them not to be afeard of bugbeares and hobgoblins, and vtterly scorning both god and his ministers as I Richard Baines will Justify & approue both by mine oth and the testimony of many honest men, and almost al men with whome he hath Conversed any time will testify the same, and as I think all men in Cristianity ought to indevor that the mouth of so dangerous a member may be stopped, he saith likewise that he hath quoted a number of Contrarieties oute of the Scripture which he hath giuen to some great men who in Convenient time shalbe named. When these thinges shalbe Called in question the witnes shalbe produced.

Similar examples of Marlowe's statements were given by Thomas Kyd after his imprisonment and possible torture; Kyd and Baines connect Marlowe with the mathematician Thomas Harriot's and Sir Walter Raleigh's circle. Another document claimed about that time that "one Marlowe is able to show more sound reasons for Atheism than any divine in England is able to give to prove divinity, and that ... he hath read the Atheist lecture to Sir Walter Raleigh and others".

Some critics believe that Marlowe sought to disseminate these views in his work and that he identified with his rebellious and iconoclastic protagonists. Plays had to be approved by the Master of the Revels before they could be performed and the censorship of publications was under the control of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Presumably these authorities did not consider any of Marlowe's works to be unacceptable other than the Amores.

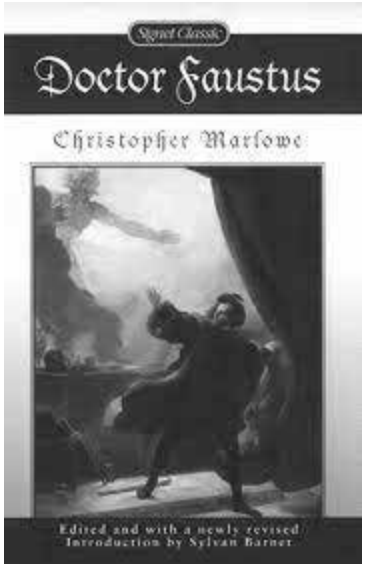
1.3 DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Doctor Faustus Summary

Doctor Faustus is a scholar living in Wittenberg, Germany. Feeling that he has reached the ends of all traditional studies, he decides to pursue magic, and has his servant Wagner bring him Valdes and Cornelius, two men who can teach him how to perform magic incantations. Two angels (a Good Angel and an Evil Angel) appear. The Good Angel tries to convince Faustus not to pursue unholy magic, but the Evil Angel encourages him to delve into

NOTES

sorcery. Valdes and Cornelius give Faustus spell-books and Faustus is excited to begin casting spells and summoning spirits.



Two scholars, who know of Faustus for his reputation as a scholar, wonder what he is up to and, running into Wagner, ask him. Wagner tells them that Faustus is with Valdes and Cornelius, and the two scholars lament Faustus' interest in magic.

Faustus begins conjuring, and summons up a devil named Mephastophilis. Faustus orders Mephastophilis to do his bidding, but Mephastophilis informs him that he can do nothing that is not commanded by Lucifer. Faustus asks him questions about hell and its devils, and then tells Mephastophilis to bring an offer to Lucifer: he will give his soul to Lucifer, on the condition that he gets 24 years of unlimited power and knowledge, with Mephastophilis as his willing servant. Mephastophilis goes to Lucifer, and Faustus thinks that he has made a good deal.

Meanwhile, Wagner finds a clown and persuades him to be his servant, promising to teach him some magic in return. In his study, Faustus begins to hesitate about the deal he has proposed with Lucifer. As he debates repenting and turning back to God, the two angels appear again and try to persuade Faustus in their respective directions. Faustus renews his resolve to give his soul to Lucifer.

Mephastophilis returns and Faustus questions him about hell before officially agreeing to his deal with Lucifer. Mephastophilis demands that Faustus certify the agreement with a deed of gift written in Faustus' own blood. As Faustus attempts to sign the agreement, his blood congeals, as if refusing to sign. Mephastophilis fetches some hot coals to melt the congealed blood, and Faustus signs the agreement. Faustus immediately regrets the deal, but is distracted from his worries when Mephastophilis summons up a group of devils bringing various riches to him. Faustus then asks Mephastophilis more questions about hell. He asks Mephastophilis for a wife, but Mephastophilis cannot do anything related to marriage (a holy ceremony), so he summons a devil-woman instead.

Mephastophilis gives Faustus books containing all the knowledge of astronomy and the stars, as well as of all plants and trees. Faustus again begins to regret giving up his soul and considers repenting. At this, the angels re-appear and again make their cases to Faustus. Faustus again decides not to repent. Mephastophilis teaches him about the movement of the planets and the composition of the universe. Faustus asks who made the world, but Mephastophilis refuses to answer, as he does not want to say the name of God. This makes Faustus want to repent again and turn to God. The angels appear again, and Faustus says that he wishes to repent. At this, Lucifer appears with other devils, telling Faustus not to speak of God and Christ. Faustus apologizes and assures Lucifer that he will reject God. Lucifer entertains Faustus by summoning up personifications of the Seven Deadly Sins, which parade past Faustus for his enjoyment. Lucifer gives Faustus another book to learn from, before leaving.

A stable-hand named Robin steals one of Faustus› spell-books and tells his friend, the inn-keeper Rafe, that they should try to cast some magic spells. Wagner informs the audience that Mephastophilis has taken Faustus on a grand tour of the world in a chariot drawn by dragons, in order to learn all, the secrets of astronomy. The pair is now headed for Rome.

Once in Rome, Faustus wants to see all the city's monuments, but Mephastophilis tells him to stay in the pope's private chambers and play a joke on him. Mephastophilis makes Faustus and himself invisible, and they conduct mischief as the pope and his cardinals attempt to have a banquet. A group of friars attempt to sing a dirge to drive away malevolent spirits.

Back in Germany, a vintner (wine merchant) confronts Robin and Rafe about a goblet they have stolen. The pair uses Faustus' spell-book to summon Mephastophilis in order to scare the vintner away. Mephastophilis comes, but is frustrated that he has been summoned by two lowly "slaves" (VIII, 39) for such a banal task. Meanwhile, after some more traveling, Faustus returns to Germany. His fame as a conjurer has spread far and wide. The German emperor Charles V has invited Faustus to his court, having heard about his magic skills.

At the emperor's court, Faustus indulges the emperor by calling up the spirit of Alexander the Great, essentially Charles' hero. Charles V is exceedingly impressed, but a knight of his is uncomfortable with the devilish magic and is sceptical of Faustus. Faustus repays the knight's rudeness by making horns appear on his head.

After Faustus' visit to the emperor, a horse-courser (horse-trader) finds him and asks to buy his horse. Faustus agrees but tells him not to ride the horse into water. Thinking that Faustus is trying to trick him, the horse-courser rides the horse into a pond. In the middle of the pond, the horse vanishes, plunging the horse-courser into the water. Angry, he attempts to confront Faustus, who is sleeping. He yanks on Faustus› leg to wake him up, but the leg comes right off Faustus' body. He runs off, scared, while Faustus' leg is instantly replaced by magic. Wagner informs Faustus that his company is requested at the court of a nobleman, the Duke of Vanholt.

At the Duke's court, Faustus entertains the Duke and Duchess with his magic. The Duchess asks for him to make grapes appear (it is the middle of winter and grapes are unavailable). Faustus does so, to the delight of the Duchess.

Wagner tells the audience that he is worried Faustus will die soon, as he has given his property to Wagner. In any case, Faustus continues to impress people with his magic. A group of scholars asks him to call up the spirit of Helen of Greece, the most beautiful woman in the world, which he does. An old man appears and urges Faustus to repent. Faustus is troubled and says that he wants to repent. Mephastophilis calls him a traitor and threatens to tear his flesh "in piecemeal" (XII, 59) for his disobedience. Faustus apologizes and resolves not to repent. He asks Mephastophilis to send demons after the old man, for making Faustus doubt himself. Faustus asks Mephastophilis to make Helen his lover, so that her beauty can distract him from his impending doom.

As Faustus' death draws nearer, he begins to despair and the group of scholars with him

NOTES

asks what is wrong. He finally tells them about the deal he has made with Lucifer and they are horrified. They go to pray for his soul. Alone on stage, Faustus realizes that he has only an hour left to live. He begs time to stand still and goes back and forth as to whether he will repent. He calls out to God, saying that one drop of Christ's blood would save him, but he is unable to commit to repenting. He tries to bargain with God, asking for salvation in return for a thousand or a hundred-thousand years in hell. The clock strikes midnight: Faustus› time is up. He cries out, making a last promise to burn his books, as devils surround him and drag him away.

The chorus delivers an epilogue to conclude the play, confirming that Faustus has fallen to hell, and telling the audience to learn from Faustus' example not to try to learn "unlawful things" (Epilogue, 6) beyond the limits of appropriate human knowledge.

Character List

Faustus- The protagonist. Faustus is a brilliant sixteenth-century scholar from Wittenberg, Germany, whose ambition for knowledge, wealth, and worldly might makes him willing to pay the ultimate price—his soul—to Lucifer in exchange for supernatural powers. Faustus's initial tragic grandeur is diminished by the fact that he never seems completely sure of the decision to forfeit his soul and constantly wavers about whether or not to repent. His ambition is admirable and initially awesome, yet he ultimately lacks a certain inner strength. He is unable to embrace his dark path wholeheartedly but is also unwilling to admit his mistake.

Mephastophilis- A devil whom Faustus summons with his initial magical experiments. Mephastophilis's motivations are ambiguous: on the one hand, his oft-expressed goal is to catch Faustus's soul and carry it off to hell; on the other hand, he actively attempts to dissuade Faustus from making a deal with Lucifer by warning him about the horrors of hell. Mephastophilis is ultimately as tragic a figure as Faustus, with his moving, regretful accounts of what the devils have lost in their eternal separation from God and his repeated reflections on the pain that comes with damnation.

Chorus- A character who stands outside the story, providing narration and commentary. The Chorus was customary in Greek tragedy.

Old Man- An enigmatic figure who appears in the final scene. The old man urges Faustus to repent and to ask God for mercy. He seems to replace the good and evil angels, who, in the first scene, try to influence Faustus's behavior.

Good Angel- A spirit that urges Faustus to repent for his pact with Lucifer and return to God. Along with the old man and the bad angel, the good angel represents, in many ways, Faustus's conscience and divided will between good and evil.

Evil Angel- A spirit that serves as the counterpart to the good angel and provides Faustus with reasons not to repent for sins against God. The evil angel represents the evil half of Faustus's conscience.

Lucifer- The prince of devils, the ruler of hell, and Mephastophilis's master.

Wagner- Faustus's servant. Wagner uses his master's books to learn how to summon

devils and work magic.

Clown- A clown who becomes Wagner's servant. The clown's antics provide comic relief; he is a ridiculous character, and his absurd behavior initially contrasts with Faustus's grandeur. As the play goes on, though, Faustus's behavior comes to resemble that of the clown.

Robin- An ostler, or innkeeper, who, like the clown, provides a comic contrast to Faustus. Robin and his friend Rafe learn some basic conjuring, demonstrating that even the least scholarly can possess skill in magic. Marlowe includes Robin and Rafe to illustrate Faustus's degradation as he submits to simple trickery such as theirs.

Rafe- An ostler, and a friend of Robin. Rafe appears as Dick (Robin's friend and a clown) in B-text editions of Doctor Faustus.

Valdes and Cornelius- Two friends of Faustus, both magicians, who teach him the art of black magic.

Horse-courser- A horse-trader who buys a horse from Faustus, which vanishes after the horse-courser rides it into the water, leading him to seek revenge.

The Scholars- Faustus's colleagues at the University of Wittenberg. Loyal to Faustus, the scholars appear at the beginning and end of the play to express dismay at the turn Faustus's studies have taken, to marvel at his achievements, and then to hear his agonized confession of his pact with Lucifer.

The pope- The head of the Roman Catholic Church and a powerful political figure in the Europe of Faustus's day. The pope serves as both a source of amusement for the play's Protestant audience and a symbol of the religious faith that Faustus has rejected.

Emperor Charles V- The most powerful monarch in Europe, whose court Faustus visits.

Knight- A German nobleman at the emperor's court. The knight is skeptical of Faustus's power, and Faustus makes antlers sprout from his head to teach him a lesson. The knight is further developed and known as Benvolio in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus; Benvolio seeks revenge on Faustus and plans to murder him.

Bruno- A candidate for the papacy, supported by the emperor. Bruno is captured by the pope and freed by Faustus. Bruno appears only in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus.

Duke of Vanholt- A German nobleman whom Faustus visits.

Martino and Frederick- Friends of Benvolio who reluctantly join his attempt to kill Faustus. Martino and Frederick appear only in B-text versions of Doctor Faustus.

Character Analysis

Faustus

Faustus is the protagonist and tragic hero of Marlowe's play. He is a contradictory character, capable of tremendous eloquence and possessing awesome ambition, yet prone to a strange, almost wilful blindness and a willingness to waste powers that he has gained at great cost. When we first meet Faustus, he is just preparing to embark on his career as a magician, and while we already anticipate that things will turn out badly (the Chorus's introduction, if nothing else, prepares us), there is nonetheless a grandeur

NOTES

to Faustus as he contemplates all the marvels that his magical powers will produce. He imagines piling up wealth from the four corners of the globe, reshaping the map of Europe (both politically and physically), and gaining access to every scrap of knowledge about the universe. He is an arrogant, self-aggrandizing man, but his ambitions are so grand that we cannot help being impressed, and we even feel sympathetic toward him. He represents the spirit of the Renaissance, with its rejection of the medieval, God-centered universe, and its embrace of human possibility. Faustus, at least early on in his acquisition of magic, is the personification of possibility.

But Faustus also possesses an obtuseness that becomes apparent during his bargaining sessions with Mephastophilis. Having decided that a pact with the devil is the only way to fulfil his ambitions, Faustus then blinds himself happily to what such a pact actually means. Sometimes he tells himself that hell is not so bad and that one needs only "fortitude"; at other times, even while conversing with Mephastophilis, he remarks to the disbelieving demon that he does not actually believe hell exists. Meanwhile, despite his lack of concern about the prospect of eternal damnation, -Faustus is also beset with doubts from the beginning, setting a pattern for the play in which he repeatedly approaches repentance only to pull back at the last moment. Why he fails to repent is unclear: -sometimes it seems a matter of pride and continuing ambition, sometimes a conviction that God will not hear his plea. Other times, it seems that Mephastophilis simply bullies him away from repenting.

Bullying Faustus is less difficult than it might seem, because Marlowe, after setting his protagonist up as a grandly tragic figure of sweeping visions and immense ambitions, spends the middle scenes revealing Faustus's true, petty nature. Once Faustus gains his long-desired powers, he does not know what to do with them. Marlowe suggests that this uncertainty stems, in part, from the fact that desire for knowledge leads inexorably toward God, whom Faustus has renounced. But, more generally, absolute power corrupts Faustus: once he can do everything, he no longer wants to do anything. Instead, he traipses around Europe, playing tricks on yokels and performing conjuring acts to impress various heads of state. He uses his incredible gifts for what is essentially trifling entertainment. The fields of possibility narrow gradually, as he visits ever more minor nobles and performs ever more unimportant magic tricks, until the Faustus of the first few scenes is entirely swallowed up in mediocrity. Only in the final scene is Faustus rescued from mediocrity, as the knowledge of his impending doom restores his earlier gift of powerful rhetoric, and he regains his sweeping sense of vision. Now, however, the vision that he sees is of hell looming up to swallow him. Marlowe uses much of his finest poetry to describe Faustus's final hours, during which Faustus's desire for repentance finally wins out, although too late. Still, Faustus is restored to his earlier grandeur in his closing speech, with its hurried rush from idea to idea and its despairing, Renaissance-renouncing last line, "I'll burn my books!" He becomes once again a tragic hero, a great man undone because his ambitions have butted up against the law of God.

Mephastophilis

Mephistophilis is the second most important dramatic personage in the drama. He appears in most of the scenes with Faustus. When he is first seen by Faustus, he is horrendously ugly. Faustus immediately sends him away and has him reappear in the form of a Franciscan friar. The mere physical appearance of Mephistophilis suggests the ugliness of hell itself.

Throughout the play, Faustus seems to have forgotten how ugly the devils are in their natural shape. Only at the very end of the drama, when devils come to carry Faustus off to his eternal damnation, does he once again understand the terrible significance of their ugly physical appearance. As Faustus exclaims when he sees the devils at the end of the drama, "Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile! / Ugly hell, gape not."

In his first appearance, we discover that Mephistophilis is bound to Lucifer in a manner similar to Faustus' later servitude. Mephistophilis is not free to serve Faustus unless he has Lucifer's permission. Then after the pact, he will be Faustus' servant for twenty-four years. Consequently, the concepts of freedom and bondage are important ideas connected with Mephistophilis and Faustus. In other words, no person in the entire order of the universe is entirely free, and what Faustus is hoping for in his contract is a complete and total physical, not moral, freedom. It is paradoxical that the brilliant Dr. Faustus does not see this contradiction in his views about freedom and bondage.

In most of the scenes, Mephistophilis functions as the representative of hell and Lucifer. Only in a few fleeting moments do we see that Mephistophilis is also experiencing both suffering and damnation because of his status as a fallen angel. In the third scene, he admits that he is also tormented by ten thousand hells because he had once tasted the bliss of heaven and now is in hell with Lucifer and the other fallen angels.

Upon Faustus' insistence to know about the nature of hell, Mephistophilis reveals that it is not a place, but a condition or state of being. Any place where God is not, is hell. Being deprived of everlasting bliss is also hell. In other words, heaven is being admitted into the presence of God, and hell, therefore, is deprivation of the presence of God. This definition of hell corresponded to the newly founded doctrine of the Anglican church, which had just recently broken with the Roman Catholic church. But Marlowe also uses a medieval concept of hell for dramatic purposes. As the devils appear in the final scene and as Faustus contemplates his eternal damnation, there are strong suggestions and images of a hell consisting of severe punishment and torment, where ugly devils swarm about and punish the unrepentant sinner.

Chorus

The chorus announces that this play will not be concerned with war, love, or proud deeds. Instead, it will present the good and bad fortunes of Dr. John Faustus, who is born of base stock in Germany and who goes to the University of Wittenberg, where he studies philosophy and divinity. He so excels in matters of theology that he eventually becomes swollen with pride, which leads to his downfall. Ultimately, Faustus turns to a study of necromancy, or magic.

The technique of the chorus is adapted from the traditions of classic Greek drama. The

NOTES

chorus functions in several ways throughout the play. It stands outside the direct action of the play and comments upon various parts of the drama. The chorus speaks directly to the audience and tells the basic background history of Faustus and explains that the play is to concern his downfall. The chorus is also used to express the author's views and to remind the audience of the proper moral to be learned from the play itself. The opening speech of the chorus functions as a prologue to define the scope of the play.

The chorus speaks in very formal, rhetorical language and explains that the subject of this play will not be that which is usually depicted in dramas. Instead of a subject dealing with love or war, the play will present the history of a scholar. The purpose of this explanation is that, traditionally, tragedy had dealt with such grand subjects as the history of kings, great wars, or powerful love affairs. Consequently, Marlowe is preparing the audience for a departure in subject matter. Most frequently, tragedy is concerned with the downfall of kings, and Marlowe's tragedy does not fit into this formula since this drama deals with the downfall of a man of common birth.

The Icarus image is used in the opening passage to characterize the fall of Faustus. Icarus was a figure in classical mythology who because of his pride had soared too high in the sky, had melted his wax wings, and subsequently had fallen to his death. This classical image of the fall of Icarus reinforces the Christian images of the fall of Lucifer brought out in Scene 3. Both images set the scene for the fall of Dr. Faustus during the course of the drama.

Old Man

Like the Good and Bad Angels, the Old Man is an allegorical character, which means that he's a physical representation of an abstract concept.

What concept does the Old Man represent? Well, consider his words to Faustus: he begs him to stop sinning, assuring him that his soul is still "amiable," or good. He claims to see an angel hovering over Faustus's head waiting to pour "a vial full of precious grace" into that soul. Then he assures Faustus that all of his words are spoken in "tender love / And pity of thy future misery".

To us, the Old Man's words sound a lot like things Jesus might say to Faustus, if he were around to give the guy a talking to. So, it's possible that the Old Man represents Christ. But that's just one theory. He might also represent faith, since the Christian definition of faith involves the belief in God's grace, and that God will save the souls of believers despite their sins, which is exactly what the Old Man tries to convince Faustus of. Too bad he totally fails.

Good Angel

An agent of God who appears in pair with the Evil Angel, the Good Angel tries to make Faustus think about God and of heavenly things. The Good Angel represents the good side in the good/evil dichotomy. In a literary sense, the Good Angel reflects the good side of Faustus' conscience, for Marlowe tries to show that Faustus, like every human being, has two natures, both good and bad. What the Good Angel says mirrors what Faustus' good nature is thinking. Thus, the interchanges between the Good Angel and the Evil Angel

reveal Faustus' inner struggles with himself. The Good Angel's main message to Faustus is that it is never too late to turn to God. A spirit that urges Faustus to repent for his pact with Lucifer and return to God. Along with the old man and the bad angel, the good angel represents, in many ways, Faustus's conscience and divided will between good and evil.

Evil Angel

An agent of Lucifer who appears in pair with the Good Angel, the Evil Angel tries to keep Faustus focused on power, wealth, and worldly pleasures. In direct contrast to the Good Angel, the Evil Angel represents the evil side in the good/evil dichotomy. In a literary sense, the Evil Angel reflects the evil side of Faustus' conscience, for Marlowe tries to show that Faustus, like every human being, has two natures, both good and bad. What the Evil Angel says mirrors what Faustus' evil nature is thinking. Thus, the interchanges between the Good Angel and the Evil Angel reveal Faustus' inner struggles with himself. The Evil Angel main message to Faustus is that God will not accept his repentance. A spirit that serves as the counterpart to the good angel and provides Faustus with reasons not to repent for sins against God. The evil angel represents the evil half of Faustus's conscience.

Lucifer

Lucifer is one of the central personages of the tragedy, which embodies the world of devilish power and immense pleasures. He serves as the source of contradiction, the beginning of anxiety and dissatisfaction. At the same time, an image is associated with the denial of everything inert and false in public attitudes, all the satirical elements in Faust.

Lucifer constantly intervenes in the principal's deeds, distorting his intentions, which frequently leads to a tragic finale. In the first part of the plot, he certifies himself as part of the absolute evil, exposing Faust to temptations and trials. With the expansion of the hero's activities, Lucifer changes his appearance, playing various roles. He can be a wit, magician, pimp, and even a mentor. In the world of spirits, he is just as plastic and versatile, because he finds a common language with witches and demons. So, he plays the role of a sarcastic denier, mocks everything obsolete and inert. In the same cases when he acts as an assistant to Faust, he maliciously distorts his will. When they are at the emperor's court of the, he becomes a court jester. To replenish the empty treasury, the demon offers the king to issue paper money under the fantastic provision of underground wealth and treasures.

He also takes part in the search for Helena, experiences some adventures in the world of mythological creatures of antiquity and, having assumed the appearance of the ugly Forkiad known from ancient myths, protects the rest of the lovers in a solitary castle. The tragic irony painted the final episodes of the second part. Blinded and decrepit Faust still dreams of draining swamps and great deeds, but Lucifer orders Lemurs not to build a mound, digging a grave for a doctor. After his death, he tries to take possession of his soul, but the choir of angels heralds the justification of the protagonist.

Marlowe's Lucifer is distant. His interests in Faustus's affairs are usually represented by Mephastophilis, who does his bidding above all else, and who does not have the authority to make a deal for Faustus's soul without Lucifer's permission. This Lucifer may be powerful, but he is also a practical businessman who is aware of his weaknesses. He

NOTES

is offended when Faustus calls out to God, and he insists on an official blood oath from Faustus as a guarantee of loyalty.

The Prince of the devils, Lucifer was once an angel of God who was cast out of heaven with other rebel angels because of their pride and insolence. Lucifer authorizes the deal between Faustus and Mephistophilis. If Mephistophilis is a conflicted devil, Lucifer shows no such weaknesses or signs of remorse for having been cast out of heaven. When Faustus cries upon the name of Christ, Lucifer comes, as though Mephistophilis is not crafty enough in such urgent cases. Lucifer masterly prevents Faustus from turning back to God at key points in the story.

Wagner

One of the basic character relationships and one of the dominant ideas throughout Doctor Faustus is that of the relationship between the servant and the master. Faustus' basic desire is that he will never be a slave to anything but that he will be master over the entire world. For this desire he sells his soul. Mephistophilis then becomes Faustus' servant for twenty-four years and has to carry out every wish and command that Faustus makes. The paradox of the situation is that in order to achieve this mastery for these few years, Faustus must sell his soul and thus is, in fact, no longer a free man but, instead, is actually the slave to his desires. Furthermore, when Mephistophilis first appears, he lets Faustus know that there is no such thing as complete freedom. He acknowledges that he now serves Lucifer and that everything in the universe is subjected to something else.

Faustus also is involved in another servant-master relationship with his pupil Wagner. Wagner, the inferior student of the masterful doctor, represents the servant who does not understand either his master or what is happening to him. Wagner tries to emulate Faustus in many things and to take upon himself all the power that his master displays. In his failure, he becomes one of the comic devices in the drama. He tries to use the magical powers to get the clown to serve him, thus establishing another servant-master relationship. On the comic level then, there is even a greater misuse of power. The comic actions of Wagner show that Faustus' essential relationship with Mephistophilis carries a more universal significance. Faustus' actions affect other people, for Wagner tries to imitate his master and only bungles whatever he does.

This master-servant relationship is carried to further comic extremes in the relationship between Robin and Ralph in the comic interludes. Robin gets one of Faustus' conjuring books and tries to force Ralph to become his servant. Thus, the comic episodes are loosely related to the serious aspects of the drama by this servant-master relationship in which the actions of the master influence the behavior and destiny of the servant.

Faustus' servant and eventual heir of his fortunes, Wagner is a pale reflection of Faustus; he displays a nature similar to his master, even trying to obtain his own servant through the practice of magic. Wagner's background is not known, but it is clear from his language and demeanour that he is a young servant who looks up to Faustus. Wagner tries to imitate Faustus in many ways, in the way he talks and even in his taking up of magic. Wagner is Faustus' image-bearing progeny. That he inherits Faustus' fortunes suggests he might even be of physical progeny. At several points, Wagner acts as a narrator, filling in

gaps in the story.

Clown

A clown who becomes Wagner's servant. The clown's antics provide comic relief; he is a ridiculous character, and his absurd behavior initially contrasts with Faustus's grandeur. As the play goes on, though, Faustus's behavior comes to resemble that of the clown. A poor, beggar-like character, the Clown is threatened by Wagner to be his servant. When the clown refuses, Wagner conjures up some spirits to scare him. The Clown follows Wagner, but asks Wagner to teach him magic. A poor, beggar-like character, the Clown is threatened by Wagner to be his servant. When the clown refuses, Wagner conjures up some spirits to scare him. The Clown follows Wagner, but asks Wagner to teach him magic.

Robin

Robin is a stable-hand who steals a spell-book from Doctor Faustus. He reappears in comic scenes throughout the play. His foolish attempts at magic act as a counter to Faustus' serious, ambitious sorcery. However, at times one may question how different the two uses of magic are: Faustus ends up using his magic to do parlor tricks for wealthy noblemen and to summon a beautiful woman (Helen of Troy); in some ways, then, the ambitious Faustus is really not so different from the lowly Robin.

An employee of an inn, Robin steals one of Faustus' magic books and makes Mephistophilis appear. He is turned into an ape by Mephistophilis.

Rafe

Referred to as "Dick" in the B-text of Doctor Faustus, Rafe is a friend of Robin's. The two try to use Faustus' spell book to learn incantations, but generally botch the process. A fellow employee with Robin at the inn, Robin is turned into a dog by Mephistophilis. A friend of Robin's who is present with Robin during the attempt to conjure up devils.

Valdes and Cornelius

These characters, described by Faustus as 'my dearest friends', appear only in Scene 1. They are already practising magicians and they have clearly had previous conversations with Faustus, persuading him to 'practise magic and concealed arts' .

They present the benefits of their art very much in terms of power and fame, especially in Valdes' speech beginning: 'Faustus, these books, thy wit, and our experience / Shall make all nations to canonize us'. They clearly hope to recruit Faustus to increase their own power – there are several references to what they may achieve together.

However, they are disappointed in their hope of creating a triumvirate of magical power, because, once Faustus has learnt enough to summon Mephastophilis, he has no further contact with them. A pair of magicians Faustus knows, Valdes and Cornelius have encouraged Faustus to try the dark arts in the past. They are more than happy to provide Faustus with reading materials and instruction in the basics of devil-summoning, and thus help instigate Faustus' fall from grace.

NOTES

Friends of Faustus, they are reputed to be practitioners of magic. Faustus calls on them to teach him the black arts. Valdes and Cornelius tell Faustus that with his wit, he will be powerful, and together they will be famous all over the world.

Horse-courser

A horse-trader who buys a horse from Faustus. Faustus warns him not to ride the horse in water. The Horse-courser assumes Faustus is trying to cheat him and rides it in water; the horse promptly melts. The angry Horse-courser confronts Faustus (whom he finds sleeping) and pulls on his leg to wake him up. The leg comes apart from Faustus' body (through a magic trick), terrifying the trader, who flees. The Horse-Courser purchases a horse from Faustus. He is warned by Faustus not to ride the horse through water, but does not listen. When the Horse-Courser rides into water, the horse turns into a bottle of hay. The Horse-Courser tries to get Faustus' attention by pulling on his leg while he is sleeping. But Faustus plays a joke on him by making his leg fall off, scaring the Horse-Courser away.

The Scholars

The Scholars first appear on stage immediately after Valdes and Cornelius make their exit, so that the two groups of characters are associated in the audience's minds. Learning from Wagner that his master is dining with these two known magicians, they resolve to do what they can to save him. They are thus identified as the representatives of 'good' or permitted knowledge, as against the 'bad' or forbidden knowledge offered by Valdes and Cornelius.

No such encounter is dramatized in the play, but it could be argued that the Good and Evil Angels, who first appear in Scene 7, take up the roles of the Scholars and Valdes and Cornelius respectively, competing for Faustus' soul.

The Scholars reappear in Scene 13, but the audience is asked to believe that they have been in touch with Faustus in the intervening years, and have at least taken part in a 'conference about fair ladies, which was the most beautiful in all the world' (Scene 12, 9-10). It is at their request that Faustus conjures the vision of Helen of Troy, the winner of this title, so it would seem that they have forgotten their doubts about Faustus' activities as a magician.

Of course, they only know about his public reputation for performing such feats: they are presumably ignorant of his pact with the Devil, the true source of his power. Under these circumstances, the words spoken by the First Scholar are ironic: 'for this glorious deed / Happy and blest be Faustus evermore' (Scene 12, 31-32). The audience knows that Faustus will be damned for such deeds.

The Scholars make one final appearance, at the beginning of Scene 13, when they find Faustus in despair and try to comfort him. It is only now that he reveals the true source of his power, which shocks them. Although they wish to stay with him during his final hours, he tells them to leave him and save themselves. He knows that however good their intentions, they are powerless to save him. In this sense, Marlowe is using the Scholars to dramatize likely audience reactions – horror, compassion, the desire to resolve Faustus' situation – and to convey that, ultimately, merely human intervention is insufficient.

Scholars in Wittenberg who gossip about and bemoan Faustus's interest in necromancy, rise to power, and damnation. They are emblems of a wider public reaction to Faustus's meteoric rise and fall, and also serve as examples of the scholarly, academic world in which Faustus lives. While devoted to the pursuit of knowledge, they do not put their desire for knowledge ahead of their devotion to God (unlike Faustus) and they pray for Faustus' soul at the end of the play.

Faustus' fellow colleagues at the university, they are concerned that he has not been around. They ask Wagner about Faustus' whereabouts. When they find out Faustus has been with Valdes and Cornelius, they decide to tell the Rector of the university.

The pope

Faustus and Mephastophilis visit the pope in his private chambers in Rome. They annoy him and play practical jokes on him. This antagonizing of the head of the Catholic church is an example of Faustus' rejection of religion, but the duped pope may also have been a source of comedic amusement for Marlowe's Protestant, anti-Catholic audience.

When we first meet Pope Adrian in Act 3, Scene 1, he doesn't exactly make a great first impression. He's too busy commanding rival Saxon pope Bruno to get down on all fours so he can use him as a steps tool.

Is this Marlowe looking for laughs? For sure. But arrogance and pride are also par for the course with this character, who, most scholars agree, is meant to symbolize the Catholic Church from the point of view of Protestant England.

Throughout his scene, the Pope displays what Protestants of this time period would have thought of as typically "Catholic" behaviours. He uses a bunch of man-made books (rather than just the Bible) to pass judgment on Bruno, makes threats of excommunication, brags about his power to condemn or save his fellow Christians, displays a belief in the existence of Purgatory (a state of salvation somewhere in between heaven and hell), crosses himself frequently, and, to cap it all off, has his friars perform an exorcism of the spirit he thinks is haunting him—Faustus.

To a Protestant of Marlowe's day, Pope Adrian would be Catholic with a capital C. Most of his behaviours appear totally ridiculous, which makes Catholicism in general appear ridiculous, too. It doesn't help that the guy is totally illogical, either. When Bruno points out that a prior Pope recognized the sovereignty of the Holy Roman Emperor, Pope Adrian just says something along the lines of, "Well, he was *wrong*. That prior Pope must have decreed in error. And I decree that he was wrong because I am the Pope, and I am invoking the doctrine of papal infallibility, which means that a Pope's decrees are never wrong." Except, you know, he says it in a prettier way, because Christopher Marlowe was putting the words in his mouth.

But here's the thing. Pope Adrian has proven this prior Pope wrong by invoking papal infallibility, which says that Popes are *never* wrong. That's not the most logically sound of arguments, now, is it?

In Act 3, Scene 1, the Pope appears ridiculous, logically inconsistent, arrogant, and proud. This characterization means that the audience will delight in seeing him tormented as Faustus foils his plans to punish Bruno then steals all his good silver and china.

NOTES

But it also makes us wonder why Faustus even bothers to torment him at all. The guy doesn't seem like a very formidable enemy, after all. This character and his storyline may just be for comedic effect, but they also give us important information about the priorities of Faustus's character and Renaissance stereotypes of Catholicism. In short, Faustus is petty, and Protestant Brits were not fond of continental Catholics (to generalize wildly).

Emperor Charles V

Charles V is the powerful emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Faustus visits his court and entertains him with magic. While his magic thus brings him into the most powerful court in Europe, Faustus uses his sorcery for mere courtly entertainment.

Knight

Charles V's knight is sceptical of Doctor Faustus and does not want to see him perform his magic. Faustus makes horns appear on his head in return for his scepticism and snide remarks. (In the B-text, the knight is named Benvolio and has a slightly expanded role, attempting to exact revenge on Faustus by killing him.)

The Knight, who serves in the court of Emperor Carolus the Fifth, is sceptical about Faustus' magical powers. In spite, Faustus makes horns grow on his head. In Doctor Faustus by Christopher Marloew, the knight has been presented as a nobleman. But abused by Faustus at Charles's Court. The Knight, whose name is "Benvolio", is absolutely sceptical of Faustus' miraculous power. Therefore, to teach him a lesson, Faustus makes him appear with horns on his head. Above all the character of the Knight is delineated as a comic one.

The major purpose of fetching "the knight" in Doctor Faustus is to provide some relaxation to the audience. As tragedy ends with a more pathetic conclusion, the readers and the audience feel more sadness and mood swings. Therefore, some humorous scenes are typically included to provide some humour before being introduced with the fatal tragic history.

Secondly, the scenes of the knight are also included in doctor Faustus to meet the pressing demand of the audience. The audience of the Elizabethan Era was not used to watching or reading only the sad things. So, to meet the demand, Marlowe has included the scene of the knight.

Thirdly, the knight is also included to show the power of necromancy and crude buffoonery. Here, by the abuse of the knight, Faustus wanted to prove himself as the greatest magician to the Charles court. For these reasons, though, "The Knight" is a minor character in Doctor Faustus. It plays a significant role to mark Faustus' austerity and create pleasure in the audience's mind.

Bruno

Bruno is a schismatic Pope. In the way back days, the Catholic church experienced all kinds of schisms, or divisions when different members disagreed on certain issues. The disagreeing portions of the church would often appoint their own popes--like Bruno.

Of course, we don't know much about Bruno, and he's not much of a character in his own right. But his impact on Faustus is huge. Mainly to annoy Pope Adrian, Faustus decides to

free Bruno from his punishment at the hands of the ridiculous Pope. But when Faustus returns to Germany with Bruno, having saved him from what was sure to be torture and other awful things, the emperor is incredibly grateful.

Since we know that Pope Adrian is a bit of a joke, we're inclined to side with Bruno and his Emperor when it comes to whatever they're squabbling with Pope Adrian about. So, we're kind of glad that Faustus rescues this guy, even though his motivations are less than good. Still, it's important to realize that Faustus manages to accomplish something good, or at the very least commendable, with his powers. We're betting he didn't mean for that to happen.

Plus, this whole scene with Popes Adrian and Bruno pokes some fun at what many Protestants saw as the illogic and corruption of the Catholic Church in the way back days. Bruno seems like a good guy when compared to Pope Adrian. But we don't actually know if he's a good guy. We just know he's *not* Adrian, and that appears to be good enough for Faustus.

Duke of Vanholt

Having heard of Faustus' powers, the Duke invites Faustus to his court. Faustus visits the court of the Duke of Vanholt. There, Faustus delights the Duke and Duchess by making fresh grapes appear in the middle of winter. The Duke promises to pay Faustus for his marvellous trick. The Duke is impressed with Faustus' magical powers.

At the court of the duke of Vanholt, Faustus asks the duchess, who is with child, if she has a desire for any special dainties. Although it is January, she desires to have a dish of ripe grapes. Faustus sends Mephistophilis after them, and when he returns with them, the duke wonders how this could be accomplished. Faustus explains that he sent his spirit to India for them. The duchess exclaims that the grapes are the best she has ever tasted. The duke promises Faustus that he will reward him greatly for this favour.

Once again, this scene shows what insignificant feats Faustus accomplishes with his powers. Faustus performs a magical trick of obtaining fresh grapes at the request of the nobility. The learned doctor spends some of his last fleeting moments providing "merriment" and "delight" for the duke and duchess. Faustus succeeds in temporarily diverting himself and others from important concerns of life.

Martino and Frederick

These two men at Charles V's court appear only in the B-text, where they discuss the fame of Doctor Faustus and help Benvolio try to kill Faustus. They were Knight in the court of the German Emperor and friends to Benvolio and Frederick. When Benvolio seeks revenge against Faustus, they decide to help out of loyalty.

Doctor Faustus Themes

Temptation, Sin, and Redemption

Deeply immersed in Christianity, Marlowe's play explores the alluring temptation of sin, its consequences, and the possibility of redemption for a sinner like Doctor Faustus. Faustus's journey can be seen in relation to the possible trajectory from temptation to sin to redemption: Faustus' ambition is tempted by the prospect of limitless knowledge and

NOTES

power, he sins in order to achieve it, and then he rejects possible redemption. He is so caught up in his desire for power that he neglects the consequences of his deal with Lucifer. Giving into his temptations, he rejects God in favor of Lucifer and Mephastophilis, a sin if there ever was one.

In portraying Faustus' sinful behavior, Marlowe reveals the negative effects of sin on Faustus himself. Despite his originally lofty ambitions, Faustus ends up using his magic for practical jokes, parlor tricks, and the summoning of a beautiful woman (Helen of Troy). As the play's scholars lament, Faustus was once an esteemed scholar but after his deal with the devil he seems a mere shade of his former self.

While Faustus hurts himself and others through sin, he still has the possibility of redemption throughout the play. As the Good Angel tells him, it is never too late to repent and thereby gain God's mercy. But Faustus is persuaded by the Evil Angel not to repent, primarily by convincing Faustus that he's so damned already that he would never actually be able to return to God. These two angels can be seen as representing the opposing pulls of redemption and the temptation to sin even more. Faustus listens to the Evil Angel for the most of the play, but seems to repent in the final scene. Or does he? The question of whether Faustus really repents at the end of the tragedy is debatable and has important implications for whether the play suggests that at some moment it really is too late for a sinner like Faustus to repent and be redeemed. In any case, whether because he repented too late or didn't repent truly, Faustus rejects the possibility of redemption and is ultimately damned for his sins.

Power as a Corrupting Influence

Early in the play, before he agrees to the pact with Lucifer, Faustus is full of ideas for how to use the power that he seeks. He imagines piling up great wealth, but he also aspires to plumb the mysteries of the universe and to remake the map of Europe. Though they may not be entirely admirable, these plans are ambitious and inspire awe, if not sympathy. They lend a grandeur to Faustus's schemes and make his quest for personal power seem almost heroic, a sense that is reinforced by the eloquence of his early soliloquies.

Once Faustus actually gains the practically limitless power that he so desires, however, his horizons seem to narrow. Everything is possible to him, but his ambition is somehow sapped. Instead of the grand designs that he contemplates early on, he contents himself with performing conjuring tricks for kings and noblemen and takes a strange delight in using his magic to play practical jokes on simple folks. It is not that power has corrupted Faustus by making him evil: indeed, Faustus's behavior after he sells his soul hardly rises to the level of true wickedness. Rather, gaining absolute power corrupts Faustus by making him mediocre and by transforming his boundless ambition into a meaningless delight in petty celebrity.

In the Christian framework of the play, one can argue that true greatness can be achieved only with God's blessing. By cutting himself off from the creator of the universe, Faustus is condemned to mediocrity. He has gained the whole world, but he does not know what to do with it.

The Bargain

Faustus' bargain with Lucifer is the most famous part of *Doctor Faustus.* The so-called "Faustian bargain" has become a standard way of referring to some kind of "deal with the devil," a motif that recurs throughout Western literary and cultural traditions (from a version of the Faust story by the German poet Goethe to the blues musician Robert Johnson, who legend says sold his soul to Satan for his skill on the guitar). But the importance of the bargain extends beyond this famous plot device. The idea of some kind of economic exchange or deal pervades the tragedy. Just as Lucifer cheats Faustus in their deal, Faustus cheats the horse-courser who buys a horse from him and Wagner gets a clown to agree to be his servant in return for learning some magic. These deals might be taken to suggest that bargains are often simply occasions for one individual to exploit another.

However, there is another system of bargaining in the play, related to Christianity. The very word "redemption" literally means "a buying back." In Christian thinking, Jesus redeems mankind by "buying back" their sins at the expense of his own death. If Faustus' bargain with Lucifer is sealed with blood, God's agreement with mankind is, too—with the very blood of Jesus, shed on the cross. Moreover, Faustus can strike a deal with God at any point in the play, gaining eternal salvation by simply repenting his sins. Lucifer may hold Faustus to his original agreement, threatening him when he thinks about repenting, but God is willing to take mercy even on sinners who don't uphold their end of the divine bargain. Faustus, however, refuses to make this ultimate deal. At the end of the play, he is desperate but still attempts to haggle with God, begging for salvation in return for a thousand or a hundred-thousand years in hell.

Thus, one could see the play as ultimately about good and bad deals. And through this profusion of deals and exchanges, Marlowe is able to raise questions of value: what is worth more, power in this world or salvation in the next? How much is a soul worth? Can it even be put in terms of money and profit? As a tragic hero, Faustus is done in by his excessive ambition and pride, but he is also doomed by his tendency to under-value the things he bargains with and over-value the things he bargains for.

The Renaissance Individual

Marlowe lived and wrote during the English Renaissance, and his play has much to say about the transition from a more medieval society to the Renaissance. Greatly simplified, this means a shift in a variety of ways from reliance on some kind of authority figure to reliance on one's own individual self. Humanist scholars of the Renaissance refocused their studies on the individual human subject, while the Protestant reformation affirmed the individual's prerogative to interpret scripture instead of relying on the pope and the hierarchical Catholic church. A flourishing of education and other social changes made it more and more possible for people to rise up through society through their own hard work and ambition.

Faustus embodies many of these changes: he is a self-made man, from humble origins, who has risen through education. He is ambitious and constantly desires to learn and know more about the world through various forms of scholarly inquiry. But Faustus also demonstrates some possible dangers in the Renaissance stress on one's own individual

NOTES 

self. His self-reliance shades into selfishness and excessive pride. After making his deal with Lucifer, Faustus is too proud to admit that he was wrong and repent. He rejects the authority (and the help) of God and tries to handle things himself. While some resistance to authority and celebration of the individual may be a good thing (the play has no problems poking fun at the pope and the Catholic church, for example), Marlowe demonstrates the pitfalls of excessive individualism. Not only does Faustus serve as an example of excessive individualism. So does Lucifer himself, who originally rebelled against the authority of God. The tension between the Renaissance notion of the power and importance of the individual and the Christian stress on obeying God fills and animates *Doctor Faustus*. Although Faustus suffers for erring too far in the direction of the individual, Marlowe's tragedy leaves the question of how to balance these opposing values unresolved (some may, after all, sympathize with the fiercely ambitious Faustus), forcing readers to come to their own answers.

Fate vs. Free Will

In addition to the Renaissance more generally, the Protestant reformation and questions surrounding the changing nature of European Christianity in Marlowe's time have a profound influence on *Doctor Faustus.* One such question that the play tackles is the issue of predestination. According to Calvinism (a branch of protestant Christianity started by John Calvin), people are predestined to be either saved in heaven or damned in hell. In other words, they are born fated to go to one or the other and there's nothing they can do to change that.

One overarching question in Marlowe's play is whether Faustus' fall from grace is his own fault or whether he is fated to be damned. (The question can be extended also to Lucifer and his renegade angels-turned-devils: were they fated to fall from heaven to hell?) Faustus seems to choose his own path, voluntarily agreeing to his deal with Lucifer. And he appears to have the choice to repent at any moment in the play. But, according to a Calvinist interpretation, such free will is an illusion, as these "choices" are already predetermined by God. Even the two versions of the play can't seem to agree on an answer. In a crucial line, the A-text has the Good Angel tell Faustus it is "Never too late, if Faustus will repent," (V, 253). The B-text reads, "Never too late, if Faustus can repent." In one version, the only question is whether Faustus "will" or will not repent. In the other, it is questionable whether Faustus even has the option ("can" or can't he repent?). Regardless, that the play engages in this kind of questioning at all suggests that there may be limits to and constraints upon free will.

Education, Knowledge, and Power

Faustus is identified as a character by his status as a doctor (that is, someone with a doctoral degree), and the backdrop of much of the play is the university environment in which Doctor Faustus lives. It is thus no surprise that issues of formal education are of great importance to the play, in which even magic spells are learned from a kind of text-book. Systems of education obviously exist to help people learn, but Marlowe also explores the associations of formal education with power and social hierarchy. Education helps people position themselves in higher social classes. It is through education that Faustus

rises from his humble origins and that the play's scholars differentiate themselves from lowly clowns like Robin and Rafe. And when Wagner promises to teach a clown magic, he uses his superior knowledge as a way to gain power over the clown, getting him to agree to be his servant.

But not everything can be learned in school and from books. In his opening soliloquy, Faustus rejects traditional areas of study and, although his magic does rely on a spell-book, what he seeks from Mephastophilis is knowledge that he can't attain in traditional ways. For the ambitious Faustus, even beyond the implications of educations effect on social hierarchy, knowledge means power. He desires limitless knowledge largely because of the massive riches and power that come with it. And indeed, whatever power Faustus possesses with his magic is due entirely to his knowledge of certain magic incantations. This close connection between knowledge and power can be contrasted with the idea of knowledge for its own sake, which ideally characterizes learning in universities.

Ultimately, Marlowe's play suggests that there are limits to proper knowledge and education. The desire to learn is not inherently bad, but Faustus goes too far and seeks to know too much. He himself seems to recognize this, as his last line in the play contains a promise to burn his books (XIII, 113) and thus repudiate his ambition for learning. The chorus that delivers the final lines of the play sums up the moral of Faustus' story: "Regard his hellish fall, / Whose friendful fortune may exhort the wise / Only to wonder at. But even if this moral is clear-cut, where to draw the line between appropriate subjects of study and "unlawful things" that we shouldn't seek to know is unclear. Knowledge is power, but how much is too much?

The Divided Nature of Man

Faustus is constantly undecided about whether he should repent and return to God or continue to follow his pact with Lucifer. His internal struggle goes on throughout the play, as part of him of wants to do good and serve God, but part of him (the dominant part, it seems) lusts after the power that Mephastophilis promises. The good angel and the evil angel, both of whom appear at Faustus's shoulder in order to urge him in different directions, symbolize this struggle. While these angels may be intended as an actual pair of supernatural beings, they clearly represent Faustus's divided will, which compels Faustus to commit to Mephastophilis but also to question this commitment continually.

1.4 REVIEW QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Who was Christopher Marlowe?**
2. **Who was Robin?**
3. **Which book Mephastophilis did give to Faustus?**
4. **In which city, Faustus wanted to see all the city's monuments?**
5. **Who was Knight?**

NOTES

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Analyse the character of Faustus.**
2. **Discuss Marlowe's Doctor Faustus as a morality play.**
3. **Discuss Doctor Faustus as a tragedy.**
4. **How would you analyse the character of Lucifier?**
5. **Analyse the character of Wagner.**

1.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. **Who is the author of "Doctor Faustus"?**
   a. William Congreve
   b. John Webster
   c. Christopher Marlowe
   d. Aristotle

2. **Christopher Marlowe was also known as _____.**
   a. Ben Jonson
   b. Aristotle
   c. Thomas Middleton
   d. Kit Marlowe

3. **Doctor Faustus was a scholar living in Wittenberg, _____.**
   a. Germany
   b. France
   c. Singapore
   d. London

4. **Wagner found a _____ and persuades him to be his servant, promising to teach him some magic in return.**
   a. Horse
   b. Clown
   c. Man
   d. None of the above

5. **_____ was an ostler, or innkeeper, who, like the clown, provides a comic contrast to Faustus.**
   a. Lucifier
   b. Robin
   c. Rafe
   d. Chorus

6. **Bruno was captured by the pope and freed by _____.**
   a. Duke of Vanholt
   b. Rafe
   c. Faustus
   d. Clown

NOTES 

7. Valdes and Cornelius taught Faustus the art of _____.

a. Writing
b. War
c. Lying
d. Black magic

8. The pope served as both a source of amusement for the play's Protestant audience and a symbol of the _____ that Faustus had rejected.

a. Love
b. Peace
c. Religious faith
d. Purity

9. Faustus ambition was admirable and initially awesome, yet he ultimately lacked a certain _____.

a. Inner strength
b. Peace
c. Money
d. People

10. The Chorus was customary in _____ tragedy.

a. Greek
b. Roman
c. Italian
d. Japanese

♦♦♦♦♦

UNIT II

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

STRUCTURE

NOTES

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After completion of this unit, student will be able to:

- Know about William Shakespeare the famous play writer.
- Learn about his one of the famous plays "Hamlet".

2.2 ABOUT AUTHOR

William Shakespeare was a renowned English poet, playwright, and actor born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon. His birthday is most commonly celebrated on 23 April (see When was Shakespeare born), which is also believed to be the date he died in 1616.

Shakespeare was a prolific writer during the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages of British theatre (sometimes called the English Renaissance or the Early Modern Period). Shakespeare's plays are perhaps his most enduring legacy, but they are not all he wrote. Shakespeare's poems also remain popular to this day.

Records survive relating to William Shakespeare's family that offer an understanding of the context of Shakespeare›s early life and the lives of his family members. John Shakespeare married Mary Arden, and together they had eight children. John and Mary lost two daughters as infants, so William became their eldest child. John Shakespeare worked as a glove-maker, but he also became an important figure in the town of Stratford by fulfilling civic positions. His elevated status meant that he was even more likely to have sent his children, including William, to the local grammar school.

William Shakespeare would have lived with his family in their house on Henley Street until he turned eighteen. When he was eighteen, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was twenty-six. It was a rushed marriage because Anne was already pregnant at the time of the ceremony. Together they had three children. Their first daughter, Susanna, was born six months after the wedding and was later followed by twins Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet died when he was just 11 years old.

Shakespeare's career jump-started in London, but when did he go there? We know Shakespeare›s twins were baptised in 1585, and that by 1592 his reputation was established in London, but the intervening years are considered a mystery. Scholars generally refer to these years as 'The Lost Years'.

During his time in London, Shakespeare's first printed works were published. They were two long poems, 'Venus and Adonis' (1593) and 'The Rape of Lucrece' (1594). He also became a founding member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company of actors. Shakespeare was the company's regular dramatist, producing on average two plays a year, for almost twenty years.

NOTES

He remained with the company for the rest of his career, during which time it evolved into The King's Men under the patronage of King James I (from 1603). During his time in the company Shakespeare wrote many of his most famous tragedies, such as King Lear and Macbeth, as well as great romances, like The Winter's Tale and The Tempest.

Altogether Shakespeare's works include 38 plays, 2 narrative poems, 154 sonnets, and a variety of other poems. No original manuscripts of Shakespeare›s plays are known to exist today. It is actually thanks to a group of actors from Shakespeare›s company that we have about half of the plays at all. They collected them for publication after Shakespeare died, preserving the plays. These writings were brought together in what is known as the First Folio (‹Folio› refers to the size of the paper used). It contained 36 of his plays, but none of his poetry.

Shakespeare's legacy is as rich and diverse as his work; his plays have spawned countless adaptations across multiple genres and cultures. His plays have had an enduring presence on stage and film. His writings have been compiled in various iterations of The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, which include all of his plays, sonnets, and other poems. William Shakespeare continues to be one of the most important literary figures of the English language.

Shakespeare's success in the London theatres made him considerably wealthy, and by 1597 he was able to purchase New Place, the largest house in the borough of Stratford-upon-Avon. Although his professional career was spent in London, he maintained close links with his native town.

Recent archaeological evidence discovered on the site of Shakespeare's New Place shows that Shakespeare was only ever an intermittent lodger in London. This suggests he divided his time between Stratford and London (a two or three-day commute). In his later years, he may have spent more time in Stratford-upon-Avon than scholars previously thought.

On his father's death in 1601, William Shakespeare inherited the old family home in Henley Street part of which was then leased to tenants. Further property investments in Stratford followed, including the purchase of 107 acres of land in 1602.

Shakespeare died in Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 April 1616 at the age of 52. He is buried in the sanctuary of the parish church, Holy Trinity.

2.3 HAMLET

Hamlet Summary

The author of the play is William Shakespeare. The name of the play is The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark that Shakespeare wrote sometime between 1599 and 1601 and is his longest play. The play comprises of 5 Acts. The play is about Prince Hamlet and his revenge from King Claudius. Claudius was Hamlet's uncle and had murdered his father as he wanted to marry his mother and also to sit on the throne. In order to avenge his uncle, Hamlet pretends to be mad. He also writes a play and gets it enacted before

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

King Claudius in order to see his reactions. Amidst all these, finally, the play ends with the death of Polonius, Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude, and also Hamlet.

ACT I

After murdering King Hamlet, Claudius suddenly marries King's widow and Prince Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude.

As King Hamlet had killed King Fortinbras of Norway in a battle, Denmark qualms about an invasion by the deceased king's son. The guards at Elsinore Castle, and Horatio, Prince Hamlet's friend see a ghost resembling the late King Hamlet. They thus decide to inform this to Prince Hamlet. On hearing this Hamlet decides to meet him.

The ghost appears before Prince Hamlet and tells him that he is his father. He also tells him how Claudius assassinated him and urges the Prince to avenge his murder. Hamlet though not sure about the ghost's trustworthiness, agrees to it. He also asks the guards and his friend to keep this a secret. He tells them that from now on he will fake madness so that he can unleash the truth.

However, in the court, Claudius grants permission to Laertes to return to France. Laertes is Polonius's son and Polonius is an elderly advisor in the court. Ophelia, Polonius's daughter is interested in Prince Hamlet but her brother warns her to stay away from him.

ACT II

As Hamlet had decided he starts behaving strangely and madly. He appeared half-undressed before Ophelia and also rejected her love. Claudius and Polonius doubt such a sudden change in Hamlet's behavior.

Thus, Claudius called the old friends of Hamlet, Guildenstern, and Rosencrantz, to understand the reason behind his strange and mad behavior. They inform Hamlet that they have brought a group of traveling actors along with them.

Hence, Hamlet gets an opportunity to find the truth behind his father's murder. He writes a play with scenes similar to his father's murder story told by the ghost. He plans to present the play before Claudius and his mother so that he can find the truth by studying Claudius's reactions.

ACT III

After watching the scenes of murder by poisoning the King, Claudius gets restless and leaves the room. This gives Hamlet a clear sign of his uncle's guilt. However, while going to meet his mother, Hamlet by chance happens to see King Claudius repenting for his own ill deeds.

He feels like killing Claudius but then stops thinking that if he did so now the king will go to heaven and not hell. On reaching his mother's room, he hears someone moving behind the tapestry. He thinks it to be Claudius and stabs him badly but to his surprise, it was Polonius. Thus, accidentally he kills Polonius who was there to safeguard his mother from him.

ACT IV

Claudius sends Hamlet to England, as an ambassador along with Guildenstern and

NOTES

Rosencrantz, and a letter to the king of England. As he was scared of his death, he requested the king of England to assassinate Hamlet immediately. However, Hamlet returns to Denmark safely.

Meanwhile, Ophelia goes mad after Hamlet's rejection and death of her father. Later, she got drowned and died. Claudius convinced Laertes that Hamlet is responsible for his father's murder and his sister's madness. They both thus plan to kill Hamlet either by a poisoned blade or by poisoning his winning drink.

ACT V

Hamlet meets Horatio in the graveyard and tells him that Claudius wished to get him killed. At the same time, Ophelia's funeral procession reaches the graveyard. Hamlet on realizing that it is Ophelia expresses his love for her but gets into a fight with Laertes. Claudius thus arranges a duel between Hamlet and Laertes.

At the match, Hamlet defeats Laertes in the first two rounds. Gertrude celebrates her son's victory and drinks the poisoned wine unknowingly. As she drinks the wine, Laertes realizes that their plan may get revealed and thus immediately wounds Hamlet with the poisoned blade. In the brawl, Hamlet takes Laertes blade and in turn, scars him. While dying Laertes tells Hamlet about the plan of Claudius.

Hamlet flashes at Claudius and kills him. While dying Hamlet gets to know that Fortinbras, the Norwegian prince is marching towards Denmark. He thus names him as his successor. Horatio also wants to commit suicide but Hamlet stops him saying that he needs to be alive to tell his story to the world.

Character List

Hamlet- The Prince of Denmark, the title character, and the protagonist. About thirty years old at the start of the play, Hamlet is the son of Queen Gertrude and the late King Hamlet, and the nephew of the present king, Claudius. Hamlet is melancholy, bitter, and cynical, full of hatred for his uncle's scheming and disgust for his mother's sexuality. A reflective and thoughtful young man who has studied at the University of Wittenberg, Hamlet is often indecisive and hesitant, but at other times prone to rash and impulsive acts.

Claudius- The King of Denmark, Hamlet's uncle, and the play's antagonist. The villain of the play, Claudius is a calculating, ambitious politician, driven by his sexual appetites and his lust for power, but he occasionally shows signs of guilt and human feeling—his love for Gertrude, for instance, seems sincere.

Gertrude- The Queen of Denmark, Hamlet's mother, recently married to Claudius. Gertrude loves Hamlet deeply, but she is a shallow, weak woman who seeks affection and status more urgently than moral rectitude or truth.

Polonius- The Lord Chamberlain of Claudius's court, a pompous, conniving old man. Polonius is the father of Laertes and Ophelia.

Horatio- Hamlet's close friend, who studied with the prince at the university in Wittenberg. Horatio is loyal and helpful to Hamlet throughout the play. After Hamlet's death, Horatio remains alive to tell Hamlet's story.

Ophelia- Polonius's daughter, a beautiful young woman with whom Hamlet has been in love. Ophelia is a sweet and innocent young girl, who obeys her father and her brother, Laertes. Dependent on men to tell her how to behave, she gives in to Polonius's schemes to spy on Hamlet. Even in her lapse into madness and death, she remains maidenly, singing songs about flowers and finally drowning in the river amid the flower garlands she had gathered.

Laertes- Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother, a young man who spends much of the play in France. Passionate and quick to action, Laertes is clearly a foil for the reflective Hamlet.

Fortinbras- The young Prince of Norway, whose father the king (also named Fortinbras) was killed by Hamlet's father (also named Hamlet). Now Fortinbras wishes to attack Denmark to avenge his father's honour, making him another foil for Prince Hamlet.

The Ghost- The spectre of Hamlet's recently deceased father. The ghost, who claims to have been murdered by Claudius, calls upon Hamlet to avenge him. However, it is not entirely certain whether the ghost is what it appears to be, or whether it is something else. Hamlet speculates that the ghost might be a devil sent to deceive him and tempt him into murder, and the question of what the ghost is or where it comes from is never definitively resolved.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern- Two slightly bumbling courtiers, former friends of Hamlet from Wittenberg, who are summoned by Claudius and Gertrude to discover the cause of Hamlet's strange behavior.

Osric- The foolish courtier who summons Hamlet to his duel with Laertes.

Voltimand and Cornelius- Courtiers whom Claudius sends to Norway to persuade the king to prevent Fortinbras from attacking.

Marcellus and Bernardo- The officers who first see the ghost walking the ramparts of Elsinore and who summon Horatio to witness it. Marcellus is present when Hamlet first encounters the ghost.

Francisco- A soldier and guardsman at Elsinore.

Reynaldo- Polonius's servant, who is sent to France by Polonius to check up on and spy on Laertes.

Character Analysis

Hamlet

Hamlet has fascinated audiences and readers for centuries, and the first thing to point out about him is that he is enigmatic. There is always more to him than the other characters in the play can figure out; even the most careful and clever readers come away with the sense that they don't know everything there is to know about this character. Hamlet actually tells other characters that there is more to him than meets the eye—notably, his mother, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern—but his fascination involves much more than this. When he speaks, he sounds as if there's something important, he's not saying, maybe something even he is not aware of. The ability to write soliloquies and dialogues that create this effect is one of Shakespeare's most impressive achievements.

NOTES 

A university student whose studies are interrupted by his father's death, Hamlet is extremely philosophical and contemplative. He is particularly drawn to difficult questions or questions that cannot be answered with any certainty. Faced with evidence that his uncle murdered his father, evidence that any other character in a play would believe, Hamlet becomes obsessed with proving his uncle's guilt before trying to act. The standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt" is simply unacceptable to him. He is equally plagued with questions about the afterlife, about the wisdom of suicide, about what happens to bodies after they die—the list is extensive.

But even though he is thoughtful to the point of obsession, Hamlet also behaves rashly and impulsively. When he does act, it is with surprising swiftness and little or no premeditation, as when he stabs Polonius through a curtain without even checking to see who he is. He seems to step very easily into the role of a madman, behaving erratically and upsetting the other characters with his wild speech and pointed innuendos.

It is also important to note that Hamlet is extremely melancholy and discontented with the state of affairs in Denmark and in his own family—indeed, in the world at large. He is extremely disappointed with his mother for marrying his uncle so quickly, and he repudiates Ophelia, a woman he once claimed to love, in the harshest terms. His words often indicate his disgust with and distrust of women in general. At a number of points in the play, he contemplates his own death and even the option of suicide.

But, despite all of the things with which Hamlet professes dissatisfaction, it is remarkable that the prince and heir apparent of Denmark should think about these problems only in personal and philosophical terms. He spends relatively little time thinking about the threats to Denmark's national security from without or the threats to its stability from within (some of which he helps to create through his own carelessness).

Claudius

Hamlet's major antagonist is a shrewd, lustful, conniving king who contrasts sharply with the other male characters in the play. Whereas most of the other important men in Hamlet are preoccupied with ideas of justice, revenge, and moral balance, Claudius is bent upon maintaining his own power. The old King Hamlet was apparently a stern warrior, but Claudius is a corrupt politician whose main weapon is his ability to manipulate others through his skillful use of language. Claudius's speech is compared to poison being poured in the ear—the method he used to murder Hamlet's father. Claudius's love for Gertrude may be sincere, but it also seems likely that he married her as a strategic move, to help him win the throne away from Hamlet after the death of the king. As the play progresses, Claudius's mounting fear of Hamlet's insanity leads him to ever greater self-preoccupation; when Gertrude tells him that Hamlet has killed Polonius, Claudius does not remark that Gertrude might have been in danger, but only that he would have been in danger had he been in the room. He tells Laertes the same thing as he attempts to soothe the young man's anger after his father's death. Claudius is ultimately too crafty for his own good. In Act V, scene ii, rather than allowing Laertes only two methods of killing Hamlet, the sharpened sword and the poison on the blade, Claudius insists on a third, the poisoned goblet. When Gertrude inadvertently drinks the poison and dies, Hamlet

is at last able to bring himself to kill Claudius, and the king is felled by his own cowardly machination.

Gertrude

Few Shakespearean characters have caused as much uncertainty as Gertrude, the beautiful Queen of Denmark. The play seems to raise more questions about Gertrude than it answers, including: Was she involved with Claudius before the death of her husband? Did she love her husband? Did she know about Claudius's plan to commit the murder? Did she love Claudius, or did she marry him simply to keep her high station in Denmark? Does she believe Hamlet when he insists that he is not mad, or does she pretend to believe him simply to protect herself? Does she intentionally betray Hamlet to Claudius, or does she believe that she is protecting her son's secret?

These questions can be answered in numerous ways, depending upon one's reading of the play. The Gertrude who does emerge clearly in Hamlet is a woman defined by her desire for station and affection, as well as by her tendency to use men to fulfil her instinct for self-preservation—which, of course, makes her extremely dependent upon the men in her life. Hamlet's most famous comment about Gertrude is his furious condemnation of women in general: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (I.ii.146). This comment is as much indicative of Hamlet's agonized state of mind as of anything else, but to a great extent Gertrude does seem morally frail. She never exhibits the ability to think critically about her situation, but seems merely to move instinctively toward seemingly safe choices, as when she immediately runs to Claudius after her confrontation with Hamlet. She is at her best in social situations, when her natural grace and charm seem to indicate a rich, rounded personality. At times it seems that her grace and charm are her only characteristics, and her reliance on men appears to be her sole way of capitalizing on her abilities.

Polonius

Polonius is a proud and concerned father. In his first line he tells us he hesitates to let his son Laertes go abroad, and he draws out his last meeting with Laertes because he's reluctant to see him go. In the same scene, Polonius advises his daughter Ophelia to avoid Hamlet because he's worried about her. The secure and happy family unit of Polonius, Laertes, and Ophelia provides a stark contrast with the dysfunctional unit formed by Claudius, Gertrude, and Hamlet. The happiness of Polonius's family is reflected in his children's reaction to his murder. Laertes passionately pursues revenge, and Ophelia feels so struck with grief that she goes mad. At the same time, Polonius reveals himself to be a far from perfect father. He sends Reynaldo to spy on his son, and he uses his daughter as bait to trick Hamlet. Polonius's actions suggest that in Hamlet, even relationships that seem loving are ambiguous, a fact which contributes to the play's atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty.

Polonius also provides Hamlet with its main source of comic relief. As a comic character, he consistently shows himself less wise than he thinks. For instance, in Act Two he cleverly announces that "brevity is the soul of wit" (II.ii.), but he does so in the middle of a tediously long speech. The fact that Polonius gets himself so wrong contributes to one of Hamlet's central themes: the challenge of self-certainty. Polonius's amusing lack of self-awareness

NOTES 

serves as a comic foil to Hamlet's existential struggle with self-knowledge. In this sense Polonius offers an alternative and far less extreme perspective on the impossibility of perfectly knowing oneself. This difference between Polonius and Hamlet results in a powerful example of irony in Act Three, when Hamlet mistakenly kills Polonius, thinking it's Claudius. Whereas Polonius's lack of self-awareness is ultimately harmless, Hamlet's lack of self-certainty drives him to his first act of violence, which completely and tragically misfires.

Horatio

Horatio epitomizes the faithful friend. He only questions Hamlet's judgment once, when Hamlet confides the fates of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Otherwise, Horatio supports every rash decision Hamlet makes.

Horatio is the man Hamlet wants to be. He is intelligent, but not driven by his intellectual creativity. Horatio seems to accept the world as it is handed to him where Hamlet is driven by his impulse question all apparent truths. (What T.S. Eliot calls "the energy to murder and create" in "The Lovesong J. Alfred Prufrock," a poem in which the the title character, paralyzed by words and feelings protests, "I will not be Prince Hamlet.") Marcellus and Bernardo Marcellus and Barnardo admire Horatio's intellect enough to want his opinion about the ghost, but no one accuses Horatio of talking or thinking too much. He can follow Hamlet's elaborate wordplays, but he is not inclined to engage in any. He knows enough to value what ignorance he has that can protect him from political ruin, but neither ambition nor deceit determines his loyalties.

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

Ophelia

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

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

Just like Hamlet, the medieval precept that the father's word is unquestionable governs Ophelia. But her Renaissance sense of romantic love also rules her. How can she be obedient to her father and true to her love? When she lies to Hamlet and tells him that Polonius is home when he is concealed in the room eavesdropping, Ophelia proves she cannot live in both worlds. She has chosen one, and her choice seals her fate.

The dilemma also forces her into madness. She has no way to reconcile the contradictory selves her men demand that she be and still retain an equilibrium. Ophelia's desperation literally drives her crazy, and she has no means with which to heal herself.

Laertes

Hamlet and Laertes presumably grew up together, fencing with one another and confiding in one another. Then Hamlet went away to Wittenberg and Laertes to Paris, parting the friendship. Still, Hamlet refers to Laertes as «a very noble youth.»

Hamlet recognizes what Shakespeare has made abundantly clear throughout the play, that Laertes is Hamlet›s foil. He mirrors Hamlet but behaves in the opposite manner. Where Hamlet is verbal, Laertes is physical; where Hamlet broods, Laertes blusters. Laertes› love for Ophelia and duty to Polonius drive him to passionate action, while Hamlet›s love for Gertrude and duty to King Hamlet drive him to passionate inaction. In Laertes resides the picture of what Hamlet could be if the sound of his own words did not mesmerize him.

Fortinbras

Fortinbras, frequently referred to in the play, *Hamlet*, as "young" Fortinbras, is one of Shakespeare's most minor characters. He has no dramatic relevance and hardly appears in the play at all. However, he is an important *idea* in the play and has a major function in the *meaning* of it.

He is a man of action and a soldier which, in the first place, is the opposite of Hamlet in those respects. He is the nephew of "old" Fortinbras, the king of Norway. Like Hamlet, he has recently lost his father in a conflict between Norway and Denmark, in which his father was killed by Hamlet's father, "old' Hamlet. A small piece of land was lost to the Danes and the young prince has gathered a large following and marched on Denmark to recover the land and get revenge for his father's death. This expedition is a backdrop to the action of the play.

By creating the background story of that incident Shakespeare sets up multiple mirror images throughout the text, made more complex by the involvement of Laertes – son of Polonius, killed by Hamlet – who is also bent on avenging his father's death. The parallels and images that emerge from those three strands enrich and deepen the play thematically, poetically and dramatically as the echoes they create reverberate through the text.

Hamlet and Fortinbras are in some way related as Fortinbras is in line to the Danish throne. Hamlet was the heir to the throne but his uncle, Claudius, has managed to usurp him. At the end of the play, both Claudius and Hamlet die and Fortinbras enters to a scene of carnage and claims the throne.

The characterisation of Fortinbras is done mainly as hearsay, with other characters talking about him – an unusual way for Shakespeare, the greatest master of characterisation in

NOTES

the English theatre, to develop character. His characters usually emerge by displaying their characteristics in what they say and do. We learn from others that Fortinbras is a loyal member of a close family, unlike Hamlet who struggles in a dysfunctional family. We learn also, that he is such a man of action that he is liable to be reckless and has to be reined in by his uncle. He makes decisions quickly and springs into action. That is the complete opposite of Hamlet. He is a man of few words, whereas Hamlet dwells on thoughts and ideas at length.

Fortinbras is a mature young man. He is a soldier, immersed in the way of the military, where discipline is required in the midst of chaos. When he arrives at the Danish court after the chaos of the principal characters' lives has brought about their deaths, he takes immediate control and restores order. He shows himself to be more than just a military fighter. He is clearly a leader who will become a good king. His appearance at the very end of the drama shows him to be even-handed, and statesmanlike. He acts with dignity and calm and issues instructions. Hamlet has carried the burden of the action throughout the play but Fortinbras has survived to restore the broken realm to order.

Shakespeare also had a practical reason for bringing Fortinbras on to the stage at the end of the play. The stage is strewn with dead bodies. If they had just got up and walked away at the end it would have spoilt the audience's suspension of disbelief. Fortinbras instructs his officers to take the bodies away and the play ends with that solemn parade.

The Ghost

The Ghost of Old Hamlet haunts the castle of Elsinore. Having been murdered by his brother, he wanders the night, waiting for a chance to speak with his son.

As he was unable to confess to his sins before death, he lives in Purgatory during the day. He charges Hamlet to revenge his murder, and when the prince takes too long about it reappears to spur him on. In life, he was an excellent warrior. A physically impressive specimen in life, he is very pale, bearded, his hair greying, and wears the Armor he was wearing at his greatest victory, carrying a truncheon. He is at times suspected of being an evil spirit who has taken on Old Hamlet's shape to wreak havoc on Denmark.

An otherworldly presence that visits Hamlet early on in the play. The ghost appears to Hamlet as his father, though alternate readings of the play allow for the possibilities that the ghost may be a figment of Hamlet's imagination, a malevolent demon seeking to derail Hamlet's life, or even an actor working on Claudius's behalf in an attempt to drive Hamlet mad and exclude him from the line of succession to the throne. Hamlet, however, believes that the ghost is truly his father. When the ghost tells Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius and charges the prince with seeking vengeance, Hamlet takes the ghost's words to heart. Though Horatio, Marcellus, Barnardo, and Francisco can all see the ghost, it's possible that the spirit can choose to whom it is visible. When the ghost reappears to Hamlet in Gertrude's chambers, for example, Gertrude claims she can't see the apparition—whether she is truly blind to it or is simply pretending to be is a matter of interpretation. The ghost is, in this way, at the center of several of the play's themes: appearance versus reality; action and inaction; religion, honour, and revenge; as well as poison, death, and corruption. The ghost orders Hamlet to act and becomes frustrated

with him when he doesn't—at the same time, the ghost itself speaks of being trapped in a kind of purgatory, unable to move on to either heaven or hell until its will is done. The ghost serves as a constant reminder of death's omnipotence and the possibility that the afterlife for which all souls are destined is not a particularly good place, regardless of one's actions while living.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Stoppard deliberately refrains from giving much description of either of his main characters. Both Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are meant to be "everyman" figures, more or less average men who represent humanity in general. Nevertheless, both men have specific character traits. Rosencrantz is decidedly the easier going of the two, happy to continue flipping coins with little concern about the possible implications of their pattern of landing heads up. Rosencrantz spends a great deal of the play confused by both what is happening around him and Guildenstern's reactions to their situation, but he rarely engages in the overt despair that is characteristic of Guildenstern. Rosencrantz is pragmatic and seeks simple and efficient solutions to the pair's problems rather than philosophical explanations of them, a trait that leads Guildenstern to believe that his friend is complacent and unwilling or unable to think seriously and deeply.

Rosencrantz reveals himself to be more complicated than Guildenstern believes, however, and his apparently straightforward attitude of pragmatism and breezy bewilderment peels back to reveal deeper feelings, both positive and negative. Despite their continued frustrations and problems, Rosencrantz does not lose sight of Guildenstern's feelings, and he awkwardly tries to cheer his friend up by offering him the opportunity to win several easy bets. Rosencrantz also tries to help Guildenstern in a more serious and sophisticated way by encouraging him to find personal happiness and to soldier on in the face of apparent chaos. Rosencrantz's positive attitude is not the limit of his feelings, and twice he feels terror at the realization of his own mortality. First, he gets afraid during his discussion of what it would be like to be in a coffin. Later, at the end of the play, he feels fear as he realizes that he is about to die. Rosencrantz may not be an actively philosophical man like his friend Guildenstern, but he is nevertheless capable of sensitive thought.

On the surface, Guildenstern seems to be the polar opposite of his friend Rosencrantz. Guildenstern is markedly more anxious than Rosencrantz about the strange circumstances in which they find themselves, beginning with his deep concern about the coin-flipping episode. Unlike Rosencrantz, Guildenstern wants desperately to understand their situation, and he tries to reason his way through the incidents that plague them. Guildenstern's belief that there is a rational explanation for their predicament leads him to sudden bursts of strong emotion as he grows increasingly frustrated by his inability to make sense of the world around him. Guildenstern's frustration is heightened by what he sees as Rosencrantz's jovial indifference, and he lashes out at his friend on several occasions. Guildenstern's angry despair reaches its peak near the end of the play. His realization that he and Rosencrantz are about to die without having understood anything leads him to attack the Player in a fit of fury and hopelessness.

Guildenstern is not simply a blend of rationality and passion. Subtle gestures within the play show him to be capable of compassion and sympathetic understanding. Although

NOTES 

Guildenstern is certainly angry at Rosencrantz at numerous points, he quickly consoles and comforts his friend when the need arises. After arriving at Elsinore and becoming even more confused by Claudius's reception of the pair, Guildenstern soothes a tongue-tied Rosencrantz and promises him that they will be able to return home soon. Similarly, after belittling Rosencrantz for failing to say anything original when they are onboard the ship to England, Guildenstern recognizes his friend's suffering and promises him that everything will turn out okay. Though he often acts as if he would rather be alone than be with Rosencrantz, Guildenstern's final speech in the play has him alone onstage, turning to look for his friend, unable to tell which one of them is which.

Osric

Shakespeare's texts abound with unnamed characters who make brief appearances. They are the messengers, guards, soldiers and other functionaries that inhabit the Elizabethan world. Some have minimal speaking parts and some do not speak at all. Osric does have a speaking part and Shakespeare does a lot with that. Osric is one of Shakespeare's most famous and entertaining minor characters. Although he doesn't have a dramatic function, he appears in two scenes and has a speaking part. He is sent by the king, Claudius, to invite Hamlet to a fencing duel with Laertes, during which they plan to murder him.

Osric then presides over the dual scene and acts as the referee. During the course of the play all of the courtiers who have been drawn into Claudius' plot against Hamlet die, several in that final scene. Osric is the sole survivor. In Shakespeare, minor characters are usually more than just cardboard cutouts. Even if they do not have dramatic roles they contribute towards the literary unity of the text. When it comes to Osric, that is particularly true and he is presented in such a way as to illustrate several themes and concerns of the text.

Osrick appears at the point where Hamlet, now recovered from what has looked like a nervous breakdown throughout the play, is talking to his friend and sole confidant, Horatio. He is talking calmly and explaining that he is now reconciled to what has happened in his family, and that he will leave it to fate to sort it out. Osrick has come to deliver the invitation to the duel. He interrupts the friends' conversation. Hamlet knows Osric and does not like him. Osric is a young landowner and a typically corrupt and sycophantic courtier. Hamlet whispers his negative opinion of Osric to his friend.

Throughout the play Hamlet has shown two very striking approaches to courtiers. He makes fun of them and he uses biting language when talking to them. In fact, his language is so sharp that it amounts to cruelty. That is particularly marked in his conversations with Polonius and Ophelia. And now he does the same kind of thing to Osric.

Elizabethan courtiers wore hats indoors as part of the court 'uniform.' In modern productions of Hamlet, we see them all without hats but in Elizabethan performances courtiers, including Hamlet and Horatio, would have been wearing hats. Hamlet's first words to Osric are to tell him bluntly to put his hat on. Osric is holding his hat and, it seems, making flourishing gestures with it as he bows to Hamlet. Osric then seems to be fanning himself with his hat. He says it's hot. Hamlet contradicts him, saying no, it's cold. Osric agrees that it's quite cold. Hamlet then says that on second thoughts it's very hot. Osric agrees. That is a trick that Hamlet enjoys as he likes to bring out the sycophantic

responses of courtiers he doesn't like, and watch their sycophantic acrobatics.

Voltimand and Cornelius

Voltemand is a courtier at Claudius's court. He is sent with Cornelius to Norway, to inform that country's king of how his nephew Fortinbras is threatening Denmark, and to convince him to restrain the young man. His mission is highly successful. Cornelius is a Danish Courtier sent to Norway as an ambassador by Claudius to prevent invasion by Fortinbras.

Marcellus and Bernardo

Marcellus is a guard at Elsinore, Barnardo's companion on the midnight round. With him, he witnesses the apparition of the ghost. He convinces Horatio to join them for the watch on the third night. He knows more about ghosts than Barnardo, and known to Hamlet. He risks physically restraining the latter from following the ghost, but later swears himself to silence over the whole matter of the haunting. He is concerned about the warlike preparations going on in Denmark, and feels that something is wrong in the world. Barnardo is a guard at Elsinore, charged with the midnight round. On two separate nights he has seen the ghost of Old Hamlet while standing guard. With Marcellus, he tells the tale to the sceptical Horatio; when the latter witnesses the apparition, he cannot resist a little dig at the scholar's disbelief. He suspects that the ghost appears in warning about the possible coming war.

Francisco

Francisco is a guard at Elsinore. He is slightly depressed, or at least unhappy about having to work cold nights.

Reynaldo

The inclusion of Reynaldo gives the audience an insight into the true character of Polonius. Just as Hamlet, Claudius and many other characters in the play have vast differences between their true selves and the selves that they present to the world, Polinius often hides his true intentions. Most of the time, the aim of his speech is to please and appease the royalty. Therefore, it is hard to discern whether he is really a bumbling fool or manipulative conniver at heart. However, in the part with Reynaldo, the audience sees his sneakiness and controlling nature, an aspect of his true self. Therefore, the function of Reynaldo is to aid the audience's understanding of Polonius' true self.

Hamlet Themes

Action and Inaction

Hamlet is part of a literary tradition called the revenge play, in which a person—most often a man—must take revenge against those who have wronged him. Hamlet, however, turns the genre on its head in an ingenious way: Hamlet, the person seeking vengeance, can't actually bring himself to take his revenge. As Hamlet struggles throughout the play with the logistical difficulties and moral burdens of vengeance, waffling between whether he should kill Claudius and avenge his father once and for all, or whether to do so would be pointless, cruel, or even self-destructive, William Shakespeare's unique perspective on action versus inaction becomes clear. Ultimately, as the characters within the play puzzle, pontificate, and perish, Shakespeare suggests that there is no inherent morality in either

NOTES 

action or inaction, insofar as each option is tied to vengeance: whether one acts or does not, death inevitably comes for everyone.

There are two major arenas in which Hamlet's ability to take decisive action are played out: the first being the question of whether or not he will kill Claudius and avenge his father, and the second being the question of whether Hamlet will take his own life in order to avoid making the former decision. When Hamlet's father's ghost appears to him and charges him with taking vengeance upon Claudius for murdering him, Hamlet is determined to do the ghost's bidding—but as Hamlet (often purposefully) misses opportunity after opportunity to kill Claudius, he begins to wonder what his own inability to act says about him, and whether he is as weak and mad as he has led everyone to believe. Hamlet has faked madness as a cover for his investigations into Claudius, taking one small action in order to stall having to take a larger, riskier one. However, as Hamlet languishes in indecision, even that small action becomes too frightening, and he begins contemplating suicide, asking, in a famous line, whether it is better "to be or not to be." On the matter of suicide, even, Hamlet cannot make a decision—to take his own life would be to fail his father, but to stay alive means reckoning with his own inaction day after day. Ultimately, Hamlet resolves too late to kill Claudius—Claudius and Laertes have already put a plan to kill Hamlet as revenge for the deaths of Polonius and Ophelia into action. Hamlet succeeds in killing Claudius—but not before realizing that his own death from being slain by Laertes's poisoned rapier is imminent. Hamlet has acted at last, but has staved off his actions for so long that Shakespeare seems to be using Hamlet's idleness to suggest that neither action nor inaction has any bearing on morality, or any influence on the ultimate outcome of one's life.

It is also significant that in the background of the main drama of Hamlet, Elsinore swirls with rumours of the approach of Fortinbras, the young prince of Norway who has succeeded his father (also named Fortinbras), on the Norwegian throne. Fortinbras is determined to take back lands his father lost in battle—including Denmark—and marches relentlessly across Europe as he sets his eyes on lands in Poland and beyond. Hamlet overhears these murmurings of Fortinbras's campaign, and though he never comes face-to-face with his foil and opposite, the audience (and Hamlet himself) recognize Fortinbras's decisive action on his late father's behalf as all that Hamlet is unable to bring himself to do. In the end, when Fortinbras arrives at Elsinore to find a massacre before him, he accepts Horatio's (and the late Hamlet's) nomination to the Danish throne. For his decisive action, Fortinbras is rewarded with the one thing Hamlet partly longed for but could never take the action necessary to secure: political and social control of his country—and yet other characters who have taken the same decisive actions as Fortinbras, such as Claudius and Laertes, have met their deaths as well.

By the end of the play, all of the major characters are dead, and a new leader has come to Denmark to seize the throne. While Hamlet's great inner moral struggles— "to be or not to be," to take revenge or to stay his hand, to ascend to the throne or to languish in obscurity—have been slowly unfolding, the wheels of the world have kept turning. Death has come for all the major players, and while some have been slain as a result of Hamlet's actions, others have been killed by his inaction. Death is humanity's great equalizer, and

Shakespeare shows that it does not discriminate between the valiant and the cowardly, the motivated and the fearful, or the good and the wicked.

Appearance vs. Reality

Hamlet is full of references to the wide gulf that often exists between how things appear and how they really are. From Hamlet's own "craft[ed]" madness to Claudius's many schemes and plots involving Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern to the very foundation of Denmark's political stability (or lack thereof), things within Elsinore castle are hardly ever as they seem. Hamlet's characters' collective desire to make sense of the difference between what's real and what's not drives them to deception, cruelty, and indeed even madness. In acting mad, Hamlet succeeds in driving himself mad; in pretending to spurn Hamlet's affections, Ophelia actually creates a searing rift between them; in trying to ignore the fact that her new husband murdered her old one, Gertrude forgets the truth and abandons her moral compass. Ultimately, Shakespeare makes the slightly metaphysical argument that the desire to determine which aspects of a person's character or actions are "real" or intentional actually serves to expose the fact that there is, perhaps, sometimes no difference between what is real and what is perceived; the identities people perform and the choices they make, even in jest, become their realities.

Throughout the play, many of the major characters find themselves confounded by the gulf between how things appear to be and how they really are—even as they themselves engage in subterfuge and masquerades in repeated attempts to present themselves other than as they are, or deliberately mislead one another. Hamlet is the most egregious example of this behavior—he pretends to be mad in order to confuse the members of court at Elsinore and make them believe he's crazy or blind to what's going on at the castle, so that he can more sneakily investigate Claudius and come to a conclusion about whether or not his uncle really did murder his father. In his attempts to pass himself off as mad, Hamlet spurns, denigrates, and verbally harasses Ophelia and his mother, Gertrude; entangles two of his old school friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in a wild goose chase that leads to their deaths; and berates, offends, and condemns Gertrude as he attempts to ascertain her complicity (or lack thereof) in King Hamlet's demise. Even as Hamlet deceives those around him in an attempt to save his own skin, he worries incessantly about the guise's others adopt to survive at court. He lambasts Ophelia—and, by proxy, all women—for wearing makeup on their faces, accusing them of presenting themselves other than as they are. He makes fun of Polonius's wormy, fawning obsequiousness to the king and queen, even though he knows it is the job of courtiers and councillors to serve the monarchy. He calls out Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as players in his mother and uncle's plot to get to the root of his own (false) madness, even though he knows they, too are at the mercy of royalty, unable to refuse the demands of their rulers. Hamlet's constant anxiety about being lied to, or merely shown a version of reality that runs counter to the truth, is the subject of several length monologues and soliloquies—but ultimately, Hamlet's endless inquiries into the morality of constructed appearances lead nowhere: at the end of the day, he is complicit in his own worst fears.

Other characters who bring into question the gulf between appearance and reality include the ghost of Hamlet's father, Hamlet's mother Gertrude, Polonius, and Ophelia.

NOTES

The ghost of Hamlet's father claims to be the late King Hamlet—but Hamlet himself has reservations about the ghost's true nature which are further called into question when the ghost appears to Hamlet a second time inside of Gertrude's chambers. Gertrude claims to not be able to see the ghost, allowing for several possibilities: the ghost may indeed be a figment of Hamlet's own imagination, or Gertrude may be pretending not to be able to see the ghost for fear of admitting to her complicity in his murder (or simply her indifference to marrying his killer to retain her own political position). The ghost itself tampers with the denizens of Elsinore's ideas about "reality," inspiring awe and fear in Horatio, Marcellus, and other watchmen and sentinels. Gertrude, meanwhile, appears innocent and ignorant of her husband's murder—but she may, in reality, be affecting innocence just as Hamlet affects madness as a cover for a darker motive. Polonius, too, is guilty of presenting a version of himself that runs counter to the truth of who he is: he makes claims about himself and offers advice that contradict his own actions, such as when he tells Laertes "to thine own self be true," contradicting his own behavior as a fawning courtier loyal to the whims of his superiors, or when he claims that "brevity is the soul of wit" before embarking on several lengthy, long-winded monologues. Ophelia claims to be pure, honest, and undesirous of Hamlet's sexual or romantic attention—and yet their interactions seem to suggest that she and Hamlet have a long (and lurid) history, making her desperate attempts at purporting her purity all the more pathetic when seen through Hamlet's eyes. Ultimately, Hamlet, who has been pretending to be mad for so long, drives himself to the edge of sanity, adopting a kind of nihilism when it comes to questions of life and death, morality, and reality itself. Gertrude, who pretends to be an innocent victim, becomes one when she unwittingly drinks poisoned wine intended for Hamlet. Polonius, who sacrificed his moral compass in service to a corrupt crown, is held up as a tragic loss for the court after his death, revered and mourned by the king. Ophelia, who denied her love for Hamlet in an attempt to appease her father, is buried as a virgin, in spite of the play's suggestion that she was not pure when she died. All of these characters become the things they once merely pretended to be—and the line between appearance and reality grows blurrier and blurrier as the play progresses.

Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's most complex plays, noted throughout history for its ambiguous moral center, deep existentialism, and deft exploration of appearance versus reality. As Shakespeare shows how fine the line between appearance and reality really is, he transforms the play into a cautionary tale about the dangers of adopting behaviours, traits, and ways of moving through the world that obscure or corrupt the truth of who one really is.

Women

Though there are only two traditionally female characters in Hamlet—Ophelia and Gertrude—the play itself speaks volumes about the uniquely painful, difficult struggles and unfair fates women have suffered throughout history. Written in the first years of the 17th century, when women were forbidden even from appearing onstage, and set in the Middle Ages, Hamlet exposes the prejudices and disadvantages which narrowed or blocked off the choices available to women–even women of noble birth. Hamlet is obsessive about the women in his life, but at the same time expresses contempt and

ridicule for their actions—actions which are, Shakespeare ultimately argues, things they're forced to do just to survive in a cruel, hostile, misogynistic world.

Gertrude and Ophelia are two of Hamlet's most misunderstood—and underdeveloped—characters. Hamlet himself rails against each of them separately, for very different reasons, in misogynistic rants which accuse women of being sly seductresses, pretenders, and lustful schemers. What Hamlet does not see—and what men of his social standing and his time period perhaps could not see if they tried—is that Gertrude and Ophelia are products of their environment, forced to make difficult and even lethal decisions in an attempt to survive and stay afloat in a politically dangerous world built for men, not for women. When Gertrude's husband, King Hamlet, dies, she quickly remarries his brother, Claudius—who actually murdered him. There are two possibilities: the first is that Gertrude knew about the murder, and the second is that she didn't. The text suggests that while Gertrude was likely not directly involved in the murder, she was aware of the truth about Claudius all along—and chose to marry him anyway. While Hamlet accuses his mother of lusting after her own brother-in-law, killing her husband, and revelling in her corrupted marriage bed with her new spouse, he fails to see that perhaps Gertrude married Claudius out of fear of what would happen to her if she didn't. Gertrude, as a woman, holds no political power of her own—with her husband dead, she might have lost her position at court, been killed by a power-hungry new or foreign king, or forced into another, less appealing marital arrangement. Marrying Claudius was perhaps, for Gertrude, the lesser of several evils—and an effort just to survive.

Ophelia's trajectory is similar to Gertrude's, in that she is forced into several decisions and situations which don't seem to be of her own making, but rather things she must do simply to appease the men around her and retain her social position at court. When Ophelia is drawn into her father Polonius and Claudius's plot to spy on Hamlet and try to tease the reason behind his madness out of him, she's essentially used as a pawn in a game between men. Polonius wants to see if Hamlet's madness is tied to Ophelia, and so asks Ophelia to spurn Hamlet's advances, return gifts and letters he's given her in the past, and refuse to see or speak with him anymore to see test his hypothesis. Ophelia does these things—and incurs Hamlet's wrath and derision. Again, as with his mother, he is unable to see the larger socio-political forces steering Ophelia through her own life, and has no sympathy for her uncharacteristic behavior. After the death of her father—at Hamlet's hands—Ophelia loses her sanity. Spurned by Hamlet, left alone by Laertes (who is off studying in France, pursuing his future while his sister sits at court by herself) and forced to reckon with the death of her father—after Hamlet, her last bastion of socio-political protection—she goes mad. Even in the depths of her insanity, she continues singing nursery songs and passing out invisible flowers to those around her, performing the sweet niceties of womanhood that are hardwired into her after years of knowing how she must look and behave in order to win the favour of others—specifically men. Indeed, when Ophelia kills herself, it is perhaps out of a desire to take her fate into her own hands. A woman at court is in a perilous position already—but a madwoman at court, divorced from all agency and seen as an outsider and a liability, is even further endangered. Though Ophelia kills herself, she is perhaps attempting to keep her dignity—and whatever shreds of agency she has left at the end of her life—intact.

NOTES 

Gertrude and Ophelia are subject to paternalistic condescension, sexual objectification, and abuse. They are also subject to the constant psychological and emotional weight of knowing that no matter how dehumanizing and cruel the treatment they must face at court may be, things are even worse for women of lower social standings—and if the two of them don't keep in line, lose their positions at court and face far worse fates. Gertrude and Ophelia make the decisions they make out of a drive simply to survive—and yet Hamlet never stops to imagine the weighty considerations which lie behind both women's actions.

Religion, Honour, and Revenge

Every society is defined by its codes of conduct—its rules about how to act and behave. In Hamlet, the codes of conduct are largely defined by religion and an aristocratic code that demands honour—and revenge if honour has been soiled. As the play unfolds and Hamlet (in keeping with his country's spoken and unspoken) rules) seeks revenge for his father's murder, he begins to realize just how complicated vengeance, justice, and honour all truly are. As Hamlet plunges deeper and deeper into existential musings, he also begins to wonder about the true meaning of honour—and Shakespeare ultimately suggests that the codes of conduct by which any given society operates are, more often than not, muddy, contradictory, and confused.

As Hamlet begins considering what it would mean to actually get revenge—to actually commit murder—he begins waffling and languishing in indecision and inaction. His inability to act, however, is not necessarily a mark of cowardice or fear—rather, as the play progresses, Hamlet is forced to reckon very seriously with what retribution and violence in the name of retroactively reclaiming "honour" or glory actually accomplishes. This conundrum is felt most profoundly in the middle of Act 3, when Hamlet comes upon Claudius totally alone for the first time in the play. It is the perfect opportunity to kill the man uninterrupted and unseen—but Claudius is on his knees, praying. Hamlet worries that killing Claudius while he prays will mean that Claudius's soul will go to heaven. Hamlet is ignorant of the fact that Claudius, just moments before, was lamenting that his prayers for absolution are empty because he will not take action to actually repent for the violence he's done and the pain he's caused. Hamlet is paralyzed in this moment, unable to reconcile religion with the things he's been taught about goodness, honour, duty, and vengeance. This moment represents a serious, profound turning point in the play—once Hamlet chooses not to kill Claudius for fear of unwittingly sending his father's murderer to heaven, thus failing at the concept of revenge entirely, he begins to think differently about the codes, institutions, and social structures which demand unthinking vengeance and religious piety in the same breath. Because the idea of a revenge killing runs counter to the very tenets of Christian goodness and charity at the core of Hamlet's upbringing—regardless of whether or not he believes them on a personal level—he begins to see the artifice upon which all social codes are built.

The second half of the play charts Hamlet's descent into a new worldview—one which is very similar to nihilism in its surrender to the randomness of the universe and the difficulty of living within the confines of so many rules and standards at one time. As Hamlet gets even more deeply existential about life and death, appearances versus reality,

and even the common courtesies and decencies which define society, he exposes the many hypocrisies which define life for common people and nobility alike. Hamlet resolves to pursue revenge, claiming that his thoughts will be worth nothing if they are anything but "bloody," but at the same time is exacting and calculating in the vengeances he does secure. He dispatches with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, charged with bringing him to England for execution, by craftily outwitting them and sending them on to their own deaths. He laments to Horatio that all men, whether they be Alexander the Great or a common court jester, end up in the same ground. Finally, he warns off Horatio's warning about duelling Laertes by claiming that he wants to leave his fate to God. Hamlet's devil-may-care attitude and his increasingly reckless choices are the result of realizing that the social and moral codes he's clung to for so long are inapplicable to his current circumstances—and perhaps more broadly irrelevant.

Hamlet is a deeply subversive text—one that asks hard, uncomfortable questions about the value of human life, the indifference of the universe, and the construction of society, culture, and common decency. As Hamlet pursues his society's ingrained ideals of honour, he discovers that perhaps honour means something very different than what he's been raised to believe it does—and confronts the full weight of society's arbitrary, outdated expectations and demands.

Poison, Corruption, Death

When the sentinel Marcellus speaks the line "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" after seeing the ghost of the former King Hamlet, he is speaking to a broadly-held societal superstition. In medieval times and the Middle Ages—the era in which Hamlet is set—the majority of people believed that the health of a nation was connected to the legitimacy of its king. As Hamlet endeavours to discover—and root out—the "rotten" core of Denmark, he grows increasingly disgusted and perturbed by literal manifestations of death as well as "deaths" of other kinds: those of honour, decency, and indeed the state of Denmark as he once knew it. Ultimately, Shakespeare suggests a connection between external rot and internal, systemic rot, arguing that physical corruption portends and even predicts the poisoning of spiritual, political, and social affairs.

An atmosphere of poison, corruption, and death lingers over Hamlet from the play's very first moments. The citizens of Denmark—both within the castle of Elsinore and beyond its walls—know that there is something "rotten" in their state. Marcellus, Barnardo, and Francisco—three watchmen at Elsinore—greet one another as they arrive for their nightly watch with hesitation, suspicion, and even skittishness, and soon the source of their anxiety becomes clear: an apparition of the recently-deceased King Hamlet has appeared on the castle walls several times in the last week. The ghost can hardly portend anything good, and as Hamlet and Horatio decide to investigate the apparition and its purpose, they learn that there is indeed a deep corruption at the heart of Denmark's throne: Claudius, King Hamlet's brother, murdered him and took his throne. The political corruption which has overtaken Denmark so disturbs Hamlet that he develops, as the play goes on, an obsession with physical corruption—with rot, decay, and the disgusting nature of death.

NOTES

Throughout the play, Hamlet's fixation with rot and corruption—both of the body and of the soul—reflects his (and his society's) conflation of the spoilage of the outside with the deterioration of the inside. In Act 2, Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that he sees the beauty of the world around him as nothing but a "foul and pestilent congregation of vapors," demonstrating his inability to look past the nasty, foul truths which have recently been exposed to him. Thinking so much about his father's death has given Hamlet's thoughts an existential bent, but there is a deeper, darker pessimism that has overtaken his mind, as well—one which manifests as a preoccupation with disease and foulness. When confronting his mother Gertrude about her marriage to Claudius, his father's murderer, he calls Claudius a "mildewed" man and refers to the "rank sweat" of their "enseamèd [marriage] bed." Pestilence, rot, mold, and decay are never far from Hamlet's mind—and this obsession reflects his larger anxieties about the deteriorating health not just of himself or his family, but of their very nation. After killing Polonius, Hamlet hides the man's body in a place where, he warns Claudius, it will soon become food for the worms and begin to stink up the castle. Hamlet knows that just as bodies putrefy and grow rancid, so too does subterfuge and foul play. His obsession with rotting things shows that he truly believes Claudius's "foul deeds" will soon reveal themselves—with or without Hamlet's own help.

When Hamlet finds the skull of Yorick, a former court jester, while paying a visit to the graveyard just beyond the walls of Elsinore, he is flung into an existential despair—and one of the play's most profound moments of reckoning with the finality (and the foulness) of death and decay unfolds. As Hamlet laments that all the parts of Yorick he knew in life—the man's "infinite jest," warmth, and geniality, but also his physical attributes, such as his tongue and his flesh—are gone forever, he realizes that all men, be they formidable leaders like Alexander the Great or a lowly fool, return to "dust." Hamlet is both disturbed and soothed by the specifics of the body's process of decay, and even asks the gravediggers working in the yard for detailed descriptions of how long, exactly, it takes for flesh to rot off of human bones. Hamlet's continued fixation on the undignified but inescapable process of dying and decay shows that he feels incapable of stopping whatever is festering at the heart of Denmark—and indeed, in the end, a foreign leader named Fortinbras is the only one left to take over the Danish throne after Hamlet, Claudius, Laertes, and Gertrude all perish. Denmark had to rot in order to flourish—just as human flesh decays and fertilizes the ground beneath which it lies.

Shakespeare creates a gloomy, poisonous atmosphere throughout Hamlet in order to argue that there is a profound connection between internal rot and external decay. As the state of Denmark suffers political corruption, Shakespeare invokes another kind of corruption—rotting, fouling, and putrefying—to suggest that a corrupt state is just as odious as a decaying corpse.

The Impossibility of Certainty

What separates *Hamlet* from other revenge plays (and maybe from every play written before it) is that the action we expect to see, particularly from Hamlet himself, is continually postponed while Hamlet tries to obtain more certain knowledge about what he is doing. This play poses many questions that other plays would simply take for granted. Can we

have certain knowledge about ghosts? Is the ghost what it appears to be, or is it really a misleading fiend? Does the ghost have reliable knowledge about its own death, or is the ghost itself deluded? Moving to more earthly matters: How can we know for certain the facts about a crime that has no witnesses? Can Hamlet know the state of Claudius's soul by watching his behavior? If so, can he know the facts of what Claudius did by observing the state of his soul? Can Claudius (or the audience) know the state of Hamlet's mind by observing his behavior and listening to his speech? Can we know whether our actions will have the consequences we want them to have? Can we know anything about the afterlife? Many people have seen *Hamlet* as a play about indecisiveness, and thus about Hamlet's failure to act appropriately. It might be more interesting to consider that the play shows us how many uncertainties our lives are built upon, and how many unknown quantities are taken for granted when people act or when they evaluate one another's actions.

Madness

One of the central questions of *Hamlet* is whether the main character has lost his mind or is only pretending to be mad. Hamlet's erratic behavior and nonsensical speech can be interpreted as a ruse to get the other characters to believe he's gone mad. On the other hand, his behavior may be a logical response to the "mad" situation he finds himself in – his father has been murdered by his uncle, who is now his stepfather. Initially, Hamlet himself seems to believe he's sane – he describes his plans to "put an antic disposition on" and tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he is only mad when the wind blows "north-north-west" – in other words, his madness is something he can turn on and off at will. By the end of the play, however, Hamlet seems to doubt his own sanity. Referring to himself in the third person, he says "And when he's not himself does harm Laertes," suggesting Hamlet has become estranged from his former, sane self. Referring to his murder of Polonius, he says, "Who does it then? His madness." At the same time, Hamlet's excuse of madness absolves him of murder, so it can also be read as the workings of a sane and cunning mind.

Doubt

In *Hamlet*, the main character's doubt creates a world where very little is known for sure. Hamlet thinks, but isn't entirely sure, that his uncle killed his father. He believes he sees his father's Ghost, but he isn't sure he should believe in the Ghost or listen to what the Ghost tells him: "I'll have grounds / More relative than this." In his "to be or not to be" soliloquy, Hamlet suspects he should probably just kill himself, but doubt about what lies beyond the grave prevents him from acting. Hamlet is so wracked with doubt, he even works to infect other characters with his lack of certainty, as when he tells Ophelia "you should not have believed me" when he told her he loved her. As a result, the audience doubts Hamlet's reliability as a protagonist. We are left with many doubts about the action – whether Gertrude was having an affair with Claudius before he killed Hamlet's father; whether Hamlet is sane or mad; what Hamlet's true feelings are for Ophelia.

The Nation As A Diseased Body

Everything is connected in *Hamlet*, including the welfare of the royal family and the health of the state as a whole. The play's early scenes explore the sense of anxiety and dread that surrounds the transfer of power from one ruler to the next. Throughout the play,

NOTES

characters draw explicit connections between the moral legitimacy of a ruler and the health of the nation. Denmark is frequently described as a physical body made ill by the moral corruption of Claudius and Gertrude, and many observers interpret the presence of the ghost as a supernatural omen indicating that "[s]omething is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.67). The dead King Hamlet is portrayed as a strong, forthright ruler under whose guard the state was in good health, while Claudius, a wicked politician, has corrupted and compromised Denmark to satisfy his own appetites. At the end of the play, the rise to power of the upright Fortinbras suggests that Denmark will be strengthened once again.

2.4 REVIEW QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Where was Shakespeare, when his first printed works were published?**
2. **When was Hamlet play written?**
3. **Who was Polonius?**
4. **When is William Shakespeare Birthday celebrated?**
5. **Who was Francisco?**

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Analyse the character of Hamlet.**
2. **Write a short note on "Action and Inaction" theme.**
3. **Analyse the character of Fortinbras.**
4. **Write a short note on "Appearance vs. Reality" theme.**
5. **Write the summary of play Hamlet.**

2.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. **Claudius sends Hamlet to_____, as an ambassador along with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, and a letter to the king of England.**
   a. London
   b. Russia
   c. Denmark
   d. Brazil
2. **Hamlet meets Horatio in the graveyard and tells him that Claudius wished to get him _____.**
   a. Crowned
   b. Win
   c. Set free
   d. Killed
3. **Hamlet was the prince of _____.**
   a. Denmark
   b. London
   c. Paris

d. Washington

4. _____ was Polonius's servant.

a. Osric
b. Reynaldo
c. Fortinbras
d. Horatio

5. _____ loves Hamlet so much that he would rather impale himself on his own sword than live on after Hamlet's death.

a. Ophelia
b. Polonius
c. Horatio
d. Gertrude

6. Elizabethan courtiers wore _____ indoors as part of the court 'uniform'.

a. Caps
b. Gloves
c. Hats
d. Scarfs

7. Francisco is a guard at Elsinore. He is slightly depressed, or at least _____ about having to work cold nights.

a. Unhappy
b. Happy
c. Excited
d. None of the above

8. William Shakespeare also became a founding member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company of _____.

a. Writers
b. Directors
c. Players
d. Actors

9. The ghost appears before Prince Hamlet and tells him that he is his_____.

a. Father
b. Son
c. Advisor
d. Teacher

10. _____ was Hamlet's close friend, who studied with the prince at the university in Wittenberg.

a. Polonius
b. Horatio
c. Fortinbras
d. Reynaldo

♦♦♦♦♦

UNIT III

BEN JONSON

STRUCTURE

NOTES

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After completion of this unit, student will be able to:

- Know about Ben Jonson the famous play writer.
- Learn about his one of the famous plays "Volpone".

3.2 ABOUT AUTHOR

Ben Jonson, poet and playwright, was born in London on 11 June 1572. His father, a clergyman, died a month before he was born, and his mother soon married Robert Brett, a master bricklayer. He attended Westminster School from around the late 1570s, where his tutor was the famous historian William Camden: Jonson later wrote that he owed to Camden 'All that I am in arts, all that I know'. Not able to attend university, Jonson's Westminster years provided the most important educational experience of his life, and sparked his love of classical authors such as the Roman poet Horace.

After Westminster, Jonson served as a soldier in the Netherlands, and worked for his stepfather as a bricklayer. In 1594 he married Anne Lewis. The deaths of their children Mary and Benjamin are movingly recorded in Jonson's poems 'On my first daughter' and 'On my first sonne'. Jonson started out in the theatre as an actor, but quickly moved into writing plays. His earliest surviving play, *The Case is Altered*, was performed in 1597, and his first smash hit, the sophisticated city comedy *Every Man in his Humour*, in 1598. Jonson produced the comedies for which he is now most famous in nine intensive years: Volpone (1606), The Alchemist (1610) and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614).

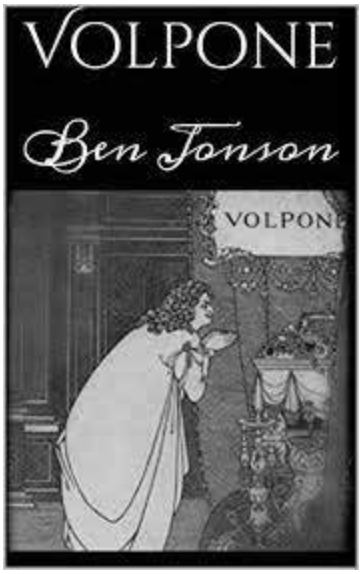
The coronation of James I in 1603 marked the beginning of Jonson's long literary relationship with the Stuarts. Over the next four decades, often in collaboration with the theatre designer Inigo Jones, he wrote many entertainments for the royal family. Though he had many long-lasting friendships, Jonson seems to have been quarrelsome, thin-skinned and, in the words of his good friend William Drummond, 'a great lover and praiser of himself'. In 1598 he killed his opponent in a duel, narrowly avoiding execution for manslaughter. Jonson took aim at his fellow playwrights, who mocked his bricklaying background and sense of superiority, in his viciously satiric play *Poetaster* (c. 1601). His relationship with Jones at the Stuart court was finally destroyed by rivalry.

Jonson masterminded the publication of his *Workes* in 1616, which collected his entertainments, some of his poetry, and many of his plays. This unprecedented volume set the scene for William Shakespeare's posthumous First Folio in 1623. Jonson was rewarded with a royal pension and, with Shakespeare's death, was widely regarded as England's greatest living author. He journeyed on foot to Scotland in 1618, and was appointed City Chronologer to the City of London in 1628 ('To collect and set down all memorable acts of this City and occurences thereof'). The same year he possibly suffered a paralytic stroke. He died on 6 August 1637, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

NOTES

3.3 VOLPONE

Volpolne Summary



Volpone takes place in seventeenth-century Venice, over the course of one day. The play opens at the house of Volpone, a Venetian nobleman. He and his "parasite" Mosca—part slave, part servant, part lackey—enter the shrine where Volpone keeps his gold. Volpone has amassed his fortune, we learn, through dishonest means: he is a con artist. And we also learn that he likes to use his money extravagantly.

Soon, we see Volpone's latest con in action. For the last three years, he has been attracting the interest of three legacy hunters: Voltore, a lawyer; Corbaccio, an old gentleman; and Corvino, a merchant—individuals interested in inheriting his estate after he dies. Volpone is known to be rich, and he is also known to be childless, have no natural heirs. Furthermore, he is believed to very ill, so each of the legacy hunters lavishes gifts on him, in the hope that Volpone, out of gratitude, will make him his heir. The legacy hunters do not know that Volpone is actually in excellent health and merely faking illness for the purpose of collecting all those impressive "get-well" gifts.

In the first act, each legacy hunter arrives to present a gift to Volpone, except for Corbaccio, who offers only a worthless (and probably poisoned) vial of medicine. But Corbaccio agrees to return later in the day to make Volpone his heir, so that Volpone will return the favor. This act is a boon to Volpone, since Corbaccio, in all likelihood, will die long before Volpone does. After each hunter leaves, Volpone and Mosca laugh at each's gullibility. After Corvino's departure Lady Politic Would-be, the wife of an English knight living in Venice, arrives at the house but is told to come back three hours later. And Volpone decides that he will try to get a close look at Corvino's wife, Celia, who Mosca describes as one of the most beautiful women in all of Italy. She is kept under lock and key by her husband, who has ten guards on her at all times, but Volpone vows to use disguise to get around these barriers.

The second act portrays a time just a short while later that day, and we meet Sir Politic Would-be, Lady Politic's husband, who is conversing with Peregrine, an young English traveler who has just landed in Venice. Sir Politic takes a liking to the young boy and vows to teach him a thing or two about Venice and Venetians; Peregrine, too, enjoys the company of Sir Politic, but only because he is hilariously gullible and vain. The two are walking in the public square in front of Corvino's house and are interrupted by the arrival of "Scoto Mantua," actually Volpone in diguise as an Italian mountebank, or medicine-show man. Scoto engages in a long and colorful speech, hawking his new "oil", which is touted as a cure-all for disease and suffering. At the end of the speech, he asks the crows to toss him their handkerchiefs, and Celia complies. Corvino arrives, just as she does this, and flies into a jealous rage, scattering the crows in the square. Volpone goes home

and complains to Mosca that he is sick with lust for Celia, and Mosca vows to deliver her to Volpone. Meanwhile, Corvino berates his wife for tossing her handkerchief, since he interprets it as a sign of her unfaithfulness, and he threatens to murder her and her family as a result. He decrees that, as punishment, she will now no longer be allowed to go to Church, she cannot stand near windows (as she did when watching Volpone), and, most bizarrely, she must do everything backwards from now on–she must even walk and speak backwards. Mosca then arrives, implying to Corvino that if he lets Celia sleep with Volpone (as a "restorative" for Volpone's failing health), then Volpone will choose him as his heir. Suddenly, Corvino's jealousy disappears, and he consents to the offer.

The third act begins with a soliloquy from Mosca, indicating that he is growing increasingly conscious of his power and his independence from Volpone. Mosca then runs into Bonario, Corbaccio's son, and informs the young man of his father's plans to disinherit him. He has Bonario come back to Volpone's house with him, in order to watch Corbaccio sign the documents (hoping that Bonario might kill Corbaccio then and there out of rage, thus allowing Volpone to gain his inheritance early). Meanwhile Lady Politic again arrives at Volpone's residence, indicating that it is now mid-morning, approaching noon. This time, Volpone lets her in, but he soon regrets it, for he is exasperated by her talkativeness. Mosca rescues Volpone by telling the Lady that Sir Politic has been seen in a gondola with a courtesan (a high-class prostitute). Volpone then prepares for his seduction of Celia, while Mosca hides Bonario in a corner of the bedroom, in anticipation of Corbaccio's arrival. But Celia and Corvino arrive first—Celia complains bitterly about being forced to be unfaithful, while Corvino tells her to be quiet and do her job. When Celia and Volpone are alone together, Volpone greatly surprises Celia by leaping out of bed. Celia had expected and old, infirm man, but what she gets instead is a lothario who attempts to seduce her with a passionate speech. Always the good Christian, Celia refuses Volpone's advances, at which point Volpone says that he will rape her. But Bonario, who has been witnessing the scene from his hiding place the entire time, rescues Celia. Bonario wounds Mosca on his way out. Corbaccio finally arrives, too late, as does Voltore. Mosca plots, with Voltore's assistance, how to get Volpone out of this mess.

A short while later, in the early afternoon, Peregrine and Sir Politic are still talking. Sir Politic gives the young traveler some advice on living in Venice and describes several schemes he has under consideration for making a great deal of money. They are soon interrupted by Lady Politic, who is convinced that Peregrine is the prostitute Mosca told her about—admittedly, in disguise. But Mosca arrives and tells Lady Politic that she is mistaken; the courtesan he referred to is now in front of the Senate (in other words, Celia). Lady Politic believes him and ends by giving Peregrine a seductive goodbye with a coy suggestion that they see each other again. Peregrine is incensed at her behavior and vows revenge on Sir Politic because of it. The scene switches to the Scrutineo, the Venetian Senate building, where Celia and Bonario have informed the judges of Venice about Volpone's deceit, Volpone's attempt to rape Celia, Corbaccio's disinheritance of his son, and Corvino's decision to prostitute his wife. But the defendants make a very good case for themselves, led by their lawyer, Voltore. Voltore portrays Bonario and Celia as lovers, Corvino as an innocent jilted husband, and Corbaccio as a wounded father nearly

NOTES

killed by his evil son. The judge are swayed when Lady Politic comes in and (set up perfectly by Mosca) identifies Celia as the seducer of her husband Sir Politic. Further, they are convinced when Volpone enters the courtroom, again acting ill. The judges order that Celia and Bonario be arrested and separated.

In the final act, Volpone returns home tired and worried that he is actually growing ill, for he is now feeling some of the symptoms he has been faking. To dispel his fears, he decides to engage in one final prank on the legacy hunters. He spreads a rumor that he has died and then tells Mosca to pretend that he has been made his master's heir. The plan goes off perfectly, and all three legacy hunters are fooled. Volpone then disguises himself as a Venetian guard, so that he can gloat in each legacy hunter's face over their humiliation, without being recognized. But Mosca lets the audience know that Volpone is dead in the eyes of the world and that Mosca will not let him "return to the world of the living" unless Volpone pays up, giving Mosca a share of his wealth.

Meanwhile, Peregrine is in disguise himself, playing his own prank on Sir Politic. Peregrine presents himself as a merchant to the knight and informs Politic that word has gotten out of his plan to sell Venice to the Turks. Politic, who once mentioned the idea in jest, is terrified. When three merchants who are in collusion with Peregrine knock on the door, Politic jumps into a tortoise-shell wine case to save himself. Peregrine informs the merchants when they enter that he is looking at a valuable tortoise. The merchants decide to jump on the tortoise and demand that it crawls along the floor. They remark loudly upon its leg-garters and fine hand-gloves, before turning it over to reveal Sir Politic. Peregrine and the merchants go off, laughing at their prank, and Sir Politic moans about how much he agrees with his wife's desire to leave Venice and go back to England.

Meanwhile, Volpone gloats in front of each legacy hunter, deriding them for having lost Volpone's inheritance to a parasite such as Mosca, and he successfully avoids recognition. But his plan backfires nonetheless. Voltore, driven to such a state of distraction by Volpone's teasing, decides to recant his testimony in front of the Senate, implicating both himself but more importantly Mosca as a criminal. Corvino accuses him of being a sore loser, upset that Mosca has inherited Volpone's estate upon his death, and the news of this death surprises the Senators greatly. Volpone nearly recovers from his blunder by telling Voltore, in the middle of the Senate proceeding, that "Volpone" is still alive. Mosca pretends to faint and claims to the Senate that he does not know where he is, how he got there, and that he must have been possessed by a demon during the last few minutes when he was speaking to them. He also informs the Senators that Volpone is not dead, contradicting Corvino. All seems good for Volpone until Mosca returns, and, instead of confirming Voltore's claim that Volpone is alive, Mosca denies it. Mosca, after all, has a will, written by Volpone and in his signaure, stating that he is Volpone's heir. now that Volpone is believed to be dead, Mosca legally owns Volpone's property, and Mosca tells Volpone that he is not going to give it back by telling the truth. Realizing that he has been betrayed, Volpone decides that rather than let Mosca inherit his wealth, he will turn them both in. Volpone takes off his disguise and finally reveals the truth about the events of the past day. Volpone ends up being sent to prison, while Mosca is consigned to a slave galley. Voltore is disbarred, Corbaccio is stripped of his property (which is given to his son

Bonario), and Corvino is publicly humiliated, forced to wear donkey's ears while being rowed around the canals of Venice. At the end, there is a small note from the playwright to the audience, simply asking them to applaud if they enjoyed the play they just saw.

Character List

Volpone- The protagonist of the play. Volpone's name means "The Fox" in Italian. He is lustful, lecherous, and greedy for pleasure. He is also energetic and has an unusual gift for rhetoric, mixing the sacred and the profane to enunciate a passionate commitment to self-gratification. He worships his money, all of which he has acquired through cons, such as the one he now plays on Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino. Volpone has no children, but he has something of a family: his parasite, Mosca, his dwarf, Nano, his eunuch, Castrone, and his hermaphrodite, Androgyno. Mosca is his only true confidante, and he begins to lust feverishly after Celia upon first setting eyes on her.

Mosca- Mosca is Volpone's parasite, a combination of his slave, his servant, his lackey, and his surrogate child. Though initially (and for most of the play) he behaves in a servile manner towards Volpone, Mosca conceals a growing independence he gains as a result of the incredible resourcefulness he shows in aiding and abetting Volpone's confidence game. Mosca's growing confidence, and awareness that the others in the play are just as much "parasites" as he—in that they too would rather live off the wealth of others than do honest work—eventually bring him into conflict with Volpone, a conflict that destroys them both.

Celia- The voice of goodness and religiosity in the play, Celia is the wife of Corvino, who is extremely beautiful, enough to drive both Volpone and Corvino to distraction. She is absolutely committed to her husband, even though he treats her horribly, and has a faith in God and sense of honour, traits which seem to be lacking in both Corvino and Volpone. These traits guide her toward self- restraint and self-denial. Her self-restraint makes her a foil for Volpone, who suffers a complete absence of that quality.

Voltore- One of the three legacy hunters or carrion-birds—the legacy hunters continually circle around Volpone, giving him gifts in the hope that he will choose them as his heir. Voltore is a lawyer by profession, and, as a result, he is adept in the use of words and, by implication, adept in deceit, something he proves during the course of the play. He is also something of a social climber, conscious of his position in his society and resentful at being overtaken by others on the way up.

Corvino- An extremely vicious and dishonourable character, Corvino is Celia's jealous husband. He frequently threatens to do disgusting acts of physical violence to her and her family in order to gain control over her. Yet he is more concerned with financial gain than with her faithfulness, seeing her, in essence, as a piece of property. Corvino is another one of the "carrion-birds" circling Volpone.

Corbaccio- The third "carrion-bird" circling Volpone, Corbaccio is actually extremely old and ill himself and is much more likely to die before Volpone even has a chance to bequeath him his wealth. He has a hearing problem and betrays no sign of concern for Volpone, delighting openly in (fake) reports of Volpone's worsening symptoms.

NOTES

Bonario- The son of Corbaccio. Bonario is an upright youth who remains loyal to his father even when his father perjures against him in court. He heroically rescues Celia from Volpone and represents bravery and honour, qualities which the other characters seem to lack.

Sir Politic Would-be- An English knight who resides in Venice. Sir Politic represents the danger of moral corruption that English travellers face when they go abroad to the continent, especially to Italy. He occupies the central role in the subplot, which centers on the relationship between himself and Peregrine, another English traveller much less gullible than the good knight. Sir Politic is also imaginative, coming up with ideas for moneymaking schemes such as using onions to detect the plague, as well as the idea of making a detailed note of every single action he performs in his diary, including his urinations.

Lady Politic Would-be- The Lady Politic Would-be is portrayed as a would-be courtesan. She was the impetus for the Would-be move to Venice, because of her desire to learn the ways of the sophisticated Venetians. She is very well read and very inclined to let anyone know this, or anything else about her. She is extremely vain.

Peregrine- Peregrine is a young English traveller who meets and befriends Sir Politic Would- be upon arriving in Venice. Peregrine is amused by the gullible Would-be, but is also easily offended, as demonstrated by his adverse reaction to Lady Politic Would-be's suggestive comments.

Nano- Nano, as his named in Italian indicates ("nano" means "dwarf"), is a dwarf. He is also Volpone's fool, or jester, keeping Volpone amused with songs and jokes written by Mosca.

Castrone- The only notable fact about Castrone is that his name means eunuch ("castrone" means "eunuch" in Italian). There is not much else to say about Castrone, as he has no speaking lines whatsoever.

Androgyno- "Androgyno" means "hermaphrodite" in Italian, and as in the case of Nano and Castrone, the name rings true. Androgyno apparently possesses the soul of Pythagoras, according to Nano, which has been in gradual decline ever since it left the ancient mathematician's body.

Character Analysis

Volpone

The play's title character is its protagonist, though an inconsistent one He disappears in Act IV, seemingly replaced by Mosca, and is first an instrument and then a victim of Jonson's satire of money-obsessed society. He is an instrument of it because it is through his ingenuity and cleverness that Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino are duped and he seems to share in Jonson's satiric interpretation of the events, observing in I.v "What a rare punishment / Is avarice to itself." But the satire eventually turns back on him, when he becomes a victim of Mosca's "Fox-trap." The reason he is ensnared by Mosca is that he cannot resist one final gloat at his dupes, oblivious to the fact that in doing so, he hands over his entire estate to Mosca. This lack of rational forethought and commitment to his

own sensual impulses, is characteristic of Volpone. He enjoys entertainment, banquets, feasts, and love- making. He hates having to make money through honest labour or cold, heartless banking, but he loves making it in clever, deceitful ways, especially as a means toward food and lovemaking. He is a creature of passion, an imaginative hedonist continually looking to find and attain new forms of pleasure, whatever the consequences may be. This dynamic in his character shapes our reaction to him throughout the play. At times, this hedonism seems fun, engaging, entertaining, and even morally valuable, such as when he is engaged in the con on his fortune hunters. But his attempted seduction of Celia reveals a darker side to his hedonism when it becomes an attempted rape. The incident makes him, in the moral universe of the play, a worthy target for satire, which is what he becomes in Act V, when because of his lack of restraint, he ends up on his way to prison, the most unpleasurable situation imaginable.

Mosca

In a play that revolves around disguises, Mosca is the ultimate master of disguise. He is the person who continually executes Volpone's ideas and the one who comes up with the necessary lie whenever needed. The lie could be made in order to save Volpone from the charges laid against him by Bonario and Celia or to convince Corvino to let his wife sleep with the Fox—either way Mosca seems to have no scruples about deceit. But his most important deception is the one he effects on Volpone and the audience, hiding his true nature and intentions from both the Fox and us. In the opening acts, Mosca appears to be exactly what he is described as: a clinging, servile parasite, who only exists for Volpone and through Volpone. In other words, he exists to serve Volpone, and all that Volpone wants he wants. This impression is reinforced by several cringing speeches that he gives, all in praise of Volpone. But in Act Three, we have the beginning of what seems an assertion of self-identity by Mosca, when he begins to grow confident in his abilities. But then this confidence again is left unvoiced, and Mosca seems to go back to being Volpone's faithful servant, helping him get out of the troublesome situation with Bonario and Celia. But it turns out that Mosca's aid in this situation may have been motivated as much by personal interest as it was by a desire to aid Volpone, for when he is presented with an opportunity to seize Volpone's wealth, he takes it. Mosca himself is possessed by greed, and he attempts to move out of his role as parasite—a harmless fly, circling around a great beast—to the role of great beast himself. But his attempt fails, as Volpone exposes them both. An interesting question is what significance his failure has in the context of the play and whether it is just punishment for his greed, his deceit, or his attempt to usurp the powers and privileges of the nobility and move above his social class.

Celia

While Volpone says "yes" to every single pleasure he can find—and pursues those pleasures vigorously—Celia is defined by her self-denial. This makes her a perfect foil for Volpone, since her self-restraint exposes his complete lack thereof, no more clearly than in Volpone's attempted seduction of her. The turning point of the play comes when she says "no" to Volpone's advances, thus denying him the lascivious pleasures he describes in his seduction speech. Celia seems willing to do anything to avoid dishonour, and this makes her character flat and predictable, too ready to sacrifice herself to be believable.

NOTES

Her willingness to subject herself to Corvino's harsh dictates and abuse may make her seem more weak than strong. But she has an inner moral sense, (even if it is dictated by seventeenth-century conventions on femininity) indicated by the fact that she refuses Volpone against her husband's express wishes. The fact that Jonson sides with her can be seen in his decision to put one of the strongest statements of the play's thesis in her mouth: "Whither, whither / Is shame fled human breasts? Is that, whichever was a cause for life, /Now placed beneath the basest circumstance? / And modesty an exile made, for money?" Jonson again chooses a name with symbolic meaning for Celia: it derives from the Latin word caelum, meaning "sky" or "heaven".

Voltore

Voltore is, like all the legacy hunters, named after a carrion-bird. In the case of Voltore, that bird is the vulture; for Corvino, it is the crow, and for Corbaccio, the raven. Voltore is the most pleasant of all the legacy hunters, for he is the least crass and the least obsessed with seeing Volpone die. His preferential status shows in Mosca's special regard for him: Mosca tries to make sure that Voltore gets enough payment for his services at the Scrutineo in Act IV. But Voltore comes to regret his actions at the Scrutineo. Of course, this regret only comes after he has been denied his inheritance, and it seems to stem directly from his resentment at Mosca's leapfrogging over him on the social ladder. And when Volpone whispers to him that he might still get his inheritance, he stops confessing his lies to the Scrutineo and pretends that he was "possessed" by an evil demon. The verbal irony is that Voltore, in that statement and action, reveals his greed.

Corvino

Corvino, whose name means "crow," is the final 'bird' hoping to inherit Volpone's wealth. He is a merchant, and he is both greedy and controlling to an extreme. He is cruel to his wife Celia, whom he confines to their home, and he is so jealous of other men looking at her that he tries to prevent her from getting too close to the windows. However, his financial greed proves more powerful than his jealousy and desire for control; having heard that doctors have prescribed a night with a woman as the only cure for Volpone's illness, Corvino tries to force Celia to sleep with Volpone in order to secure his place as Volpone's heir. By the end of the play, Corvino is willing to pretend that Celia cheated on him, preferring to be publicly recognized as a cuckold than to admit that he tried to force his wife into infidelity to obtain someone else's wealth.

Corbaccio

Corbaccio's name means "raven." Another bird of prey figure, he is a doddering old man who, like Voltore and Corvino, hopes to be named Volpone's heir. Corbaccio doesn't hear well, and he is old and infirm, so his hope is only to live longer than Volpone. Whenever he receives news of Volpone's (false) illness, Corbaccio openly expresses joy, even saying that hearing that Volpone is dying fills him with youth and energy. Part of Corbaccio's desire for wealth seems altruistic, as he wants to leave his own fortune to his son Bonario. However, Mosca is easily able to manipulate Corbaccio into disinheriting Bonario. While Corbaccio initially does this in the hope of increasing the wealth he'll eventually leave to

his son, Corbaccio ultimately becomes corrupted and caught up in Mosca's schemes, and the court forcibly transfers all of Corbaccio's assets to Bonario.

Bonario

Corbaccio's son. Bonario's name comes from the Italian word for "good," and he represents goodness in the play. He is a valiant, morally righteous figure who maintains family values despite being disinherited by his father. Though Mosca attempts to manipulate him, Bonario is able to resist this manipulation more so than other characters in the play, and he courageously rescues Celia from Volpone's attempted rape. In court, he refuses to lie, and he claims that truth will be his only testimony.

Sir Politic Would-be

Sir Politic Would-be is an English knight, but he only gained his knighthood at a time when the English throne sold knighthoods out to make money. As an English traveller in Venice, he has been warned by travel guides to avoid being corrupted by the loose Italian morals. Politic means "worldly-wise," and Sir Politic attempts to seem so. However, he is a comic figure because he is extremely gullible, and he tries so hard to give the appearance of being knowledgeable that he agrees to ridiculous fictions and fabricates absurd economic enterprises. Much of the play's subplot is at his expense.

Lady Politic Would-be

Lady Would-be is Politics' wife. In contrast to Celia, who is confined to her home, Lady Would-be is given a lot of freedom, roaming Venice freely. Lady Would-be also contrasts with the Renaissance ideal of a woman, since she is extremely talkative and well educated. She is skilled with language and makes constant literary references, but most of the men in the play (in particular Volpone) find her exceptionally annoying. She constantly chides her staff for not doing a good enough job.

Peregrine

Peregrine's name means "traveler," and he is another English traveler abroad, a counterpoint to Sir Politic Would-be. Sir Politic offers to help Peregrine learn the ways of Venice and avoid corruption, and Peregrine agrees in order to spend time with Sir Politic (whom he considers to be a ridiculous figure) for his own amusement. When Lady Would-be mistakes Peregrine for a prostitute, Peregrine believes he has fallen for a prank of Sir Politic's, and he immediately designs his own prank in revenge.

Nano

Nano's name means "dwarf" in Italian, which is fitting, since Nano is a dwarf. He, along with Androgyno and Castrone, is a servant and fool (jester) to Volpone.

Castrone

Castrone is a eunuch who visits Volpone to entertain him with banter and song. He is One of the three servants whom Volpone keeps for entertainment, who are also, allegedly, his illegitimate children.

NOTES 

Androgyno

Androgyno means "hermaphrodite" in Italian. Like Nano and Castrone, Androgyno is a companion and entertainer to Volpone.

Volpone Themes

Theatre and Appearance vs Reality

Like other Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, Jonson explores the relationship between appearance and reality, of seeming versus being—which, of course, evokes the theatre itself. At first glance, much in the play is as it seems. Certain appearances and labels (names, for example) are indicative of reality. Volpone, the fox, is a sly trickster hoping to fool other animals. Mosca, the fly, is his servant, buzzing around and whispering lies into peoples' ears. Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, the vulture, raven, and crow respectively, act like birds of prey, scavenging for Volpone's wealth on his (apparent) deathbed. Most of the play's other characters also have allegorical names that reveal their true selves at first glance. This effect is used for humor (the dwarf has the deadpan name of Nano, which means "dwarf") and to reinforce the play's sense of morality, as the virtuous characters Bonario and Celia are named after, respectively, "good" and "heaven." These characters clearly represent abstract ideals, which is typical of morality plays, a genre which Jonson riffs on in Volpone.

While Jonson merges many sources and complicates the typical morality play, the plot of Volpone is essentially that of a simple animal fable in which the fox uses cunning to trick birds out of their meals. Appearance, then, can be indicative of reality. At the same time, the trickery in the play suggests that appearance cannot always be trusted. Volpone is filled with disguise, deception, and theatre. The characters constantly stage performances to confuse and manipulate on another. Volpone pretends to be mortally ill as part of his ruse, which includes a costume and makeup to appear more convincing. In a completely contrasting role, he also acts as an over-the-top mountebank selling a healing elixir, and later he acts as a court deputy.

Mosca facilitates much of this deception; he deceives Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino into believing that they each will be Volpone's heir, acting as a writer and a director of the play's tricks. Mosca's skills, then, are performance and improvisation—in other words, obscuring reality with theatrical appearances. At one point, Volpone even praises Mosca for his "quick fiction," which draws him into parallel with the playwright himself, since Jonson's "quick comedy" is praised in the play's prologue. As the play unfolds, though, Jonson begins to suggest some of the dangers of deception: some of the disguises in the play, for example, become so convincing they threaten to become real—Volpone worries that pretending to be diseased will cause his health to decline, and the ruse in which Volpone makes Mosca his heir threatens to become reality and rob Volpone of his fortune.

Ultimately, though, the ruses are all revealed. Jonson's opinion on theatre, as indicated in the prologue, is that it should be entertaining and beneficial; theatre can be funny, but it should still contain some moral lesson. In this play, the moral lesson is reinforced through the punishment of pretty much all of the major characters. Volpone and Mosca are exposed and punished for their deception, and so are Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, who by the

end of the play have been roped into one of Mosca's ruses. After all the plots have been revealed in court, Bonario says, "Heaven will not let such gross crimes be hid." This line can be used to express the play's overall treatment of appearance and reality. Appearances can be convincing and deceptive, and they can be manipulated for positive gain. However, certain realities—fundamental truths, goodness, and evil—will always make themselves known, despite any attempts to change or hide their appearance. Theatre can create powerful fantasies, but Jonson seems to say that, even in the best performances, truth and goodness will shine through fiction.

Money and Commerce

The driving force of the play's plot is desire for money, which propels the three men trying to steal Volpone's fortune and drives Volpone in his attempt to manipulate and swindle them. In the play's opening scene, Volpone shows how much the Italians value money when he delivers a blasphemous speech in which he calls money "the world's soul" and praises it like a god. Money, he says, is everything, and whoever has money is naturally imbued with nobility, valiance, honesty, and wisdom. Numerous other analogies are also used during the play that stress money's importance. Talking to Volpone's fortune, for example, Mosca tells money to "multiply," which personifies wealth by invoking reproduction. Throughout the play, money is also described, through medicinal and alchemical imagery, as the best, purest cure for all ailments, expanding on Volpone's claim that money makes everything better. In a final, extreme example, Mosca leads Corvino to believe that he will act as Corvino's servant, and he says that for this employment he owes his very being to Corvino. Mosca thereby substitutes money and employment for a divine creator, who would typically be credited for a person's existence. It's a telling substitution, because, in the play, material pursuits become a sort of religion for those obsessed with money.

Such excessive emphasis on money is a satire on Venice's stereotypical obsession with commerce. In one sense, Ben Jonson's satire of commerce is purely comedic and ridiculous. Sir Politic Would-Be plans numerous farfetched entrepreneurial schemes with the hope of becoming rich, all the while being ridiculed by Peregrine. This absurd subplot goes as far as Sir Politic pretending to be an imported turtle. But the play also gives a more serious satire in the main plot, in which money is depicted as dangerous and corrupting (as we'll see in more detail in the following theme). The play shows that people are willing to do anything for money, which leads to moral lapses. Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvio, and even Lady Would-Be become convinced that they will inherit Volpone's fortune, and all of them compromise their values and are easily manipulated by Mosca. Corvino is even convinced to offer his wife up as a sexual partner for Volpone to secure his chances at the fortune.

Much of the emphasis on commerce and money comes from the English stereotype of Italians (and in particular Venetians). English playwrights like Jonson saw in Italy a dangerous society in which wealth, competition, and materialism were valued over morality. Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, for example, concerns money and desire for wealth taken to the extreme, and it is also set in Venice (as its title suggests). Part of Jonson's mission as a playwright is to leave the audience with a lesson, and so his satire of the Italian obsession with commerce also expresses the fear that London would fall

NOTES

prey to the same obsession and become morally bankrupt in the pursuit of wealth. In other words, Jonson feared that London would turn into an English version of Venice, in which citizens are fatally, blasphemously obsessed with wealth. The play thus hopes to dissuade viewers and readers from allowing financial matters to outweigh moral ones. This message is heavily reinforced by the play's ending, in which none of the principal characters wind up with any fortune, and Volpone himself winds up with a near death sentence. Money can be taken away easily, since it is impermanent, but the implications of moral lapses are eternal.

Greed and Corruption

In addition to having a reputation for commerce, Venice (and Italy in general) was stereotypically known for greed and corruption, both moral and political. Volpone's subplot involves fear of spying, but the play's primary interest in corruption is of a different kind; more than political corruption, Volpone explores the ways in which people can become morally corrupted.

The Italian men in the play are all corrupted by avarice, which means greed or excessive desire. According to Jonson, desire itself is not inherently evil. Rather, it's avarice—excessive desire—that becomes morally corrupting. Avarice is first presented (as hinted at in the Money and Commerce theme), as financial greed. Again, desire for money isn't inherently bad, but the characters in Volpone become corrupted once that desire is excessive. Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino are obsessed with becoming Volpone's heir because they hope to inherit his fortune. Their greed is so strong that they have no regard for Volpone's life; Corbaccio even overtly expresses glee when Mosca lists Volpone's fake symptoms and diseases. All three of the hopeful heirs are driven to extreme moral lapses by their greed, each of which violates a key aspect of society. Voltore, the lawyer, commits perjury and helps Mosca to deceive the court, the play's ultimate source of punishment, authority, and justice. Corbaccio is convinced to disinherit his son, challenging the fundamental means by which wealth was preserved. (Though it could be argued that he only disinherited his son to win Volpone's fortune, thereby increasing the fortune that Corbaccio's son would eventually inherit.) Greed is also sufficient to convince Corvino to break the sanctity of marriage and offer his wife up to Volpone.

Volpone is greedy for money, but his downfall is ultimately caused by excessive greed for pleasure, showing that greed comes in many forms and that, in excess, it is all consuming. Volpone takes immense pleasure in fooling and swindling Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino, and it's his inability to stop and settle for the pleasure he's already had that brings him to his demise. After he has almost been discovered and still managed to get away with his plots, Volpone is driven to try to pull off an even more excessive one, going as far to fake his death. This fake death then provides opportunity for Mosca to succumb to greed and turn on Volpone. Victory, then, and excess of anything (especially wealth and pleasure) are corrupting. Put simply, desire for too much of anything is bad.

While the Italian men in the play are morally corrupted by greed in many forms, the play also explores the way Englishmen could be morally corrupted by Italian influence. This dynamic is explored through Sir Politic Would-Be and Peregrine, two English travellers

abroad in Italy. Sir Politic offers to help teach Peregrine how to properly be Italian without corrupting his more reserved, English nature. Neither man becomes corrupted in the same sense that the other major characters are (a ruinous obsession with wealth or pleasure), but Peregrine does stage an elaborate ruse to prank Sir Politic, complete with disguises and costumes, which suggests that his time in Venice did influence him to use the type of trickery that Volpone and Mosca abuse.

The play's moral stance towards greed and corruption is outlined by Volpone at the beginning of the play, despite the fact that even he eventually falls prey to it. Volpone says, "What a rare punishment is avarice to itself." The act of being greedy necessarily brings on its own punishment. He is referring to his would-be heirs here, but also unwittingly foretelling his own downfall. Audiences might root for Volpone in his first plots and take pleasure in his ability to manipulate others, but Volpone's desire for pleasure becomes so excessive and insatiable that the play turns on him and ends with his punishment. The harsh sentencing rendered at the end of the play reinforces Jonson's moral lesson to avoid excess: all the men are stripped of their wealth, and it is implied that Volpone will lose his life for his own acquiescence to avarice.

Gender Roles and Women

Most of the play's characters are men who operate in the traditionally male sphere of commerce. At the time in which the play is set, men were wholly responsible for finance and they were expected to have power over women in relationships, roles that most of the male characters in the play firmly occupy. However, the play also compares male authority, love, sex, and courtship to the social expectations of women by exploring two examples of marriages, one an extreme depiction of an Italian marriage and the other a comedic English relationship.

The Italian marriage is between Celia and Corvino. Though Celia is virtuous, she is kept under Corvino's extremely careful and cruel control—Corvino keeps her indoors almost at all times, and he forbids her, at one point, from even venturing too close to a window. Corvino's rule over Celia is extreme, but it was stereotypical for Italian men to be jealous and controlling of their wives. Likewise, Celia represents the stereotypical Renaissance ideal of a woman; she is silent, chaste, and obedient. This is shown to work to both her advantage and disadvantage. Her sterling reputation initially gives her credibility in court, but her testimony is quickly undermined since, as a woman, she was considered to be an unreliable witness (even to a crime of which she was a victim). The power of Celia's reputation cannot stand up to the stereotype that women are too hysterical and emotional to be trustworthy and rational, even though the men who argue against her are known to be deceitful. The cruelty of the impossible position in which Celia finds herself in court illustrates that seventeenth century women couldn't win—no matter how virtuous, women were considered to be untrustworthy and inferior creatures.

Jonson's position on gender roles can be clarified, to an extent, through an examination of Corvino and Volpone, who both try to exhibit male authority over Celia through sexuality (Corvino attempts to whore her to Volpone, who in turn attempts to rape her). For a while, it seems that Volpone will get away with this rape attempt, as several men during the play

NOTES 

conspire to say that Celia is lying about her accusation. At the end of the play, Volpone is punished, but it seems that the primary reason for his punishment is his continuous deception of the play's other men, rather than the attempted rape. It's difficult to discern Jonson's ultimate statement (if any exists) about sexual oppression. However, it could be argued that, while he shows sexual oppression and violence to be reprehensible, Jonson believes that the oppression of women is less important than the moral lesson about excessive desire and greed. Lust and rape are bad, in other words, but only because they are a form of avariciousness. The crime Volpone seems most guilty of in the play is excessive greed for money at the expense of Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino.

Lady Would-Be, the second woman in the play, is the opposite of Celia. The play contrasts her marriage to Sir Politic Would-Be—a quintessentially English marriage—with the Italian marriage between Corvino and Celia. Lady Would-Be is more independent than Celia, which reinforces the stereotype that married English women were given more freedom than married Italian women. Lady Would-Be is able to wander Venice on her own, and she is seen without her husband just as often as with him (contrast this with Celia, who is prevented from even leaving her home). Lady Would-Be is also much more talkative than Celia, though the play doesn't exactly suggest that this is a good thing. When Lady Would-Be visits Volpone, he jokes in asides that she is so long-winded that he's being tortured by her "flood of words," and that, though he's only pretending to be sick, she's actually making him ill by talking ceaselessly. Much of this scene, we can note, is taken from an ancient Greek book called "On Talkative Women," suggesting that Jonson might have believed that there was some truth to the stereotype that woman talk excessively (more generously, one could argue that Jonson is merely engaging with the literary tradition of depicting women in this way). Lady Would-Be, however, also breaks the mould of a renaissance woman in that she appears to be educated, certainly much more so than Celia. Her long-winded speeches are so filled with literary references and allusions that Peregrine is shocked when she yells at him.

The differences between Lady Would-Be and Celia illustrate different societal roles for women in Italy and England, which suggests that gender roles are culturally contingent, rather than biologically determined. In this way, the play challenges stereotypical gender roles and assumptions about women, though it sometimes affirms stereotypes, too. At the very least, Volpone complicates the role of women in society by showing that women—like men—can be well read, virtuous, well educated, and well spoken.

Language

Throughout Volpone, Jonson celebrates quick wit (especially his own), wordplay, and language itself. The play begins with the "Argument" and the "Prologue," both of which stress the playwright's mastery of language. The argument is given in a masterful acrostic, in which each of the seven verses begins with one of the letters of VOLPONE. The prologue then emphasizes that the play itself is of high quality, and assures the audience that the play was written in five weeks without any collaborator or any other input. By the time the play itself begins, audiences have been firmly reassured of Jonson's own wit and skill with language.

Within the play, the skill that separates Volpone and Mosca from the other characters is a brilliant ability to use and manipulate language. Volpone even praises Mosca for his "quick fiction," which echoes the lauding of Jonson's "quick comedy" from the Prologue. Mosca, then, can be seen as embodying some aspects of the playwright within the play. As noted in the Appearance vs Reality theme, Mosca is like a writer and director, using his plays-within-the-play to trick other characters. While Mosca uses disguises to pull off these ruses, language is his most significant means of deception and the greatest source of power in the play. It's Mosca's ability to think and speak on his feet that allows him to deceive Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino so easily, even if they are all in the room together.

The play also emphasizes the importance of language in the court scenes, in which language is equivalent with truth. Voltore, the lawyer with a "gold-tipped tongue," is praised (disingenuously) by Mosca at the beginning of the play for his ability to instantly argue either side of a case. In the court scenes, though, Voltore launches into long legal speeches that are so successful that the court becomes convinced by Mosca's ruse (that Volpone didn't attempt to rape Celia). Mosca even tells Volpone to pay Voltore because the language he used was so strong. When asked to put up their own witnesses, Bonario and Celia merely appeal to their consciences and to heaven without saying very much. One of the Avocatori is quick to respond, "These are no testimonies." Though Bonario and Celia cannot properly speak or testify for themselves, their morality is insufficient—their exoneration must occur through language, as Volpone eventually confesses verbally to his crimes. It's also of note that the Avocatori deliver their punishments simply by speaking them, demonstrating the legal power of speech acts. The legal system thus reinforces what Jonson shows in the Argument and Prologue and what Mosca demonstrates throughout the play: language is power.

Parasitism

"Everyone's a parasite" to paraphrase Mosca (III.i), and over the course of the play he is proved right, in the sense that everyone tries to live off of the wealth or livelihood of others, without doing any "honest toil" of their own. Corvino, Corbaccio and Voltore all try to inherit a fortune from a dying man; and Volpone himself has built his fortune on cons such as the one he is playing now. Parasitism, thus portrayed, is not a form of laziness or desperation, but a form of superiority. The parasite lives by his wits, and feeds off of others, by skilfully manipulating their credulity and goodwill.

3.4 REVIEW QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Where was Ben Jonson born?**
2. **In which year Ben Jonson got married?**
3. **In the first act, who offered worthless gift to Volpone?**
4. **Who was Nano?**
5. **Who was Castrone?**

NOTES

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Summarize the play "Volpone".**
2. **Analyse the character of Mosca and Celia.**
3. **Write a short note on "Theatre and Appearance vs Reality" theme.**
4. **Who as Ben Jonson? Write a note on his life and works.**
5. **Briefly explain "Money and Commerce" theme.**

3.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. **After Westminster, Jonson served as a _____ in the Netherlands, and worked for his stepfather as a bricklayer.**
   a. Professor
   b. Waiter
   c. Driver
   d. Soldier

2. **Volpone then disguises himself as a_____, so that he can gloat in each legacy hunter's face over their humiliation, without being recognized.**
   a. Doctor
   b. Venetian guard
   c. Chef
   d. Servant

3. **The third act begins with a soliloquy from Mosca, indicating that he is growing increasingly conscious of his _____ and his independence from Volpone.**
   a. Power
   b. Attitude
   c. Power
   d. None of the above

4. **Peregrine presents himself as a merchant to the knight and informs Politic that word has gotten out of his plan to sell Venice to the _____.**
   a. Romans
   b. Americans
   c. Turks
   d. Africans

5. **All seems good for Volpone until _____ returns, and, instead of confirming Voltore's claim that Volpone is alive, Mosca denies it.**
   a. Mosca
   b. Celia
   c. Corvino
   d. Nano

6. **Sir Politic Would-be was an _____ knight who resides in Venice.**
   a. Indian
   b. English

c. Japenese
d. Turkish

7. In a play that revolves around disguises, _____is the ultimate master of disguise.
a. Mosca
b. Nano
c. Celia
d. Androgyno

8. While Jonson merges many sources and complicates the typical morality play, the plot of Volpone is essentially that of a simple animal fable in which the _____ uses cunning to trick birds out of their meals.
a. Lion
b. Tiger
c. Eagle
d. Fox

9. _____ is a merchant, and he is both greedy and controlling to an extreme.
a. Bonario
b. Peregrine
c. Castrone
d. Corvino

10. Ben Jonson attended Westminster School from around the late _____.
a. 1540s
b. 1510s
c. 1570s
d. 1610s

♦♦♦♦♦

UNIT IV

JOHN WEBSTER

STRUCTURE

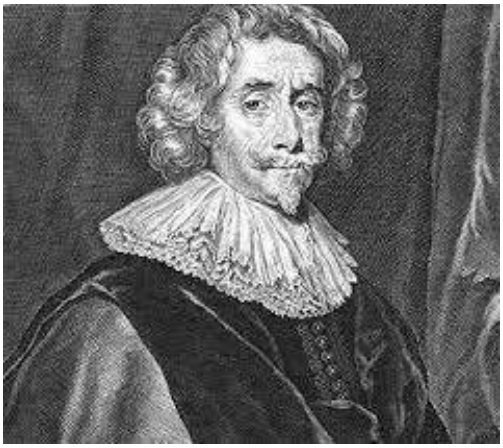
NOTES

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After completion of this unit, student will be able to:

- Know about John Webster the famous play writer.
- Learn about his one of the famous plays "The Duchess of Malfi".

4.2 ABOUT AUTHOR



John Webster (c. 1580 – c. 1632) was an English Jacobean dramatist best known for his tragedies The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi, which are often seen as masterpieces of the early 17th-century English stage. His life and career overlapped with Shakespeare's. Webster's life is obscure and the dates of his birth and death are not known. His father, a carriage maker also named John Webster, married a blacksmith's daughter named Elizabeth Coates on 4 November 1577 and it is likely that Webster was born not long after, in or near London. The family lived in St Sepulchre's parish. His father John and uncle Edward were Freemen of the Merchant Taylors' Company and Webster attended Merchant Taylors› School in Suffolk Lane, London. On 1 August 1598, "John Webster, lately of the New Inn" was admitted to the Middle Temple, one of the Inns of Court; in view of the legal interests evident in his dramatic work, this may be the playwright. Webster married 17-year-old Sara Peniall on 18 March 1605 at St Mary's Church, Islington. A special licence was needed to permit a wedding in Lent, as Sara was seven months pregnant. Their first child, John Webster III, was baptised at the parish of St Dunstan-in-the-West on 8 March 1606. Bequests in the will of a neighbour who died in 1617, indicate that other children were born to him. Most of what is otherwise known of him relates to his theatrical activities. Webster was still writing plays in the mid-1620s, but Thomas Heywood's Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels (licensed 7 November 1634) speaks of him in the past tense, implying he was then dead. There is no known portrait of Webster.

By 1602, Webster was working with teams of playwrights on history plays, most of which were never printed. They included a tragedy, Caesar's Fall (written with Michael Drayton, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton and Anthony Munday), and a collaboration with Dekker, Christmas Comes but Once a Year (1602). With Dekker he also wrote Sir Thomas Wyatt, which was printed in 1607 and had probably been first performed in 1602. He worked with Dekker again on two city comedies, Westward Ho in 1604 and Northward Ho in 1605. Also in 1604, he adapted John Marston's The Malcontent for staging by the King's Men.

Despite his ability to write comedy, Webster is best known for two brooding English tragedies based on Italian sources. The White Devil, a retelling of the intrigues involving Vittoria Accoramboni, an Italian woman assassinated at the age of 28, was a

NOTES

failure when staged at the Red Bull Theatre in 1612 (published the same year) being too unusual and intellectual for its audience. The Duchess of Malfi, first performed by the King's Men about 1614 and published nine years later, was more successful. He also wrote a play called Guise, based on French history, of which little else is known, as no text has survived.

The White Devil was performed in the Red Bull Theatre, an open-air theatre that is believed to have specialised in providing simple, escapist drama for a largely working-class audience, a factor that might explain why Webster's intellectual and complex play was unpopular with its audience. In contrast, The Duchess of Malfi was probably performed by the King's Men in the smaller, indoor Blackfriars Theatre, where it might have been appreciated by a better educated audience. The two plays would thus have been played very differently: The White Devil by adult actors, probably in continuous action, with elaborate stage effects a possibility, and The Duchess of Malfi in a controlled environment, with artificial lighting and musical interludes between acts, which allowed time, perhaps, for the audience to accept the otherwise strange rapidity with which the Duchess could have babies.

Webster wrote one more play on his own: The Devil's Law Case (c. 1617–1619), a tragicomedy. His later plays were collaborative city comedies: Anything for a Quiet Life (c. 1621) co-written with Thomas Middleton and A Cure for a Cuckold (c. 1624) co-written with William Rowley. In 1624, he also co-wrote a topical play about a recent scandal, Keep the Widow Waking (with John Ford, Rowley and Dekker). The play is lost, but its plot is known from a court case. He is believed to have contributed to the tragicomedy The Fair Maid of the Inn with John Fletcher, Ford and Phillip Massinger. His Appius and Virginia, probably written with Thomas Heywood, is of uncertain date.

Webster's intricate, complex, subtle and learned plays are difficult, but rewarding and are still frequently staged. Webster has gained a reputation as the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatist with the most unsparingly dark vision of human nature. Even more than John Ford, whose 'Tis Pity She's a Whore is also bleak, Webster›s tragedies present a horrific vision of humanity. In his poem «Whispers of Immortality», T. S. Eliot memorably says that Webster always saw «the skull beneath the skin».

Webster's title character in The Duchess of Malfi is presented as a figure of virtue compared with her malevolent brothers. She faces death with classic Stoic courage in martyr-like scene which has been compared to that of the king in Christopher Marlowe's play Edward II. Webster's use of a strong, virtuous woman as his main character was rare for his time and marks a deliberate reworking of some of the original historical events on which the play was based. The character of the Duchess recalls the Victorian poet and essayist Algernon Charles Swinburne's comment in A Study of Shakespeare that in tragedies such as King Lear Shakespeare had shown such a bleak world as a foil or backdrop for virtuous heroines such as Ophelia and Imogen, so that their characterisation would not seem too incredible. Swinburne describes such heroines as shining in the darkness.

Webster's drama was generally dismissed in the 18th and 19th centuries, but many 20th-century critics and theatregoers have found The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi brilliant plays of great poetic quality. One explanation for the change of view is that the horrors of war in the early 20th century had led to desperate protagonists being on stage again and understood. W. A. Edwards wrote of Webster›s plays in Scrutiny II (1933–1934) «Events are not within control, nor are our human desires; let›s snatch what comes and clutch it, fight our way out of tight corners, and meet the end without squealing." The violence and pessimism of the tragedies have seemed to some analysts close to modern sensibilities.

4.3 THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

The Duchess of Malfi Summary

The Duchess of Malfi takes place in Roman Catholic Italy, which English audiences at the time when the play was written would have associated with corruption. It begins in the palace of the Duchess, a young widow and the ruler of the Italian town of Amalfi. Her steward, Antonio, has just returned from a visit to the French court, and Bosola, a murderer and former employee of her brother, the Cardinal, has just returned from his punishment. Soon Duke Ferdinand, the Duchess's other brother, enters with his whole retinue. In a private conversation with his friend Delio, Antonio reveals that though the Cardinal and Duke appear good, they are in fact jealous, conniving, and despicable. He adds that though her brothers are horrible, the Duchess is noble, temperate, beautiful, and intelligent.

Even though the Duchess is still young and beautiful, her brothers do not want her to remarry. They hope to both preserve their honour by ensuring for ongoing sexual purity, and to eventually inherit her fortune by forcing her to remain a widow. In order to make sure they have their way, Ferdinand gets Bosola a position on the Duchess's estate and hires him to be his spy. Bosola doesn't want to be a spy, but he feels that it's his duty to obey the duke, even if doing so makes him corrupt. Ferdinand and the Cardinal then confront the Duchess with a rehearsed speech instructing her not to remarry. She agrees not to, but as soon as her brothers leave, she tells her maid Cariola that she will marry in secret. The Duchess then woos Antonio, inverting the traditional male and female roles in courtship. The two marry in secret.

Nine months later, the Duchess is pregnant with Antonio's child. Bosola, still spying for Ferdinand, notes the signs of her pregnancy and plans to give her apricots as a test, because they are known to induce labor. The Duchess eats the apricots and goes into labor, creating chaos in her palace. To try to maintain the secret, Antonio and the Duchess give out a story that the Duchess has fallen ill with some disease. Antonio confronts Bosola to ask if the apricots were poisoned. Bosola denies the accusation, but after the confrontation he

NOTES 

notices that Antonio ha accidentally dropped a piece of paper: it is a horoscope for a baby, which provides Bosola with concrete evidence that the Duchess had a child. He decides to send the paper in a letter to the Duchess's brothers in Rome. When Ferdinand and the Cardinal learn that the Duchess has disobeyed them, they are infuriated, thinking their noble blood has been tainted (and Ferdinand seems also to be overwhelmed with anger by the idea that the Duchess has been having sex at all), but they decide to wait to find out who the father is before taking action.

A few years later, the Duchess has had two more of Antonio's children. Ferdinand, who learned of the children from Bosola, decides to confront the Duchess in her bedchamber. Ferdinand sneaks in and frightens the Duchess, giving her a knife and suggesting that she kill herself. She admits that she is married, and he becomes enraged. He says that she has lost her reputation, and he swears that he will never see her again in his life. Antonio and the Duchess make a plan to flee: the Duchess announces that Antonio has been using his position to steel from her, and has been fired, as an excuse to get him out of Amalfi. After Bosola privately defends Antonio to the Duchess as being honourable and worthy, the Duchess confides in Bosola that Antonio is innocent and is in fact her husband. She plans to flee to join him.

Back in Rome, the Cardinal and Ferdinand find out from Bosola about the Duchess's plan. The Cardinal then formally banishes the Duchess, Antonio, and their children. Ferdinand invites Antonio to reconcile, but Antonio believes this is a trap, so instead of accepting the invitation he flees with his eldest son to Milan. After he leaves, Bosola renters in disguise and takes the Duchess and her other two children captive under orders from the brothers.

The brothers imprison the Duchess in her Amalfi palace. There, because Ferdinand has sworn never to see the Duchess, confronts her in the dark. He gives her his hand to hold, but then reveals that it is the hand of a dead man in order to convince her that Antonio is dead. He then plays a trick with silhouettes to convince the Duchess that her children are also dead, at which point the Duchess wants to die. Ferdinand reveals to Bosola that he plans to torture her by exposing her to madmen from the local insane asylum. While Bosola feels bad for the Duchess and dislikes that he is participating in her torture, he continues to obey the duke.

In her prison, the madmen confront the Duchess and Cariola. Bosola then enters, disguised as an old man, and he tells the Duchess that he's going to kill her. The Duchess maintains her composure and is unafraid, but executioners enter and strangle her, her two children, and Cariola. Though Ferdinand has no pity for the children, he immediately begins to feel remorse when he sees the Duchess's dead body. Ferdinand becomes maddened by guilt, and Bosola also acknowledges feeling a guilty conscience. Ferdinand then condemns Bosola for following his orders, and refuses to pay him for his work. After Ferdinand has departed, the Duchess wakes up, but only long enough for Bosola to tell her that her husband is still alive; she dies for real almost immediately after waking up.

Now in Milan, Antonio doesn't yet know his wife's fate. He decides to wager everything and confront the Cardinal in person in an attempt to defuse the situation. Ferdinand, meanwhile, has been diagnosed with lycanthropia (werewolf disease), and he begins

acting like a madman, even attacking his shadow, clearly plagued by guilt. The Cardinal wants his involvement in the murder to remain secret, and he instructs Bosola to murder Antonio. A woman named Julia, with whom the Cardinal has been having an affair, becomes smitten with Bosola, and he convinces Julia to try and get a confession out of the Cardinal. Julia confronts the Cardinal and finds out his secret, so he forces her to kiss a poisoned book, thereby killing her. Bosola reveals to the Cardinal that he has overseen this murder and the Cardinal's confession. He agrees to help the Cardinal in return for payment, but in fact this is a trick. He decides that he will do everything in his power to save Antonio and get revenge on the brothers.

In the Cardinal's palace, the Cardinal tells all of his courtiers to stay away from his room, no matter what they hear, even if he tests them with screams and shouts. Bosola sneaks into the palace, and overhears that the Cardinal plans to kill him after he helps the Cardinal. Soon after, Antonio sneaks into the palace in his effort to find the Cardinal and end their quarrel. However, in the darkness, Bosola accidentally stabs Antonio, mistaking him for one of the brothers. Antonio lives just long enough for Bosola to inform him that the Duchess and two of their children have been murdered, at which point Antonio no longer wants to live. Bosola goes to find and kill the Cardinal, and when the Cardinal starts screaming for help, no one comes because of his instruction that they stay away. In the chaos, Bosola stabs the Cardinal twice. Ferdinand then enters, and, mistaking, his brother for the devil, stabs both the Cardinal and Bosola. Bosola then stabs Ferdinand, who uses his dying words to say that our deaths are caused by our own actions. While Bosola explains what happened, the Cardinal dies, and after Bosola makes a final speech, he dies as well. After all of the deaths, Delio enters with Antonio's son, announces his intention to help the son to receive his proper inheritance, and ends the play.

Character List

Bosola- Bosola is the tool through which the Cardinal and Ferdinand perpetrate most of their evil in *The Duchess of Malfi*. He is hired by Ferdinand to spy on the Duchess, for whom he serves as manager of her horses. He is an enigmatic figure, willing to murder for hire without hesitation, while initially reluctant to the commit to the seemingly less extreme vice of spying.

As his deeds lead to worse and worse consequences--the banishment of the Duchess and her family, the murder of the Duchess and her children, Antonio's accidental death--he shows more and more remorse for his actions. It is only when Ferdinand and the Cardinal refuse to reward him for all he has done, though, that he stops blindly following their orders, and avenges the Duchess and Antonio by murdering the Cardinal and Ferdinand.

The Duchess- At the opening of the play, the Duchess of Malfi, sister to the Cardinal and twin sister to Ferdinand, has just been widowed in her youth. Though she promises her domineering brothers that she won't remarry, she almost immediately proposes to Antonio, a decision that ultimately leads to the destruction of her entire family, save their oldest son. The Duchess is strong-willed, brave, passionate, proud, and a loving wife and mother. In the opening of the play, Antonio speaks of her incredible virtue, and though she marries him against custom and her brothers' wishes, her goodness and vitality stand in stark contrast to her brothers' evil.

NOTES

Ferdinand- The Duke of Calabria and the Duchess's twin brother, Ferdinand boasts an impressive collection of vices: he has a terrible temper, is greedy, is lustful, and has an unhealthy obsession with his sister. He is powerful and corrupt, but as his anger over the Duchess's actions grows, he becomes more and more deranged. Once Bosola has, under his orders, killed the Duchess and two of her children, he immediately feels deep regret and then loses his mind completely. In the play, Ferdinand is often associated with fire imagery, and represents violent, choleric evil.

The Cardinal- The Duchess and Ferdinand's older brother, the Cardinal of Aragon represents cold and calculated evil in contrast to his hot-tempered brother. He is a Machiavellian character, using the power of his position to torture and counter the Duchess. Ultimately, though, he loses his ability to control events, a situation Bosola exploits to kill him.

Antonio- Antonio Bologna is the steward of the Duchess's household. She falls in love with him and they secretly wed, managing to keep this hidden from her brothers and Bosola. Antonio is an honest man, a good horseman, a good judge of character, and a loving husband and father, but he is also passive and largely ineffectual in a crisis, ultimately unable to protect his family from harm. He is also rather unremarkable when compared to the impressive Duchess.

Delio- Delio is Antonio's friend and the only one besides Cariola who is initially trusted with the secret of the Duchess's marriage to Antonio. He remains a faithful friend to the family through the end of the play. He also has a history with Julia, which he'd like to continue.

Cariola- Cariola is the Duchess's maid and confidant. She is the witness to the Duchess's marriage to Antonio, and thus the first to know about it. She keeps the secret faithfully, and in the end is killed by Bosola for doing so.

Julia- Julia is the Cardinal's mistress and Castruccio's wife. She is also wooed by Delio and later falls in love with Bosola. Bosola uses her as an unwitting tool to force a confession for the Duchess's death from the Cardinal, after which the Cardinal poisons her.

The Children- The Duchess and Antonio's three children never speak in the play, but are on stage in multiple scenes. The two youngest are viciously murdered by Bosola's men, while the oldest, in spite of his dire horoscope, is the only member of the family to survive, and symbolizes a hopeful future at the play's end.

Count Malateste- Malateste is known for presenting himself as a soldier but avoiding any battles, and thus is scorned as a coward. Ferdinand recommends him to the Duchess as a suitable husband, but she scorns the idea.

Marquis of Pescara- The Marquis of Pescara is a soldier, and the only courtier save Antonio and Delio who acts with any real honor. When Bosola attacks the Cardinal, he is the only lord to answer the cries for help, even at risk of being mocked for it.

Castruccio- Castruccio is a courtier under Ferdinand, and Julia's older husband. He represents the cuckolded fool.

Silvio- Silvio is a courtier under Ferdinand.

Roderigo- Roderigo is a courtier under Ferdinand.

Grisolan- Grisolan is a courtier under Ferdinand.

Old Lady- The Old Lady, a midwife, is ridiculed by Bosola at length for wearing makeup to try to cover what he perceives as her hideousness.

Doctor- The Doctor diagnoses and tries to treat Ferdinand's lycanthropia. His primary method of treatment is to make Ferdinand frightened of him.

Two Pilgrims- As the Cardinal enacts the ceremony that results in the Duchess's exile from Ancona, the two pilgrims watch the ceremony and provide commentary.

Mad Astrologer- Sent to the Duchess during her imprisonment, the Mad Astrologer lost his mind when they day he had predicted for the apocalypse came and went without incident.

Mad Doctor- Sent to the Duchess during her imprisonment, the Mad Doctor lost his mind due to jealousy.

Mad Priest- The Mad Priest is sent to the Duchess during her imprisonment to try to drive her crazy.

Mad Lawyer- The Mad Lawyer is sent to the Duchess during her imprisonment to try to drive her crazy.

Character Analysis

Bosola

Bosola is certainly a complex character painted in The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster. His full name is Daniel de Bosola. He is essentially a good man but he does not realise his own goodness. In the play, he acts the role of a villain. He appears to be a villain and pitiless murderer. He wanted to become a man of rank and power. But circumstances did not permit him to realize his ambition. He is a profound scholar. He had once burnt the midnight oil to achieve his aspirations. Instead of a scholar, Bosola feels in love with cardinal and become his tool. Bosola plays a triple role in the play 'The Duchess of Malfi'. He is a malcontent mediator, a tool villain and an avenger. He is also satirist. There is ample evidence of his intelligent in the play. He met Cardinal and committed murder at his instance.

Bosola becomes the tool villain of Ferdinand. Now he appears to be a perfect villain. He works as the spy of Ferdinand. Nothing can be more dishonourable than the work of spy. He knows it well. He sends secret information to Ferdinand and betrays the secret of Duchess. He does not hesitate to kill Cairo and the little kids of Duchess. By mistake, he kills Antonio too. Thus, he works as a villain in the play.

But this is not real character of Bosola. Ferdinand offers him gold when he employs him. Bosola refuses to take it. Because he knows that Ferdinand is bribing him to do something villainous. So, he refuses to take it. Yet he takes bribe. He also takes dishonourable job offered by Ferdinand. But he is not really bad man. Circumstances compel him to become. He has suffered much from poverty. So, he cannot refuse a tempting offer. In the Duchess of Malfi, Bosola plays a role of spy and murderer. But at the end of play,

NOTES

he plays a role of noble and avenger. So, his role is significant. He keeps a link between Ferdinand and Duchess. He sends massage from Malfi to Rome. He arrests duchess and brings her to Ferdinand. He is tortured duchess disguised as an old tomb-maker and later makes her killed by strangling. After the death of the Duchess, he suffers from hellish torments and gives her dead body to a woman for proper burial. He also killed Ferdinand and Cardinal while taking revenge on the two brothers. So, he becomes the symbol of the victory of Duchess.

From the above discussion, we can say that Bosola is a complex character. He is changed because he is deprived of a material prosperity. Thus, he is a Machiavellian character with a difference.

The Duchess

The Duchess, a high spirited and high-minded widow, reveals her love for the honest Antonio, steward at her court and secretly marries him, despite the warnings of her brothers, Ferdinand duke of Calabria, and the cardinal after informing them that she has no intention of remarrying. Their resistance appears to be induced consideration for their high blood, and by as Ferdinand later asserts a desire to inherit her property; there is also a strong suggestion of Ferdinand's repressed incestuous desire for her. The brothers place in her employment as a spy the cynical ex-galley slave Bosola, who betrays her to them; she and Antonio free and seperate. She is captured and subjected by Ferdinand and Bosola to fearful mental tortures, including the sight of the feigned corpse of her husband and the attendance of a group of madmen.

Finally, she is struggled with two of her children and Cariola, her waiting women. Retribution overtakes the murderers: Ferdinand goes mad, imagining himself a wolf. The Cardinal is killed by the now remorseful Bosola and Bosola by Ferdinand. Bosola has already killed Antonio and their children; the pride and dignity of the Duchess in her suffering (I am Duchess Of Malfi still) and individual lines such as the celebrated "cover her face: Mine eyes dazzle: she died young " have long been admired but until recently critics have been less happy about the overall structure, the abrupt changes in tone and the blood both of the last act.

Ferdinand

Duke Ferdinand is the brother of the Cardinal and the twin brother of the Duchess. He doesn't want his widowed sister to remarry, in part because of his pride and his greed for her wealth, but also because he harbors his own incestuous desires for her. It is Ferdinand who places Bosola in the Duchess's employment and then hires Bosola to spy on her activities. When rumors reach Ferdinand of the Duchess possibly giving birth to children (and thus also having sex), his anger is so overwhelming that his violent outbursts about the horrible ways he plans to revenge himself on her are too much even for the Cardinal. When he finds out that she has secretly married Antonio and had three children, Ferdinand acts decisively: he has her imprisoned, tortured, and killed. He seems to enjoy the torture, and act as if the torture he makes her endure is just payback for torture that she has made him endure, though the clear implication is that the "torture" he experienced was his sexual jealousy of the Duchess. Upon seeing the Duchess's dead body, however,

Ferdinand almost immediately feels remorse, and his guilt eventually drives him insane. In his madness he stabs the Cardinal, and is killed by Bosola.

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."

Though he is a religious figure, he is in fact just as immoral and despicable as his brother, facts made clear by his attempt to bribe his way into being pope, the fact that Bosola once killed a man on his orders, and the affair he carries on with Julia, Castruccio's wife. Like Ferdinand, he tries to prevent the Duchess from remarrying in order to preserve his sense of his family's purity and honour as well as his access to the Duchess's wealth. Unlike the wild Ferdinand, though, the Cardinal is careful, calculating, and controlled: he refuses to interact personally with the spy Bosola, and he threatens to walk away when Ferdinand becomes too overt about his plans for revenge on the Duchess. While it's never explained whether the Cardinal is upset by Ferdinand's violence or just trying to shut Ferdinand up in order to keep themselves looking clean while they plan their revenge, the fact that the Cardinal is entirely capable of murder – he later poisons Julia, after all, when she learns his secrets – suggests that it is the latter. Though he is aware of the religious consequences of his actions, he wields religion only as a tool to maintain his power. He never seems to feel true guilt for his actions, and there is a sense of poetic justice in the fact that ultimately the Cardinal dies after being stabbed by Bosola, the spy he used but refused to engage with or even pay, and his own brother, Ferdinand, who by the end of the play is guilt ridden and insane.

Antonio

Antonio is the Duchess's steward, and very capably runs the Duchess's estate. Despite the fact that he is neither wealthy nor high-born, the Duchess considers him to be a "complete" man, and the two of them secretly marry. He clearly reveres the Duchess – he is marrying

NOTES

for love, not just money. He is also knowledgeable about people: even early in the play he knows that Ferdinand and the Cardinal are duplicitous and murderous. Despite his knowledge of their characters, though, he proves entirely incapable of protecting his family from Ferdinand or the Cardinal. And while that failure seems to stem from his lower-class status and lack of political power of any sort, and while Antonio never seems anything less than morally good, his plan to sneak into the Cardinals home at the end of the play in order to try to convince the Cardinal to make amends also seems incredible naïve. During this effort, he is accidentally killed by Bosola, who mistakes Antonio for someone else.

He's intended to be a noble, honest character who served as a foil to both the Cardinal and Ferdinand. Whereas the Cardinal and Ferdinand were both attempting to control the Duchess, Antonio simply wanted to be with her. Antonio has the ability to see the nature of other individuals more clearly than others can. This kind of thing is seen near the beginning of the play, where he describes the inward nature of both Ferdinand and the Cardinal to his friend Delio. He also foretells the fall of Bosola.

Delio

Delio is one of the most important courtiers at Malfi. A good-hearted gentleman, he remains loyal to Antonio and the Duchess. Delio is Antonio's friend and is of the same social class. Totally loyal, he is privy to Antonio and the Duchess' secret marriage, and he looks after Antonio's sole surviving son at the end of the play. In a break from the Shakespearean tradition of giving a play's closing lines to the highest-ranking character, Webster gives Delio the play's final lines. Delio is also a former suitor of Julia.

Cariola

The Duchess's waiting-maid. She is loyal to the Duchess throughout, and dies for it. She is the witness to the Duchess's marriage to Antonio, and thus the first to know about it. She keeps the secret faithfully, and in the end is killed by Bosola for doing so. 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.

Julia

Julia is Castruccio's wife and the Cardinal's mistress. Julia is the play's stereotypical fickle female, with constantly changing affections. Near the end of the play, she becomes enamoured with Bosola, who then uses her to get the Cardinal to admit his involvement in the Duchess's murder. When the Cardinal finds out that Julia betrayed him, he kills her by making her kiss a poison covered book, but not before Julia reveals that she betrayed him to Bosola.

The Children

Though they are not named and do not speak, the Duchess's three children appear on stage a number of times. The two younger children wind up murdered, but the oldest survives and under Delio's care seems likely to inherit his mother's wealth and lands.

Count Malateste
Count Malateste is a wealthy nobleman in Rome. He is good friends with Ferdinand.

Marquis of Pescara
A soldier and courtier in Ferdinand's court. Of all the courtiers, he alone seems to have some sense of honour and independence of mind.

Castruccio
Castruccio is an old Italian lord, and his name is a pun on the word castrated. This pun is furthered by the fact that Castruccio's wife, Julia, is having an affair with the Cardinal.

Silvio
Silvio is a savvy courtier. He offers occasional comments on the character of the Cardinal.

Roderigo
Roderigo is a courtier under Ferdinand.

Grisolan
Grisolan is a courtier under Ferdinand.

Old Lady
The Old Lady, a midwife, is ridiculed by Bosola at length for wearing makeup to try to cover what he perceives as her hideousness.

Doctor
A Doctor to Ferdinand who diagnoses the duke with the disease Lycanthropic. His primary method of treatment is to make Ferdinand frightened of him.

Two Pilgrims
As the Cardinal enacts the ceremony that results in the Duchess's exile from Ancona, the two pilgrims watch the ceremony and provide commentary. They are the Witnesses to the banishment of the Duchess and Antonio.

Mad Astrologer
Sent to the Duchess during her imprisonment, the Mad Astrologer lost his mind when they day he had predicted for the apocalypse came and went without incident.

Mad Doctor
Sent to the Duchess during her imprisonment, the Mad Doctor lost his mind due to jealousy.

Mad Priest
The Mad Priest is sent to the Duchess during her imprisonment to try to drive her crazy.

Mad Lawyer
The Mad Lawyer is sent to the Duchess during her imprisonment to try to drive her crazy.

NOTES

The Duchess of Malfi Themes

Politics and Corruption

The Duchess of Malfi takes place in Roman Catholic Italy, which English Renaissance audiences would have associated with the stereotype of "sophisticated corruption." The play begins with Antonio's speech about his recent return from the French court; he praises France and offers the play's notion of an ideal royal state. The French king, Antonio reports, in order to bring everything to order, has rid himself of all flatterers and "infamous persons" because he rightly understands that a court "is like a common fountain." Usually goodness flows, but if it is poisoned near the head (i.e., the monarch), death spreads throughout the entire fountain (the entire nation). The French court is especially good because there is a council unafraid to inform the King of the "corruption of the times." Some advisors tell rulers what to do, but in France the advisors tell the King what he should foresee. It's ideal that France is filled with nobles willing to speak against corruption and give genuine advice to rulers.

Webster juxtaposes the ideal court of France with the political situation in Italy, whose corruption is exemplified by Duke Ferdinand and his brother the Cardinal, who deal illicitly throughout the play. Both men make efforts to appear temperate, courtly, and honorable, but inside, they are both evil and corrupt. The Cardinal, for example, lays elaborate plots against anyone he is jealous of or doesn't like, and he surrounds himself with flatterers, spies, and "a thousand such political monsters." He is so corrupt as to have attempted to bribe his way into becoming Pope. Likewise, Duke Ferdinand is perverse and corrupt. He is duplicitous and relies heavily on spies. Delio even describes the Duke as a spider and the law as his web: he uses the laws of the country as a means of security for himself and as a weapon against his enemies. It is through spies that the two find out about the Duchess' marriage and children, and through continual abuse of power that they break her family apart and ultimately slaughter them.

The Duchess of Malfi makes an argument about ideal government and the dangers (both physical and spiritual) of corruption. Though there are momentary gains and successes achieved by the brothers' plans, ultimately the play ends with the slaughter of nearly everyone involved in their web of influence. This ending suggests that corruption yields disastrous results; even beyond death, corruption can lead to damnation. This point is made explicitly when Bosola tells Ferdinand that taking a higher position in exchange for spying on the Duchess would make him a traitor and Ferdinand a corruptor, thereby leading both of them to hell.

Finally, the death of all of the play's major figures of political power leaves a vacuum at the end of the play; there is no new leader to take over. To show this, the play's final lines, often reserved for the highest-ranking character, are spoken by a mere courier. Ferdinand and the Cardinal's positions aren't filled, but are merely left vacant at the play's end. Thus political corruption and duplicitous behavior has the potential to lead to dire personal and religious consequences, and possibly to the collapse of government itself.

Love and Male Authority

The Duchess of Malfi explores love and male authority in a traditional society in which women are subjected to the wills of men. The Cardinal's illicit relationship

with Julia provides an example of a woman successfully controlled by a man. Julia is depicted according to the stereotype of a fickle woman, while the Cardinal is the constant figure of authority. Webster even uses animal imagery to describe their relationship: the Cardinal is metaphorically a falconer who tames Julia, the falcon. Later, when Julia becomes infatuated with Bosola, she begs for him to tell her to do something so that she can prove that she loves him—clearly, she understands love to be an experience controlled by men.

The Cardinal and Ferdinand also try to exert their male authority over the Duchess. In order to preserve her honour and reputation (supposedly) and to take her fortune, the brothers seek to prevent her from remarrying. They deliver a rehearsed argument, in which they characterize marriage as a prison and forbid her from marrying again. Once she does so behind their backs, they use all of their power to correct the situation and get revenge on her. We should also note that Ferdinand's initial argument for the Duchess not to marry has undertones of incest.

The Duchess, however, inverts the pattern of male authority over love. Refusing to remain a widow, she covertly goes against her brothers' order and marries for love. What's more, she does so outside of the normal confines of courtship in which the man pursues the woman; in part due to her high birth, she is "forced to woo" Antonio. This marriage between Antonio and the Duchess is figured as a true partnership; the Duchess married Antonio purely out of love, in spite of custom and opposition, as he had no special status or nobility.

Throughout the play, the Duchess continues to defy male authority and assert her own agency, for love, for the sake of her children, and for her own self-interest. Even facing her own execution, she remains proud and unafraid, and she undercuts the power of the men executing her by ensuring that her body will be cared for by women after her death. Even so, the Duchess's final, dying thought is that her husband is still alive. This gestures towards the fact that male authority is still powerful, despite the Duchess's assertions of her own power, for which she is being executed. The Duchess, then, can be seen both as a proud example of a woman exerting her will and a tragic example of society's refusal to relinquish the power of male authority.

Guilt, Death, and Suffering

Put simply, this play is filled with death and suffering. In a tragedy, the deaths of most of the main characters are pretty much guaranteed, but Webster achieves a spectacular level of horror with the way that characters are killed and the tortures they undergo beforehand. In light of the Duchess being subjected to imprisonment, torture, and execution, it's notable that death itself doesn't frighten her. The Duchess possesses composure and dignity in the moments leading up to her death, even to the point of asking for her violent death in order to put her to sleep. In this way, death is shown as an escape that is preferable to a life of suffering. Death, no matter how gruesome, leads to "excellent company in the other world," and it frees the Duchess from the control and torture of her brothers. We can also note that the Duchess' death showcases the play's exploration of the permanence of death, as an echo rises from her grave in an attempt to tell Antonio of her fate.

NOTES 

While Ferdinand and the Cardinal are directly responsible for much of the suffering and death in the play (including and beyond what's mentioned above), the suffering they create does not lead to satisfaction or pleasure. Instead, it leads to guilt, as well as to more suffering and more death. Ferdinand, for example, begins to regret his actions immediately after seeing that the Duchess has died; he shows signs of guilt right away when he sees the Duchess' body. Soon this guilt progresses so far as to drive him mad. He acts so strangely that the doctor believes he has the disease of lycanthropic (that he is a werewolf), and at one point he starts attacking his own shadow. He shows himself to be obsessed with the crime of the Duchess's death, saying to himself "Strangling is a very quiet death." Guilt, therefore, has the power to drive someone insane (and ultimately to his death).

As the Cardinal is a religious figure, his guilt (which, in a way, also leads him to death) is expressed in terms of faith instead of insanity. After killing Julia, he is plagued by guilt. He cries out, "Oh, my conscience!" and says that he would pray, but the devil is preventing him. Thus, we see that guilt has the power to stop even a Catholic Cardinal from offering prayer. Since he cannot pray, he cannot be forgiven, and he later offers a brief soliloquy in which he explains that he has been thinking about hell, a symptom of his guilty conscience. The association with hell continues, as, in his insanity, Ferdinand becomes convinced that his brother is the devil, and he stabs the Cardinal. Guilt transforms a Cardinal into the devil and apparently indicates that he will go to hell. It's among the severe consequences of murder and evil.

Finally, Bosola is in a unique situation, as he is forced into killing and experiences guilt throughout the play. In all of his actions, he feels guilty, but this guilt is overwhelmed by a sense of duty to the duke, emphasizing the play's suggestion that guilt or pre-emptive guilt is not enough to deter murder or bad behavior. Ultimately, though, guilt and desire for revenge take precedence over duty. Overwhelmed by guilt for the suffering he has caused, Bosola seeks to right his wrongs. Since he is guilty, however, he also suffers the fate of the diabolical brothers.

Religion and Sin

Sin—and the religious consequences of sin—run rampant in The Duchess of Malfi. The tragic forces of the play's major plotline are primarily driven by sin: it is because they are greedy for her fortune and prideful of their noble blood that the Cardinal and the Duke do not wish the Duchess to remarry. Ferdinand also exhibits a strange incestuous desire for his sister (another glaring sin), which leads in part to his horrible treatment of her. Ferdinand's rage, lust, pride, and greed all upset him to the point of deformity, and he shocks the Cardinal with the horrible things he talks about doing to punish the Duchess. But Ferdinand also believes that his and the Cardinal's sins are being avenged by heaven through the Duchess. Further, his last lines before dying echo and reinforce the sentiment that we are punished and suffer fates according to our sins: "Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds we are cut with our own dust." These lines indicate that our own sins and our own actions are responsible for our downfalls.

The Cardinal is a religious figure, and most of the characters acknowledge the dangers of sin, the devil, and hell. Bosola knows, for example, that the devil makes sins look good and calls gracious whatever heaven calls vile. Likewise, the Cardinal at one point enters the stage carrying a religious book and, after murdering Julia, he ponders the nature of hell like a scholar and a believer. But despite this knowledge, most figures (especially the evil ones) are not deterred from sinning, even egregiously. Religion, then, is not presented as a force that prevents bad behavior.

The Duchess, we can note has a particularly conflicting view of religion. She is able to face death with such poise, in part, because she believes that she will meet greet people in her next life (i.e. in heaven). Her last spoken word is even "mercy." But during her life, she implies that certain religious practices or beliefs are mere superstition. When devising a plan for the Duchess to escape, Bosola suggests that she pretend to make a sacred pilgrimage. The Duchess thinks it is a good idea, but Cariola says that she should not "jest" with religion, and that it is better to avoid a fake pilgrimage. The Duchess doesn't take this advice seriously, calling Cariola a "superstitious fool."

Her brothers, though, recognize this tactic. The Cardinal says that she is making "religion her riding hood" to keep her from attention and trouble. Ferdinand's response is that it "damns her." He goes on to say that the purer she pretends to be, given her devious intentions, the fouler she is actually being. In a strange way, this notion echoes the devil's means of profanity, which is accomplished by taking what heaven calls bad and making it good, and by inverting or twisting what is most pure and most holy. At the same time, we can note that the Cardinal uses his religious influence for immoral purposes. For example, he banishes the Duchess and Antonio in a formal ceremony at a religious shrine, thereby hypocritically doing exactly what he damned the Duchess for doing: using a religious exercise as a façade for personal gain.

Religion in this play, then, is generally acknowledged but ignored by its characters. Though the stakes of sin and mercy are real and high, and most characters acknowledge the dangers of sins, those sins simply prove too tempting for almost everyone in the play. While Webster sometimes shows religion to be a tool used by the suffering to find comfort, it's more commonly used by the powerful to seize or maintain power, and by the wicked to justify themselves and hide their terrible sins.

Class

The Duchess's marriage to Antonio is not just remarkable because she was the pursuer and because she married against her brothers' will. It is also remarkable because she married someone of a lower class. During their courtship, Antonio is careful not to appear to ambitious, which is considered dangerous for someone in a lower class. Further, in the marriage scene, the Duchess laments the misery of being high born, which forces her to woo because no one dares to woo her. Such a marriage would have been progressive and scandalous at the time. The significance of this marriage is not lost on Bosola, another one of the play's lowerclassmen with upward mobility. When Bosola finds out about the marriage, he is stunned. He asks if in such an ambitious time, is there really a woman who would marry a man simply for his worth, without all of his wealth and honours. And when

NOTES 

she confirms the marriage, Bosola launches into a speech about how praiseworthy the Duchess is for marrying Antonio, saying that she shows that some benefits in the world can still come from merit.

The marriage and Bosola's reaction to it, when paired with other details, suggest the play's treatment of class in general. First, we can note that Webster himself was not noble born; he was the son of a tailor. Next, we can note that Delio, a minor character and friend of Antonio (with whom he shares a social class), speaks the play's opening and closing lines. While Shakespeare, for example, often gave closing lines to the character of the highest status, Webster inverts this tradition, in part to emphasize the fact that most upper-class characters have died. Class is shown, on the one hand, to be binding and restricting (as it is one of the reasons the marriage is so scandalous and ends so tragically), but Webster's play also suggests that class is fluid, that figures can rise and fall in status, and that true worth and merit should be given a greater value than birth, wealth, and social status.

Hell on Earth

The Duchess of Malfi is a play replete with darkness, both literal and figurative. There are good figures, and these characters are associated with light. On the other hand, the brothers, who exhibit unrelenting evil, are associated with motifs of darkness, fire, the devil, and sin.

The idea that the brothers have unleashed hell on Earth is most apparent in the fourth act, which includes utter horrors like fake corpses, a severed hand, a plethora of madmen, and most centrally, the vicious murders of the Duchess and her children. The Duchess, a symbol of motherhood and light, is unfazed by these horrors because she believes her family already dead, but she does explain that "the earth" seems made "of flaming sulphur". And when Bosola tells her she must keep living, she makes it clear that hell is truly on Earth—"That's the greatest torture souls feel in hell,/In hell: that they must live, and cannot die", The Cardinal and Ferdinand are particularly responsible for bringing this fire to her world. Ferdinand is constantly associated with fire, by others and in his own language. He says only the Duchess's "whore's blood" can put out his "wild-fire", he imagines killing her children by having them "burning in a coal-pit", lighting "them like a match" after dipping them in "sulphur". Additionally, he is associated with salamanders—at the time of the play, thought to live in fire—multiple times.

Both brothers are also even more directly connected to hell through constant associations with the devil. Antonio says "the devil speaks in" the Cardinal's lips, and Bosola describes Ferdinand›s manipulation as: "Thus the devil/Candies all sins o'er". These are but two of several instances.

This hell on Earth serves to emphasize just how virtuous the Duchess is, and how much better for the world her kind of domestic love and child-rearing is than the greed and selfishness of her brothers. The hell that they create in the end destroys them, too—as Ferdinand says, "Like diamonds, we are cut with our own dust". Ferdinand goes mad, the Cardinal loses all hope, and both die, leaving no legacy behind them.

Disguise

Disguise—masking reality, hiding one's true intentions, presenting a false front—is a major theme in *The Duchess of Malfi*. The most obvious symbol of this is Bosola. The distinction between what he says and how he acts is so vast that even the audience, who is given access to his private thoughts through soliloquies and asides, has trouble understanding his motivations.

He is a spy, and is thus constantly disguising his motives and his true feelings. Further, in the fourth act, he literally disguises himself as an old man. However, he also repeatedly shows disgust for the act of disguising. He is reluctant to take on the role of spy, and notes that "the devil/Candies all sin o'er", thus associating the act of disguising with evil, and he scorns how men "delight/To hide" their "rotten and dead body" "eaten up of lice and worms" "in rich tissue". Thus, he is both the character who most thoroughly employs disguise, and the one most aware of its sinful, unattractive nature.

Disguise is so prevalent in the play that even the Duchess, the paragon of light, must employ it. In her first appearance on stage, she tells her brothers, "I'll never marry", and then before the scene is even over, she has proposed to and married Antonio. Clearly, she had disguised her true intentions from them. She then manages to have three children with Antonio without ever revealing their marriage, and even when the discovery of the marriage becomes imminent, she quickly devises an excuse to send Antonio out of harm's way.

Yet this dishonesty is not meant to reflect poorly on the Duchess. Instead, it shows just how profoundly corrupt her brothers have made the world, in that the Duchess must disguise a good and pure love simply to survive. Her use of disguise reveals her energy and resourcefulness in her fight for what is good on this Earth.

The Perversion of Justice

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, justice fails completely as a force for good; instead, it is corrupted into a tool for Ferdinand and the Cardinal. The rules that govern their world are perverse and immoral, so the justice they seek to enact inherently becomes perverse and immoral itself. Delio prepares the audience for this in the first act, when he says of Ferdinand, the law, which should uphold peace and fairness, is instead a "foul" trap that Ferdinand uses to benefit himself.

Once the Duchess is dead and Ferdinand is overcome with regret, he himself points out how he has misused justice, when he asks, "Did any ceremonial form of law/Doom her to not-being?". Bosola, to assuage his own guilt, has imagined the Duchess's murder as an officially sanctioned act. He describes himself as "the common bellman/That usually is sent to condemned persons", as if she had actually been condemned by a judge or jury. When Ferdinand disabuses this notion by arguing he (Ferdinand) holds no authority with which to condemn the Duchess to death, Bosola says, "The office of justice is perverted quite/When one thief hangs another". Only now, when it corrupted justice is working directly against him, does he realize how perverted their system truly is.

NOTES

The Fertile Woman

Evil in *The Duchess of Malfi* is a powerful and pervasive force that manages to destroy almost all that is good, but it is not all-powerful. At the end of the play, the Duchess›s oldest son survives to carry on her and Antonio›s legacy, which provides a symbol of hope tied in with the play›s greatest force for good: the fertile and reproductive female.

Ferdinand and the Cardinal both express dark views on female sexuality. When they find out that the Duchess has a son, they cannot imagine this being the result of love, or of a legitimate marriage, but they instead imagine the boy as a product of wanton lust. Ferdinand goes so far as to describe the men he imagines having sex with his sister.

The reality of a woman's fertility, though, is the complete opposite. After Antonio and the Duchess wed, she says they can remain chaste if he wants, suggesting that their marriage is not based on an all-consuming lust. They do, clearly, sleep together and produce three children, but this reflects only the loving creation of family. The scene in which Antonio, the Duchess, and Cariola tease each other reveals a comfortable domestic bliss, not a hotbed of fiery passion. And, also in this scene, the goodness of such a love is emphasized when Antonio berates Cariola for wanting to stay single. He argues that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, those women who scorned love and lovers were turned into barren plants or stone, while those who married became fruitful trees, bestowing gifts to the world.

Though Antonio's first description of the Duchess is arguably unrealistic, she is revealed through the play as figure very much of the earth. She is fat with pregnancy in the second act, "an excellent/Feeder of pedigrees", and manages to birth three children over two acts. Even when she is about to die, rather than transition into a saintly figure, she retains her ties to the earth for one last moment, asking Cariola to give her son some cold medicine, and to let her daughter say her prayers. Her domestic duties remain paramount to her, even as she prepares to leave the earth forever.

Once all the evil has been done, all that remains of this family that had epitomized domestic bliss is its eldest son. In the midst of all the destruction, this product of love and the reproductive woman, will be raised as a testament to the goodness of his mother. Thus, her power as a good mother, in the end, is greater than her brothers' evil.

4.4 REVIEW QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Where does the play "The Duchess of Malfi" take place?**
2. **Who was Count Malateste?**
3. **In which year John Webster was born?**
4. **Where the Cardinal and Ferdinand find out from Bosola about the Duchess's plan?**
5. **Who was Julia?**

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Analyse the character of the Cardinal.**

2. **What is the importance of Religion and Sin in the play?**
3. **Who is the most courageous character in the play? Defend your choice.**
4. **Summarize the play "The Duchess of Malfi".**
5. **What is the importance of Politics and Corruption in the play?**

4.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. **John Webster's father married a blacksmith's daughter named _____.**
   a. Elizabeth
   b. Rose
   c. Charlotte
   d. Hazel
2. **Despite his ability to write comedy, Webster is best known for two brooding English tragedies based on _____ sources.**
   a. Spanish
   b. French
   c. Italian
   d. Roman
3. **Even though the Duchess is still young and beautiful, her _____ do not want her to remarry.**
   a. Sisters
   b. Brothers
   c. Parents
   d. Children
4. **_____ reveals to the Cardinal that he has overseen this murder and the Cardinal's confession.**
   a. Ferdinand
   b. Antonio
   c. Cariola
   d. Bosola
5. **Grisolan is a _____ under Ferdinand.**
   a. Soldier
   b. Courtier
   c. Doctor
   d. Fisherman
6. **_____ is the Cardinal's mistress and Castruccio's wife.**
   a. Romeo, earl of Montague
   b. William Shakespeare
   c. Julia
   d. Ralph, earl of Montague
7. **Bosola is hired by Ferdinand to spy on the Duchess, for whom he serves as manager of her_____.**
   a. Horses

NOTES

b. Soldiers
c. Courtiers
d. Elephants

8. The Cardinal is The Duchess and Ferdinand's _____brother.

a. Younger
b. Cousin
c. Twin
d. Older

9. _____ is a soldier, and the only courtier save Antonio and Delio who acts with any real honour.

a. Silvio
b. The Marquis of Pescara
c. Grisolan
d. Roderigo

10. The Cardinal is a _____ figure, and most of the characters acknowledge the dangers of sin, the devil, and hell.

a. Religious
b. Political
c. Corporate
d. None of the above

♦♦♦♦♦

UNIT V

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY

STRUCTURE

NOTES

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After completion of this unit, student will be able to:

- Understand the Changeling.
- Know about the Plot Summary.
- Understand Character List.
- Know About the Changeling Themes.

5.2 ABOUT AUTHOR

William Rowley, (born 1585), London, Eng.—buried February 1626, London), English dramatist and actor who collaborated with several Jacobean dramatists, notably Thomas Middleton. Rowley became an actor before 1610. He met Middleton about 1614 but was already writing plays for his company, Prince Charles's Men, in 1612–13. He later joined Lady Elizabeth's Men and then the King's Men, serving as both playwright and actor. Rowley's large girth and flair for comedy led to appearances as Plumporridge in The Inner Temple Masque (1619) and as the Fat Bishop in A Game at Chess (1625), both plays by Middleton. In his own writings, Rowley often included oversized comic characters for his performance. Of some 20 plays known to have been written by Rowley alone or in collaboration, relatively few are extant. His most important solitary effort is All's Lost by Lust (performed 1619; published 1633), a romantic tragedy with a strong strain of dramatic morality, written in harsh but powerful verse. His other extant plays are comedies and include A New Wonder, A Woman Never Vext (c. 1610; published 1632), A Match at Mid-Night (c. 1607; published 1633), and A Shoo-maker a Gentleman (c. 1608; published 1638). Plays written with Middleton include The Old Law (performed c. 1615), on which Philip Massinger also collaborated; A Faire Quarrell (c. 1616, published 1617) and The Changeling (1622; published 1653), in both of which Rowley wrote the subplot and helped with the plan of the whole; Wit at Several Weapons (c. 1616), incorrectly attributed to John Fletcher; and The World Tost at Tennis (1620). Other plays in which Rowley collaborated are Fortune by Land and Sea (c. 1609) with Thomas Heywood; The Witch of Edmonton (1621) with Thomas Dekker and John Ford; The Maid in the Mill (1623) with Fletcher; and The Birth of Merlin, or: The Child Hath Found His Father (1662), the title page of which wrongly attributes part authorship to William Shakespeare.

5.3 THE CHANGELING

THE CHANGELING SUMMARY

Thanks for exploring this Super Summary Study Guide of "The Changeling" by Thomas Middleton, William Rowley. A modern alternative to Spark Notes and CliffsNotes, Super Summary offers high-quality study guides that feature detailed chapter summaries and analysis of major themes, characters, quotes, and essay topics.

NOTES

OVERVIEW

The Changeling is a Jacobean tragicomedy written in collaboration between established playwrights Thomas Middleton and William Rowley. It was first performed in 1622 and published in 1653. The play is adapted from John Reynolds's 1621 story collection titled The Triumphs of Gods Revenge Against the Crying and Execrable Sinne of Willful and Premeditated Murther. The play has two plots: a tragic main plot and a comedic subplot. Scholars believe Middleton wrote the majority of the main plot (Act II; Act III, Scenes 1, 2, and 4; Act IV, Scenes 1 and 2; and Act V, Scenes 1 and 2), while Rowley wrote the comedic subplot as well as the first act and final scene (Act I; Act III, Scene 3; Act IV, Scene 3; and Act V, Scene 3). The Changeling is considered one of the best tragedies of its time outside of Shakespeare and enjoys popularity still today. This summary refers to edition published in The Routledge Anthology of Renaissance Drama (2002).

Plot Summary

Tragedy is stirring in Alicante, Spain. Beatrice, sometimes called Joanna, is newly betrothed to Spanish nobleman Alonzo de Piracquo. A lady of wealth and privilege, Beatrice must marry according to the orders of her father, Vermandero. However, when Beatrice meets Alsemero—a nobleman from Valencia passing through on his travels—only five days later, she decides no other man will do. Beatrice and Alsemero fall in love at a church, and Alsemero wants to marry Beatrice. Their union seems blessed by the heavens. Beatrice secures an invite for Alsemero to visit her father's castle, knowing she only needs a few days to scheme a way for them to be together. All the while, her father's repulsive servant De Flores seems to lurk wherever Beatrice goes. De Flores burns with an obsessive passion for Beatrice, while Beatrice recoils from De Flores with a passionate hatred. De Flores does not care that Beatrice hates him; his love is unstoppable, and he must be around her at every opportunity. When Alonzo arrives at the castle with his brother Tomazo, Beatrice hatches a plan to secure all her heart desires. While she is not a man and therefore does not have agency to marry whom she pleases, she can still invent a plan to change her fortune. She flatters and persuades De Flores to murder Alonzo on her behalf, intending to pay De Flores after and arrange for him to flee the castle—and leave her forever. De Flores, however, needs no persuading. He's eager to enact Beatrice's wishes and means to collect Beatrice's virginity as his reward.

De Flores leads Alonzo into the castle's vault, where he stabs Alonzo and severs one of Alonzo's ringed fingers as a token for Beatrice. When he returns, Beatrice tries to pay De Flores and send him on his way. De Flores rejects the money with a vengeance. Beatrice is his only desire, and he threatens to expose their crime and ruin her marriage plans if she does not comply. Beatrice is horrified the ugly servant who so repulses her is demanding her virginity, and her honor with it. De Flores reminds her she is now his equal, having lost her innocence with Alonzo's murder. Left with no other choice, Beatrice accepts the bargain. Meanwhile, a jealous old doctor named Alibius hides his beautiful young wife Isabella inside his mental asylum. He instructs his servant Lollio to ensure no men tempt Isabella away. However, two men from Vermandero's castle sneak into the asylum to woo Isabella, disguised as asylum patients. There's Antonio, masquerading as a fool, and Franciscus, who is masquerading as a madman. At separate points in the play, the

NOTES

men reveal their identities and declare their love to Isabella. Lollio also decides to vie for Isabella's affections. Isabella rejects them all. All the while, the asylum is rehearsing for an upcoming performance at Beatrice's wedding. The fools and madmen will dance and entertain the wedding guests with their madness. Lunatic performers are a popular commodity, and Alibius intends to capitalize on the venture. These scenes bring comedic relief during tense moments in the main plot while mirroring the mad crimes of passion unfolding throughout the play. Back at the castle, Beatrice's plan works. She marries Alsemero with her father's blessing. The wedding night, however, presents another problem. Beatrice worries Alsemero will discover she's no longer a virgin. She comes across Alsemero's closet, where she finds hidden concoctions meant to reveal women's natural secrets, such as whether a lady is pregnant or still a virgin. Knowing Alsemero might discover her lost maidenhood, Beatrice plans a bed trick, arranging for her virgin waiting-woman Diaphanta to swap places in bed with Beatrice without Alsemero knowing. Beatrice gives Diaphanta Alsemero's virginity test, and Diaphanta exhibits the intended symptoms: yawning, sneezing, and laughing. Later, Alsemero makes Beatrice take his virginity test. Having seen Diaphanta experience the symptoms earlier, Beatrice fakes the symptoms and passes the test. While Beatrice works to keep her secrets from ruining her marriage, Tomazo seeks revenge for Alonzo's death.

Vermandero also seeks Alonzo's murderer to restore honor to the castle. Vermandero discovers Antonio and Franciscus suspiciously left the castle around the time of the murder. He declares the two men murder suspects and issues a warrant for their arrest. That evening, Diaphanta sleeps with Alsemero for hours longer than planned. Beatrice feels betrayed and knows she can no longer trust Diaphanta. De Flores sets a fire in Diaphanta's bedroom and murders her for Beatrice. As Beatrice becomes further entrenched in a labyrinth of murder and secrets, she decides she loves De Flores. Beatrice's secrets all come out when Alsemero and Jasperino overhear Beatrice and De Flores talking in the garden. Alsemero accuses Beatrice of adultery. Beatrice instead confesses to Alonzo's murder and otherwise claims innocence. Beatrice reminds Alsemero the murder was for his sake, but he's not swayed. His wife has defiled their marriage bed with the sin of murder. Their relationship is lost. De Flores arrives, and Alsemero locks De Flores and Beatrice in his closet while waiting to bring them to justice. Once the rest of the characters arrive, including Alibius, Isabella, Antonio, and Franciscus, Alsemero reveals that Beatrice and De Flores murdered Alonzo. In the closet, De Flores fatally stabs Beatrice and himself. The two confess their crimes, then die. De Flores is thankful to have taken Beatrice for himself and does not regret his crime. Beatrice asks for forgiveness and welcomes death as an ending to her shame. Justice has been restored, and everyone is changed. Alsemero offers to be a new brother to Tomazo and a son to Vermandero, to relieve their grief and replace their loved ones lost to tragedy.

CHARACTER LIST

Due to the detailed nature of this play, it may be necessary to refer to a character list to truly understand all the different relationships and love stories.

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY

Alibius: A doctor that runs an insane asylum. He is very jealous of his much younger wife, Isabella.

NOTES 

Alsemero: A noble gentleman from Valencia who meets and falls in love with Beatrice, even though Beatrice is engaged to another.

Antonio: A man who pretends to be crazy to be committed to the insane asylum where the woman he loves, Isabella, is.

Beatrice: Known also as Joanna, she is the daughter of Vermandero and is very vain and selfish. She falls head over heels for Alsemero, although she is betrothed to another.

De Flores: An unattractive servant of Vermandero who is obsessed with Beatrice.

Diaphanta: Beatrice's maid who replaces Beatrice in Alsemero's bed so that Beatrice can be proven a virgin.

Franciscus: Another man who pretends to be mad to be committed so he can tell Isabella how much he loves her.

Isabella: Young wife of the doctor at the asylum. She is beautiful and attracts many suitors, but she is honest and sticks with her husband.

Jasperino: Friend of Alsemero and one of the people who overhears Beatrice's machinations.

Lollio: Alibius' servant who is in love with Isabella. He gives misinformation to Isabella's suitors in hopes of getting them to kill each other.

Alonzo: Betrothed to Beatrice, he is a well-respected nobleman.

Tomazo: Alonzo's brother who knows that Beatrice does not love his brother.

Vermandero: Beatrice's father and an old friend of Alsemero's father.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Alibius: Alibius is a jealous old doctor who is in charge of a private lunatic asylum. He is married to Isabella, a woman much younger than himself, and he is worried that when he is away another man may usurp his position. He therefore instructs his servant Lollio to prevent any of the visitors to the asylum, who may include young nobleman who come to gawk at the inmates, from seeing Isabella. Alibius is the owner of a lunatic asylum. He allows paying visitors to see his "brainsick patients", but he is a jealous husband, and worries about the gallants who admire his young wife, Isabella. To this end he confines Isabella to the madhouse, ordering Lollio to guard her when he is away from home. The plan fails: two gallants disguise themselves as madmen in order to seduce Isabella. Alibius, remaining blissfully ignorant, is hired by Vermandero to present a "madmen's morris" at the wedding of Beatrice-Joanna. He oversees the rehearsal. Then, Isabella tells him about the counterfeit madmen (this event is not dramatized). Alibius and Isabella go to the castle, to inform Vermandero. In the conclusion, Alibius says he has learned his lesson, and will try to become a better husband.

Alsemero: is a nobleman from Valencia who falls in love with Beatrice. He immediately postpones his voyage to Malta to declare his love for her. Alsemero is an honorable man. When he finds out that Beatrice is betrothed to Alonzo but would sooner marry him, Alsemero, he wants to challenge Alonzo to a duel. Alsemero is a Valencian soldier who falls in love with Beatrice-Joanna, daughter of Vermandero. Beatrice loves him in return,

NOTES

but her father has already matched her to Alonzo de Piracquo. Not realizing his feelings toward Beatrice, Vermandero invites Alsemero to stay in his castle. There, Alsemero meets with Beatrice in secret, and offers to duel with Alonzo. Beatrice, fearful of losing him, secretly hires DeFlores to murder Alonzo, but DeFlores forces her to sacrifice her virginity as payment. Thinking that Alonzo has run away, Vermandero chooses Alsemero as Beatrice's new fiancé, and they are married. After the wedding, Alsemero's friend Jasperino informs him that Beatrice may have had sex with DeFlores. Alsemero is incredulous, and uses a virginity test on Beatrice, but she outwits him, and convinces him of her innocence. She then tricks him into sleeping with Diaphanta, rather than herself, on the wedding night. But afterwards, Jasperino shows Alsemero ocular proof of Beatrice's adultery. He confronts her with the evidence, and she confesses, explaining that she did it all to marry him. Alsemero locks her in his closet, and, when DeFlores confesses his crimes, thrusts him in after. There, DeFlores stabs Beatrice and himself. Alsemero offers a moral commentary in the conclusion, and promises to act as a son to Vermandero. He also speaks the epilogue at the end.

Antonio: is a gentleman of Vermandero's household. He enters Alibius's madhouse disguised as an innocent fool in order to seduce Isabella. When Lollio is distracted, Antonio reveals his true identity to Isabella, and tries to kiss her. But Isabella is unimpressed, and when Antonio tries again, Lollio sees him. Later, with the complicity of Lollio, Isabella disguises as a madwoman, and approaches Antonio with wild sexual abandon. Antonio is disgusted, and so Isabella, revealing her identity, tells him that she is rejecting him as a lover because he cannot see beyond her outward attire. Antonio decides to leave the madhouse, but Lollio reawakens his lust by telling him that Isabella will love him if he fights Franciscus, the counterfeit madman. When Alibius learns that two gentlemen have infiltrated his madhouse, he tells Vermandero, who assumes that Antonio and Franciscus are the murderers of Alonzo. Fortunately, the truth is discovered before Antonio can be hanged, and he shamefacedly admits before the assembled cast that he has been proven a true fool Antonio is a kind-hearted man who lends money to needy people without charging any interest from them. In this respect he offers a striking contrast to Shylock who is a usurer. (A usurer is a money lender who charges excessive rates of interest on the loans which he gives). Antonio, an antisemitic merchant, takes a loan from the Jew Shylock to help his friend to court Portia. Antonio can't repay the loan, and without mercy, Shylock demands a pound of his flesh. The heiress Portia, now the wife of Antonio's friend, dresses as a lawyer and saves Antonio. Loyal – Antonio is a good friend to Bassanio and puts his own life on the line to help him out. Honest – when Shylock demands his pound of flesh, Antonio does not fight or complain but accepts that he has entered into a contract, no matter how unpleasant. Antonio is the protagonist and titular merchant in The Merchant of Venice. Antonio incites the central conflict of the play by accepting Shylock's terms in order to secure a loan. Antonio wants to help Bassanio win Portia, and is willing to do anything to achieve this goal. Antonio is the sea captain who fishes Sebastian out of the ocean and saves his life. He's a relatively minor character in the play, but his relationship with Sebastian is fascinating for the way it dramatizes male bonds Antonio is the title character in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. An influential,

powerful, and wealthy nobleman of Venice, he is a middle-aged man and a merchant by trade who has his financial interests tied up in overseas shipments when the play begins. Wikipedia

Beatrice: Beatrice, the niece of Leonato, who is governor of Messina, and Hero's cousin in Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing. Beatrice is a feisty, witty foil to her docile, gentle cousin and a perfect match for Benedick, who also shuns marriage. The rest of the characters set Beatrice up with Benedick and she willingly falls for him. She is strong-willed, passionate and defends her cousin's honour when everyone else abandons Hero. Beatrice is one of the most delightful characters in all of Shakespeare — certainly one of the most talkative and witty. She is likely to touch a responsive chord with many readers and playgoers today in light of current social ideas that encourage greater equality and self-assertiveness for women than has been traditional for women of the Western world. The traditional woman of the Elizabethan period, especially of Beatrice's class, is better represented by her cousin Hero — the naive, chaste, and quiet young woman of whom Beatrice is extremely protective. Beatrice is as cunning and forward as Hero is naive and shy.

Beatrice often interrupts or speaks her mind without concern about decorum. Her first line interrupts the conversation between Leonato and the messenger and is loaded with sarcasm and bitterness. Throughout the play, she is very clever with words, displaying considerable intellectual faculty as well as a natural ability for humor. And her way with words is sharpened when the object of her humor is Benedick.

Beatrice's unexplained bitterness toward Benedick is displayed right from the beginning. Then we begin to realize she has been hurt by him. Still stinging from past experiences with him, now she greets him with scorn, wariness, and anger. Eventually we recognize that desire and affection for him are still buried within her. She has learned to use humor and insults to disguise deeper emotions. Yet, when she overhears Hero describing her faults, she is surprised at how she is perceived by others: "Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?" She vows to abandon her habits of contempt and pride, and also to let herself love Benedick openly.

De Flores: When he tells Beatrice of his love, she regrets that five days ago she was promised in marriage to Alonzo de Piracquo. De Flores enters the scene; he is the servant of Vermandero, Beatrice's father. Beatrice despises De Flores, but he is in love with her and persists in seeing her at every opportunity. De Flores is a servant of Vermandero, Beatrice's father. He has an ugly appearance, particularly the skin on his face. De Flores is known to most people as an honest man, and Vermandero thinks highly of him. But in fact De Flores has no ethical sense at all, and his besetting sin is his sexual obsession with Beatrice. He invents any little excuse to go and see her, even though she loathes him and insults him. He is ready to endure such humiliations simply to have a glimpse of her. De Flores is more experienced and worldly-wise than Beatrice, and when she hints to him that she would like to see Alonzo murdered, he at once sees how he can use the opportunity to blackmail her into sexual submission. After he has killed Alonzo, he ignores Beatrice's attempts to buy him off, insisting that he will only be satisfied by his sexual enjoyment of her.

NOTES

Having outwitted and outmaneuvered her, he has his desire. Then, when Beatrice is threatened by the fact that Diaphanta has not returned from Alsemero's bed, it is De Flores who thinks up a scheme to save her. De Flores is so efficient in planning and acting upon it that Beatrice convinces herself that he is a man worth loving, because he takes such good care of her. Although De Flores does have some moments when his conscience troubles him, when his crimes are discovered, he remains defiant. He kills himself and Beatrice so they can be together in hell. De Flores arrives, and Alsemero locks De Flores and Beatrice in his closet while waiting to bring them to justice. Once the rest of the characters arrive, including Alibius, Isabella, Antonio, and Franciscus, Alsemero reveals that Beatrice and De Flores murdered Alonzo. In the closet, De Flores fatally stabs Beatrice and himself. The two confess their crimes, then die. De Flores is thankful to have taken Beatrice for himself and does not regret his crime. Beatrice asks for forgiveness and welcomes death as an ending to her shame. Justice has been restored, and everyone is changed. Alsemero offers to be a new brother to Tomazo and a son to Vermandero, to relieve their grief and replace their loved ones lost to tragedy.

Diaphanta: is Beatrice's maid who flirts with Jasperino. At Beatrice's request, she takes Beatrice's place in Alsemero's bed on the wedding night. Beatrice thinks Diaphanta is a little too eager to accept the assignment and wonders whether she really is a virgin. But she is satisfied when she gives Diaphanta the test for virginity prescribed in a medical book, and the maid passes it. But Diaphanta apparently enjoys her love-making with Alsemero since she fails to return at midnight, as she had promised. When the first streaks of dawn appear in the sky, De Flores sets fire to Diaphanta's chamber, to lure her home. When the alarm is sounded about the fire, Diaphanta rushes back to her chambers, where she meets her death in the flames, just as De Flores had intended. Beatrice's maid who replaces Beatrice in Alsemero's bed so that Beatrice can be proven a virgin. That evening, Diaphanta sleeps with Alsemero for hours longer than planned. Beatrice feels betrayed and knows she can no longer trust Diaphanta. De Flores sets a fire in Diaphanta's bedroom and murders her for Beatrice. As Beatrice becomes further entrenched in a labyrinth of murder and secrets, she decides she loves De Flores.

Franciscus: is an employee of Vermandero who gets a leave of absence. He uses it to disguise himself as a madman and enter the lunatic asylum, where his purpose is to declare his love for Isabella. For a while he acts like a madman, but then sends Isabella a love letter, which unfortunately for him is intercepted by Lollio. Franciscus is arrested along with Antonio on suspicion of the murder of Alonzo, and would have been hanged had the truth not come out.

Isabella: is the young wife of Alibius. She is attractive to men and her old husband fears that her affections may stray. Confined to a room where she may only meet the inmates of the lunatic asylum rather than the visitors, she finds herself subject to the unwanted romantic attentions of Antonio and Franciscus. She also has to fend off an attempted seduction by Lollio. Isabella's common sense and good judgment are contrasted with Beatrice's complete lack of those qualities.

Jasperino: is Alsemero's friend. He expresses surprise at Alsemero's sudden change of plans after he falls in love with Beatrice, and decides that he will entertain himself by

seducing Diaphanta, who seems more than willing to be seduced. Jasperino later reports to Alsemero that he and Diaphanta have overheard incriminating conversation between De Flores and Beatrice.

Lollio: is Alibius's servant. Alibius charges him with ensuring that none of the visitors to the lunatic asylum are allowed to see Isabella. Lollio, who wants to seduce Isabella himself, readily agrees. He introduces Franciscus and then Antonio to Isabella, not realizing that they are only pretending to be madman and fool, respectively. When Lollio tries to kiss Isabella, she rebuffs him severely, telling him that if he does not stop, she will get Antonio to cut his throat. Lollio then tries to set Antonio and Franciscus against each other by telling each man separately that Isabella is in love with them.

Pedro: is Antonio's friend who takes him to the lunatic asylum.

Alonzo: de Piracquo is a nobleman who when the play begins is engaged to marry Beatrice. Beatrice's father thinks very highly of him and is pleased that he is going to he his son-in-law. But Beatrice quickly loses interest in Alonzo when she meets Alsemero. Alonzo's brother Tomazo warns him not to marry Beatrice but he does not listen. He is murdered by De Flores as De Flores shows him around Vermandero's castle.

Tomazo: de Piracquo is Alonzo's brother. He sees that Beatrice does not love Alonzo, and advises him not to marry her. After the murder of Alonzo, Tomazo comes to Vermandero's castle, seeking revenge, but he does not know the identity of the murderer. At first he is courteous to De Flores, thinking him an honest man (Act 4, scene 1), but later (Act 5, scene 2) takes an instinctive dislike to him and strikes him. At the end of the play he is satisfied that justice has been done.

Vermandero: is Beatrice's father. He occupies a high position in Alicant society, since he lives in a castle and is attended by servants and has other employees. He is an old friend of Alsemero's late father, so is well-disposed to Alsemero. He is a good-hearted man, hospitable and honorable who is forced in the final scene of the play to watch in dismay as the evil acts are revealed and his own daughter is killed.

5.4 THE CHANGELING THEMES

RELIGION AND SIN

The religious symbols and allusions replete throughout The Changeling serve two purposes: They support the play's critique of Catholic Spain and emphasize Beatrice's moral fall. The Changeling was originally performed in 1622, a time when many in Jacobean England—which was predominantly Protestant—were suspicious of Spain. King James I of England ruled with a policy of peace and tried to align with Spain through several royal marriages. However, these policies were unpopular among the public and faced critique in literature produced during the period. By setting The Changeling in Alicante, Spain, Middleton and Rowley write characters who uphold Spanish Catholic ideals. However, these characters fall toward madness and sin as the play progresses. The tragic crimes and strong religious allusions outlined in the play offer a negative critique of Spanish society and England's proposed alliance with the country. The play also develops religious allusions to condemn Beatrice's actions and emphasize her fate, which represents the

NOTES

fall of man and "original sin." The play establishes its religious commentary by starting outside a church, where Alsemero falls in love with Beatrice. Beatrice is portrayed as beautiful and virtuous, comparable to "man's first creation" (1.1.8). Alsemero intends to marry Beatrice, legitimizing his attraction to her in the eyes of God.

5.5 REVIEW QUESTIONS

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Who was William Rowley?**
2. **Who was Tomazo?**
3. **Who was the Author of the Changeling?**
4. **How much Character in this play?**
5. **Explain the theme of the play?**

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

1. **Analyse the character of The Changeling?**
2. **How would you analyse the character of De Flores?**
3. **Analyse the character of Antonio?**
4. **Discuss about the play?**
5. **Analyse the character of De Flores in brief?**

5.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. **Who was The Changeling written by?**
   a. Thomas Middleton
   b. William Rowley
   c. Shakespeare
   d. Thomas Middleton and William Rowley
2. **De Flores is a _____ of Vermandero?**
   a. Servant
   b. Wife
   c. Doctor
   d. Daughter
3. **Alibius is a jealous_____?**
   a. Servant
   b. Old doctor
   c. Husband
   d. Son
4. **Who meets and falls in love with _____?**
   a. Alibius
   b. De flores
   c. Tomazo
   d. Beatrice

5. Vermandero is Beatrice's _____?

a. Brother
b. Father
c. Son
d. Doctor

6. He is an old friend of _____ late father?

a. Alsemeros
b. Vermandero
c. Beatrice
d. Tomazo

7. At the end of the play he is satisfied that justice has been done?

a. Happy
b. Satisfied
c. Proud
d. Frustrate

8. The Changeling was originally performed in _____?

a. 1995
b. 1887
c. 1622
d. 1876

9. It was first performed in 1622 and published in _____?

a. 1660
b. 1654
c. 1653
d. 1671

10. 20 plays known to have been written by Rowley?

a. 15
b. 20
c. 30
d. 20

♦♦♦♦♦

ANSWER KEY

UNIT I

QUESTION	ANSWER	QUESTION	ANSWER
1.	c.	6.	c.
2.	d.	7.	d.
3.	a.	8.	c.
4.	b.	9.	a.
5.	b.	10.	a.

UNIT II

QUESTION	ANSWER	QUESTION	ANSWER
1.	b.	6.	c.
2.	d.	7.	a.
3.	a.	8.	d.
4.	b.	9.	a.
5.	c.	10.	b.

UNIT III

QUESTION	ANSWER	QUESTION	ANSWER
1.	d.	6.	b.
2.	b.	7.	a.
3.	a.	8.	d.
4.	c.	9.	d.
5.	a.	10.	c.

UNIT IV

QUESTION	ANSWER	QUESTION	ANSWER
1.	a.	6.	c.
2.	c.	7.	a.
3.	b.	8.	d.
4.	d.	9.	b.
5.	b.	10.	a.

UNIT V

QUESTION	ANSWER	QUESTION	ANSWER
1.	a.	6.	a.
2.	a.	7.	b.
3.	b.	8.	c.
4.	d.	9.	c.
5.	b.	10	d.

NOTE

NOTE

Suggestive Reading

Books

- Bloom, Harold. Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999.
- Bradley, A. C. Shakespearean Tragedy. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, reprint edition 2007.
- Eliot, T. S. “Hamlet and His Problems.” In The Sacred Wood. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, reprint edition 1997.
- Frye, Northrop. Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy. Toronto: University of
- Toronto Press, reprint edition 1996.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. Hamlet in Purgatory. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Husain, Adrian A. Politics and Genre in Hamlet. New York: Oxford University Press, reprint edition 2007.
- Kerrigan, Wililam. Hamlet’ s Perfection. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Kinney, Arthur F. Hamlet: Critical Essays. Oxford, UK: Routledge, Inc., 2001.
- Wilson, John Dover. What Happens in Hamlet. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1951.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. Caliban. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992.
- Graff, Gerald, and James Phelan, eds. The Tempest: A Case Study in Critical Controversy. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000.
- Gurr, Andrew. The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Murphy, Patrick M., ed. The Tempest: Critical Essays. New York: Garland, 2000.
- Palmer, D., ed. Shakespeare: The Tempest: A Casebook. Nashville: Aurora Publishers, 1970.
- Richards, Jennifer, and James Knowles, eds. Shakespeare’s Late Plays: New Readings. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

- Smith, Hallett Darius, ed. The Tempest: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969.
- Vaughan, Virginia Mason, and Alden T. Vaughan, eds. Critical Essays on Shakespeare's The Tempest. New York: G. K. Hall, 1998.
- Hollis, Jason, "Elizabeth Sawyer, the Witch of Edmonton", Spooky Isles, Mar. 11, 2015.
- [Online].
- Herrington, H.W., (1919) "Witchcraft and Magic in the Elizabethan Drama", The Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 32, No. 126, pp 447-485.
- Spoto, Stephanie Irene, (2010) "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power". Pacific Coast
- Philology, No. 45, pp 53-70.
- Anderson, Alan. & Raymond Gordon, (1978) "Witchcraft and the Status of Women—The Case of England", The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp 171-184.
- Thomas, Keith (1991) Religion and the Decline of Magic, Penguin Books.
- Sawyer, Ronald C, (1989) "'Strangely Handled in All Her Lyms': Witchcraft and Healing in Jacobean England", Journal of Social History, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp 461-485.
- Neureiter, Suzanne, (1995) "Mapping Early Modern English Witchcraft: A Study of Pamphlet, Treatise, and Drama", Ph. D dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.
- Marlowe, Christopher (2005) The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, Routledge.
- Acquinas, Thomas (1947) Compendium of Theology, St. Louis.
- Acquinas, Thomas (1981) Summa Theologica, Christian Classics.
- O'Brien. & Margaret Anne, (1970) "Christian Belief in Doctor Faustus", ELH, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp 1-11.
- Greene, Robert (1963) The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe, Perimedes the Blacksmith.
- International Journal of Humanities, Art and Social Studies (IJHAS) Vol.2, No.2, May 2021.
- The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Franciscan", in Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2019.

- Coffin, Judith. Robert Stacey. Joshua Cole. & Carol Symes (2011) Western Civilizations, W. W. Norton & Company.
- Dekker, Thomas, (2014) Thomas Dekker. Project Gutenberg. [E-book] Available: Project
- Gutenberg.
- Shakespeare, William (2009) The Tempest, Cambridge University Press.
- Brome, Richard. & Thomas Heywood, (2010) The Late Lancashire Witches. Richard Brome Online. [E-book] Available: Richard Brome Online.
- Kent, E.J., (2005) "Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680", History Workshop Journal, No. 60, pp 69-92.
- Thomas, Keith (1986) The Written Word: Literacy in Transition, Clarendon Press.
- Stearne, John (1648) A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft, London.
- Charlton, Kenneth (2002) A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing, Blackwell.
- King James the First (1924) Daemonologie, The Bodley Head Ltd.
- Middleton, Thomas (1994) The Witch, A. & C. Black.
- "The History of Erectile Dysfunction", First Med Consulting, 2018.
- Forth, Christopher E, (2008) "Impotence: A Cultural History (review)", Bulletin of the History of Medicine, Vol. 82, No. 4, pp 925-927.
- McLaren, Angus (2007) Impotence: A Cultural History, The University of Chicago Press.
- Verhulst, Johan, (2008) "Impotence: A Cultural History: by Angus McLaren. Chicago and

  London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007, 332 pages, $30.00 (hardback)", Taylor &

  Francis, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp 283.
- Fletcher, John. & Francis Beaumont (1966–96) The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and
- Fletcher Canon, Cambridge University Press.
- Bain, Joseph (1894) Calendar of Letters and Papers Relating to the Affairs of the Boarders of England and Scotland, Edinburgh.
- Young, Michael B (1999) James VI and I and the History of Homosexuality, Macmillan.

- Harrison, G.B (1966) King James the First Daemonologie (1597) [and] Newes from Scotland, New York.
- Findlay, Alison, (2013) The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories, Manchester University.