

# **MODULE 1 - ENGLISH DRAMA**

---

## **UNIT 1 □ THE RISE AND GROWTH OF ENGLISH DRAMA**

---

### **Structure**

- 1.0 Objectives**
- 1.1 Middle English Dramatic Representations-Miracle Plays**
- 1.2 Middle English Dramatic Representations-Morality Plays**
- 1.3 The Interlude**
- 1.4 Influence of the Renaissance**
- 1.5 The Theatre in Elizabethan England**
- 1.6 Theatre and Contemporary Society**
- 1.7 The University Wits**
  - 1.7.1 Christopher Marlowe**
- 1.8 William Shakespeare**
- 1.9 Jacobean Dramatists**
  - 1.9.1 Ben Jonson**
  - 1.9.2 Webster**
- 1.10 The Collapse of Drama**
- 1.11 The Restoration**
  - 1.11.1 William Congreve**
- 1.12 Sentimental Drama**
- 1.13 Anti-Sentimental Comedy**
- 1.14 Comprehension Exercises**
- 1.15 Works Cited**

---

## **1.0 OBJECTIVES**

---

The objective of this Unit is to trace the dynamic socio-cultural processes involved in the rise of English drama in its most rudimentary form in the Middle English period. The Unit also studies in some detail the flourish of this drama in the Elizabethan period and its meandering movements in subsequent ages till the beginnings of modernity.

---

## **1.1 MIDDLE ENGLISH DRAMATIC REPRESENTATIONS MIRACLE PLAYS**

---

The earliest history of English drama holds great importance to an understanding of how the instinct for dramatic expression makes itself felt in human communities. It could also make for interesting study of the workings of popular imagination and equally enlighten us on the evolution of themes and conventions prevalent in later and more mature drama.

As with the early stages of most civilizations, drama and religious ritual were inextricably bound up in England too, The history of English drama thus begins, in its most rudimentary form, with the elaboration of the ecclesiastical (related to the Church) liturgy (series of rites to be followed in any public Worship) in catechistical dialogues. As a medium of oral instruction, such mutual question -answer pattern simplified the understanding of religious doctrines for the common man; from the perspective of enactment, it brought about the first inklings of an emergent dramatic repertoire. Thus two very integrally related aspects of social life came to be connected with each other as a matter of natural choice.

The rituals of the Christian church with its major festivals like Christmas and Easter, along with the observance of the significant points in Christ's life was inherently filled with dramatic potential. The ceremonies with, which, these events were celebrated lent themselves naturally to dramatization of sons, This could be anything between simple antiphonal chanting between priest and choir to more vivid acting out of scenes by sets of characters. These 'tropes' or dramatic elaborations of the liturgy significantly mark the earliest beginnings of medieval drama.

Quite naturally, the tropes began to gain increasing popularity by virtue of being alive visual medium; and soon the original devotional ritual of the feast days started getting over shadowed. The elaboration of the plays necessitated first, the introduction of minor clerics; and then laymen as actors - all this in addition to the choir that had been enacting till then through songs. In keeping with the demands of common understanding, vernacular gradually began to replace Latin as the language of the plays. Till a time, the church premises sufficed to accommodate the audience, but once they began to attend in burgeoning numbers, the performances started moving out of the precincts of the church into the market-place or a convenient meadow. This change, of space was much more, than just a physical reality; the liberation of liturgical drama from the church premises brought forth plays in English that did not have much to do with liturgical representation per se. For their subject matter they did retain the semblance of a religious nature but/and elements from minstrel performances to folk idioms all began to co-exist with stories of the Old Testament and lives of Jesus and the saints. The 'theatre' of this time came to be known as the **Miracle Play**.

From the clergy, control over these performances passed first to the religious and social guilds and then to-trade guilds under the supervision of the Town Council. Since these performances were held in open-air stages, they had to take note of the seasons and so, most Miracle cycles attached themselves to the feast of Corpus Christi in May/June. At this time of the year, the weather would be favourable and the hours of daylight long. The shows were staged on 'pageants' or wagons with wheels that could be moved from one place to another. The most important cycles were **Chester** with 25. plays, Wakefield with 30 plays. **Coventry** with 42 plays and **York** with 48 plays to their oeuvre. By modern standards, a wagon stage could not be considered any more than primitive, but facts show that considerable ingenuity was exhibited in the arrangement of the superstructure and the stage properties. It may rightly be said that the Miracle play contained the seeds of both serious and comic drama that, flourished in England in the 16th and 17th centuries.

---

## 1.2 MIDDLE ENGLISH DRAMATIC REPRESENTATIONS - MORALITY PLAYS

---

Right when the Miracle plays were at their prime, another medieval form of drama known as the **Morality Play** began to emerge. It was of a greater length than the former and was divided into Acts and Scenes as in the Senecan tradition. In this sense, the Morality play established a more direct connection with the Elizabethan dramatic tradition. Many Morality pieces were written to be performed for more aristocratic audiences and they were mostly enacted by professional actors. They are also important because it is in the Moralities that we find for the first time, indications of individual authorship and the **humanistic** zeal of the Renaissance. The Morality plays further differ from the Miracle plays in that they do not deal with Biblical or even pseudo-Biblical stories, but create personified abstractions like Life, Death, Repentance, Goodness, Love, Greed and such virtues and vices in the main. These human qualities are shown as struggling for supremacy over the soul of man. The Moralities may therefore be regarded as the dramatic counterpart of allegorical poetry that was the common norm in medieval England. These plays handled subjects that were popular among religious preachers and so they relied considerably on contemporary homiletic (methods used to impart lectures on moral themes) techniques. Though there are references to Morality plays in the 14<sup>th</sup> century itself, the 15<sup>th</sup> century seems to have been the period of its full development. The earliest complete extant Morality play is *The Castle of Preseverance*, written probably around 1425; while the best known and perhaps the most appealing of the surviving 15<sup>th</sup> century Moralities is *Everyman*. In this play the action is developed with ; simple dignity and personified abstractions play their parts with forceful dramatic logic. Critics are of the opinion that the play has some links with a Dutch Morality play and might as well have been a translation from the original Dutch.

---

## 1.3 THE INTERLUDE

---

The last stage in this process of the metamorphosis from the Miracle to the drama proper is the **Interlude**; a type of Morality play equally allegorical but will more pronounced realistic and comic elements. An Interlude was a kind of a shot

play having real characters, employing broad farce and using set scenes -a unique feature in English drama. In this sense, the Interlude could be considered an advancement upon the Morality play.

The most gifted writer of Interludes was John Heywood, one of his best plays being **The Four P's**, composed in doggerel (an irregular metre mostly used to produce comic effect) verse describing a lying match between a Pedlar, a Palmer, a Pardoner and a Potycary.

On close examination it will be found that the political, ethical and. religious Moralities of the early Tudor period show a movement from presenting allegorical personifications of virtues and vices to the fates of individual characters. This is indeed a movement towards dramatic maturity, in keeping with the emergent humanistic spirit of the Renaissance. This transition however was not a singular event, nor did it occur suddenly. In fact, allegorical, Biblical and historic Morality plays existed well into the 16th century and we have *Respublica*, probably by Nicholas Udall, which is a mix of older religion with new political themes. At this time Classicism began to exert its influence on emerging English drama, and the results of this new combination are evident in Udall's play **Ralph Roister Doister** which came about in 1553. It is an adaptation from the Roman playwright Plautus' play *Miles Glorfasits*, and introduces the figure of the braggan (loud, arrogant boaster) soldier into English drama. It is commonly felt that Shakespeare might have had this tradition in mind when he created the character of Falstaff in several of his plays. The next important play of this kind, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, in 1562 probably by William Stevenson, is a domestic comedy representing the life of the English peasantry. This first wholly English comedy abounds in fun and humour (though coarse) and is for that very reason, wonderfully true to (the-life that it represents. Here again we find Plautine themes and characters domiciled in a comedy of English rural life.

---

## 1.4 INFLUENCE OF THE RENAISSANCE

---

The inclination towards classical elements made it inevitable that humanist interest in the Latin and Greek classics should also manifest itself in the field of Tragedy. The favourite classical writer of tragedies among English humanists was

Seneca, the Latin writer of violent tragedies. The first English tragedy, *Gorboduc*, by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton is thus essentially Senecan both in, plot and plan. It is a tale in five Acts of a divided kingdom, civil war and the resultant effects of split authority in the State. It follows the classical manner in being sententious, rhetorical and supremely dull. Nonetheless, *Gorboduc* has historical importance in that it is the first English tragedy, more so because it is a maiden triumph in blank verse.

The influence of the Renaissance, was felt very strongly in the fields of drama and poetry. It is clear from the nature of content found in the Interludes that the move away from the didactic nature of the earlier plays toward purely secular plays was quite prominent in them. Not only were plays shifting emphasis, from teaching to entertaining; they were also slowly changing focus from the religious towards the political and broad humanistic themes. Around the 1530's, the first **History Plays** came to be written, the most notable of which was John Bale's *King Johan*. While it considered matters of morality and religion, these were handled in the light of the Reformation. These plays set the precedent of presenting history in the dramatic medium and laid the foundations for what would later be elevated by Marlowe and Shakespeare into the English History Play, or Chronicle Play, in the latter part of the century.

---

## **1.5 THE THEATRE IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND**

---

The history of the Elizabethan Theatre started with the wandering minstrels who moved from one castle and town to the next. Any strangers were treated with suspicion during the Elizabethan era, and this also applied to wandering actors, especially when many horrific outbreaks of the Bubonic Plague transpired. The reputations of Elizabethan actors were that of vagabonds and thieves. Travelling throughout the era was restricted, and required a license. Regulations restricting actors soon followed and Licenses were granted to the nobles of England for the maintenance of troupes of players. Thus the Elizabethan Acting Troupes were formed. With the opening of the first English theatre in London, The Red Lion (1567) in Whitechapel by John Brayne, we have, what may be called the systematic beginnings of early modern English drama. This former farm, converted into a single gallery multi-sided theatre; was however a short

lived attempt to provide a purpose built play house for the touring theatrical companies of Tudor England. The venture was soon replaced by a more successful collaboration between Brayne and a brother-in-law of his, the actor-manager James Burbage at Shoreditch known as **The Theatre**. **The Red Lion** was a receiving house for touring companies, whereas **The Theatre** accepted long-term engagements, essentially in repertory, with companies being based there. The former was a continuation of the tradition of touring groups, performing at inns and grand houses, the later a radically new form of theatrical engagement. The public theatres had circular arenas, a stage was set at one end of the open courtyard and the auditorium was open to the sky. The private theatres were enclosed halls with the stage lightened by candles, Jumps or torches (plays were given during the night). Either circular or octagonal, the playhouses had three tiers of balconies surrounding the pit, where the stage was set. It was called the “apron stage” due to the platform, which consisted of the front or main stage. There would be a ‘gallery above the upper stage which would serve as a balcony, or to signify walls of cities as part of the setting. Below the gallery were curtains, which were occasionally drawn back so that a rear or inner stage was provided.

The first so to say proper theatre built in London by James Burbage, in 1576, was located outside the city jurisdiction, so the mayor and council had no right concerning the theatre. Soon, another theatre **The Curtain** was built by Richard Farrant. **The Rose**, owned by Philip Henslowe, kept the detailed record of all the expenses and sources of income, which are now an important insight into that time. **The Globe**, later owned by Shakespeare and Hemminge, was a model for a number of theatres built later on. Usually built of timber, lath and plaster and with thatched roofs, the early theatres were vulnerable to fire, and were replaced (when necessary) with stronger structures. When **The Globe** burned down in June 1613, it was rebuilt with a tile roof; when **The Fortune** burned down in December 1621, it was rebuilt in brick (and apparently was no longer square). Around 1580, when both **The Theatre and The Curtain** were full on summer days, the total theatre capacity of London was about 5000 spectators. With the building of new theatre facilities and the formation of new companies, the capital’s total theatre

capacity exceeded 10,000 after 1610. In 1580, the poorest citizens could purchase admittance to the **Curtain** or the **Theatre** for a penny; in 1640, their counterparts could gain admittance to the **Globe**, the Cockpit, or the **Red Bull**—for exactly the same price. Ticket prices at the private theatres were however five or six times higher at this time.

---

## 1.6 THEATRE AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

---

The growing population of London, the growing wealth of its people and their fondness for spectacle produced a dramatic literature of remarkable variety, quality, and extent. Although most of the plays written for the Elizabethan stage have been lost; over 600 remain, The profession of a dramatist at this time was however challenging and far from lucrative They were normally paid in increments during the writing process, and if their play was accepted, they would also receive the proceeds from one day's performance. However, they had no ownership of the plays they wrote. Once a play was sold to a company, the company owned it, and the playwright had no control over casting, performance, revision or publication. Entries in Philip Henslowe's Diary show that in the years around 1600 Henslowe, paid as little as £6 or £7 per play. This was probably at the low end of the range, though even the best waters could not demand too much more. A playwright, working alone, could generally produce two plays a year at most; in the 1630s Richard Brome signed a contract with the Salisbury Court Theatre to supply three plays a year, but found himself unable to meet the workload. Shakespeare produced fewer than 40 solo plays in a career that spanned more than two decades; he was financially successful because he was an- actor and, most importantly, a shareholder in the company for which he acted and in the theatres they used. Ben Jonson achieved success as a purveyor of Court masques and was talented at playing the patronage game that was an important pan of the social and economic life of the era. Those who were playwrights pure and simple fared far less well; the biographies of early figures like George Peele and Robert Greene, and later ones like Bromc and Philip Massinger. are marked by financial uncertainty, struggle, and poverty.



Playwrights dealt with the natural limitation on their productivity by combining into teams of two, three, four, and even five to generate play texts; the majority of plays written in this era were collaborations, and the solo artists who generally eschewed collaborative efforts, like Jonson and Shakespeare, were the exceptions to the rule. Dividing the work, of course, meant dividing the income; but the arrangement seems to have functioned well enough to have made it worthwhile. Henslowe's Diary indicates that a team of four or five writers could produce a play in as little as two weeks.

Along with the economics of the profession, the character of the drama too began to change toward the end of the period. Under Elizabeth, the drama was a unified expression as far as social class was concerned: the Court watched the same plays the commoners saw in the public playhouses. With the development of the private theatres, drama became more oriented toward the tastes and values of an upper-class audience. By the later part of the reign of Charles I, few new plays were being written for the public theatres, which sustained themselves on the accumulated works of the previous decades. But before we come to that, it would be worthwhile to have an overall view of the unprecedented flourish of drama in the Elizabethan-period.

---

## **1.7 THE UNIVERSITY WITS**

---

These young men all of whom, are associated with Oxford and Cambridge did much to found the Elizabethan school of drama. Under strong influence of the Latin playwright Seneca, these plays had less emphasis on the unity of dramatic dialogue, fewer chorus songs. Not interested in the action, these were more detailed in creating a dramatic tension by words; it had unrealistic usage of monologue, a rhetorical and pathetic chorus, and an exaggerated disastrous event with horrific climax. The limelight was on the unity of theme, the machinery of tragic spectacle, the introduction of ghosts, and the five-act structure.

The characteristics of the University Wits :

1. A fondness for heroic or tragic themes, in which they treated the lives of great men,
2. Rich language (usage of figures of speech for extreme scenes of violent emotions, and actions).
3. Scarcity or complete lack of humour.
4. University education; freelance literates or employed by the court.

The university wits were the notable group of pioneer English dramatists who wrote during the last 15 years of the 16th century and who transformed the native interlude and chronicle play with their plays of quality and diversity.

The university wits include Christopher Marlowe, Robert Greene, and Thomas Nashe (all graduates of Cambridge), as well as Thomas Lodge and George Peele (both of Oxford). Another of the wits, though not university-trained, was Thomas Kyd, Preceded by John Lyly (an Oxford man), they prepared the way for William Shakespeare. The greatest poetic dramatist among them was Marlowe, whose handling of blank verse gave the theatre its characteristic voice for the next 50 years.

Chronologically speaking both Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd should be regarded as Shakespeare's contemporaries' rather than his predecessors. What Kyd and Marlowe introduced, Shakespeare refined.

### **1.7.1 Christopher Marlowe**

Christopher Marlowe, (baptized Feb. 26, 1564, Canterbury, Kent, Eng.—died May 30, 1593, Deptford, near London), is noted especially for his establishment of dramatic blank verse.

In a playwriting career that spanned little more than six years, Marlowe's achievements were diverse and splendid. Perhaps before leaving Cambridge he had already written *Tamburlaine the Great* (in two parts, both performed by the end of 1587; published 1590). Almost certainly during his later Cambridge years, Marlowe had translated Ovid's *Amores* (*The Loves*) and the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* from the Latin. About this time he also wrote the play *Dido, Queen of*

*Carthage* (published in 1594 as the joint work of Marlowe and Thomas Nashe). With the production of *Tamburlaine* he received recognition and acclaim, and play writing became his major concern in the few years that lay ahead. Both parts of *Tamburlaine* were published anonymously in 1590, and the publisher omitted certain passages that he found incongruous with the play's serious concern with history; even so, the extant *Tamburlaine* text can be regarded as substantially Marlowe's. No other of his plays or poems or translations was published during his life. His unfinished but splendid poem *Hero and Leander*—which is almost certainly the finest non-dramatic Elizabethan poem apart from those produced by Edmund—appeared in 1598.

There is argument among scholars concerning the order in which the plays subsequent to *Tamburlaine* were written. It is not uncommonly held that *Faustus* quickly followed *Tamburlaine* and that then Marlowe turned to a more neutral, more "social" kind of writing in *Edward III* and *The Massacre at Paris*. His last play may have been *The Jew of Malta*, in which he signally broke new ground. It is known that *Tamburlaine*, *Faustus*, and *The Jew of Malta* were performed by the Admiral's, a company whose outstanding actor was Edward Alleyn, who most certainly played Tamburlaine, Patience, and Barabas the Jew,

In the earliest of Marlowe's plays, the two-part *Tamburlaine the Great* (c.1587; published 1590), Marlowe's characteristic "**mighty line**" (as Ben Jonson called it) established blank verse as the staple medium for later Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatic writing.

Marlowe's most famous play is *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*; but it has survived only in a corrupt form, and its date of composition has been much-disputed. It was first published in 1604, and another version appeared in 1616. *Faustus* takes over the dramatic framework of the plays in its presentation of a story of temptation, fall, and damnation—and its free use of morality figures such as the good angel and the bad angel and the seven deadly sins, along with the devils Lucifer and Mephistopheles.

In *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*, Marlowe portrays another power-hungry figure in the Jew Barabas, who in the villainous society of-Christian

Malta shows no scruple in self-advancement. But this figure is more closely incorporated within his society than Tamburlaine, the supreme conqueror, or Faustus, the lonely adventurer against God.

Apart from *Tamburlaine* and the minor work *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (of uncertain date, published 1594 and written in collaboration with Thomas Nashe), *Edward II* is the only one of Marlowe's plays whose extant text can be relied on as adequately representing the author's manuscript. And certainly *Edward II* is a major work, not merely one of the first Elizabethan plays on an English historical theme. The relationships linking the king, his neglected queen, the king's favourite, Gaveston, and the ambitious Mortimer are studied with detached sympathy and remarkable understanding: no character here is lightly disposed of, and the abdication and the brutal murder of Edward show the same dark and violent imagination as appeared in Marlowe's presentation of Faustus' last hour. Though this play, along with *The Jew* and *The Massacre*, shows Marlowe's fascinated response to the distorted Elizabethan idea of Machiavelli, it more importantly shows Marlowe's deeply suggestive awareness of the nature of disaster, the power of society, and the dark extent of an individual's suffering.

---

## 1.8 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

---

William Shakespeare absorbed Marlowe so completely that there is no Marlowe in Shakespeare. The same may be said regarding Kyd's influence on him as well. Shakespeare not only imbibes what best in Kyd and Marlowe he also avoids cleverly their lapses,

Shakespeare arrived in London probably sometime in the late 1580s. He was in his mid-20s. It is not known how he got started in the theatre or for what acting companies he wrote his early plays, which are not easy to date. Indicating a time of apprenticeship, these plays show a more direct debt to London dramatists of the 1580s and to Classical examples than do his later works. He learned a great deal about writing plays by imitating the successes of the London theatre, as any young poet and budding dramatist might do.

*Titus Andronicus* (c. 1589-92) is a case in point. As Shakespeare's first full-length tragedy\* it owes much of its theme, structure, and language to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*^ which was a huge success in the late 1580s. Kyd had hit on the formula of adopting the dramaturgy of Seneca (the younger), the great Stoic philosopher and statesman, to the needs of a burgeoning new London theatre.

Other than *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare did not experiment with formal tragedy in his early years. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (c. 1590-94), love and friendship does battle for the divided loyalties of the erring male until the generosity of his friend and, most of all, the enduring chaste loyalty of the two women bring Proteus to his senses. The motif of the young woman disguised as a male was to prove invaluable to Shakespeare in subsequent romantic comedies, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. As is generally true of Shakespeare, he derived the essentials of his plot from a narrative source, in this case a long Spanish prose romance, the *Diana* of Jorge de Montemayor.

Shakespeare's most classically inspired early comedy is *The Comedy of Errors* (c. 1589-94). Here he turned particularly to Plautus's farcical play called the *Menaechmi* (*Twins*). The story of one twin (Antipholus) looking for his lost brother, accompanied by a clever servant (Dromio) whose twin has also disappeared, results in a farce of mistaken identities that also thoughtfully explores issues of identity and self-knowing.

In *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1590-94), Shakespeare employs a device of multiple plotting that is to become a standard feature of his romantic comedies.

Shakespeare in 1590 or thereabouts had really only one viable model for the English history play, an anonymous and sprawling drama called *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* (1583-88) that told the saga of Henry IV's son, Prince Hal, from the days of his adolescent rebellion down through his victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415—in other words, the material that Shakespeare would later use in writing three major plays, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *Henry IV, Part 2*; and *Henry V*. Shakespeare chose to start not with Prince Hal but with more recent history in the reign of Henry V's son Henry VI and with

the civil wars that saw the overthrow of Henry VI by Edward IV and then the accession, to power in-1 of Richard III. This material proved to be so rich in themes and dramatic conflicts that he wrote four plays on it, a “tetralogy” extending from *Henry VI* in three parts (c. 1589-93) to *Richard III* (c. 1592-94).

The Shakespearean English history play told of the country’s history at a time when the English nation was struggling with its own sense of national identity and experiencing a new sense of power. Queen Elizabeth had brought stability and a relative freedom from war to her decades of rule, She had held at bay the Rorman Catholic powers of the Continent, notably Philip II of Spain, and, with the help of a storm at sea, had fought off Philip’s attempts to invade her kingdom with the great Spanis Armada of 1588, In England the triumph of the nation was viewed universally as a divine deliverance. The second edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* was at hand a vast source for Shakespeare’s historical playwriting. It, too, celebrated the mergence of England as a major Protestant power, led by a popular and astute monar

*Richard III* is a tremendous play, both in length and in the bravura depiction of its titular protagonist. It is called a tragedy on its original title page, as are other these early English history plays. Certainly they present us with brutal deaths and with instructive falls of great men from positions of high authority to degradation and misery. Yet these plays are not tragedies in the Classical sense of the term. They contain so much else, and notably they end on a major key: the accession to power of the Tudor dynasty that will give England its great years under Elizabeth. After having finished in 1589-94.the tetralogy about Henry VI, Edward IV, and Ricru III, bringing the story down to 1485, and then circa 1594-96 a play about John that deals with a chronological period (the 13th century) that sets it quite apart from 1 other history plays, Shakespeare turned to the late 14th and early 15th centuries and; to the chronicle of Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry’s legendary son Henry V This inversion of historical order in the two tetralogies allowed Shakespeare to finish his sweep of late medieval English history with Henry V, a hero king in a way that Richard III could never pretend to be.

*Richard II* (c. 1595-96), written throughout in blank verse, is a sombre play

about political impasse. It contains almost no humour, other than a wry scene in which the new king, Henry IV, must adjudicate the competing claims of the Duke of York and his Duchess

History proceeds without any sense of moral imperative. Henry IV is a more capable ruler, but his authority is tarnished by his crimes (including his seeming assent to the execution of Richard), and his own rebellion appears to teach the barons to rebel against him in turn.

Apart from the early *Titus Andronicus*, the only other play that Shakespeare wrote prior to 1599 that is classified as a tragedy is *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1594-96) which is quite untypical of the tragedies that are to follow. Written more or less at the time when Shakespeare was writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet* shares many of the characteristics of romantic comedy. Romeo and Juliet are not persons of extraordinary social rank or position, like Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. They are the boy and girl next door, interesting not for their philosophical ideas but for their appealing love for each other. They are character types more suited to Classical comedy in that they do not derive from the upper class. Their wealthy families are essentially bourgeois. The eagerness with which Capulet and his wife court Count Paris as their prospective son-in-law bespeaks their desire for social advancement.

The three problem plays dating from these years are *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well* is a comedy ending in acceptance of marriage, but in a way that poses thorny ethical issues.

*Measure for Measure* (c. 1603-04) similarly employs the bed trick, though in even murkier circumstances. *Troilus and Cressida* (c.1601-02) is the most experimental and puzzling of these three plays. Simply in terms of genre, it is virtually unclassifiable. It can hardly be a comedy, ending as it does in the deaths of Patroclus and Hector and the looming defeat of the Trojans.

*Hamlet* (c. 1599-1601), on the other hand, chooses a tragic model closer to that of *Titus Andronicus* and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. In form, *Hamlet* is a revenge tragedy. It features characteristics found in *Titus* as well: a protagonist



charged with the responsibility of avenging a heinous crime against the protagonist's family, a cunning antagonist, the appearance of the ghost of the murdered person, the feigning of madness to throw off the villain's suspicions, the play within the play as a means of testing the villain, and still more.

*Othello*, as a tragedy, the play skilfully exemplifies the traditional Classical model of a good man brought to misfortune by hamartia or tragic flaw; as Othello grieves, he is one who has "loved not wisely, but too well" (Act V, scene 2, line 354).

Daughters and fathers are also at the heart of the major dilemma in *King Lear*; In this configuration, Shakespeare does what he often does in his late plays: erase the wife from the picture, so that father and daughters) are left to deal with one another.

*Macbeth* is in some ways Shakespeare's most unsettling tragedy, because it invites the intense examination of the heart of a man who is well-intentioned in most ways but who discovers that he cannot resist the temptation to achieve power at any cost. His collapse of moral integrity confronts the audience and perhaps implicates it.

*Antony and Cleopatra* approaches human frailty in terms that are less spiritually terrifying. The story of the lovers is certainly one of worldly failure,

*The Tempest* (c. 1611) sums up much of what Shakespeare's mature art was all about. *The Tempest* seems to have been intended as Shakespeare's farewell to the theatre. It contains moving passages of reflection on what his powers as artist have been able to accomplish, and valedictory themes of closure. As a comedy, it demonstrates perfectly the way that Shakespeare was able to combine precise artistic construction (the play chooses on this farewell occasion to observe the Classical unities of time, place, and action) with his special flair for stories that transcend the merely human and physical : *The Tempest* is peopled with spirits, monsters, and drolleries. This, it seems, is Shakespeare's summation of his art as comic dramatist.

---

## 1.9 JACOBEAN DRAMATISTS

---

Historically, the Jacobean age spans between 1603-1625 that saw the death of Queen Elizabeth and the reign of James I. It is interesting that the best plays of



Shakespeare were written during these years and yet, Shakespeare is not considered a Jacobean dramatist. The term Jacobean is in fact indicative not so much of time as of quality and attitude reflected in literature. The Jacobean dramatists led by Ben Jonson are mostly Shakespeare's contemporaries. What makes them unique is the change that they wanted to bring about to sense and sensibilities of the theatre goers of that time by imparting to them the course on imitation of classical drama, the value restrain and realism. The Jacobean dramatists include Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Chapman, Marston, Dekker, Middleton, Heywood, Tournier and Webster. Of these writers Ben Jonson and Webster demand special attention.

### **1.9.1 Ben Jonson**

Ben Jonson wanted to convert the English stage and the theatre into a house of character analysis for the understanding of human nature. Jonson introduced with enough of confidence the new type of drama known as "Comedy of Humours" humour indicating psychological as well as physiological disposition determining the dominant tendency of an individual which in the long run becomes an inevitable type. Among his major plays are the comedies *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), *Volpone* (1606), *The Alchemist* (1610), and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614).

*Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man out of His Humour* establish Jonson as a significant writer. With its galleries of grotesques, its scornful detachment, and its rather academic effect, the plays introduced to the English stage a vigorous and direct anatomizing of "the time's deformities"—the language, habits, and humours of the contemporary London scene. The characters in *Every Man in His Humour* are based on the four humours of medieval physiology, bodily fluids that were held to influence personality or temperament.

*Volpone* (Italian for "sly fox") is a comedy by Ben Jonson first produced in 1606, drawing on elements of city comedy, black comedy and beast fable. A merciless satire of greed and lust, it remains Jonson's most-performed play, and it is among the finest Jacobean comedies. The play's clever fulfilment of the classical unities and vivid depiction of human folly have made *The Alchemist* one of the few Renaissance plays with a continuing life on stage. In the *Bartholomew Fair* Jonson uses this fair as the setting for an unusually detailed and diverse

panorama of London life in the early seventeenth century. The one day of fair life represented in the play allows Jonson ample opportunity not just to conduct his plot but also to depict the vivid life of the fair, from pickpockets and bullies to justices and slumming gallants, Jonson also uses the characters that he creates as a way to comment on the social, religious and political conflicts of London society in Jacobean England.

Thus we find Ben Jonson as a writer of rare qualities who excels for his “fine sense of form” and “the purpose for which the form was intended”.

### **1.9.2 Webster**

Webster (1580 -1625) is a full fledged Jacobean writer remarkable at once for his sombre and macabre genius, and it is primarily as a consummate writer of tragedy that Webster has carved a special niche in the history of British drama. The plots of Webster plays are well built and well designed. Webster dramatized dark aspects of life and human nature and showed the tragic results in terms of ambition, greed and lust that motivated his villains who were ultimately doomed and in the process the good were jolted for being good and honest.

*The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* are by and large regarded as two of Webster’s best plays. It is significant that these two plays are intended to set right the Elizabethan revenge tradition. Webster does not revive the subject of revenge to evoke sympathies for the avengers. He rather renders the act of nemesis to show the sympathy for innocent victims. Webster controls the theme of horror and builds tragedy as melodrama shows how he excels as a dramatist.

---

## **1.10 THE COLLAPSE OF DRAMA**

---

In 1642, under the force of the Puritans, the English Parliament issued an ordinance suppressing all stage plays in the theatres. The Puritans were a religious faction and the term came into general usage at the end of the reign of Queen Mary I (Bloody Mary). A broad definition of the puritans is ‘those who wanted to completely change the Church of England, with its Roman Catholic type of structure and traditions, for another reformed and plain church model’. This strict religious view spread to encompass many social activities within England moving

to a stricter code of conduct which deplored any kind of finery or flippant behaviours, 1642 was a truly eventful year for England. The Puritans, lead by Oliver Cromwell, who had been elected to Parliament came into total conflict with the Royalists lead by King Charles I. The English Civil war broke out. In 1644 the Globe Theatre was demolished by the Puritans. In 1647 even stricter rules were passed regarding stage plays and theatres. This culminated in 1648 when all playhouses were ordered to be pulled down. All players were to be seized and whipped, and anyone caught attending a play to be fined five shillings. In 1649 the Civil War finally lead to the terrible execution of King Charles I. In 1653 Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector of England. In 1658 Cromwell died and the power of the Puritans started to decline. In 1660 King Charles II was if was restored to the throne of England. With the Restoration of the English monarchy and the demise in the power of the Puritans in 1660 the theatres finally opened again.

---

## **1.11 THE RESTORATION**

---

In 1660, Charles II stepped ashore in England. England rejoiced at the return and at the relief from stifling pressure of a Puritan government and welcomed the king with open arms. Monarchy thus restored, the following years came to be known in the political and literary history of England as the Restoration Age. One of the finest things that King Charles II did in 1660 was to restore the lost glory of theatre and withdraw the ban. And immediately the long repressed longing for theatre came to have a free, random and exuberant play.

The prevailing sentiments found expression mostly and mainly in comedies. It should however be made clear that Restoration Tragedy too is equally worth considering and Dryden remains the unchallenged master of it. The Restoration Comedy writers drew inspiration from the native tradition of Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson and the French writer of comedies, Moliere. The cynical spirit and frivolous elegance of the fashionable society of the time were not congenial to the flourish of Romantic Comedy. The Restoration society was free from all moralizing realism and doctrinal intentions and comedy became a replica of the carefree life. Critics often describe Restoration comedy as Comedy of Manners. But manner is difficult to define, hence, it is right to consider Restoration Comedy

as a social and realistic comedy of a relatively doubtful cultural epoch. Of all the leading Restoration comedy writers mention must be made of William Congreve, William Wycherley, George Etherege and others.

### **1.11.1 William Congreve**

William Congreve is unquestionably the greatest of all Restoration Comedians, He deserted law for literature and made his debut in the literary world with the story called *Incognita* and then with *The Old Bachelor*, The other comedies of Congreve are *The Double Dealer* and *Love for Love*. *The Way of the World* which was received with less admiration during his own lifetime has been recognized as the masterpiece of Congreve and one of the best known of Restoration Comedies, The plays of Congreve give an acute observation of the upper class life. Objectionable and filthy things have been quoted with brilliant wit and humour and artificial manners of the time are well dramatized. The tone of Congreve plays in one of cynical vivacity. The characters are real and full drawn and the prose is pointed and precise and lucid. In other words Congreve is an accomplished writer and a polished artist.

---

## **1.12 SENTIMENTAL DRAMA**

---

Sentiments increased in Comedies as more merchants attended the theatre. The ideas and tendencies that were reflected in the sentimental drama were the representation of middle-class life that replaced in the theatre the tough amorality and the comic or satiric representation of aristocratic sexual licence in Restoration Comedy. In this form the virtues of private life are exhibited rather than the vices exposed and the distress rather than the frailty of mankind. The characters, both good and bad are luminously simple and the hero ever magnanimous, honourable and hypersensitive to the sensibilities of other people. Sentimental Comedy does not have light hearted fun, trenchant dialogue, wit or satire. It is devoid of realism and humour which is the very life and blood of comedy. Richard Steele catered to the bourgeoisie sensibility with *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), a play that marks the turn from Restoration bawdy comedy to comedy of sentiment. The purpose

of Sentimental Comedy was neither laughter nor ridicule but the arousal of “a pleasure too exquisite.”

---

### **1.13 ANTI-SENTIMENTAL COMEDY**

---

Sentimental comedy yielded place to Anti-Sentimental Comedy. Anti Sentimental Comedy was written in a mood of satirical observation of life which 18<sup>th</sup> century novel expressed. The plots are ingehipus and effective. The characters are stage types. The repartees are epigrammatic. The plays have charm and vivacity. The descriptions are accurate and graphic, full of sensation and scandals, thrills and excitement. Anti-Sentimental Comedy comprises both irony and satire in a delicate manner ‘accompanied by wit, charming dialogues and beautiful repartee. Mention must be made of Sheridan’and Goldsmith.

A change came in the Victorian era with a profusion on the London stage of farces, musical burlesques, extravaganzas and comic operas that competed with Shakespeare productions and serious drama by the likes of James Planche and Thomas William Robertson. In 1855, the German Reed Entertainments began a process of elevating the level of (formerly risqué) musical theatre in Britain that culminated in the famous series of comic operas by Gilbert and Sullivatvand were followed in the 1890s with the first Edwardian musical comedies. W. S. Gilbert and Oscar Wilde were leading poets and dramatists of the late Victorian period. Wilde’s plays, in particular, stand apart from the many now forgotten plays of Victorian times and have a much closer relationship to those of the Edwardian dramatists such as Irishman George Bernard Shaw and Norwegian Henrik Ibsen.

---

### **1.14 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES**

---

#### **Long Questions**

1. Give an account of the rise of drama in Medieval England,
2. Assess the influence of Shakespeare to English drama.

### **Medium Answer Type Questions**

1. Analyse the influence of the Renaissance to the development of English drama.
2. Who were the University Wits? What were the chief features of their works?
3. Account for the decline of drama in the Jacobean period.

---

### **1.15 WORKS CITED**

---

- Abrams, M. H. - A Glossary of Literary Terms, 7th Ed (1999) English ISSN: 015505452X
- Cuddon, J. A. - The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, Fourth Edition, ISBN 0140513639
- Albert, Edward - History of English Literature, Fifth Edition, OUP
- Sanders, Andrew - The Short Oxford History of English Literature, Third Edition, OUP
- <http://www.wikipedia.org/>
- <http://www.britannica.com/>

---

## **UNIT 2 □ MACBETH**

---

**Structure :**

- 2.0 Objectives**
- 2.1 Macbeth as a Tragedy**
- 2.2 Treatment of History**
- 2.3 Act Wise Summary of the Play**
- 2.4 Important Scenes in Macbeth**
  - 2.4.1 Murder Scene**
  - 2.4.2 Porter Scene**
  - 2.4.3 Banquet Scene**
  - 2.4.4 Sleepwalking Scene**
- 2.5 Analysis of Character**
  - 2.5.1 Macbeth**
  - 2.5.2 Lady Macbeth**
- 2.6 Role of the Witches in the Play**
- 2.7 Imagery in Macbeth**
- 2.8 Comprehension Exercises**
- 2.9 Select Bibliography**

---

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

---

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* belongs a group of four plays that are regarded as Shakespeare's great tragedies and is the last of these four plays which includes *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. In this play, Shakespeare takes incidents from history as described in Holinshed's *Chronicles* and other accounts and creates a moving tragedy. The objective of this Unit is to introduce the learner to *Macbeth*, the play which among the quartet of tragedies, has aroused perhaps the greatest critical attention because of the diversity of issues it embraces within its relatively

short span. It is expected that the learner will supplement his/her reading of the study material with a primary acquaintance of the text of the play.

---

## 2.1 MACBETH AS A TRAGEDY

---

Tragedy was one of the most popular genres of the Elizabethan theatre and in the hands of Marlowe and Shakespeare, the medium gained great heights. It may be noted in this context that as the Renaissance was concerned more with the idea concerning Man and his position in the Universe, tragedy served as a perfect medium for analysis of the issues. Christian concepts of the original sin added a new aspect to the way in which one looked at the tragic heroes.

Aristotle in his *Poetics* has talked of tragedy as a serious play that evokes pity and fear. In Classical plays, fate or circumstances played an important role as man was looked upon as a puppet in the hands of fate. Thus many of the heroes of Classical tragedies are seen to face consequences of those actions which may have been done unknowingly. Shakespearean tragic hero is responsible for his actions and is aware of the evil that he is committing. There is a fault or flaw in the characters of the tragic heroes for which he suffers. But the suffering is always more than the sin that he has committed. That is why we are moved to emotions of pity and fear. The tragic hero is a person who is above us in stature and we also admire his courage and grandeur. His fall makes us think of a terrible waste of potential. The tragic hero reminds us that he may be bodily defeated but he is still a brave man.

The Shakespearean tragic hero, Macbeth or Hamlet or Othello, is a man who is above the ordinary human beings but his greatness is also a marker of the potential of fall. It may be noted that the Renaissance tried to come to terms with the paradoxical nature of Man as is expressed in the famous lines from *Hamlet*. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me what is this quintessence of dust?' Dr. Faustus or Macbeth suffer, not because of an error of judgement but, as Helen Gardner points out, 'an error of will'. The heroes cannot blame fortune or fate as misguiding them and leading them to the path of destruction. Their suffering is self wrought and yet we feel



sad at the but come of the fate. Retributive justice necessitates that the hero be punished. But our responses are far from simple. We mourn the loss of potential in the hero.

---

## **2.2 TREATMENT OF HISTORY**

---

History has always been a sensitive area and any dramatist who uses historical material for his plays is bound to end up in controversy. Moreover, in the Elizabethan times, the very concept of fidelity with the sources was very fluid. After all, *Macbeth* is a tragedy that is based on certain incidents in history and the requirements of the play must have prompted Shakespeare to take a considerable amount of freedom with the sources. Shakespeare combines elements from accounts of Donwald's murder of King Duff and Mackbeth's murder of King Duncan and draws the character of Macbeth. Some of the changes that Shakespeare made to the accounts available in chronicles are :

- a. Duncan is older in the play than he actually was. His weakness as a king is never directly stated in the play,
- b. In spite of being a usurper, Macbeth governed his kingdom well. This is altered in the play.
- c. Holinshed's Lady Macbeth never takes part in the actual murder, in Shakespeare, she does,
- d. In Holinshed, Macbeth had worked with the complicity of Banquo but in the play the character of Banquo is never given a dark shade.

But these liberties that Shakespeare took created a play that is rich in possibilities and a treasure for any student of literature.

---

## **2.3 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY**

---

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is set in Scotland. The King of Scotland, Duncan, has two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain. His brave general and cousin Macbeth successfully quells rebellions and threats to the Kingdom with the support of Banquo and he is granted a new title. However, the King announces the name of Malcolm as the future King. Macbeth, incited by the prophecies of the three Witches and with the help of his wife, Lady Macbeth, murders the king and sits

on the throne. He even kills his friend Banquo who he considered to be a threat. But he cannot kill Banquo's son Fleance. Eventually, Malcolm, Macduff and the English army defeat and kill Macbeth as order is restored.

## **Act 1**

The play begins with three Witches meeting on a stormy night. They hold out the promise of meeting Macbeth only an empty heath. This scene, though short (only 11 lines) sets the tone of the play. The Witches talk of meeting again when the 'hurlyburly' is done. This confusion is a major pre-occupation in the play and may be interpreted as a confusion of moral standards. The Witches also refer to fair being foul and foul being fair and the audience is confused even further. It is not just a idle riddle that the Witches pronounce. Amidst the equivocation and the play with words, they speak of the impossibility of separating the fair from the foul and vice versa. The scene changes to an account given by the Captain of two bloody battles that were fought and won by Macbeth and Banquo. The first was a fight with Macdonwald and the second with the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth is introduced in the play with heroic epithets like 'Valour's minion' and 'Bellona's bridegroom' as we hear the accounts of how he had fought to defeat the evil designs of traitors like Macdonwald and the Thane of Cawdor. With such positive images of his strength and power, we are introduced to Macbeth and Banquo even before we actually see them on stage. King Duncan, on hearing about the bravery of Macbeth, awards him with the title of Thane of Cawdor. The Witches meet Macbeth and Banquo as they are returning from the battlefield. They greet Macbeth as the Thane of Glamis and refer to him as the Thane of Cawdor, and also as the future King of Scotland. To Banquo they say that he will be the father of the future King of Scotland. As if in answer to these prophecies, Ross and Angus arrive and greet Macbeth with the title of Thane of Cawdor. The temptation is complete as hopes arise in his mind about the fulfillment of the other prophecy as well. We find Macbeth debating within himself about the nature of the prophecies of the Witches. He feels that if this 'supernatural soliciting' is evil then it could not have begun in a truth. But the very thought of his becoming the future King of Scotland makes him apprehensive and shakes his 'single state of man'. Duncan, in the meanwhile confers the title of the Prince of Cumberland on his eldest son Malcolm and Macbeth sees this as a difficulty that has to be

overcome if he is to become the King; The change in Macbeth's mind is revealed as he asks the stars to hide their fires and so hide his 'black and deep desires'. He regards this Conferring of the title as a step on which he must fall or overleap in order to achieve his goal of becoming the King.

Diincan decides to spend the night at Macbeth's castle and this gives Lady Macbeth the opportunity to attempt to kill Duncan and allow Macbeth to ascend the throne. She decides to stop Macbeth from having any thoughts of kindness or fear. Macbeth's character is perfectly summed up by Lady Macbeth as she talks of him being 'too full o'th' milk of human kindness' and that is what comes in the way of his ambitions. She calls on the spirits to 'unsex' her and change her milk for gall. She wants to become so cruel that nothing can divert her from her purpose. She marvellously stage manages the entire situation as she plays the perfect hostess and simultaneously leads her husband on to the murder. The fearful image of how she would not hesitate to violently kill her own child if she had decided to so, fills our hearts with awe and fear. But we cannot help but be affected by her power. She takes it upon herself to pour her spirits into her husband's mind and make him succeed in the action. Macbeth is aware that the murder of Duncan would betray the trust in many ways as Duncan is the guest of Macbeth's house and it is the host's duty to protect the guest and not play the murderer himself. Moreover, Duncan is the King and Macbeth should protect his security as he had done at the beginning of the play. Macbeth has the vision of Pity as a 'naked newborn babe' and says; 'I have no spur/ To prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition which overleaps itself/And falls on Th', other'. But Lady Macbeth succeeds in making her husband change his mind and at the end of Act I Macbeth strikes a powerful tone and says: 'I am settled, and bent up / Each corporeal agent to this terrible feat.' She succeeds in her attempt as the initial hesitation of Macbeth disappears and he gets ready to do all that it takes for his ambition. Thus the character moves towards the destruction with complete awareness of the consequences. Such is the human propensity to sin.

## **Act 2**

The opening scene of this act has repeated references to darkness as Banquo refers to 'husbandry in heaven'. He pleads to the higher powers to restrain 'cursed thoughts' in him. In the conversation with Macbeth, he clarifies that he has had

a dream of the Weird Sisters. These lines point to the pervasiveness of sin and the fact that the entire atmosphere is rife with feelings of suspicion and treachery. Soon Macbeth has a hallucination and sees a blood-stained dagger in his imagination and this weapon, he feels, leads him to Duncan's bedchamber. The fall in Macbeth's first character can be noticed here as his imaginings are now centered around the murder and completely unlike the vision of Pity that he had seen earlier. Macbeth refers to the darkness of the night but a sense of guilt pervades his consciousness as he asks the earth not to hear his footsteps. He even equates his own footsteps to those of Tarquin as he moved towards the bedchamber of Lucrece. Thus again, the sense of betrayal and violation is seen to be foremost in Macbeth's mind.

Lady Macbeth gives the guards a—heavy dose of drink in order not to be disturbed. But she fails to kill Duncan as his face reminds her of her father. Macbeth kills Duncan and soon realizes that he has murdered sleep and is now cursed with sleeplessness for the rest of his life; His sense of guilt prevents him from praying, and he mourns the loss of his soul as he refers to his inability to utter words of prayer and looks at the prospect of having, to bear the consequences of having murdered sleep. The, invocation to sleep, as 'sore labour's path, / Balm of hurt minds, great Nature's second course, / Chief nourisher in life's feast' is an expression of the sense of what, Macbeth, has lost. He feels, that he will never be able to wash the blood of Duncan from his hands. He looks at his bloody hands and they seem as if to pluck out his eyes. He feels that even if he were to wash his hands with all the oceans' waters, his hands would still remain tainted while the waters would turn red. These imaginative visions are not expressions of fear at any practical level. They are expressions of a pain that goes to a deeper level. Lady Macbeth cannot sound the depths of her husband's feelings and talks of how a little water would clean the hands. These words have their ironic reversal in the Sleepwalking Scene Where she talks of how her hands can never be clean of blood.

Amidst descriptions of storms and violence in nature, the murder of Duncan is discovered. Macbeth's words, 'Had I but died an hour before this chance, / I had lived a blessed time...', may be interpreted both as mere lip service of a murder and also as being true in a secret way. Macbeth will face new pains every day now that he has murdered Duncan. Moreover, the fact that Lady Macbeth faints in the morning when the murder is discovered and this might be a sign of her inner turmoil.

However, Macbeth takes advantage of the escape of Duncan's two sons Malcolm and Donalbain and is crowned the King in the middle of doubts about the circumstances leading to Duncan's death. A coronation that should herald new beginning is instead filled with images of destruction and disorder both in the macrocosm and the microcosms.

### **Act 3**

The initial lines of this Act show the effect of the prophecies of the Witches on Banquo. He mentally calculates how the foul play of Macbeth in ascending the throne of Scotland will have its results and ultimately the sons of Banquo would become the future kings. There is talk of a royal banquet being organized and Macbeth is meticulous in his inquiries regarding where Banquo and his son would be that evening. Macbeth does not enjoy peace of mind even after he ascends the throne. The fact that Banquo and his son Fleance are still alive troubles him a lot. He says, 'To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus'. In spite of keeping a good and friendly exterior with him, Macbeth secretly plots the murder of the father and the son. Macbeth hires murderers and paints the character of Banquo in a dark shade. He now does not need the support of his wife for execution of a murder, as he had needed earlier. He invites Banquo to the Banquet and ensures that he is killed that evening. He tells Lady Macbeth that his mind is full of scorpions because he knows that the father and the son live. The invocation to the powers of darkness is in sharp contrast to the earlier expressions when Macbeth had asked the stars to hide their fires. The lines: 'Good things of Day begin to droop and drowse, / While Night's black agents to their prey do rouse' are fearful in themselves and they also point to the changes that have taken place in the character of Macbeth. It is as if he has developed an affinity with the powers of darkness. Lady Macbeth's invocation of the spirits fades besides this celebration of darkness.

But, though Banquo is killed, Fleance escapes the assassins and the threat remains for Macbeth. He considers himself to be 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd' on hearing the news. Macbeth however comes face to face with Banquo's ghost in the Banquet and it may be interpreted that his sense of guilt disturbs his mind as no one else in the room can see the ghost. The scene presents another instance of the hallucination similar to the blood stained dagger that Macbeth had seen before

Duncan's murder. The supernatural here is subjective. Lady Macbeth tries her best to restore a sense of order in the mind of her husband as she calls on him to welcome the guests who have assembled but Macbeth can have no peace as the Ghost of Banquo occupies Macbeth's own place on the table. The exclamation that the 'table is full', raises only surprise in the minds of the guests. Macbeth reprimands the Ghost not to shake its 'gory locks' at him. Lady Macbeth tries in vain to explain the 'behaviour and says that her husband is in the grasp of a temporary fit. Secretly, she asks her husband in the manner similar to that she had used earlier, 'Are you a man?' Macbeth presents a situation when he feels that murdered individuals seem now to come back from the dead and push the living from their places. These lines bring to our minds the idea of the usurper and how the dead have a right to avenge their killings and overthrow the unlawful occupant. As Macbeth gains some composure, the Ghost reenters and again throws him off balance. Macbeth cannot take the cold glance any more. He feels that he can fight Banquo in any form but this. The Russian tiger or the armed rhinoceros or the Hyrcan tiger cannot hold any fear for him. Lady Macbeth cannot keep the show going as she asks the guest to leave. She mourns the fact that Macbeth has 'displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting / With most admired disorder', Macbeth's words; 'It will have blood, they say, blood will have blood' is extremely fearful Macbeth decides to visit the Witches in order to know the future. His next target is Macduff as he was not present at the Banquet. This is the last time that we see the husband and wife together. The rift would grow, and ultimately Lady Macbeth would die.

#### **Act 4**

There is a change in Macbeth as he seeks out the Weird Sisters and greets them as if he has developed an affinity with them. The Witches confuse Macbeth even further with a new set of prophecies. The vision of an armed head tells him to beware, of Macduff. They show him the vision of a bloody child which tells him that he need not fear as no man who is born of a woman would be able to harm him. They show him the third vision of a crowned child with a tree which tells him that he is safe as long as Birnam Wood does not come up to Dunsinane Hill. But the vision of the eight Kings with Banquo following them fills Macbeth's heart with fear. As always, the Witches never directly instruct anything to Macbeth. It is his own depraved Will that prompts Macbeth to kill Macduff and on learning

that he has escaped, he unnecessarily murders his wife and children. This is the deepest point to which Macbeth's character can fall

But there are preparations to end the rule of Macbeth the tyrant. In the middle of the cries of widows and orphans, there is talk of the restoration of order and harmony. The images used are those of healing. Malcolm and Macduff meet and there is an elaborate testing of Macduff by Malcolm which is justified in the atmosphere of treason that pervades the scene. They decide to attack Macbeth with the help of the King of England.

### **Act 5**

We are shocked at the opening scene as we see Lady Macbeth who has become a wreckage of what she was earlier. All the power that we have seen in her character in the early part of the play are now lost. She is seen as a broken woman who is constantly being troubled by guilt. She constantly keeps a light by her side. She had no rest and even when she is sleeping, she walks and relives the incidents of her life. Her advices to her husband, memories of the murder of Duncan, the mourning for the wife of Macduff are present in her mind. She tries her best to wash the blood stain from her hand but she fails. The Doctor sums up her situation and says: 'Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds to deaf pillows will discharge their secrets. More she needs the divine than the physician'. The Doctor expresses his inability to cure her.

In such a time troubles multiply for Macbeth as Malcolm, Macduff, Siward advance towards Dunsinane. Macbeth is gradually taken in by deep realizations of his own conditions. He finds that his 'way of life / Is fall'n into the sere, the -yellow leaf and instead of honour, love and friends, his lot is only to receive curses. But still he banks on the prophecies of the Witches. He hears of the news of his wife's death and talks of life as 'a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing'. He is brought reports that soldiers have camouflaged themselves with branches of trees from Birnam Wood giving the illusion that the Wood itself is travelling up to Dunsinane Hill. Soon he learns that Macduff was untimely taken out of his mother's womb. When he realizes that he has been fooled by the equivocation of the Witches and finds out that both the situations can be metaphorically interpreted, does he say that no one should believe in the words of the 'juggling fiends' who only 'palter with us in a double sense;/ That keep



the word of promise to our ear, / And break it to our hope,” He knows that he would soon be defeated by Macduff but he dies with defiance on his lips. He says, ‘I will not yield, / To kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet / and to be baited with the rabble’s curse.’ Though the play ends with Malcolm establishing order to Scotland, the final impression is that of grandeur and power, of Macbeth which had been lost in the middle section of the play. We cannot agree with Malcolm’s phrase that describes Macbeth and his wife as ‘this dead butcher and his fiend-like Queen’.

---

## **2.4 IMPORTANT SCENES IN MACBETH**

---

The strength of Macbeth as a play stands on Shakespeare’s skilful utilization of a number of specific scenes. This can be said both in terms of the plot and also the treatment of the themes. This sub-unit aims to study some of the pivotal scenes of the play.

### **2.4.1 MURDER SCENE**

The Murder Scene (Act2 Scene 2) is crucial to the play. The murder of Duncan is not depicted on stage but is reported. This is interesting because in contemporary Elizabethan theatre, murders were acted on stage. Here we see the effect of the murder on the minds of Macbeth and his wife. We see the imaginative aspect of Macbeth’s mind as he feels sad that he could not say words of prayer even though he had need of blessings. He says how Amen stuck in his throat. Macbeth’s realization that he has killed sleep and so is now cursed with sleeplessness is indeed moving. The invocation to sleep as ‘sore labour’s bath, Balm of hurt minds, great Nature’s second course, / Chief nourisher in life’s feast’ is more an expression of the sense of what Macbeth has lost. The image of the seas turning red and the hands not being clean of blood is also very powerful. Macbeth looks at his bloody hands and they seem as if to pluck out his eyes. He feels that even if he were to wash his hands with all the oceans’ waters, his hands would still remain tainted while the waters would turn red. These imaginative visions are not expressions of fear at any practical level. They are expressions of a pain that goes to a deeper level. Lady Macbeth cannot sound the depths of her husband’s feelings



and talks of how a little water would clean the hands. These words have their ironic reversal in the Sleepwalking Scene where she talks of how her hands can never be clean of blood.

Lady Macbeth's practical mind is shown in the scene as she arranges for the daggers to be left in the hands of Duncan's sleeping guards and asks her husband to change clothes. But we also see that she cannot commit the murder herself as it seems to her that Duncan looks like her own father.

#### **2.4.2 PORTER SCENE**

The Porter Scene (Act 2 Scene 3) comes immediately after the Murder Scene and provided a comic relief. Within a tragedy there are sometimes scenes of comedy that give relief to the audience. This is one such scene. Aristotle had talked of the unity of impression and most of the classical plays did not mix comic scenes with tragedy. However, in Elizabethan theatre this mixture is practiced and as always, Shakespeare makes use of a convention and adds a new dimension to it. Similar in tone to the so-called Grave-diggers' Scene in *Hamlet* this scene increases the tragic sense of the play.

A drunken porter imagines himself to be the porter of the gate of Hell and makes many comments/Among them are references to equivocation, time serving, evil and many events of recent history like the Gunpowder Plot. All these references alert us to the issue of treachery and betrayal. So they are never out of context and the scene is crucial to the play as a whole. This scene is not an interpolation and it serves the important function as critics have pointed out how, without destroying the unity of place, the scene transforms Macbeth's castle into Hell.

#### **2.4.3 BANQUET SCENE**

The Banquet Scene (Act 3 Scene 4) is an important scene in the play. It is a central scene as far as its position in the play is concerned, Thematically also, it is central as it marks a change in the character of Macbeth. Though Macbeth arranges for Banquo to be killed, Fleance escapes the assassins and the threat remains for Macbeth. He considers himself to be 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd' on hearing the news. Macbeth however comes face to face with Banquo's ghost in the royal Banquet that he arranges. The Ghost may be interpreted that his sense of guilt disturbs his mind as no one else in the room can see the ghost. The scene

presents another instance of the hallucination similar to the blood stained dagger that Macbeth had seen before Duncan's murder. The supernatural here is subjective. Lady Macbeth tries her best to restore a sense of order in the mind of her husband as she calls on him to welcome the guests who have assembled but Macbeth can have no peace as the Ghost of Banquo occupies Macbeth's own place on the table. The exclamation that the 'table is full', raises only surprises in the minds of the guests. Macbeth reprimands the Ghost not to shake its 'gory locks' at him. Lady Macbeth tries in vain to explain the behaviour and says that her husband is in the grasp of a temporary fit. Secretly, she asks her husband in the manner similar to that she had used earlier, 'Are you a man?' Macbeth presents a situation when he feels that murdered individuals seem now to come back from the dead and push the living from their places. These lines bring to our minds the idea of the usurper and how the dead have a right to avenge their killings and overthrow the unlawful occupant.

As Macbeth gains some composure, the Ghost reenters and throws him off balance. Macbeth cannot take the cold glance any more. He feels that he can fight Banquo in any form but this. The Russian tiger or the armed rhinoceros or the Hyrcan tiger cannot hold any fear for him. Lady Macbeth cannot keep the show going as she asks the guest to leave. She mourns the fact that Macbeth has 'displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting / With most admired disorder'. Macbeth's words: 'It will have blood, they say, blood will have blood is extremely fearful. His next target is Macduff as he was not present at the Banquet. This is the last time that we see the husband and wife together. The rift would grow and ultimately Lady Macbeth would die.

The guest leave and the banquet is left incomplete. This signifies the complete loss of order and harmony in Macbeth's kingdom. Food as a symbol of sustenance fails to serve its purpose as disorder and fear overtake what should have been an occasion of celebration. But, the usurper can never celebrate and the scene ends with Macbeth deciding to visit the Witches again, an action that will lead to more bloodshed and suffering.

#### **2.4.4 SLEEPWALKING SCENE**

The Sleepwalking Scene (Act 5 Scene 1) presents Lady Macbeth in a different light. This scene is written mostly in prose and the halting rhythms of Lady

Macbeth's words are marvellously captured in the medium. All the power that we have seen in her character in the early part of the play are now lost. She is seen as a broken woman who is constantly being troubled by guilt. She constantly keeps a light by her side. It is as if the dark powers that she had invoked have deserted her. She had no rest and even when she is sleeping, she walks and relives the incidents of her life. Her advices to her husband, memories of the murder of Duncan, the mourning for the wife of Macduff are present in her mind. She tries her best to wash the blood stain from her hand but she fails. The earlier comments of a little water clearing them of the deed now has changed to a question : 'who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?' The Doctor sums up her situation and says : 'Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds to deaf pillows will discharge their secrets. More she needs the divine than the physician'. The Doctor expresses his inability to cure her. This is an extremely moving scene and arouses our sympathy for this troubled lady.

---

## **2.5 ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER**

---

### **2.5.1 MACBETH**

Macbeth has been described as a 'villain hero'. But any analysis of the play reveals major gaps in such sweeping generalizations. It is true that Macbeth is a murderer. But he is much more than just that. In him we find all the shades of a man who is ambitious and also has a strong imaginative faculty. Like all other Shakespearean tragic heroes, he is a person whose range, variety and grandeur makes him attractive and fearful.

Macbeth is introduced in the play in Act 2 Sc 2 with heroic epithets like 'Valour's minion' and 'Bellona's bridegroom' as we hear the accounts of how he had fought to defeat the evil designs of traitors like Macdonwald and the Thane of Cawdor. With such positive images of his strength and power, we find Macbeth and Banquo face to face with the three witches in the next scene of the play. These three Weird Sisters greet Macbeth as the Thane of Glamis, the Thane of Cawdor and as one 'that shall be King hereafter'. Soon Macbeth is surprised to find that he has already been awarded with the title of the Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan in recognition of his contribution in upholding the security of the kingdom.

The temptation of the Witches starts having its effects, as we find Macbeth debating within himself about the nature of the prophecies of the Witches. He feels that if this 'supernatural soliciting' is evil then it could not have begun in a truth. But the very thought of his becoming the future King of Scotland makes him apprehensive and shakes his 'single state of man'. A further confusion comes to Macbeth as Duncan soon declares his son Malcolm as the Prince of Cumberland. The change in Macbeth's mind is revealed as he asks the stars to hide their fires and so hide his 'black and deep desires'. He regards this conferring of the title as a step on which he must fall or overleap in order to achieve his goal of becoming the King. Macbeth's character is perfectly summed up by Lady Macbeth as she talks of him being 'too full o'th' milk of human kindness and that is what comes in the way of his ambitions.

Soon circumstances provide an opportunity for the execution of the deadly plan of murder as Duncan decides to visit Macbeth's castle of an overnight stay. It seems that Macbeth initially decides not to proceed further in murdering Duncan. Macbeth is aware that the murder of Duncan would betray the trust in many ways as he is the guest of Macbeth's house and it is the host's duty to protect the guest and not play the murderer himself. Moreover, Duncan was the King and Macbeth should protect his security as he had done at the beginning of the play. He has the vision of Pity as a 'naked newborn babe' and says: I have no spur/ To prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself/ And falls on th'other'. But Lady Macbeth succeeds in making her husband change his mind and at the end of Act I Macbeth strikes a powerful tone and says: 'I am settled, and bent up / Each corporeal agent to this terrible feat/ Thus the character moves towards the destruction with complete awareness of the consequences. Such is the human propensity to sin. This is what differentiates Macbeth from any other hero of Classical tragedy who move unknowingly to their destruction.

As Macbeth waits for the proper time he has another vision of a boldly dagger that leads him towards Duncan's bedchamber. The fall in Macbeth's character can be noticed here as his imaginings are now centered around the murder and completely unlike the vision of Pity that he had seen earlier. Macbeth refers to the darkness of the night but a sense of guilt pervades his consciousness as he asks the earth not to hear his footsteps. He even equates his own footsteps to those

of Tarquin as he moved towards the bedchamber of Lucrece, Thus again, the sense of betrayal and violation is foremost in Macbeth's mind,

Macbeth commits the murder even as Lady Macbeth who had initially seemed to be the stronger of the two, fails in her attempt, But he mourns the loss of his soul as he refers to his inability to utter words of prayer and looks at the prospect of having to bear the consequences of having murdered sleep. He looks at his bloody hands and they seem as if to pluck out his eyes. He feels that even if he were to wash his hands with all the oceans' waters, his hands would still remain tainted while the waters would turn red. These imaginative visions are not expressions of fear at any practical level. They are expressions of a pain that goes to a deeper level.

But soon there is a fall in Macbeth's stature. He kills the guards in Duncan's room in order to secure himself. But, Macbeth's words, 'Had I but died an hour before this chance, / I had lived a blessed time.../ may be interpreted both as mere up service of a murder and also as being true in a secret way. Macbeth will face grievous pains every day now that he has murdered Duncan. However, taking advantage of the escape of the sons of Duncan, Macbeth crowns himself the King of Scotland.

But a sense of threat starts haunting him and the first target is Banquo. Macbeth feels, 'To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus'. He hires assassins and falsely sullies the character of Banquo in order to keep his position safe. The invocation to the powers of darkness is in sharp contrast to the earlier expressions when Macbeth had asked the stars to hide their fires. The lines: 'Good things of Day begin to droop and drowse, A Whiles Night's black agents to their prey do rouse' are fearful in themselves and they also point to the changes that have taken place in the character of Macbeth. It is as if he has developed an affinity with the powers of darkness. Lady Macbeth's invocation of the spirits fades besides this celebration of darkness. However, Macbeth fails to get peace as Fleance, the son of Banquo escapes the murder attempt and the threat that one day Fleance, will overthrow Macbeth from his throne remains. He considers himself to be 'cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd\*' on hearing the news.

Macbeth however comes face to face with Banquo's ghost in the Banquet and it may be interpreted that his sense of guilt disturbs his mind as no one else in

the room can see the ghost. The scene presents another instance of the hallucination similar to the blood stained dagger that Macbeth had seen before Duncan's murder. The supernatural here is subjective as it is only Macbeth who can see the Ghost. Lady Macbeth tries her best to restore a sense of order in the mind of her husband as she calls on him to welcome the guests who have assembled but Macbeth can have no peace as the Ghost of Banquo occupies Macbeth's own place on the table. The exclamation that the 'table is full', raises only surprises in the minds of the guests. Macbeth reprimands the Ghost not to shake its 'gory locks' at him. Lady Macbeth tries in vain to explain the behaviour and says that her husband is in the grasp of a temporary fit. Secretly, she asks her husband in the manner similar to that she had used earlier, 'Are you a man?' Macbeth presents a situation when he feels that murdered individuals seem now to come back from the dead and push the living from their places. These lines bring to our minds the idea of the usurper and how the dead have a right to avenge their killings and overthrow the unlawful occupant.

As Macbeth gains some composure, the Ghost reenters and throws him off balance. Macbeth cannot take the cold glance any more. He feels that he can fight Banquo in any form but this. The Russian tiger or the armed rhinoceros or the Hyrcan tiger cannot hold any fear for him. Lady Macbeth cannot keep the show going as she asks the guest to leave. She mourns the fact that Macbeth has 'displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting / With most admired disorder'. His words : 'It will have blood, they say, blood will have blood' is extremely fearful Macbeth decides to visit the Witches in order to know the future. His next target is Macduff as he was not present at the Banquet.

The new set of cryptic remarks of the Witches leads Macbeth further down in the path of damnation. He decides to destroy the threat posed by Macduff and when he cannot kill him, he causes the deaths of Macduff's wife and children. He thinks himself to be invincible as no man born of a woman would kill him and he would remain safe as long as Birnam Wood does not come up to Dunsinane Hill, But the image of the procession of Kings disturbs him.

At the end, when the odds turn against Macbeth, one is impressed by the power and resilience of the hero. He hears of the news of his wife's death and talks of life as 'a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/ Signifying nothing'. He realizes that his 'way of life / Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf he must

not seek honour and love from friends but only get curses. When he realizes that he has been fooled by the equivocation of the Witches and finds out that both the situations can be metaphorically interpreted, does he say that no one should believe in the words of the 'juggling fiends' who only 'palter with us in a double sense;/ That keep the word of promise to our ear,/ And break it to our hope.' He knows that he would soon be defeated by Macduff and he dies with defiance on his lips. He says, 'I will not yield, / To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet / and to be baited with the rabble's curse;' At the end we see a resurfacing of the brave Macbeth and so it would be highly unjust and inadequate to refer to him to as simply a 'dead butcher'. The sense of loss pervades our minds and any sense of justice is combined with our feelings of pity, fear and admiration. Though Macbeth has been described as a villain hero, he is a tragic hero. He is responsible for the evil that he commits and the Witches only act as an influence. He is aware of the cruelty of the acts and still his ambition and greed for power, lead him on. But he is also a person with an imaginative mind. His last words of defiance and his soliloquies and speeches point to the uniqueness of the mind of this man who is above any degree of mediocrity.

### **2.5.2 LADY MACBETH**

Lady Macbeth is the heroine of the play as the second most important character in it. She enters the stage reading a letter in which her husband describes the incident of the Witches' prophecy and of his being awarded the title of the Thane of Cawdor. She is the more practical among the couple and soon starts to plan the execution of the murder. Her perfect understanding of the character of her husband is revealed as she talks of his ambitious and kind natures being always in conflict. She decides to 'pour' her 'spirits' in her husband's ears. As the opportunity presents itself and she learns of Duncan's arrival at the Castle, she invokes the powers of darkness. She calls the spirits to 'unsex' her and change her milk for gall. She wants to become so; I that nothing can divert her from her purpose. She 'marvellously stage manages the entire situation as she plays the perfect hostess and simultaneously leads her husband on to the murder. The fearful image of how she would not hesitate to violently kill her own child if she had decided to so, fills our hearts with awe and fear. But we cannot help but be affected by her power.



However, in spite of repeatedly telling her husband that they will not fail, she herself fails in the attempt. The face of Duncan reminds her of that of her father and she cannot kill the King. She seems to be a person who does not possess as much of emotional and imaginative depth as that of her husband. Her practical mind cannot see the depth in Macbeth's pains and she talks of how a little water will help wash the hands. These words have an ironic reversal in the Sleepwalking Scene as she desperately tries to wash her hands off Duncan's blood and fails in her attempt. She goes ahead and keeps the daggers in Duncan's bedchamber so that the blame can later be passed on to the guards. She even urges her husband to change the clothes in order to be above all suspicion. But, she does faint in the morning when the murder is discovered and this might be a sign of her inner turmoil.

After Macbeth comes to the throne of Scotland and Lady Macbeth becomes the Queen, we notice a distance between the husband and wife. Macbeth no longer needs the support of his wife and this leads to a sense of loneliness in her. There is also a sense of loss as she feels, that she has had nothing and yet she has spent everything. The Queen however takes care of the situation in the Banquet Scene and we see her again in the role that she had played earlier in the play. She asks all the guests to leave and lies about the ailments that have plagued her husband. She even reprimands her husband for being weak and asks the question: 'Are you a man?' Lady Macbeth cannot keep the show going as she asks the guest to leave. She mourns the fact that Macbeth has 'displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting / With most admired disorder'. But we do not see the husband and wife together after this as the distance between the two reaches unbridgeable proportions.

We see a completely different Lady Macbeth in the Sleepwalking Scene. She is found to be mentally destroyed. She cannot find peace and walks in her sleep. Her attempt to write a letter signifies her attempt to express herself, something that she has not been able to do lately. All the actions of hers come back in her memory and she also mourns for the death of Lady Macduff. She tries to wash the blood stains from her hand and we remember how she has changed from her commanding position. Her question 'who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?' is extremely poignant. The Doctor sums up her situation and says: 'Unnatural deeds do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds



to deaf pillows' will discharge their secrets. More she needs the divine than the physician'. The Doctor expresses his inability to cure her and soon we hear of her death,

Lady Macbeth is thus much more than just the 'fiend-like Queen' of Macbeth. She is a character who is ruthless, fearful, and powerful and yet one who invokes our pity and sympathy at the end. She may lack the imaginative vigour of her husband, yet she is indeed a close companion to Macbeth. She is indeed an extremely powerful creation of Shakespeare and the moral response, as always, will not do justice to this grand figure in the play.

---

## **2.6 ROLE OF THE WITCHES IN THE PLAY**

---

The supernatural does play an important role in tragedy as its presence alerts the audience to the fact that there are many things in this Universe that are beyond human control. The three Witches in this play have many roles to play. They are forces of evil and also representatives of fate and destiny as expressed in the adjective \* 'Weird'.

The first scene of the play shows the three Witches meeting on a stormy night. They hold out the promise of meeting Macbeth on an empty heath. This scene, though short (only 11 lines) sets the tone of the play. The Witches talk of meeting again when the 'hurlyburly' is done. This confusion is a major preoccupation in the play and may be interpreted as a confusion of moral standards. The Witches also refer to fair being foul and foul being fair and the audience is confused even further. It is not just an idle riddle that the Witches pronounce. Amidst the equivocation and the play with words, they speak of the impossibility of separating the fair from the foul and vice versa, and in their mouth we hear the words, 'Fair is foul and foul is fair' which is very useful in the understanding of the play.

The Witches meet Macbeth and Banquo as they are returning from the battlefield. They greet Macbeth as the Thane of Glamis and refer to him as the Thane of Cawdor, and also as the future King of Scotland. To Banquo they say that he will be the father of the future King of Scotland. The Witches speak in riddles and employ equivocation. They speak half the truth and tempt the listener to interpret the remaining half in his own way. Though they say that Macbeth will 'be the King, they never say a word about Duncan's murder. So these creatures cannot be blamed for the murder committed by Macbeth. The way they give Macbeth

the security and take it away by foretelling that Banquo will be the father of the future King is interesting. It is as if the Witches are enjoying the game that they are playing with Macbeth and Banquo.

When Macbeth seeks out the Weird Sisters again in the latter half of the play, their reassurances and prophecies are even more confusing. The vision of an armed head tells him to beware of Macduff. They show him the vision of a bloody child which tells him that he need not fear as no man who is born of a woman would be able to harm him. They show him the third vision of a crowned child with a tree which tells him that he is safe as long as Birnam Wood does not come up to Dunsinane Hill. But the vision of the eight Kings with Banquo following them fills Macbeth's heart with fear as it reminds Macbeth of the earlier prophecy that the Witches had made to Banquo. As always, the Witches never directly instruct anything to Macbeth. It is his own depraved Will that prompts Macbeth. They provide a series of visions but do not answer to any queries that Macbeth puts forward. Later when Macbeth realizes that both the situations can be metaphorically interpreted, does he say that no one should believe in the words of the 'juggling fiends' who only 'palter with us in a double sense;/ That keep the word of promise to our ear/ And break it to our hope.'

However the Witches' charms have a fearful effect on the audience and they make the atmosphere uncomfortable. The way in which the Witches cook up their charms is such an instance where popular ideas about Witchcraft are used by Shakespeare in this play. They highlight many important themes and also to look into the nature of evil in the Universe.

---

## **2.7 IMAGERY IN MACBETH**

---

An image is a description that appeals to one or more of our senses and explains the major themes and ideas of the play. Critics have pointed out that *Macbeth* has some identifiable images that help in the interpretation of the play. One such is the clothing imagery. Equating honours with new clothes or the image of a dwarf looking odd wearing a giant's robe make us question whether the person enjoying a certain position is worthy of it or not. Invocations to the powers of darkness stress both evil that will be done and also point to the fear in the

mind, Blood is a symbol both of the murder and also of the guilt that exists in the minds of Macbeth and his wife. The references to the birds and beasts of prey point to the dangers that exist all around.

---

## 2.8 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

---

### Long Questions

1. Attempt an analysis of the character of Macbeth,
2. What role do the Witches play in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*?
3. Lady Macbeth is a powerful and interesting character. Discuss.
4. Consider *Macbeth* as a tragedy.

### Medium Answer Type questions

1. What role does the Banquet Scene have in the play?
2. Describe the second meeting between Macbeth and the Witches.
3. Describe the state of Macbeth's mind before the murder of Duncan.
4. The sleepwalking scene is very important in understanding the character of Lady Macbeth. Discuss.
5. Describe the Murder Scene.

### Short Questions

1. What are the prophecies that the Witches utter in front of Macbeth and Banquo?
2. Why was Macbeth given the title of Thane of Cawdor?
3. What is Macbeth's reaction to his Wife's death?
4. Briefly talk of any two of the images used in *Macbeth*.
5. How does Lady Macbeth describe the character of her husband?
6. Is the Porter Scene unnecessary in the play?
7. Why does Macbeth murder Banquo?
8. What is Macbeth's final realization about the Witches?

---

## 2.9 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Ed. Kenneth. Muir. New Delhi and London  
Routledge / B.I Publications, 1988.

Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1904,

Gardners, Helen, 'Milton's "Satan" and the Theme of Damnation in Elizabeths  
Tragedy'. *English Association Essays and Studies*. 1 (1948), 46-66.

Knight, G.Wilson. *The Imperial Theme*. London : Oxford University Press, 1931  
Sinfield, Alan. (*ed*). *Macbeth : New Casebooks*. London: Macmillan, 1992.

Spurgeon. Caroline. *Shakesp eare's Imagery and What it Tells Us*. Cambridge:  
Cambridge University Press, 1935.

---

## UNIT 3 □ THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

---

### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 An Introduction to The Merchant of Venice
- 3.2 Scene-wise Critical Summary, Detailed Analysis of Dramatic Action and Examination of Rhetorical Devices
- 3.3 Detailed Character Analyses
- 3.4 Discussion on the Title, Plot and Major Themes
- 3.5 Comprehension Exercises
- 3.6 Suggested Readings

---

### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

---

This play captures in a large way the manifold complexities that underlie a mature Shakespearean comedy. The purpose of this Unit is to communicate to the learner some such issues that were very relevant in Shakespeare's times.

---

### 3.1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

---

Written around 1596 and first published in the year 1600, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* has baffled readers and audiences since its very inception. The play largely deals with the battle between notions of 'mercy' and 'justice', as foisted on the antagonism between a charitable Christian merchant Antonio and a self-seeking Jewish usurer Shylock. Involving a classic plot of revenge, the play seemingly makes the Christian versus Jewish opposition only a symbolic variant of the debate between good and evil. And going by such a simplistic evaluation of the dramatist's purpose, the text - in concluding with the rescue and restitution of the Venetian merchant in Antonio - appears to champion the cause of good and advocate a comic principle. Structurally therefore, insofar as the text ends with a restoration of the order of the good, it fits the definition of a comedy. Critics across the ages have accordingly placed *The Merchant of*

*Venice* within the Shakespearean canon of comedies - and, often romantic comedies, because of its principal plot of a love-affair between Bassanio and Portia. In fact, in more ways than one, it is this love affair that seems to drive the play towards its moment of crisis in the law court by making Antonio beholden to the vengeful moneylender in Shylock.

On another plane however, Shylock's desire for violence is made to seem entirely plausible and justifiable in the light of his prolonged victimization by Christian state. The audience is almost made to believe that Shylock's murderous bond is in fact provoked by the Christian merchant's public jibes at his race and profession. The history of the Jew's marginality is attested by the play's depiction of racial hatred, as perpetrated by all the Christian characters from Antonio to Launcelot. It is as if Shylock is the villain of the piece because he is the religious minority in a Christian state. His villainy, rather than requiring any proof in action, is presumed right at the beginning of the play by all the other characters in it. And, even before he can will any evil, he is apparently made the butt of much criticism and public condemnation by the protagonist and his circle of friends. In a way, therefore, *The Merchant of Venice* opens with a tragic consciousness of Shylock's minority status in Venice by rooting it within a history of racial prejudice. The play, at the very outset, demonstrates tragic possibilities for Shylock - a predetermined villain whose crime is his religion and not his action. In that Shakespeare manages to mobilize occasional sympathy for the character of Shylock as an outcast within the Christian moral order, the ending of the play confirms his tragedy by forcing him to convert. The moral battle between the Christian merchant and the Jewish moneylender is resolved through a cunning twist in legal reasoning, whereby the racial outcast is also outlawed. Though in the name of Christian 'mercy', his life is pardoned, the final verdict against Shylock betrays no example of 'justice'. His property is confiscated by the state and willed to a Christian son-in-law, while his arch-rival in Antonio orders his conversion into Christianity as repayment for granting life. The tragic potential of the racial 'other' is in the end realized, till Shylock's exit as a resigned and submissive outlaw closely resembles the plot design of a tragedy. *The Merchant of Venice*, while being a comedy of romance and reconciliation for the Christian characters, is alternatively the tragedy of the Jew in Shylock.

Interestingly, the final scene of *The Merchant of Venice* includes a rather unconvincing reversal of Antonio's fortunes, known through Portia's chance-encounter with a letter that reports of his ship's safe return to the harbour. While a sudden rediscovery of one of Antonio's lost ships seems to make false the very basis of the dramatic conflict in courtroom bargains, Portia's accidental custody of the letter which reports such development is further beyond any attempt at explanation. All that one can say in defence of such an ending is that it becomes, for Shakespeare, a deliberate contrivance to make his play akin to the structure of a comedy. By concluding with a thematic reinstatement of the 'good' through coincidental turns in the tale (of lost things found, mistaken identities recognized, disguises abandoned and couples reunited), the text becomes a classic comedy of yore. Also, the minor subplot of the lost wedding rings and their ultimate repossession leading to the final act of disclosure of identities serves as a trope to underline the romantic underpinnings of this comedy. The play leaves its audience with a vision of three reconciled Christian couples, content with their lot in life and love.

An apparent romantic comedy by its mode of closure. *The Merchant of Venice* has yet raised ranging critical debates about the tragic impact of its images of violence and hatred. Significantly, Nicholas Rowe commented on *The Jew of Venice* in 1709: 'Though we have seen that play received and acted as a comedy... I cannot but think it was designed tragically by the author. There appears in it such a deadly spirit of revenge, such a savage fierceness and fellness... as cannot agree with either [the] style or characters of comedy.'

---

### **3.2 SCENE-WISE CRITICAL SUMMARY, DETAILED ANALYSIS OF DRAMATIC ACTION AND EXAMINATION OF RHETORICAL DEVICES**

---

#### **Act I Scene (i)**

The play opens with the Venetian merchant, Antonio, giving words to a characteristic sadness that he has no knowledge of the cause of. He can speak about it, but only in an effort to express his lack of knowledge about what it stems from. His audience includes his close friends Salarino and Salanio, who poetically attempt to discern the possible reasons behind Antonio's melancholia.

While the most obvious guess hints at his legitimate worries about the fate of his merchandise-laden I ships at sea, Antonio dismisses it as being the least of his concerns. Contrary to the I later turn of events in the play, Antonio claims that his current trading venture does I not in any way determine his fortunes - and therefore, merit not the hue of so deep a displeasure. Salarino and Salanio however continue to poetise the legitimacy of a merchant's worries about business. In a characteristic play of striking imagery, 'Shakespeare makes the two friends imaginatively apprehend catastrophe through everyday reminders and encounters. Antonio vehemently opposes such diagnoses of his sadness. At this, Salarino suggests that if not business and wealth, Antonio's I pallidness must be the consequence of heterosexual love. While the latter is quick to I disdain this suggestion, it ironically pre-empts Bassanio's plea for money (later in this Act) to woo the fair maid of Belmont, Portia. Indeed, Antonio's sadness might I be caused by an intuitive knowledge of his friend's prospective heterosexual alliance I with Portia, which in turn threatens his homosocial bond with Bassanio.

Unable to elicit assent from Antonio with regard to any of the imagined I diagnoses of his sadness, Salarino playfully ascribes it to a mysterious clinical disposition. He discourses at length about how Nature has moulded the constitution of certain people in ways that defy logical explanation of their moods and manners, and possibly Antonio is just one of that curious creed. At this point in the conversation, Bassanio, Lorenzo and Gratiano enter the scene. Salarino and Salanio beg leave of their friends, on the pretext of leaving Antonio with better company than theirs.

The garrulous Gratiano soon notices Antonio's silence as a mark of his perturbed interior and offers his services as a fool to usher merriment. In a long exhortation peculiar to his character — and later identified by Bassanio as “an infinite deal of nothing” —Gratiano explains the (de)merits of enforced silence as either bearing evidence of little mettle or a feminine will to coyness. He exclaims that the one who speaks less either lacks the power of conviction (like a self-proclaimed “Sir Oracle”) or the right to a voice (like “a maid not vendible”). This is again ironical in the sense that this same power of speech-making - declaredly the prerogative of the worthy male - will crucially be usurped by the disguised woman-as-lawyc^ in Portia to save the merchant's life.



On Gratiano's exit with Lorenzo with the promise of dinnertime mirth, the two bosom-friends in Antonio and Bassanio are left to make way for the major dramatic action of the play. Bassanio, in beginning by thanking Antonio for his perpetual support and financial aid, asks one last favour of him. He is in love with the fair lady of Belmont Portia, and we get to know that he has already squandered a lot of money in projecting himself as a suitor worthy of her attention. For one last time. Bassanio believes that a monetary grant from the merchant would bolster his prospects of winning the much-sought-after maid by providing him with the means of journeying to Belmont. Antonio, bound by the strongest ties of love to Bassanio, says that though all his fortunes are on the seas, his reputation in Venice as an honest merchant would not hinder the success of Bassanio's planned enterprise. He is convinced that his name could well garner all the money that Bassanio needs, and he shall fearlessly stand guarantor of a bond that promises happiness and triumph in love for his friend.

### **Act I Scene (ii)**

The next scene takes us to Belmont, a room within the mansion bequeathed to Portia by a dead father. But, there is more than financial inheritance that the father has willed to the young maid. Bound as Portia is by the Law of the (dead) Father, her life now depends on a lottery of caskets designed to find her a fitting husband. While this dramatic device significantly points to the patrilineal-patriarchal underpinnings of Law, it also ironically prepares us for Portia's deviant attempts at subverting both the Law of the Father and the Law of the State from within;

Portia begins by complaining against the curbs on her own agency and free will by the fatalistic trope of a lottery ordained by her father. She can neither choose nor refuse a suitor by the merit in her own judgment; and though her father's plot of choosing the right husband for Portia is in effect a ploy to evaluate the candidature of her potential suitors, it threatens a negation of the woman's own subjectivity. It only signifies the oppressive regime of a patriarchal power that deems the woman unfit for the knowledge of her own well-being. Her desire, in being potentially disruptive, must of necessity be contained within the structural mandate of patrimonial law. And, yet the paradox lies in the ways in which the victim of this law in Portia finally gets around to tinkering it in order to win over the object of her desire, Bassanio. It is interesting how through the whole of the

play it is the rather the man in the relationship who seems to be the plaything, the supplicant and the beneficiary.

As the action prepares us for the play of caskets by the many suitors of Portia, Nerissa urges her mistress to weigh the candidature of all the wooers who had come to Belmont in hope of her fair hand. We are serially given a catalogue of the many rival-claimants for Portia, as she recounts the worth of each in accents that smack of sheer disdain. Almost all the potential suitors seem inadequate (whether in physical or moral terms), though they are said to have come with bragging professions of self-worth and love for Portia. In her recounting of the (dis)agreeable aspects of every one of this lot, Portia paints delightful caricatures of different excesses of human nature. Shakespeare, by making his heroine speak through his reserve of wit, emerges as a master-judge of human folly and makes our pleasure attend on baneful descriptions of sins and vices.

Nerissa, running us through this humorous catalogue of princely suitors, finally informs her mistress that her fears of being paired with either of them have been safely allayed. On being told of the terms of the lottery, the entire community of her wooers fled as by a divine command. Playfully, Nerissa names a Venetian “scholar and soldier” who had once visited Portia’s father’s court in company of the Marquis of Montferrat. She knows that it is this scholar, named Bassanio, who her mistress had pawned off her heart to and awaits the arrival of as the most worthy claimant to marital liaison. Portia falls into the bait, and expresses her eager admiration for the youth without any reserve.

The servant enters and announces the arrival of the Prince of Morocco, who has come determined to try his. own fortune and is not dissuaded by the conditions of the lottery,

### **Act I Scene (iii)**

It is in this scene that the primary dramatic action begins to unfold itself, with the entry of the Jewish usurer, Shylock. Bassanio, in looking for means to enable his quest for love, asks three thousand ducats of the Jew for three months and offers the name of Antonio as surety for the bond. On hearing of the Christian merchant, Shylock discerns a plot of revenge in the bond. An uncompunctious moneylender, Shylock has been routinely assaulted and abused by the entire

Christian community (and, of them, prominently by Antonio) for charging high rates of interest. Also, Antonio - himself a merchant and money-lender - leads his life by Christian principles and believes in an ideal of fraternity that seeks no profit through interest and exaction. He therefore directly stands as a professional rival to Shylock, in first lessening his business prospects and then openly castigating him for his racial identity.

The professional animosity between the two merchants is not only cloaked in racial terms but rationalized as being rooted in the religious faith of either. Antonio's self-effacing desire for philanthropy is characteristically classified as Christian, while Shylock's policy of self-interest cannot but be fuelled by the Judaic desire for excess. While the former vows by a Christian doctrine of moderation to disdain the 'taking [or] giving of excess', the latter cites scriptural parallels to the story of Jacob and Laban to justify his self-seeking tendencies.

Furthermore, Shylock's status in Venice as a racial-political outcast - constantly warring with a predominantly Christian citizenry - is also made evident at the outset. The crimes of Shylock that provide for the major impetus of the play are, we are made to believe, for the most part provoked by a historical victimization and ostracization of the Jew within a Christian state. The legal apparatus of the state, as the play hereafter would prove, will only further ratify his history of anti-Semitism in the name of justice!

This scene tells us that Shylock, true to his profession, is acutely aware of Antonio's business ventures. He recalls almost as a rhyme the places to which the Christian merchant's ships are bound. Antonio enters to seal the bond that his friend is trying to talk the Jew into, and soon the latter launches into a diatribe against the public humiliation heaped on him by his Christian counterparts "where merchants most do congregate". In an aside, Shylock curses Antonio for his lack of declared Christian temperance in public spaces, and his consistent attempts to foil the Jew's "bargains and well-worn thrift". The bond appears to Shylock as a potential source of revenge on Antonio, who now stands with no capital possession and yet willfully the legal surety to a bond worth three thousand ducats.

Following another elaborate verbal assault on the two friends, for seeking help from one they have routinely called the “Devil” and a “cut-throat dog” and still want to do so, Shylock agrees to enter the contract but on different terms. He professes to play the friend with his self-announced “enemy” and repay “love” for racial hate by charging no interest on the doled money, but “in a merry sport” claiming forfeiture payment of the bond in the form of a pound of flesh from near the Christian merchant’s heart.

Bassanio, on hearing of the evil terms ordained by the Jew and realizing his penchant for-vengeance, warns Antonio not to stand liable for it. He would rather dwell in his wants than make his dearest friend pay for them with his life. Antonio, however, is convinced that the sinister intent in the bond will never be realized since his ships are bound to return a month before the due date. Though Antonio would lovingly have his own body violated for the desires of his friend, he is sure that there can be no question of forfeiting the bond.

## **Act II. Scene (i)**

Returning to Belmont and the deciding lottery of the fair maid’s fortunes, we are introduced for the first time to a suitor of Portia in person. It is the Prince of Morocco, who begins with a plea to Portia for ignoring his dark complexion. Because, he claims by the strength of his courage to prove his deserving in any fair battle with the “fairest” rival in love. He ironically urges Portia not to judge him by the outward force of appearances, while the Prince will - in his choice of caskets -soon fall prey to what he warns against the lure of.

Portia disclaims any effort at judging by one’s exterior, because her fate lies not in the force of her eyes but in her faith in the will of her father. She then declares that though she is forbidden from an exercise of her own choice, the Prince of Morocco does seem the worthiest of all that had sought her attention so far.

Thanking the lady for hazarding so huge a favour despite the curbs on her will, the Prince desires to be led on to the final moment of the fateful sport of a lottery. He pledges by his sword that had borne the marks of unflinching resolution in many a war that he can perform such innumerable other feats to prove the validity of his claim on the lady. But, he is aware that in a lottery of caskets, none of

this spunk will endure and too worthy a suitor might also give in to the whims of fortune. Portia warns him about the conditions attendant upon the lottery once again, whereby the one who chooses once and chooses wrong will be bound by an oath, never to approach any other woman by way of marriage. The Prince of Morocco assures her of his awareness of this decree, and requests a hastening of the final hour of decision.

## **Act II Scene (ii)**

Though decidedly a scene that provides comic relief in the midst of the play's serious action (around lately raised questions of revenge and marriage), the entrance of Lancelot Gobbo preserves acute dramatic significance.

At the outset, the servant of the rich Shylock seems to be suffering from a moment of existential angst and inner conflict arising from the opposing claims of will and responsibility. In an almost Faustian way, the clown in Launcelot is shown warring with moral polarities just as his opening soliloquy ironizes the classic Christian ethical binary of good versus evil. He problematizes the simplistic ascriptions of moral value to action (as already seen in the play's famous pitting of the 'good' Christian protagonist against the 'evil' Jewish villain) by demonstrating how such categories cannot be titulary assigned. For Launcelot, while on the one hand staying with the Jew (his master) signifies a habitation with the Devil incarnate, his attempted flight from 'Shylock's house on the other meant a pact with the devil in unheeding the call of his duty as a servant. In either way, he finds himself led by and into the path of the wrong - whether in his bondage to the Jew or in his seeking new appointment with the Christian in Bassanio. The time-tested dramatic device of the soliloquy as stemming from a conflict of conscience and venting psychological agony is accurately parodied by not the quintessential Elizabethan overreacher in the protagonist but the base figure of the fool.

Soon afterwards, Launcelot decides against the call of duty to save his own soul from the scourge of the Jewish villain and run away, But, his exercise of moral self-questioning is immediately intercepted by his old blind father Gobbo, who unwittingly stumbles across the son on his way to Shylock's house to find him. Gobbo asks Launcelot for directions to the Jew's house and expresses his desire for a renewed union with his long-lost son. Launcelot takes his father's blindness as an excuse to avoid immediate recognition and provide cause for some

playful banter. In this mirthful exchange between the father and son, the latter - again, in a characteristic trope of the carnivalesque - attempts to subvert social hierarchies by appropriating the title of the “Master” while being but a servant. He insists on his father calling this Launcelot by some respectful epithet as the “young Master”. Making fun of the very institutes of patrimony and aristocratic descent, Launcelot delivers the last shaft of his comic irony by proclaiming himself dead to his father. And, yet soon after seeing the father inconsolably struck by the news, he acknowledges his true identity and achieves an adequately sentimental scene of reunion with his father by painstakingly clearing all his doubts. He apprises his father of his decision to forsake the services of the Jewish usurer and seek employment with a new and better Christian master in Bassanio.

Both father and son take to pleading for a favour of employment from Bassanio, and the latter grants their suit following a laborious revelation of the same. Gobbo requests the bliss of Bassanio’s superior company for his son because he has the “grace of God”, while his erstwhile Jewish master only had enough material grace and none spiritual.

On the exit of Launcelot in order to take leave of the Jew, Bassanio revisits plans and preparations for his pre-exile dinner with friends. At this point, Gratiano enters the scene and begs to accompany Bassanio on his exile. The latter agrees to his request, but warns his friend to temper his tongue and garrulous disposition lest they spoil his fortunes abroad by their habitual show of excess. Gratiano soon falls to the suggestion and vouches for a policy of complete abstinence from wanton speech and an accompanying show of civility-induced sadness through their stay in Belmont

### **Act II Scene (iii)**

A short scene, here we see Launcelot bidding farewell to Shylock’s daughter Jessica and taking her leave. The latter credits the servant for infusing much happiness into a semblance of “hell” in the Jew’s house. She ironically calls him a “merry devil” in the Devil’s own abode, who abated much of the general tedium around her; The insistent punning on the word ‘devil’ again reminds us of Launcelot’s previous disquisition on how he is ineluctably in the grasp of the devil, whether in staying with or leaving the Jew.

It is here that we come to know of the love affair between the rich Jew's daughter and Bassanio's Christian friend, Lorenzo - when the former hands a letter to Launcelot to be delivered to her paramour; The servant, in promising the safe dispatch of Jessica's letter, also rues her Jewish lineage that has yet not been able to contaminate the innate goodness of her character - and, therefore seeks deliverance through a Christian husband,

Jessica closes the scene with an admittance of her sense of shame and guilt at being the daughter of a sinning Jew. She wishes to overcome this internal splintering of her noble self bound by filial ties to an evil father by way of marriage to Lorenzo, and a voluntary conversion to Christianity hence.

### **Act II Scene (iv)**

Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino. and Salanio are in Venice, deliberating on arrangements made for the masque and dinner. While Salanio feels that they are too unprepared for the masque and hence the plan be better forsaken than executed with amateurish impropriety, Launcelot enters with Jessica's letter. Lorenzo at once recognizes the "fair hand" that wrote it and sends word back with Launcelot assuring his beloved of his steadfast resolve.

As Soon as the rest depart, Lorenzo reveals his plan of elopement with Jessica to his Mend Gratiano. He narrates the contents of the letter, whereby Jessica directed him about the exact details of their planned escape from Venice and divulged her secret plot of thieving her father in securing provisions for their flight. She tells Lorenzo of her potential disguise as a servant, in order to prevent a discovery of the enterprise.

The love-stricken Lorenzo is amazed by the punctilious care of Jessica in plotting their escape and swears that the rich Jew's sins can only be atoned for by his daughter's nobility of purpose. He wishes her a life of bliss, arid is convinced of her virtue - which, despite her lineal Jewishness - can earn her the pleasures of heaven. He tells Gratiano that for tonight's masque, Jessica shall play his torchbearer.

### **Act II Scene (v)**

Launcelot tells Shylock of his new appointment with Bassanio, and is reproved for his unfaithfulness. The Jew tells his former servant that he will soon discover



the difference between a rich master and a pauper for employer. Launcelot is accused of frittering away his master's wealth by virtue of his insatiable appetite - which, he now taunts, will for the most part remain unconsummated for his master's lack of means. Also, the servant is leveled charges of sloth and laziness against - all of which went to injure Shylock's desire for profitable deals. The Jew impishly persists with his allegations and reminds Launcelot of the fact that his present master's "borrowed purse" would no longer ensure such privileges for him.

Launcelot unflickeringly gulps down his master's accusations, and then ingeniously calls out to Jessica to be able to deliver Lorenzo's word to her. Shylock prepares to leave for dinner with the Christian merchant and his friend, much to his chagrin. He hates the hosts and knows well enough that this invitation issues not from well-meaning love but flattery. And, yet he readies himself to feast on the prodigal's borrowed fortunes, and entrusts the care of his house unto his daughter. He shares some premonitory knowledge of omens, and is bothered by apprehensions of impending monetary loss. This is a case of dramatic irony, where the reader is already aware of the validity of Shylock's suspicious foreknowledge. While the character can only intuitively apprehend misfortune, we the readers - are perfectly in knowledge of how and who will deliver this stroke of ill-fate on the Jew.

Launcelot, in passing on Lorenzo's message to Jessica, hints-at the preparations of the masque by Antonio's friends. Hearing this, Shylock is flown into a frenzied rage as he forewarns Jessica against the useless foppery of these Christian dandies and asks her not be in sight of any of them. He forbids her from appearing at the window and trying to catch a glimpse at the disguised retinue of Christian men, fearing that she might be lured by the spectacle into amorous intrigues. Little does he know that for Jessica the masque would serve as the precise facilitator of her escape with one of the disguised Christian youths in Lorenzo.

## **Act II Scene (vi)**

Gratiano and Salarino await Lorenzo's arrival outside Shylock's mansion, and express dismay about his delay in executing a plot commissioned by love; In a classic Shakespearean rhetorical flourish, Gratiano talks about how the pursuit of desire is always more intense than the enjoyment of it. Similarly, the textbooks



of love ordain a more spirited chase of the beloved than the conjugal hours of sustained intimacy. The climax of love is in its getting rather than the living of it.

Gratiano is soon intercepted by the hurried entry of Lorenzo, who apologizes for his delay and hopes to make up for it through a similar test of patience when his friends get to thieving wives. Jessica appears on the balcony, dressed as a boy - and, on confirming the identity of her masked lover, throws down a casket of gold and jewels robbed from her father's store to support them on their flight. She is ashamed of her sinful action, and thanks the night for enshrouding her crimes in darkness and thus preventing their discovery. Lorenzo urges her to descend and be his torchbearer for the masque -and then, on beholding her, bursts out into effusive encomiums of her virtue and wisdom. He hopes that she will escape the scourge of damnation for her Jewish pedigree by the sheer merit of her own truthfulness and constancy in love,

Antonio enters. in search of Gratiano and announces an early departure for Bassanio because of the weather. The masque, he reports much to Gratiano's pleasure, has been called off in hastening preparations for Bassanio's take-off.

## **Act II scene (vii)**

We are returned to Belmont, and the first scene of the selection of caskets by the Prince of Morocco. The curtains are drawn from the table of caskets, and Portia invites the Prince to make his choice and attempt a winning of his proclaimed love. She explains that if the Prince chooses the casket that contains her picture, she would immediately give herself unto him as per her father's wish.

In a long drawn monologue that reflects on the perpetual feud between appearances and reality, illusion and truth, beauty and value, the Prince of Morocco surveys all three caskets of gold, silver and lead. He serially reads the inscriptions on either, and bases his choice on the assurances made thereon. While the outward dross of the leaden casket sufficiently puts him off as but an element too unworthy to house fair Portia's portrait, the inscription on it threatens further the winning of the desired prize. The silver casket promises as much as one deserves. Though the Prince is adequately convinced about how he deserves Portia if not only by virtue of his strength and wealth b it also the power of his Jove. His eyes wander so far as the golden casket now. And, this one ensures the winning of that which

many desire. The Prince cannot be more certain that the object of the want of many cannot but be the object of his own love - Portia! And, since like all that travel across the seas and against the winds he desires the one indisputable prize, he shall choose the casket that promises such. He has made up his mind, and asks for the key to the golden casket.

He unlocks it, and inside is found the carrion of a corpse's skull, with a scroll stuffed into one of its sockets. The Prince unrolls the paper inscription, and reads it. In a curt rhyme, it teaches the defeated Prince the deceit borne by the lure of one's eyes and pronounces his choice of casket as a lifelong lesson on the principles of judicious judgment. What matters is not the exterior show of glamour and finesse but an inward evaluation of value. The rhyme ends by reminding the Prince of the consequences of his oath, and urges a silent return without much further ado.

The Prince of Morocco obeys; and Portia thanks her fortune for a marriage averted and wishes the same fate for all that bear such a complexion. Smacking of a racist undertone, Portia's final statement paradoxically makes her a potential victim of that same error of judgment by exteriors that her father warned against.

## **Act II Scene (viii)**

Salarino and Salanio are engaged in a conversation about the grand departure of Bassanio for Belmont, to claim his love. Salanio reports of the Jew's discovery of his daughter's act of betrayal and his demands for redressal from the Duke of Venice. Shylock, having initially conjured Jessica's flight with Lorenzo on the same ship that carried Bassanio, sought legal intervention through the state of Venice. It was only after Antonio assured the Duke that the two were not travelling on the same ship as his friend Bassanio that such suspicions were laid at rest.

Shylock, as the hopes of finding Jessica flickered away, reportedly raved through the streets of Venice mourning the loss of his ducats more than his daughter. He ranted in rage at the thought of his daughter's elopement with a Christian and prayed for a retrieval of all his jewels if not the one wearing them. It seemed as if he was more struck with grief at his monetary loss rather than the act of filial infidelity.

In recounting the madness in the Jew's reactions, Salarino remembers a report he had received from a Frenchman about the miscarriage of an Italian ship, laden

with sufficient riches. While he was immediately reminded of Antonio at this mention, he wished that such a stroke of ill-luck would never befall the kind-hearted merchant. He goes on to narrate the sentimental parting of Antonio and Bassanio, when the latter promised to return at the earliest after finishing business. Antonio, with tears in eyes, entreated his friend not to let thoughts about him foil his noble expedition for love. He admitted to a willful surrender of his life and body for the success of Bassanio's enterprise.

Salanio believes that the good merchant Antonio lives not for his own sake but for his best friend's. The two determine to find the man out, and provide him with some cheer.

### **Act II Scene (ix)**

We return again to the draw of caskets in Portia's house, but this time the one hazarding a choice is the Prince of Arragon. Portia orders a removal of the curtains from the fateful caskets, and bids the Prince to go ahead and choose the one that contains her portrait in order to claim her affections. The Prince repeats the terms of the oath he has had to undertake; the first being a vow of confidentiality about his choice and its consequences, the second mandating that in case of failure the chooser will never again propose marriage to any other, and the third eliciting the promise of a muted return following an act of misjudgment.

Having recounted the terms thus, the Prince of Arragon proceeds towards the caskets and engages in a rhetorical exercise of self-debate over the relative worth of each casket. While the leaden casket is cursorily rejected for its threatening exterior as well as its ominous proclamations on the outside, the golden invokes the promise of that which most desire. The Prince immediately sees through the implications of the 'many' in equating the prize of the worthy man with the desire of the multitude. And, this equation of the deserving 'one' with the desiring 'many' is what he most resists and denies falling prey to. In going by the logic of one's deserving, the inscription on the silver casket appeals to him best. He does believe that the truest test of merit is in the weighing of what one deserves - and therein lies the assurance of the most profitable returns. Again, in a signal instance of Shakespeare's literary prowess, the Prince of Arragon wishfully conjures the effects of a true evaluation of one's deserving in determining his

right to honour and power. He maintains that the regime of corrupt politics could indeed be remedied by a measurement of one's potential for respect. How many of those that are subjugated and deprived of their rightful shares of fortune will be redressed by this conferring of 'deserved dignity', he asks. Swayed by such philosophical questioning, the Prince of Arragon deems the silver casket fittest to contain Portia's picture and attempts unlocking it. Inside is discovered the portrait of a "blinking idiot" and a scroll mocking the chooser's folly in being bought by the silvery outsides of a shadowed nothing. The paper advises a swift retreat from Belmont for the Prince to escape further disgrace of his person - and the latter silently abides.

Portia heaves a sigh of relief at the fool's departure who, she claims, has not the wit to choose wisely. As she is about to retire, a servant reports of the coming of a young Venetian carrying an abundance of gifts of great value. Nerissa is quick to guess that the approaching Suitor is Bassanio - and the true test of love is just to follow. Again, as an employment of the device of dramatic irony, we the readers have already come to know the secret that, for Bassanio, constitutes the biggest challenge to his happiness. The readers could already guess, after the two consecutive failures in casket-selection, that the third leaden one is the route to victory. The moment of Bassanio's life-claiming decision is now only a structural necessity in the play's dramatic schema, in that there is no longer the suspense of knowledge withdrawn.

### **Act III Scene (i)**

Salarino and Salanio meet in Venice, and discuss reports received from the Rialto. Salarino reiterates news about the loss of one of Antonio's ships on the seas. His companion Salanio vehemently wishes that the report be a rumour, because the noble Antonio deserves not such misfortune. At this juncture, the Jew enters the scene and is tauntingly pricked by reminders of his daughter's flight with Lorenzo. Salarino and Salanio take jibes at the difference in character between the damned Jew and her noble daughter; and term this act of betrayal as a fitting retort to Shylock's inherent evilness. But, they are more interested in verifying whether the reports of Antonio's mercantile losses are true and seek confirmation from Shylock. The latter ratifies suspicions by calling his enemy a "beggar" and

a “bankrupt” who must now take care of the bond that claims a pound of his flesh as indemnity for forfeiture.

Shakespeare remarks that he is convinced that Shylock could not really be interested in such penalty as a pound of Christian flesh, since that serves no immediate purpose or benefit. This occasions Shylock’s famous rhetorical diatribe against the irrationality of racial-theological hatred. For the first time in the play, Shakespeare explains the “evil” Jew’s desire for revenge as being bred by the historical plight of his people in a communal culture of “Christian courtesy”. Shylock’s apparent aggressiveness and ill-feeling is, through just a nineteen-line-speech-exercise, unhinged from its earlier rationalizations in racial identity and made to reflect on the un-Christian character of the professed champions of Christianity. It is here that Shylock’s actions appear justified in the light of Christian wrongdoing, and Antonio’s presumption of a Christ-like suffering is undone by continued allegations of intolerance. Despite his psychological intemperance, Shylock is granted the status of a much-wronged human being with all-too-human desires, needs, fears and ferocities. The reader is almost confounded to identify him with this victim of the crudest creed of racial bias, inasmuch as his sins seem to stem, from the characteristic criminality of a Christian superiority.

Shylock unwaveringly maintains that even if a pound of Antonio’s flesh would have no material value, it will feed his desire for revenge. Antonio, the gracious merchant, had many a time heaped losses and insults on him for no other reason but his racial lineage. He asks, as of the audience, Whether a Jew loses his right to humanity just because of his race and religion. If the Jew has a body much like his Christian compatriot, should it not be capable of feeling pleasure and pain like the other? If the Jew lives through the same seasons and survives the same diseases, must he not too be vulnerable to the violences and extremities of either? If the Christian is born unto the right to be cruel to the Jew, must the latter not learn by the same example? And, if the Christian’s revenge on the Jew is theologically justifiable, then why must the latter’s attempt at wreaking vengeance be termed immoral and unnatural?

While in the middle of this rhetorical effervescence, a servant enters and begs Salarino and Salanio to join his master Antonio. Following the exit of the three,

Shylock's friend Tubal comes in with hearsay news about Jessica from Genoa, Soon after Shakespeare has almost managed to shift allegiances FT his audience from Antonio to Shylock through just the previous speech of the latter, he now has to again set the balance straight and return the characters to their stereotypical psychic motivations. Having neatly mobilized sympathy from the reader for the play's direct antagonist, the master-dramatist soon gets down to alienating him again and settling the figures into their predetermined stock-patterns of response. With Tubal's entry and his reference to Jessica, Shylock - by now seemingly a wronged character worthy of pity - is transformed to his earlier unethical self whereby he curses his daughter and wishes a discovery of her jewel-bedecked dead body.

In another instance of the rhetorical wit-play, Tubal deviously alternates reports about Antonio's undoing and Jessica's theft cum-flight to evoke contrary exclamations of jubilation and anguish from the Jew. On the one hand is Shylpck's loss of diamonds and ducats stolen by his daughter, and on the other is the prospect of his profit of a pound of Antonio's flesh. Two orders of economy are balanced at the same time, to hint at the irredeemable moral degeneration of the Jew - soon after he was sympathetically restored in the audience's estimation.

### **Act III Scene (ii)**

Bassanio has finally arrived at Belmont and awaits the deciding hour of his fortune. Portia, despite her vows of bondage to the will of her father and a consequent contract of self-abnegation in marriage, impetuously, gives in to elaborate proclamations of love for Bassanio. She pleads before Bassanio to wait awhile before entering the fray, and to grant her those moments of togetherness that fate might soon snatch away from the two of them. She voices her apprehensions about the results of the casket-sport, since it might end up separating the owner (Bassanio) from his rightful property (Portia). The economic terms employed by Portia in her speech almost seems to parody the contractual basis of this marriage, insofar as we know that this matrimonial alliance can only effect an upward economic mobility for the man and not the woman. The owner-inheritor relationship in the marriage contract is inverted in this case, since the beneficiary in the liaison is the husband. Portia, though deemed to be a "woman [that] hath no tongue" by the, patrimonial ordinance of her father, subverts the order of feminine selflessness by articulating her desire for Bassanio in unequivocal terms.

She seems completely liberated from concerns of womanly conduct by unabashedly declaring her love while at the same time making us recognize the subversive potential in her declarations through references to a patriarchal stereotype. On the other hand, though declaredly using the power of the 'tongue' which the woman should not have, Portia also uses her 'thought' in devious ways to throw hints along Bassanio's way with regard to the right choice. At the outset, she asks him to "beshrew" his eyes - thus hinting at the power of vision to guile and mislead.

When Bassanio eagerly urges a conclusion to his torturous strife by being brought directly to the scene of the caskets, Portia leads him on. She ushers him to the room, and orders music to play while Bassanio makes his choice. The music might be seen as serving two major dramatic purposes within the scenographic composition. First, the very lyric that is played is but a warning against Fancy "engender'd in the eyes" and therefore a didactic strategy to guide Bassanio past the allurements of outward beauty towards the leaden casket. Second, the playing of music Within the room would naturally have prevented the other witnesses present on the scene (namely, Nerissa, the servants, Gratiano et al.) from discovering any further hints/whispers that Portia could well have passed on to her suitor. Dramaturgically, the music gives Portia an opportunity to openly flout the rules of the lottery while escaping a revelation of her disobedience (to the father).

Bassanio, in taking off from the reverberating strains of the music and its lyrical reminders against the straying powers of vision, begins by disclaiming "outward shows" of beauty and goodness. In a long monologue discounting the ways of the world that rely too greatly on the outside and engage in little analysis of inner worth, Bassanio spurns the glitter of the gold and the fairness of silver. Moving towards the leaden casket, he feels more attracted by its threatening exterior and hopes joy to emanate from within it. Even before he opens the lead casket, Portia launches into an aside that expresses the surfeit of her joy and ecstasy in being won by the one that she wishes to belong to.

Bassanio opens the fateful casket, and much to his ecstasy discovers fair Portia's portrait inside. Looking at it, he is struck by the beauty of the image that is yet far from approximating to the real; He marvels at how the painter managed to



finish the picture, since each of her eyes in being painted is capable of robbing the eyesight of the one who paints it. Bassanio's speech here is a testimony to the success of verisimilitudinal realism in painting, and - almost contrary to the underlying principles of casket-selection - hints at how the image can at the same time be a truthful index to the real while falling short of its totality,

Bassanio reads the scroll inside the casket, which congratulates him for his newly-won bounty and bids him claim it for his own with a kiss. Portia expresses her sense of gratification at being rightfully chosen by the man of her choice through an ironic exercise at self-evaluation. She begins by undervaluing her own worth as incapable of matching up to her husband's, and ends by declaring the extraordinary store of her inherited property as now being transferred to Bassanio. While on the one hand this signifies a matrilineal economy of private property being willed off by the wife to the pauper-husband, it comes close on the heels of a voluntary self-depreciation by Portia as measuring up to nothing in comparison to her husband. The latter only seems to paradoxically highlight the poverty of Bassanio, who in fact has to await his marriage with Portia to claim a penny as his own. All his endeavours in love, right from his journey to courtship, are results of a borrowed profligacy and point to his utter penury beside which Portia seems but too excessive and undeserved a prize. Portia's own self-effacement charitably attempts to minimize the all-too-visible difference in their positions within the marriage, while her transference of property materially remedies it thereafter.

Portia seals the marriage bond with a kiss and a ring, which she urges Bassanio never to part with, as proof of his constancy in love. At this moment of ceremony, Gratiano interjects with a proposition to further the cause for happiness. He says that all along Bassanio's attempts at winning Portia, he too had given himself into a bargain for the lady's maid in Nerissa. They had silently exchanged vows of love, but promised a culmination of it only if Bassanio's fortunes were favourably decided by the "lottery". Now that the matter stands profitably resolved for all, he wishes his love to be solemnized in marriage at the same time as his friend's. Nerissa too consents to the arrangement, and there is much jubilation on the floor when Lorenzo, Jessica and a messenger called Salerio enter.



The latter delivers a letter to Bassanio from his friend, and bids him to journey back to Venice at the earliest. Salerio answers queries about Antonio's health, while Bassanio reads the letter and the colour on his face is blotted out. Portia begs a revelation of the contents of the letter that so calls the deepest dye of paleness onto her lover's face. She fathoms that nothing but the death of the dearest friend can so affect a man of honour. At this, Bassanio narrates the conditions of his journey to Belmont, by which his closest friend was bound in debt to an evil Jew who now claims a pound of his flesh as penalty. He knows from Salerio that none of Antonio's ships returned to the shore and he thus stands vulnerable to the murderous designs of his creditor - and all in the cause of furnishing him with the means to claim Portia. Jessica confirms fears about her father's determination to exact the penalty, by saying that she had often heard him swear vengeance upon Antonio by the same violent means as mentioned in the bond.

Portia asks of the sum that Antonio owes Shylock, and pledges to furnish as much more as can save such a selfless man from any scourge of harm incurred for the cause of Bassanio. She urges Bassanio to immediately go to the church and effect the marriage, and then venture to Venice without any further delay. She vows to live as a maid and abstain from all marital pleasure till the time her husband returns.

### **Act III Scene (iii)**

The bond has been forfeited, and Antonio is now in the custody of the Gaoler and at the mercy of Shylock. The scene begins with Antonio beseechingly trying to reason with "good Shylock", who so far had only elicited curses from him. Now, in begging leave for his own life, Antonio suddenly appears to wear a different and a much deferential attitude to the Jew who has ever invoked the worst in him. Shylock however is unmoved by all these entreaties and firmly intent on exactly the terms of his bond. He declares that he would never relent and nothing in the power of the state or its citizens can alter his resolve. He retorts to Antonio's hypocritical show of deference by reminding him of how he was wont to call the Jew a dog, and now it is time for it to gnaw its teeth into the prey.

Shylock refuses to be reasoned with and retires. And soon enough, Salarino reverts to calling him "the most impenetrable cur". Antonio agrees, and gives up all hope of persuading Shylock into mercy. He realizes that Shylock's desire for

revenge is motivated by the memory of all those times when Antonio had exempted his erstwhile debtors from the terms of penalty through financial aid.

Salarno assures his friend that the Duke of Venice cannot ever allow such a heinous penalty to be executed within his state. Antonio however knows that the Duke cannot interpose and bend the law of the state, since that will set a precedent for future manipulations within the penal machinery. Since the law mandates the aforesaid terms of the indemnity, the Duke's authority cannot but ensure the execution of it in the cause of upholding the order of justice in Venice.

### **Act III Scene (iv)**

Bassanio and Gratiano have left for Venice, and Lorenzo convinces Portia of the innate goodness of the one that she had sent help for. He remarks that if only she knew how great a person and how close a friend of Bassanio she had agreed to help, Portia's pride in her action would have multiplied manifold. Portia replies by saying that she has never shrunk back from doing good to others, though her current bounty of aid for Antonio is not even a fraction of what he deserves. She believes that friends are always similar in nature and constitution. Furthermore, companions who have spent such a great deal of time together cannot but resemble one another, and going by that logic - Antonio, she fathoms, must be quite like her own husband. In bearing in mind such mutuality between friends, how little would be the relief that Portia could furnish for one so like her own lover! In trying to deliver Antonio from a plight of unfortunate loss, she imagines herself to be helping none but her own soul.

Portia continues by saying that she would rather not dwell in commending<sup>1</sup> her own actions, but has decided to retire to a monastery with Nerissa. There, she plans to spend her time in maidenly prayers for the good of her husband and his friend. And, during her absence in Belmont, she wishes Lorenzo and Jessica to take charge of the house and her property. Lorenzo obliges with gratitude, and Jessica wishes her the deepest sense of solace through her self-willed moments of exile.

Having entrusted Lorenzo and Jessica with the responsibilities of the household, Portia turns to her servant Balthasar and commands him to rush to Padua and deliver a letter to a Doctor Bellario, She also asks him to bring back certain notes and garments that the Doctor will furnish at the earliest.

Meanwhile, we get to know that Portia has finally plotted her plans for a disguised charade in Venice and she now lets out some hints to Nerissa. Having maneuvered her tryst with the law of the father much to her own favour, she now resolves to participate and intervene in the larger machinations of justice within the law of the court. She tells Nerissa that they will of course see their husbands even before they can think of their wives.

Nerissa unsuspectingly queries Portia about the import of her statement. She divulges a part of her plan, where they will don the guise of men and equip themselves with those false adjuncts of manliness that they can never possess. She even swears to outplay Nerissa at exhibiting the pretensions of masculine self-pride through the minutest gestures of a characteristic boastfulness and chivalry. The rest of her plot, she asserts, will be unfolded in due time.

### **Act III Scene (v)**

At the garden around Portia's mansion, Launcelot and Jessica are engaged in some banter. The former is plagued with apprehensions about the prospects of Jessica's salvation, since the sins of the father cannot but invite punishment for the daughter. Jessica however playfully basks in her hopes of redemption through a Christian husband in Lorenzo. Launcelot continues the humorous raillery by alleging that Lorenzo too is no true member of the Christian community, since by helping Jews convert into their faith he is rather raising the price of pork by increasing the demand for it.

At this point, Lorenzo enters and Launcelot's preceding speech is reported against. In a bid to secure privacy with Jessica, Lorenzo asks Launcelot to forsake his banter for now and prepare the table for dinner. The clown however carries on with his immense reserve of wit-play, till Lorenzo is exasperated and at the same time awed by the fool's power over rhetoric. Finally with Launcelot's exit, Lorenzo asks of Jessica's opinions about his friend's wife Portia.

Jessica is unequivocal in her praise of Portia as the best woman that ever treaded earth, and therefore hopes that her virtue will be matched by Bassanio's faithfulness in marriage and love. And if the latter ever falters in his performance of love, Jessica believes that he cannot deserve the joys of heaven.

Lorenzo, happy at his lover's high estimation of Portia, rates himself as an equally good husband for Jessica. The latter urges a tempering of that self-prorouncement with her own opinions, till Lorenzo asks her to deliver them at dinnertime.

#### **Act IV Scene (i)**

The famous courtroom scene (and, of course, the moment of climax in the play) raises issues about questions of truth, justice, violence and mercy. It evidently begins in a Venetian court of law, with the Duke expressing his grief and sympathy over Antonio's plight. The latter records gratitude towards the Duke for his earnest attempts at trying to appease the Jew and talk him out of his murderous plans. However, he is certain that there is nothing in the power of man or God that can cure as unforgivable, a sinner as Shylock, and hence requests the few to take its own course. Antonio is resigned, and would rather willingly pay the penalty than stay the course of Venetian justice.

The Duke commands the entry of the other party to the bond, Shylock. He then goes on to temper Shylock's resolve with considerations of mercy through a series of pleas to his humanitarian feeling. The Duke says that he, along with every other in the court, is convinced that Shylock's show of unrelenting firmness is soon going to culminate in an act of forgiveness that will not only exempt the poor Antonio from a payment of penalty but also a part of the borrowed principal, in remembering his recent losses at sea. Shylock retorts by reiterating the inalterability of his resolve, and then refusing to assign a reason for his curious claim of the forfeiter's flesh. He goes on to recount how Nature has her own ways of exciting the affections of people without any diagnosable reason; and it is such an impulsive humour inherited from Nature that drives him to the exaction of his revenge. He seeks vengeance to indulge himself, if not for any other citable reason.

Bassanio interposes with protests against such unfeeling attitude, but Antonio becalms him by saying that it is easier to argue with the flood or the tempest or the blood-thirsty wolf than appeal to a heart as hard and impenetrable as the Jew's. The latter insists on a hastening of the final judgment, since sooner or later death is his forte. Bassanio tries to bribe Shylock out of his designs by offering double the sum mentioned in the bond as compensation for forfeiture. Shylock

refuses, and shuns the Duke's plea for mercy again by claiming that the penalty has been bought by him and thus belongs to him. He maintains that in the way the Duke owns slaves that he exacts labour from in the pretext of his proprietorship over them, Shylock has earned the right to own a pound of Antonio's flesh and hence demands it from the state of Venice.

The Duke attempts to exercise his power in adjourning the court till his appointed Doctor arrives from Padua as a lawyer for the defendant. The servant informs the court that a messenger from Padua already awaits a word with the Duke, The Duke calls for him, and Bassanio sees in this a faint reason for some hope. Antonio however bids him not to live off false expectations, since it is all too well for the defeated man to die.

Nerissa enters in the guise of a lawyer's clerk and holds conference with the Duke, handing him a letter from Bellario. In the meantime, Shylock sharpens his knife to 'cut the flesh off Antonio's breast and Gratiano rants at him as being possessed by the soul of a man-eater wolf.

The Duke urges the clerk to read aloud the letter from Bellario, wherein is mentioned the incapacity of the latter to appear at the Duke's behest because of some grave illness. As a substitute, Bellario promises the services of a young lawyer whose age is no evidence of his experience. Informed of the details of the case and armed with his own knowledge on legal subjects, the "young doctor of Rome" named Balthasar is reportedly the most qualified to fight for the cause of justice. Also, Bellario assures the Duke that they have had lengthy discussions on the matter and consulted books that could come of avail for the issue at hand.

The Duke immediately welcomes the Roman youth (alias, Portia dressed as a lawyer) into the court and urges an initiation of the proceedings. Portia begins by verifying the apparent facts of the case, and then suggesting that the best resolution be mercy. She engages in a long exchange with the Jew to exhort on the nature of mercy and its attendant excesses in that it rewards the one that grants it and the one that earns it. Mercy, Portia comments, has greater virtue and power than what sits on the scepter of the all-powerful monarch inasmuch as it issues forth from the Almighty. It brings along the pleasures of heaven, rather than ensuring only earthly joys by the application of force. Coercive power can effect worldly bliss, but the power of mercy is even greater in its ability to grant access to heaven. And since therefore in the Jew's pursuit of revenge, not only he but

all that stand witness to it will be denied salvation, Portia requests a granting of forgiveness

To the surprise of none, Shylock shrugs away the lawyer's advice and begs judgment. Portia asks if money cannot really be repaid, and Bassanio offers "ten times" the sum in exchange of which he wishes the law be made to change course.

Portia resists that suggestion by stating that the law of Venice is sacrosanct and any manipulation of it will be recorded as a precedent for future disruptions within the edifice of justice. The proclamation of the sovereignty of law apparently implies the granting of Shylock's demand - and therefore, calls for the latter's championing of the young lawyer.

Portia repeats the terms mentioned in the bond, and Antonio pleads guilty of forfeiture. She asks Shylock to keep a surgeon ready to prevent the merchant from bleeding to death, but the Jew urges a recourse to the letter of the bond which ordains no such provision. While Antonio and Bassanio bid each other a tearful adieu and commend the nature of their pristine self-sacrificing love, Shylock readies his knife for the due. At this point, Portia dramatically interposes with an injunction. She asks the Jew to wait a little, and begs a re-reading of the same bond that he claims the absolute sanctity of. As per the bond, the Jew enjoys the right to only a pound of the merchant's flesh but no drop of his blood or hot even a hair's worth of flesh more or less.

Portia holds that Shylock can have his penalty as per the terms of law, but if in the cutting of Antonio's flesh he sheds one drop of blood or the scales tilt by the weight of the least fraction to either side, then his property will be confiscated. Shylock is confounded, and finally deigns to leave the court on being paid just the principal sum borrowed. Portia however insists that since he had shunned a repayment of the loan earlier in the name of law, he shall have nothing, but the penalty.

Furthermore, since it has been proved that Shylock had directly attempted to claim the life of a Venetian citizen, the decrees of law provide that one half of his goods shall be confiscated by the victim and the other half held in the custody of the state. His life, which depended on the discretion of the Duke, is forgiven as a proof of the difference between the Jewish constitution and the order of the Christian state. Antonio willfully forsakes ownership of the one half of Shylock's

property on the condition that it be willed to his daughter and Lorenzo and the Jew himself become a Christian.

Shylock begs leave of the court, and the Duke - enamoured by the knowledge and wit of the young lawyer - prays for his company at dinner. The latter excuses himself, but is soon approached by Antonio and Bassanio to receive the three thousand ducats due in the bond as payment for his infinitely generous services. Portia denies the money in claiming to have been paid in kind by the satisfaction in delivering the good merchant. On repeated insistence, Portia relents to take some token of remembrance from the two gentlemen and ends up asking for Bassanio's wedding ring. Flustered at this demand, Bassanio springs excuse after excuse - at which the lawyer departs ungratified.

Antonio, feeling a little hurt at this, requests his friend to part with the ring since the lawyer did deserve far more than this in saving his life. Bassanio soon orders Gratiano to run after the departed lawyer and hand him the ring that he so demanded.

The scene ends, having provoked some debate about the very nature of courtroom penalty. First of all, the legal insistence on truth and the sanctity of identity is completely subverted in the execution of justice through a disguised charade of mistaken identities. Truth is made a travesty of, right from the communication intended by the written word from Bellario to the performance commanded by Portia and Nerissa. Also, the excesses in the written letter are exposed through curious strategies of interpretation within the law court, whereby the same terms of the bond that ordain Antonio's -death are, turned around to commission, the Jew's tragedy. Truth, howevermuch its sanctity be emphasized by Law, is not in the word but in its interpretation by the one who reads, it. Furthermore, not only is the interplay of false appearances made to thrive within the system of order that mandates a governance of the real, the fluidity of identities asserted in this scene is .also highly significant. While on the one hand the right to rhetorical exercise is appropriated by the woman who "hath not a tongue", on the other hand it is a woman disguised in the name of a servant, another counter-subject deprived of a voice. In the court, justice is dealt by Portia guilefully playing a character whose name, garments and notes are all false adjuncts borrowed from



the other. Finally, it is in the name of the authority of the state that Christianity seems to triumph, and commissions a narrative of 'mercy' as incumbent on an act of forced conversion. Is justice really achieved, or is mercy indeed granted by a sovereign Christian monarch?

#### **Act IV Scene (ii)**

Portia and Nerissa are out on the street, looking for Shylock's house to have the deed of gift for Lorenzo signed by him. Portia, still disguised as the lawyer Balthasar, is overtaken by Gratiano and offered the ring that she so demanded of the young Bassanio. She" accepts the token sent by Bassanio with gratitude and asks for directions to the Jew's house.

The clerk-seeming Nerissa, in being led by Gratiano to Shylock's abode, plots ways of extracting her marriage ring from her husband much in the same way that Portia did. This bartering of marriage rings serves only as a *dens ex machina* to bring about the reunion of the partners, the final revelation of their true identities and a further reification of their marriage vows.

#### **Act V Scene (i)**

After the climactic action in Act IV, this scene strategically serves to bring the dramatic anxieties and conflicts to a comic resolution. It exists as a ceremonial denouement, formally effecting a closure of the, play's many sub-plots, namely, the Lorenzo-Jessica affair, the shedding of Portia's and Nerissa's disguises and a consequent revelation of their role in the courtroom' climax, the exchange of marriage rings by Bassanio and Gratiano.

The scene begins, after the tumult and suspense of the preceding act, on a note of romantic languor. We encounter the two lovers, Lorenzo and Jessica, sitting outside Portia's mansion and admiring the somber beauty of the night in love-lore. The nocturnal calm reminds either of mythical chronicles of the most sanctifying love ever written about, and theirs is but a culmination of that history of worthy affections. Love seems to find its best articulation when Nature is at her darkest, till Stephano announces the arrival of his mistress Portia and her maid Nefissa. As Lorenzo prepares to give a suitable welcome to the lady of the house, Launcelot enters and declares of his master's future approach with Antonio.



Lorenzo orders music to be played while the long-exiled parties return home, and the sweet strains of harmony add to the bewitching charm of the night. It appears as if Nature outside is but a reflection of the insides of human nature, the concord of which is for the most part muted and obscured by the petty strifes of the everyday. Jessica complains of a curious breed of heaviness that music occasions in her, and Lorenzo marks it as a strong sensitivity to the soul-plumbing depths of lyrical meaning. He goes on to express the powers of music in the most memorable of Shakespearean lines, which vividly present an image of its embalming effects on even the fiercest and wildest of the animal species. He ends by saying that a man whose soul is not moved by music is the one most capable of the grossest crime and treason.

Portia enters with her maid, by the light of the candle in her hall, and remarks on how every little good deed radiates beams enough to brighten up the ways of many in this hostile world. Her metaphorical analogy of course refers to her own philanthropic exercise in the previous Act, and how that one intervention in the course of Antonio's fortune indeed lit up the lives of so many in the pilay. However, every act of charity calls forth the cause of a greater good, the bounteous light of which rightfully overrides the individual's everyday offices of love and care. In much the same vein, the dramatic resolution of Shylock's bond will fade away as a memory that keeps alive the 'greater glory' of love and comradeship between Artanio and Bassanio.

Portia's use of a monarchical image almost goes on to assert her rights of ownership over what was till now governed by a "substitute" in Lorenzo. This reference ironically reminds us that though Portia has, right after her marriage, disclaimed her proprietorship over patrilineally inherited property by swearing it off to her husband Bassanio, she still seems to be acutely aware of her rightful power over it. The woman, despite her self-effacing declarations to the contrary, finally comes around to assert her economic dominance over the men she has charitably and temporarily shared its rights of enjoyment with.

Delighted by the sound of sweet music, Portia steps into her house and is told of the immediate approach of her husband by Lorenzo. She orders Lorenzo and

her servants not to divulge the fact of their absence in Belmont to Bassanio. Soon afterwards, Bassanio and his retinue of men enter with the lately-acquitted Antonio, and (despite the audience's foreknowledge of all truths, as a device of dramatic irony) introduces his friend to the lady of the mansion and his wife. He goes on to excitedly stress on how greatly he is bound in gratitude to his friend, little knowing that Portia is the one who has ingeniously delivered him from much of that bond. Portia begins to welcome the newly-arrived Antonio, just when there is heard commotion of a squabble between Nerissa and Gratiano.

Nerissa has already discovered the loss of her husband's wedding ring, and accosts him by claiming that it must have been pawned off in affection to some maid in Venice. Gratiano vehemently resists such allegations, by further revealing that it was only after his friend and master Bassanio gifted away his wedding ring to the lawyer-deliverer of Antonio that he too was asked for same favour by the young lawyer's clerk. And, knowing how greatly the duo deserve this puny token for the magnitude of their services rendered, none could deny granting it. Bassanio goes on to narrate the exact circumstances of this transaction which, if denied, would have disgraced the worth of the lawyer's contribution and similarly proved him to be too ungrateful a beneficiary of his services. Enraged at Bassanio's rationalization of the loss of the wedding present as but a fitting reward for the clerk, Portia again puts on a show of great injury. The entire performance on the part of Portia and Nerissa is rather aimed at teaching their husbands the sanctity of the marriage oath, and to sufficiently warn them of the consequences of infidelity. It is indeed an instance of the woman's assertion of sexual and moral agency in a marital contract that has prototypically oppressed the female partner.

Following Portia's play-acting charade and her attempted conversion of her husband into an unwitting belief of his own criminal breach of trust, Antonio seems anguished at his 'being the cause of this conjugal estrangement. He promises that while he had once given his own body for Bassanio's cause of winning Portia, he will now pawn his soul in ensuring his friend's upkeep of the marriage vow. On the strength of Antonio's renewed bond, Portia and Nerissa return the rings that they had guilefully extorted from their husbands in the previous scene.

The receipt of the once-lost rings provides a dramatic, opportunity for the moment of revelation. Portia announces the details of her secret plot for saving Antonio in front of the audience in the room, and divulges her own identity as being no different from the lawyer that Bassanio gullibly pawned off his ring to. The woman further delivers her last stroke as the master-dramatist of this rather-complex plot of emotions and affections, when she hands over a letter to Antonio that she had accidentally, chanced upon. As a sheer contrivance to lend to the play the neat resolution of a comedy, the letter informs all of three of Antonio's miscarried ships having safely arrived at the harbour. Not only is misfortune lived in oblivion of, but it is finally by a slightly unconvincing turn of events - transformed into a cause of bliss.

There is more to the enduring climate of happiness that the play ends with. Nerissa passes on to Lorenzo and Jessica the deed of gift forced from Shylock, writing off all his property to the young couple. Portia promises more knowledge of this baffling chain of events, since she emerges at the end as the most masterful of authorial agents - commissioning a rather unwieldy plot and then artfully bringing it to a neat close.

---

### **3.3 DETAILED CHARACTER ANALYSES**

---

#### **1. Antonio :**

The Merchant of Venice, Antonio decidedly appears to be titular protagonist of Shakespeare's play. And yet, there has been a raging critical debate about whether the merchant - despite his positioning within the very title of the play - really occupies a place of much dramatic significance in terms of the action. Is Antonio really the hero of Shakespeare's comedy? Inasmuch as he commands very little dramatic action and is given fewer lines of dialogue than either Bassanio or Shylock or Portia, can he really qualify as a Character worthy of titular mention in the play? Why does Shakespeare make Antonio the governing presence of his play-text, if he finally grants him marginal agency in controlling dramatic action? Furthermore, it is worth noting that the playwright does not really 'name' the merchant in his title, though he nominally makes the play appear as if it is his story. There seems to be a marked ambiguity in Shakespeare's attitude towards

the ascription of heroic significance to his major character. Irresolving part of the debate, one might easily contend that though Antonio has far less 'dialogic exchange and commands minimal stake in the plot action, it is clear that "all' the conflicts in the play stem from or contribute to his misfortunes, Whe'ther/it' be'feassanio's love for Portia and its attempted consummation in a journey to Belmont or Shylock's desire for professional-racial revenge or the strengthening of Shylock's resolve by the Lorenzo-Jessica elopement, all the crucial developments 'in the play go on to foist Antonio as the singular target of action. It is in him that the play receives its impulse for sustained movement, through a successive endangering of his position within the mercantile economy.

On another plane, one might do well to note that none of Shakespeare's comedies (apart from *Pericles, The Prince of Tyre*) are named after any of its characters. While the tragedy, in going by its Aristotelian prescriptions, merits being called by the name of its protagonist, the structural configurations of the comedy evade such tropes of individual valorization or heroization. The tragedy, Aristotle himself would maintain, lent a great deal of significance to the character of the hero insofar as his tragedy is compounded by a flaw within. The comedy, in taking from its ancient descriptive lineage, revealed more in an attempted caricature of characters as types of human folly. In this, does *The Merchant of Venice* -through its curious nominal privileging of one character in the title - rather foist a critique, of Antonio and not a quasi-heroic agency? There might be merit in this suggestion, as the play does seem to show that Antonio's brand of economic philanthropy is in the last analysis fuelled by a rather crude racial condemnation of the Jewish 'other'! The former's agenda within the mercantilistic apparatus champions an abrasive rhetoric of slander against the Jew's financial fortunes, as Shylock accuses him of.

... "He hath disgraced me, and  
hindered me half a million ; laughed at my losses,  
mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my  
bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and,  
what's his reason? I am a Jew."

Not only is this irrational racial hatred cloaked in the terms of an economic conscience, but also justified in self-congratulatory comparison to the order of

“Christian courtesy” that Antonio considers himself an advocate of. In the light of his legitimization of an anti-Semitic bias through a superior Christian self-image, Antonio’s later misfortunes in the play seem- at times a fitting retort to what he himself had inaugurated by way of a crippled moral conscience. *The* same currency of conscientiousness that Antonio prides himself as the bearer of is what he seems to ironically enact of loss of through sustained invectives against the Jew. Given all -of this, one may justifiably be led to think that Shylock’s desire for revenge is in fact the result of the innumerable other acts of wrongdoing that the Christian state has perpetrated in the name of theological difference. Also, interestingly, while Antonio publicly derides and rants at Shylock’s policy of profit-making through usury, his own fortunes depend on the same logic of economic surplus in commercial transactions. Their means of gain might be different, but their goals of economic subjectivization lie in the same desire for monetary excess. It is credible that Shakespeare might have intended an effective protest against such self-righteous hypocrisy and arbitrary forms of mutual intolerance through a Christian caricature in Antonio.

Lastly, the character of Antonio does attain grace in his selfless avowals of friendship for Bassanio that almost impels him to hazard his life without the slightest thought or remorse. His racist excesses go hand-in-hand with a redeeming bond of fraternity towards a Christian compeer that again might at times seem absurdly homosexual in its insistence. Antonio wills the violation of his own body to facilitate the heterosexual union of his friend with Portia. And in the end, it is through his assurances of an abstinence from this homoerotic relationship by standing witness to the heterosexual vows of trust between Bassanio and Portia that the play receives its culmination. He tells Portia :

“I once did lend my body for his wealth;  
Which, but for him that had your husband’s ring,  
Had quite miscarried: I dare be bound again,  
My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord  
Will never more break faith advisedly.”

Antonio is sexually exorcised : frbm Bassanio's world of affections, and it is only then that the merchant's ecotvomic; threats are' removed and he is restored within the narrative of economic : seltVfashioning.

## 2. Shylock :

In the character of Shylock, Shakespeare has attempted the fullest approximation to the stock-figure of the villain. But, he has taken considerable pains in qualifying his brand of villainy as not just the target of comic caricature but as the product of deeper psychological anxieties. Through a' sustained excursion into the darkest recesses of Shy lock's psyche, Shakespeare makes his motivations seem the most convincing of all other characters in the play. His villainous instincts, we are constantly reminded, are neither bred by the excesses of individual folly nor are they attributed to the Jewish mental, 'constitution\* (as alleged by the self-righteous characters in the play). Rather, what lends conviction to Shylock's spirited doctrine of revenge is its constant reference to a history of racial-theological victimization by the Christian community and state. His vengeance derives not from a self-willed moral turpitude or a religious pathology, but is rather provoked by the injustices of a highly oppressive regime of racist power. This racist bias against the figure of the Jew produces a vocabulary of alterity or 'otherness' necessitating violence along all registers of power - economic, legal, political and religious. To quote from Act I Scene iii of the play :

“Shyfock :

Signior Antonio, many a time and oft  
In the Rial to you have rated me  
About my-moneys- and my usances :  
Still have I borne.it with a patient shrug,  
For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.  
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,  
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,  
And all for use of that which is mine own.  
Well then, it now appears you need my help :...  
Shall I bend low and in a bondman's key,  
With bated breath and whispering humbleness,

Say this :

“Fair sir, you spit on me on Wednesday last;  
You spurn’d me such a day; another time  
You call’d me dog; and for these courtesies  
I’ll lend you thus much moneys”?

Antonio :

I am as like to call thee so again,  
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.  
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not  
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take  
A breed for barren metal of his friend ?  
But lend it rather to-thine enemy,  
Who, if he break, thou mayst with better face  
Exact the penalty.”

Shylock is the villain because he is the ‘other’ in a Christian state, he is the racial subaltern. His villainy is presupposed because of his ‘difference’ from those in authority, and he is worthy of retribution because he is unlike the ones who mandate justice. Shylock’s criminality, the reader is made conscious of, is for the most part presumed and conjured by the community that sits in judgment. And, therefore, his final bond of revenge is but a failed ploy to become the criminal that he is already made to suffer punishment for. In this, the figure of Shylock refers to the processes by which ‘difference’ (of any sort - in class, race, religion or sex) is made the pretext for communal vilification and a popular mandate for exclusion or elimination. In a way, the Jewish moneylender becomes for Shakespeare an agent through which he can critique the tropes of comic characterization as effecting a systematic censure of difference.

While on the one hand, Shylock comes across as a villain who — rather than being alienated from authorial sympathies — is made a deserving subject for the reader’s feeling as well, on the other he is insistently dehumanized in his dealings with his daughter, Jessica, Shakespeare, though attempting to satirize the flawed perspectives in lop-sided comic characterization, is simultaneously subscribing to similar stereotypification in Shylock’s filial relationships. The atmost-parodic

alternating of Shylock's triumph over the Christian merchant with his loss of a Jewish daughter to a Christian Lorenzo serves for much of the humour in the play. However, what strikes the reader as most horrifying is the complete lack of sentiment in the Jew's bonding with his daughter and his consequent responses to reports of Jessica's elopement. He wishes death to her daughter not for the communal disgrace she has caused him, but for the loss of his diamonds and jewels along with her. He constantly prays that his daughter be found dead, and all his jewels studded on her corpse. That would, he maintains, be adequate compensation for him. If Shylock is a victim-turned-villain, he is right from the beginning a failed father. His villainy, though qualified to an extent, ranges beyond the racial and the communal to the more private filial domain.

It can be contended that the 'merchant' referred to (and yet, unnamed) in the title of the play could well be Shylock. That resolves a part of the ambiguity about the exact significance of the title in attributing its obscurity to the unnameability of the Jewish outcast. The play indeed seems to derive much of its thematic legitimacy from the figure of the Jewish usurer, and also it cannot be disputed that the most powerful lines in the text are his. Given the critical indecision about the playwright's real attitude towards the Jew (in that it oscillates between sympathy and condemnation), one can debatably rate Shylock as the protagonist of an impending order of capitalist economy. In the letter's insistence on terms like 'profit', 'interest', 'loans' etc., there is indeed a foreshadowing of a new apparatus of economic production. Shylock indeed is the herald of a bourgeois system of finance, but insofar as it is divorced from ethical-moral considerations it cannot further the emergent political agenda of democracy. From the historical context of the Renaissance as marking an interstitial period in the movement from feudalism to capitalism, Shakespeare seems to be wary of political implications of Europe's economic shifts. And, these apprehensions are what he voices through the text of *The Merchant of Venice*, and its climactic revenge-plot of misplaced economic registers of profit in the demand for Antonio's flesh. It is as if the playwright forewarns his public of the potential violence of capitalist desire and its fatal impact on the social physis. Portia's forbidding of one spare drop of blood or even a disproportionate measure of flesh is in effect a censoring of the capitalist desire for 'surplus'.



The ending of the courtroom scene in a forced conversion of the Jew raises a few questions about the nature of Christian justice. Though the latter prides itself in championing the principle of 'mercy', the final exorcism of the Jew and his resultant conversion into Christianity is in fact an evidence of state-mandated violence perpetrated by the legal machinery. The violence of the criminal is in the end meted with and remedied through the violence of the state garbed in accents of life-granting 'justice' or 'mercy'. The Jew's lineal history of victimization continues; and will possibly provoke the desire for vengeance in many more Shylocks. On the other plane however, the forced leasing of Shylock's wealth to his disclaimed daughter ensures a more equitable disbursement of profit than was warranted by capitalist designs.

### **3. Bassanio :**

Though the closest friend of Antonio and a liability that almost endangers his life, Bassanio is of little dramatic significance. While he is only a catalyst for the Antonio-Shylock subplot to play itself out, Bassanio's bonds of friendship with the former are particularly relevant. It might seem at times that this young Venetian "scholar" is most used to taking advantages of his relationship with Antonio, but the latter half of the play convinces us of his emotional stakes in it. His faith in Antonio is unflickering and owes to all the time that the two have spent together. At first, the unquestioning love of Antonio for his friend that makes him commit to a fatal bond with Shylock lends to their relationship a tinge of homosexual affection. But soon, Bassanio falls for a woman in Belmont in courting whom - we get to know - he has adequately exploited and squandered his own wealth and Antonio's. The First Act paints the youth as prodigal and profligate, often attempting to win Portia's favours by projecting himself higher than his own status through borrowed means. He comes across initially as quite the Renaissance dandy who - in his efforts to mobilize public opinion - impresses through pretence.

Significantly however, it is this same idea of 'pretence' and 'appearance' as masking reality that Bassanio ultimately votes against in his choice of caskets to win Portia. It is here in the play that Bassanio receives his full dramatic impetus by definitely proving himself a better suitor to all others that we have seen or heard of. He wins by a stroke of luck, but we are convinced by now that his maturity and insight indeed make him the most qualified of all candidates and

therefore the worthiest winner of Portia. In the decisive scene of his casket-selection, Bassanio undermines his own attempts at outward self-projections of worth and wealth and the play's verdict rightfully rewards him with his prize in Portia. By the end, it is evident that Bassanio is hardly a match for Portia's wit and intelligence but his sincerity and honesty still qualify him as a deserving husband to her. In an inversion of the dynastic logic of patrimonial inheritance, Bassanio - soon after his marriage - is willed into a contract of conjugal transference of wealth from the wife to the husband. The terms of the marital project as historically signifying upward mobility for the woman through the riches of her husband are reversed in this play. And in this, Bassanio - rather than being the benefactor within a patriarchal contract of marital provisions - is rather turned into the beneficiary of his wife.

#### **4. Portia :**

The heroines of Shakespeare's comedies have, as a rule, merited more critical attention and commendation than the male characters. Portia successfully falls within that same legacy of acutely self-aware Shakespearean heroines that include a Rosalind (from *As You Like It*) or Viola (from *Twelfth Night*). Interestingly, it is worth noting that Shakespeare often interjects his authorial voice in comedies through these female characters. Portia evidently is no exception. She is the one through whom the play's critique of economic and gender relations is foisted. She serves as the point of critical reference in analyzing and evaluating each of the other characters that she comes into contact 'with - be it her suitors or her courtroom client-merchant. Effectively enough, Portia seems to be the playwright within the play who wills and wishes into being the performances of every other character till all conflicts are resolved in her favour. She is the subject of a theatrical charade herself - and one that in essence exposes the theatricality of courtroom justice and its spectacular narratives of mercy and revenge. Right from the beginning of the play through to its end, every appearance of Portia goes on to reinforce a critical approach to the underlying themes of the play.

When we first see the heroine, she is complaining about the curbs on her marital-sexual agency imposed by the will of a dead father. Through the rest of the play, she not only manages to fight the patriarchal confiscation of the woman's right to free will by artfully tinkering with social strictures and sanctions, but also

ends-delivering all the other men in the play from their respective conflicts or misfortunes. At the outset, we see her bound in by the dying wish of a paternally-ordained law of inheritance, whereby her right to property depends on her vow of propriety in marital 'choice', A society which deems the woman incapable .of self-protection and judicious decision-making discovers the ploy of a lottery to determine the selection of her partner. As a result, suitors from all over the world arrive at Belmont to claim the company of the fair lady - and Portia doles out a parodic judgment of each of them. In her attempted verbal caricature of the candidates in the fray lies a trenchant social critique of human folly, in all its diverse manifestations and obscene excesses. Portia approximates to the role of the dramatist in providing the audience with a referential frame through which to view the world. Ironically, we are convinced that the woman who is supposedly ineligible to judge her best partner can in fact deliver the most rational judgment on the ways of the world.

Portia, though forced into a pledge of self-resignation, is highly aware and vocal about her own choices and desires. She is often unconventionally open about her admiration for Bassanio, and again uses every bit of ingenious cunning to sway the verdict of the caskets in favour of her desire and Bassanio's. The playing of the loud music in the background while Bassanio bargains his fortune with the caskets, the manipulative lyric as instructive aid for the correct choice - are all the products of Portia's brain in the cause of a premeditated love. In this way, she defeats the impositions of a patrilineal order - which is soon disrupted again in her matrilineal donation of privately owned-and-inherited property to a 'poor' husband in Bassanio.

Portia's agency receives a culmination right after her marriage, when she starts off for Venice to save the endangered life of her husband's friend, Antonio. In working out the machinations of this moment of dramatic climax, Portia resorts to an Elizabethan stock-trope of cross-dressing. She dresses up as a young lawyer and wears the name of her servant Balthasar in order to bring about the most crucial resolution of all conflicts in the play. While on the one hand, Portia's disguise as a man enables her entry into the masculine exercise of forensic speech-making in a public law court, her donning of a servant's name does on the other achieve a complete disruption of social hierarchies. Aristotle, in his treatise on *Rhetoric*, maintained that the law court is one of the four legitimate spaces of

rhetorical application - though the right to use it was selectively withheld from the two categories of subaltern-subjects: women and slaves. Portia's rhetorical prowess in the courtroom essentially testifies to a subversion of the Aristotelian dictum by ascribing it to the 'woman in the name of the servant,

The entire courtroom scene can be explained through Portia's attempts at making a travesty of the legal rationality of truth and the real. Here, we have the advocate of justice herself donning a false appearance, while her clinching argument in rereading the word of Law as guaranteeing variable versions of truth and interpretation is also a proof of the excesses in the truth of a legal testament. Portia's injunction that Shylock is not eligible for any more than what is transcribed in the legal 'letter' ironically makes evident the excessive act of interpretation and at the same time enacts a censure of what is in excess of the written word. On one level, it shows us that truth is not in the word but in its reading; on another, the lawyer mandates that meaning is precisely in the jurisdiction of the word and extends no further. This paradox working at the heart of the legal machinery is also mirrored in Portia's repeated workings around the 'appearance versus reality' theme of the play.

After having exposed 'the hollowness of legal strictures, Portia maneuvers another theatre of transactions with Bassanio and Gratiano by compelling them to part with their wedding rings, symptomatic of a breaking of the marriage oath. This comic sub-plot at the end is intended by Portia to teach their husbands the value of the conjugal bond outside of the court of the law. That love, despite its incompatibility with-legal registers of truth and faith, commands greater sanctity and solemnity is what she makes a lesson of. By masterfully contriving an education of Bassanio with regard to the penalty of forfeiture in marriage, Portia proves herself to be indeed the superior agent of dramatic action.

The play concludes by making Portia accidentally claim agency in delivering the news of Antonio's ships returning to harbour. Though this 'accident', of her chancing upon a letter addressed to Antonio seems a bit flimsily patched with the rest of the plot, it serves to enunciate Portia's control over the entire course of events. Portia emerges as the sovereign 'deliverer' of all the men in the play - and ends by asserting her dominance through a control of not only the means of action but also of information.

## 5. Jessica :

The daughter of the Jewish usurer in Shylock, there is more difference in character between Jessica and her father than “between jet and ivory,...red wine and rhenish”. And, it is this difference in their natures that becomes the pretext for her inclusion within a Christian order of communal morality - despite her racial lineage as an ‘other’. Furthermore, the premise of Jessica’s ‘acceptability’ within a normative Christian state is in fact her self-willed plan of conversion following marriage to Lorenzo,

Significantly, it is worth registering that Jessica’s plans of conversion are not the result of her denunciation of Jewish religious faith, but rather an attempt at articulating resistance against her father. Jessica’s relationship with Shylock, it is evident, contains no traces of emotional proximity. Instead, Shylock horrifyingly wishes the death of her daughter when he discovers the truth of elopement with his diamonds and jewels. Though this instance, the audience is as strongly disillusioned about the inhuman interior of Shylock’s personality as Jessica must have grown unto the traumatic realization of. In the light of the tenuousness of filial bonds between the two, Jessica’s continued revolt and condemnation of Shylock seem not a verdict against her faith but only her father. While others perceive the moneylender’s daughter as too un-Jewish because of her characteristic alienation from Shylock, for Jessica her difference is but an articulation of her emotional detachment. Consequently, though the community labels Jessica’s flight with Lorenzo as a cause for her salvation, for her it is nothing more than an attempted escape from patriarchal incarceration by the Law of the Father. Her theft - on another plane - signifies her disapproval of her father’s unscrupulous policy of material acquisition. She, like Portia again, inverts the logic of the woman’s social mobility through marriage by being in a materially superior position to her husband. It is through her (and by virtue of his marriage to Jessica) that Lorenzo finally begets the property of Shylock through a forced deed of gift. It is this theme of the profitability of marriage for husbands (and not wives) that gets repeatedly undercut through metaphysical assumptions of a redemptive gain for Jessica in her conversion to Christianity. The religious rationality employed by the Christian characters in the play is rather a ploy to conceal the upsetting of patriarchal contracts in marriage.

Finally, one must notice that Jessica too engages in a theatrical exercise of cross-dressing as a hoy in order to execute her escape. It is as if she needs to don the guise of a man in order to even subvert the law of the Father. In her occasional scenes of courtship with Lorenzo, it is evident that she exerts sufficient authority over her husband and even has the power to outwit him at times. Jessica is unequivocally in awe of Portia, when she says in Act IV Scene v :

“Why, if two gods should play some heavenly match  
And on the wager lay two earthly women,  
And Portia one, there must be something else  
Pawn'd with the other, for the poor rude world  
Hath not her fellow.”

In her adulation for Portia lies evidence of the similarity in their characters. Jessica serves as the touchstone against which the greatness of Shakespeare's heroine could adequately be measured.

## **6. Launcelot :**

In Shakespearean plays, the stock Elizabethan figure of the fool played a considerably significant role. Here, in this comedy, it is the character of Launcelot Gobbo which appropriately performs the role of the clown. Interestingly, the clown in Renaissance drama was not at all a figure of cheap humour but of profound rational expression. He was, by virtue of his social class, an inferior to the majority of the other characters in the play - and yet, in as far as his voice would often sound a deeper core of truth, he would effectively subvert prevalent hierarchies. The fool or the clown, therefore, would become the instrument of a critique of social conventions and affectations. He would embody the governing principle of the 'carnavalesque' as dissolving the dominant registers of human rationality.

Launcelot Gobbo appears for the first time with similar promise. Having appropriated the form of the soliloquy - a dramatic device most suitably intended for the hero of a play to exhale his inner conflicts and psychic turmoil - Launcelot seems to be parodying moral codes of conduct and religious signification of good and evil at the very outset. Engaged in battling questions of the deepest metaphysical significance, Launcelot merits a brand of seriousness that befits the tragic hero. He argues with himself about the judiciousness of his decision to quit the Jew's

service and seek employment with a Christian. It is for him a question that determines his prospects of salvation and therefore deserves much rational deliberation. Even later in the play, Launcelot feels genuinely disturbed by the potential of the Jew's daughter for gaining God's mercy. Launcelot's seriousness is not a mockery of meaning, but a pronouncement on the triviality of the world of petty self-interest and self-seeking love around him.

In weighing his own spiritual fortunes, Launcelot resolves to leave the rich Shylock and earn employment from a poor Christian Bassanio living off borrowed money. This is a singularly heroic decision, in that it materially means a contract of loss. In that the dramatic universe is peopled by characters who are constantly driven by the economic desire for 'profit' (whether in a mercantile or a loan economy), Launcelot is the only person who opts to serve a master decidedly poorer than his erstwhile benefactor. Bassanio, who is himself surviving off Antonio's (and then Shylock's) borrowed means, could not have promised a securer bond of servitude for Launcelot. The Jew himself laughs at the apparent thoughtlessness of his servant's decision :

"I part with him, and part with him  
To one that would have him help to waste  
His borrow'd purse."

But, Launcelot rests assured in his conviction of greater spiritual 'profit' through his new employment, because as he tells Bassanio :

"The old proverb is very well parted  
between my master Shylock and you, sir; you have  
the grace of God, sir, and he hath enough."

Launcelot's frequent exercises of banter with his father and then his erstwhile mistress in Jessica only serve to mark a conflict between two different modalities of knowledge. While Antonio's is a rationality that bars self-knowledge in melancholia, the fool revels in a gay wisdom. For all practical purposes in the play, it is the latter that seems more worthy of a voice. Lorenzo is full of awe for the fool's capacity for witty raillery, and mourns his lowly social position in comparison to the lot of richly bred idiots :



“O dear discretion, how his words are suited!  
The fool hath planted in his memory  
An army of good words; and I do know  
A many fools, that stand in better place,  
Garnish'd like him, that for a tricky word  
Defy the matter.”

Indeed, the play grants more lines to the fool than to the titular hero in the Venetian merchant Antonio.

---

### 3.4 DISCUSSION ON THE TITLE, PLOT AND MAJOR THEMES

---

*The Merchant of Venice* (1596) is the only play of Shakespeare's that mobilizes a reference to the economic apparatus of mercantilism in its very title. The allusion, rather than being incidental to the professional rivalry that accounts for the dramatic conflict, bears particular relevance to the historical context of the Renaissance. As the economic history of early modern Europe would testify, the Renaissance age was indeed an intermediate period of transition from the feudal to the capitalist modes of production. The figure of the merchant as breeding the emergence of a new middle class (which was to increasingly gain dominance in terms of the right to political governance) was directly a product of this inaugural moment of mercantile modernity in Europe. The merchant was of course the predecessor of the bourgeois man (alternatively, the capitalist) and eventually brought into being newer social relations through his effective alliance with the state machinery. It is this state of economic-political affairs and the consequent agency granted to the figure of the commercial entrepreneur in controlling such affairs that Shakespeare intends to portray and critique through this play. *The Merchant of Venice*, therefore, in being moored in the contemporary historical conditions of power, is more than just a theatrical spectacle of love and revenge. It is at the same time a masterfully plotted document of its times, serving the cause of both reflecting and critiquing its spirit. Furthermore, what Shakespeare's creative genius adds to the text is an intuitive awareness of the impending bourgeois ethic of business.

In the light of the above discussion, both the characters of Antonio and Shylock appear to receive a renewed impetus. First, Shakespeare cleverly invokes an air



of deliberate ambiguity in his title by never specifying who of the two is the nominal 'merchant of Venice'. It seems perfectly plausible that he intentionally avoids a naming of the 'protagonist' of his play in order to make both characters seem equally eligible for it. Also, the playwright's conscious alienation from either serves to make way for a similar response from his audience, such that there are moments in the play where we alternatively feel sympathy and revulsion towards both Antonio and Shylock. The strategy of 'riot naming' the hero serves only to afford a space for the critical evaluation of all characters that aspire towards heroic stature, by preventing an identification with either. Last but not the least, one can contend that the ambivalent title of this play actually reinforces the fact that both the apparent protagonist (the 'good' Christian Antonio) and antagonist (the 'evil' Jew Shylock) are in the end variations of the same type -the bourgeois man - and therefore require unprejudiced critique.

Though a conventional approach to the play would insist that Antonio exceeds the bourgeois principle of self-aggrandizement through references to his selfless love for Bassanio (and declaredly, the rest of the Christian community), it needs to be argued otherwise. Though, on the surface, Antonio appears to shun a policy of extortionist loan-capitalism - he is clearly jealous of those who succeed by those means. His critique and condemnation of Shylock, however cloaked in the self-righteous accents of humanitarian concern, betray a deep sense of professional envy. Antonio, we are told, engages in public campaigns against Shylock (again in the name of a crude racial-theological difference) at the Rialto - places "where' merchants most do congregate". His attempts at defaming the Jewish moneylender end up in petty shows of personal antipathy whereby - as Shylock complains -

" he hath disgraced me, and  
hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses,  
mocked at my gains,-,thwarted my  
bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies."

Despite his donning of a Christian fellow-feeling on the exterior, Antonio is evidently out to fight a battle of professional vendettas and the expression of it is in his numerous attempts at denigrating the 'other' in the hope of self-benefit. It cannot be missed that the publicness of Antonio's diatribes against the Jew aims only at manufacturing a popular knowledge of and disdain for the latter's

business ethic as detrimental to larger welfare. And, in the process, he not only tries to foil Shylock's already established business venture but also urges a massive bolstering of his own through transference of clientele. In contrast to the Jew's self-seeking business policy, Antonio advertises his own as a non-profit philanthropic enterprise. It is this public disavowal of the 'desire for profit' in Antonio that the playwright seems to launch the most discerning shaft of criticism against. If Antonio's business consists of his altruistic tendencies, then why does he at all have to engage in an open blame-game with Shylock through such petty articulations of self-gratification in laughing at his losses and mocking at his gains'? Is it not all too apparent that Antonio is attempting to win over Shylock's customers through promotional tactics of charity? If profit is not what the Venetian merchant seeks, then what could be the explanation for such competitive claims and offers? Furthermore, it is definitely not convincing that a merchant with an overseas business empire and entrenched in a trading-network with countries far and wide is averse to any kind of profit. Antonio cannot but have made such fortunes through profits garnered from overseas capitalism, and therefore his critique against Shylock's policy of 'interest on loan' as immoral implicates himself as much. If the Jew is guilty of seeking monetary benefits, so is the Christian in his puerile attempts at derogating the 'other' while he himself lives off expansionist trade profits.

Finally, what seems especially relevant in Shakespeare's critique of the proto-bourgeois economy is more than its craving for 'surplus' returns — which evidently is an extortionist tool for oppressing the masses. While Shylock becomes the playwright's agent in demonstrating how capitalism runs counter to concerns of democracy, Antonio is for him the example of the merchant's presumption of social-political power. Right from the first scene of the play, we see Antonio reveling in a rare show of popularity with friends and his countryman. He not only enjoys the trust of an ever-proliferating community of Christian friends, but also commands ties of loyalty as per their individual class-positions. There is almost a presumed aura of superiority granted to- the merchant by his network of loyalists, because of his dominance in terms of class-status. It is in fact his position as a class-superior to all his fellows that enables Antonio to engage in acts of charity (through gifts with no assurance of a return), and thus earn moral acclaim and approval. Not only does Antonio institute a matrix of social relations

based on class loyalties through his public image of 'goodwill towards others', he also effectively uses the power of the state to enforce the truth of these relations. The Venetian merchant is consistently championed and supported by the Duke of Venice, insofar as his antagonism with Shylock becomes an adequate cause for the state to criminalize the latter. We realize that Antonio, while claiming to live away from the principles of economic self-interest, is the accurate image of the capitalist - who is complicit with the political apparatus to victimize his class-rivals and gratify the submissive citizen-subjects.

In doing a thematic analysis of the play, what is of paramount importance is its apparent anti-Semitic agenda. However, critics have over the ages argued in favour of Shakespeare's attempted complication of the racial bias. In signal passages of rhetorical flourish given to Shylock, the latter ends up garnering audience sympathy. His desire to exact revenge, rather than legitimizing theological parallels to the Jew's alleged unnaturalness, is made to seem as the logical outcome of a history of racial injustice perpetrated by the Christian. But, it is important to note at this juncture that at the time when Shakespeare was writing this play, Europe was - as G. K. Hunter would insist in his essay "Elizabethans and Foreigners" - free from the racialised entity of the Jew. And, there is indeed much substance in Hunter's proposition, insofar as he is supported by Wilbur Sanders' quasi-historical document, *The Dratri&titt and the Received Idea*:

The Jews had been expelled from England in 1290 after a long period of extortion and persecution/The Jews that were known in the country between that date and the resettlement in 1656 amount to only a few hundred, and most of these were either real or pretended converts seeking assimilation (real or apparent) into the English community. The Jews known to have been present in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century London were... in no significant way related to the Shylocks and Barabas's of the stage..,

Yet, one must maintain that the unavailability of the racial Jew in Europe did not, in any way, signify an absence of the anti-Jewish feeling. Shakespeare's play rather testifies to the intensity of popular prejudice against the figure of the Jew as a 'theological' touchstone of Satanism.

Now, this voice of popular prejudice translates, as in the play, into a systematic

policy of racist oppression that Shylock has manifestly been the victim of. This history of religious violence willed by the 'Christian 'constitution' becomes<sup>A</sup> for Shakespeare and other writers of the age, a cause of grave anxiety about the claims of Christian superiority. Shylock, by speaking of the routine practices of racial discrimination against his creed, only serves to emphasize the degree to which Christianity itself has been Hebraized. If the Jew can excel in a show of avarice, the anti-Jew clan of chosen believers can exemplify itself in the same. The plot of the play often lends itself to a typical reading, wherein a systematic vilification of the Jew for what he is goes hand-in-hand with an acerbic critique of "lived" Christianity for becoming more and more Jewish.

"Shylock : ...If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction."

The entire play, in that sense, seems a framed retort on the part of the Venetian usurer to the extortionist policies of the Christian state, which pauperizes him (at the very end) and mandates a forced conversion. The Jew, as Sanders went on to maintain, exists as a "National Deficit Liquidation Fund" - whose property can therefore be legitimately divided between a Christian, state and a now-Christian daughter.

Inasmuch as property and the disbursement of it become major thematic concerns of the play, one must dwell on the questions raised here about inheritance laws. On one level, the entire text seems to be dealing with the anxieties of rightful inheritance historically situated in the contemporary shift towards privatization of property. With the advent of a bourgeois ethic of monetary acquisition, one had to ensure a legitimate possession of it by posterity. While Portia's father attempts to control the dynastic rights of heirship vested in his daughter by finding a good husband for her, Shylock's ire against Jessica is provoked by her misuse of inheritance rights through an inter-racial marriage. Interestingly, the only legitimate

heirs present in the text are both women - and, in that it complicates the patriarchal rules of dynastic lineage, the rights of *both* are legally transferable to the men they wed. Antonio incidentally is the only owner of property with no legal heir, and must therefore find one in his friend Bassanio. The latter becomes for the Venetian merchant a surrogate inheritor of his property through 'gifts' of faith and love. But, since Bassanio is a man, he requires no policing of his rights of spending despite Antonio's knowledge of his being a squanderer. The courtroom ban on Shylock's claim for Antonio's flesh is again another instance of the law forbidding inheritance beyond one's community. While Antonio can willfully write off his body as a security for the Christian Bassanio, the Jewish usurer can never claim it as his own.

In the final analysis, the stock Elizabethan dramatic trope of disguise (or, cross-dressing) bears upon the entire text as a metaphor for resisting gender- and class-norms. The delusive power of appearances is what Shakespeare consistently focuses on through all the casket-selection scenes. The exercise with the three caskets as being the key to a realization of Portia's inner worth by her suitors is essential, in that it constantly alerts us to the superficial ways of the world. The speeches attributed to all of Portia's suitors are, in varying degrees, a testimony to our imagination of 'value' as determined by the material conditions of an object's appearance. Also, they tell us volumes about the flimsiness of judgment governed by objective considerations of outward beauty. In the end, Portia's parading of a male lawyer's attire and attitude within the courtroom ironically hints even at the incapacity of the sovereign Law to perceive beyond appearances and arbitrate on the basis of truth. While this definitely serves as a mockery of the declared objective principles of justice, it is Portia's false appearance that finally enables a vindication of truth in the limits of the 'word of the Law. It is through her disguise that justice is upheld. And at the same time, in her donning of the mantle of the man and the name of the servant, both gender and class stereotypes are violated within the very space of Law that enforces them. Portia reveals as the symptom of a rare form of resistance - one that exposes the blindnesses in the system of power to both truth and fateity.

---

### 3.5 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

---

#### Long Questions

1. Critically examine the suitability of the title of *The Merchant of Venice*.
2. Portia's disguise is not only an attempt at disrupting the Law of the State, but also the law of patriarchy that she had been initially oppressed by. 'Analyze the truth of this statement through textual references.
3. Examine how disguise and cross-dressing become metaphors for gender and class transgression in *The Merchant of Venice*,
4. Shakespeare's attitude towards the Jewish usurer seems to move between sympathy and moral condemnation. Analyze the ambivalence in Shylock's characterization, through a close textual reading.
5. Is *The Merchant of Venice* a text that can be read as a document of anti-Judaic sentiment in Elizabethan times? Argue through a historical reading of the play.

#### Medium Answer Type Questions

1. Does the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* revolve around the fortunes of Antonio or Shylock? Who, among the two, is the protagonist of Shakespeare's play?
2. Explain the dramatic significance of the courtroom scene in *The Merchant of Venice*.
3. What are your views on the nature of the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio?
4. *The Merchant of Venice* is, in the final analysis, a play that deals with anxieties about property inheritance. How does the will of Portia's father confirm this statement?.
5. How does Launcelot Gobbo play the role of the Elizabethan fool in *The Merchant of Venice*? Examine the dramatic purpose served by this character.

#### Short Answer Type Questions

1. Who wins Portia by the lottery of caskets and how? Describe his emotions on opening the right casket.

2. What help does Bassanio seek from Antonio and why?
3. How does Jessica betray Shylock? What disguise does she take on and why?
4. Describe what happens in the encounter between Launcelot and Old Gobbo. How is the father-son reunion achieved?
5. Why does Portia insist on 'mercy' as being the best guarantor of justice? How does she argue that mercy is 'twice blest'? What is Shylock's response to her plea?

---

### 3.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

---

Janet Adelman, "Her Father's Blood: Race, Conversion and Nation in *The Merchant of Venice*", *Representations*, Vol. 81, No. 1, (Winter, 2003), pp. 4-30, <<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10,1525/rep.2003.81.1.4>>>

Arthur Quiller-Couch, "The Workmanship of *The Merchant of Venice*", *The North American Review*, Vol. 203, No. 724, (March, 1916), pp. 435-448, <<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25108765>>>

John W. Draper, "Usury in *The Merchant of Venice*". *Modern Philology* 33.1; (August, 1935), pp. 37-47

Jane Freeman, "'Fair Terms and a Villain's Mind': Rhetorical Patterns in *The Merchant of Venice*", *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, Vol. 20, No. 2, (Spring, 2002), pp. 149-172, <<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/rh.2002.20.2.149>>>

Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets", *Collected Papers 4*, London: Hogarth Press, 1925

G. K. Hunter, "Elizabethans and Foreigners", in Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells, eds. *Shakespeare and Race*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 37-63

Laurence Lerner, "Wilhelm S and Shylock", in Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells, eds. *Shakespeare and Race*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 139-150

- Cynthia Lewis, "Antonio and Alienation in *The Merchant of Venice*", *South Atlantic Review*, 61. 48, No. 4, (November, 1983); pp. 19-31, << <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3199668>>>
- Mary Janell Metzger, "'Now by My Hood, a Gentle and No Jew': Jessica, *The Merchant of Venice*, and the Discourse of Early Modern British Identity", *Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA)*, No. 1, 1998, pp. 52-63
- Louis Montrose, *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre*, Chicago and London : University of Chicago Press, 1996
- Joseph Pequigney, "The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*", *English Literary Renaissance* 22.2, (Spring, 1992), pp. 201-21
- Wilbur Sanders, *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1968
- James Shapiro, "Shakespur and the Jewbill", in Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells, eds. *Shakespeare and Race*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 124-138
- Peter J. Smith, "Shakespeare's Comedy of Consensus", Chapter 2, in Smith, *Social Shakespeare: Aspects of Renaissance Dramaturgy and Contemporary Society*, Basingstoke and London : Macmillan, 1995, pp. 182-215
- Leonard Tennenhouse, "The Counterfeit Order of *The Merchant of Venice*", in Murray M. Schwartz and Coppelia Kahn eds. *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, Baltimore and London : Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980, pp. 54-69
- Richard H. Weisberg, "Antonio's Legalistic Cruelty: Interdisciplinarity and *The Merchant of Venice*", *College Literature*, Vol. 25, No. 1, *Law, Literature and Interdisciplinarity*, (Winter, 1998), pp. 12-20



---

## **MODULE-2 □ OLIVER GOLDSMITH : SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER**

---

### **Structure :**

#### **1.0 Objectives**

#### **1.1 Brief Chronology of Goldsmith's Career**

#### **1.2 About 18<sup>th</sup> Century Stage : Decline of Theatre; Sentimental Drama; Stage Licensing Act; Garrick ; Audience**

#### **1.3 Oliver Goldsmith**

#### **1.4 She Stoops to Conquer**

##### **1.4.1 Goldsmith's Agenda**

##### **1.4.2 Tony Lumpkin**

##### **1.4.3 Youth Against Age**

#### **1.5 Comprehension Exercises**

#### **1.6 Select Bibliography**

---

### **1.0 OBJECTIVES**

---

This Unit introduces you to a comedy of the 18th century. It enables you to :

(i) find out how 18th century comedy changed from Restoration Comedy after the Puritan rule ;

(ii) know how the state intervention through stage Licensing Act affected the state ;

(iii) discern how Goldsmith reached against sentimentalism of theatre.

---

## 1.1 BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF GOLDSMITH'S CAREER

---

- 1730 Born at Pallas, Country Longford, or perhaps at Elphin, Roscommon. 1750 Graduates from Trinity College, Cambridge.
- 1756 Reaches London, destitute, after wandering about France, Switzerland and Italy; tries to support himself as a physician in Southwark and as usher in Peckham.
- 1757 *Publishes, under the pseudonym James Wellington, translation of The Memories of a Protestant, condemned to the Gallies of France for his Religion.*
- 1758 *Publishes his first substantial work An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe,*
- 1759 Publishes his own little periodical, The Bee, in which appears 'Elegy on Mrs Mary Blaize' and 'A City Night-Piece'.
- 1760 Smollet-starts *British Magazine*, in which Goldsmith contributes.
- 1761 Meets Dr. Johnson.
- 1762 *Citizen of the World* published; Johnson sells MS of *The Vicar o/Wakefield* to Newbery, thereby saving Goldsmith from arrest for debt.
- 1764 Earns acclaim with his poem *The Traveller*. 1766 *The Vicar of Wakefield* published.
- 1786 Goldsmith's first comedy *The Good Natur' d Man* rejected by Garrick but produced at Covent Garden.
- 1770 *The Deserted Village* published.
- 1773 *She Stoops to Conquer* produced to great acclaim; Goldsmith criticises the vogue of sentimental comedy and prejudice against laughter in 'A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy' in *The Westminster Magazine*.

1774 Dies

1776 *The Haunch of Vension*, written to then Lord Clare for a gift of game, posthumously published.

---

## 1.2 ABOUT 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY STATE : DECLINE OF THEATRE; SENTIMENTAL DRAMA; STAGE LICENSING ACT; GARRICK; AUDIENCE

---

When Goldsmith wrote his first comedy in 1786, English theatre was probably at its lowest ebb since the closing down of the theatre house during the Cromwellian interregnum. Following the backlash against allegedly profane and licentious plays at the turn of the century, English theatre began to move towards moral and sentimental drama, whose most representative example was Richard Steeie's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). However, on 28 January 1728, a packed house at Lincoln's Inn Fields watched the first night of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, a ballad-opera which had been turned down by Colley Gibber, one of the managers of the rival theatre, Drury Lane, the only other company licensed to act in London.

Gay's play was a daring new combination of popular song, underworld comedy and political and social satire. It spawned dozens of imitations and encouraged Rich, the manager at Lincoln's Inn Fields to design a new theatre in Covent Garden, which was completed in 1732. More new theatres opened during this period but a severe blow was dealt to theatre by the **Stage Licensing Act** of 1737. Alarmed at the increasing use of the stage for political satire, the Whig government of Robert Walpole moved swiftly. The sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*, *Polly*, had been openly critical of Walpole, and in the 1730s, Henry Fielding had begun to give further offence through plays like *The Historical Register for the Year 1836* (1737).

Walpole's pretext for the new legislation was an anonymous and a now lost play entitled *The Golden Rump*, in which the King was portrayed as an animate idol who was in need of the Queen's assistance with enemas to help his golden bowels. Some, like Fielding, thought that the play had been planned by Walpole himself to expedite the passage of the bill. Whatever the authorship, the Stage

Licensing Act came into being on 24 June, 1737, and laid down, among others, that **all new plays would henceforth have to be approved by the Lord Chamberlain's office**. The Examiner of the Plays had to approve texts of all spoken drama in British theatre until the office was abolished in 1968.

In practice, the Licensing Act has a twofold effect: it restricted the production of legitimate drama to the two patent theatres and required all plays to be passed by the Lord Chamberlain. Some plays were banned outright but this was largely due to self censorship on part of the playwrights before the submission of manuscripts.

Given such restrictions, it became difficult to write plays that would break new ground. This resulted in the dominance of **sentimental drama**, “comedy where tears outweighed laughter and moral orthodoxy, and reform overcame any subversive energies.” The three decades following the Licensing Act are marked by an almost total absence of memorable plays, with the possible exception Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* (1771). But nevertheless, one man strode the English stage like a colossus during this period. The contribution to theatre of **David Garrick** has perhaps not been adequately recognised by critics. From 1741 to 1776, he reigned supreme at Drury Lane. Under his management, hardly any new plays were produced for the repertoire but acting and production methods were transformed beyond recognition. Not only did he radically redefine the terms of acting—especially Shakespearean—he also experimented with new effects, spectacle and costume. As Peter Holland and Michael Patterson point out.” If in Garrick's whole career he failed to generate any significant new drama, his achievement was focused on the deification of Shakespeare, While the plays continued to be adapted and reworked, Garrick was also concerned to put back as many lines as he could and to extend the range of Shakespeare plays performed.....In the division between study and stage that was deepening throughout the century, Garrick tried to bridge the gap.”

During the Garrick years, the pattern of performance also underwent significant changes. Now the afterpiece to the main bill—pantomimes such as Theobald's *Harlequin Sorcerer*, which was performed 337 times at Covent Garden between

1747 and 1776—gained in importance. These comic afterludes went some way in balancing the sentimental, moral dullness in the main play. In fact, some critics have suggested the dominant dramatic form of the period is farce rather than sentimental comedy.

**Theatre audiences** also changed substantially in the half-century following the Stage Licensing Act. At the beginning of the 18th century, Drury Lane had a capacity of about 1,200. But the end of the century, it had increased threefold, Covent Garden—for which Goldsmith wrote exclusively—expanded from 1,330 in 1732 to 3,000 in 1782. There were other new theatres in London too, which were operating semi-legally, putting on pantomimes, equestrian shows and unlicensed plays : Sadler’s **Wells** with a capacity of 2,600 or the **Royal Amphitheatre** that could seat 2,500. **Catherine Worth** in her ‘Sheridan and Goldsmith’ writes :

“Perhaps the staging feature that would strike us most forcibly today, if we could be transported to the first night of *She Stoops to Conquer* at Covent Garden or *The School for Scandal* at Drury Lane, would be the co-existence of a large forestage, making for a close, intimate relationship between actors and audience, and a proscenium stage, where an illusion of scenic could be created by means of painted wings and back-flats.”

Garrick’s share at Drury Lane was bought out by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, but he was less keen on “theatre business, management of men”. In 1788 he sold his share to John Philip Kemble, who along with his sister Sarah Siddons, were among the finest actors of the age. Both Siddons and Kemble were able to produce larger-than-life tragic performances full of heroic proportions and emotional intensity. As **William Hazlitt** was to write :

“In short, we think the distinguishing excellence of his acting may be summed up in one word-intensity, in the seizing upon some one feeling or idea, or insisting upon it, in never letting go, and in working it up, with a-certain grateful consistency and conscious grandeur of conception to a very high degree of pathos and sublimity.”

---

### 1.3 OLIVER GOLDSMITH

---

The story of *She Stoops to Conquer* is said to have its origins in real life. According to Katharine Worth, “Walking in the country, where he (Goldsmith)

had been noticed taking an interest in fine houses (“Gentlemen’s seats), he enquired at Ardagh for “the best house in town” and was directed to the best ‘gentleman’s house which he took for the inn he had really wanted. After behaving in a very free and easy way, calling for wine and the next morning, his bill, he learned that his host was no inn-keeper but an old acquaintance of his father’s.”

Goldsmith’s varied and adventurous travels during his youth seem to have provided him with rich material for his writing career. While travelling in Europe, he spent a couple of years living rough and supporting himself by playing the flute or engaging in “university disputations” for a fee, prompting Boswell to comment that

Goldsmith disputed his way through Europe. Like Congreve, Goldsmith soon found himself nibbing shoulders with the denizens of Grub Street and coffeehouses. One of his main sources of income was producing articles and histories for the publisher John Newbery. During this time he wrote regularly for *The Monthly Review* and Newbery’s *Public Ledger*, In the latter appeared his ‘Chinese Letter’ which would be later collected under the title *The Citizen of the World*. Goldsmith first shot into the limelight with *An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, published in 1759, but it was his long poem *The Traveller* which brought him to the notice of Dr. Samuel Johnson in 1764, Others who belonged to Johnson’s inner circle included Edmund Burke and the painter Joshua Reynolds. However, it was the enormous success of *The Vicar of Wakefield* in 1766, which firmly established Goldsmith on the literary map, but not without a little help from Johnson, who by selling the manuscript of Newbery, managed to save Goldsmith from virtual house arrest by an irate landlady.

But Goldsmith was initially unable to make a similar impact as far as theatre was concerned. In his *Present State of Polite Learning*, he has attacked Garrick’s management of Drury Lane and the general tendency among theatre managers to avoid new plays. As a result, Garrick refused to take his first play. *The Good-Natur’d Man*, which therefore, had to go to Covent Garden. *The Good-Natur’d Man* premiered on 29 January 1768, with a prologue written by Dr. Johnson. It was, however, no great success, though it did run for nine nights.

1770 saw the publication of another long poem, *The Deserted Village*, But it was 1773 that was the full flowering of Goldsmith's theatrical talent. Early in the year, Goldsmith had written an article entitled "an Essay on Theatre ; or, a A Comparison between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy' in" Westminster Magazine (December .1772, vol. 1). Some portions of the essay are worth quoting in full. In the second half of the essay, Goldsmith writes :

"Yet notwithstanding this weight of authority and the universal practice of former ages, a new species of dramatic composition has been introduced, under the name of *sentimental* comedy, in which the virtues or private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed; and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the piece. These comedies have had of late great success, perhaps from their novelty, and also from their flattering every man in his favourite foible. In .these almost all the characters are good, and exceedingly generous; they are lavish enough of their *tin* money on stage; and though they want humour, have abundance of sentiment of feeling. If they happen to have faults of foibles, the spectator is taught not only to pardon but to appalaud them, in consideration of the goodness of their hearts; so that folly, instead of being ridiculed, is commended, and the comedy aims at touching our passions without the power of being truly pathetic. In this manner, we are likely to lose one great source of entertainment on the stage; for, while the comic poet is invading the province of the tragic muse, he leaves her lovely sister quite neglected. Of this, however, he is no way solicitous, as he measures his fame by profits."

This essay prepared the gound, as it were, for Goldsmith's profoundly antisentimental play, *She Stoops to Conquer*. It has been suggested that the shift towards sentimental deama (in France, this evolved into *la comedie larmoyante*) reflected some sort of change taking place in the national psyche. There was a growing acknowledgement of the middle class and the values cherished by this section of the society. Katharine Worth has argued that not *all* sentimental plays were inimical to humour, with the example of *The Clandestine Marriage* by Colman the elder and Garrick. But, Goldsmith, as well as Sheridan a few years

later, was convinced that sentimental drama was nothing more than “comedy of tears” and felt thwarted by the restrictions it imposed on contemporary theatre.

The task begun by Goldsmith in *She Stoops to Conquer* was completed by Sheridan in *The Rivals*. In what was perhaps the most symbolically powerful despatch of the sentimental genre, Sheridan wrote in the prologue of The latter :

.....And instead advance  
The Goodess of the Woeful countenance—  
The sentimental Muse!—Her emblems view,  
The Pilgrim’s Progress, and a sprig of rue !  
View her—too chaste to look like flesh and blood—  
Primly portrayed in emblematic wood !.

---

## 1.4 SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER

---

### 1.4.1 Goldsmith’s Agenda :

Goldsmith’s play begins with customary prologue, spoken by Garrick, (Enter Mr. Woodward, dressed in black, and holding a handkerchief to his eyes.)

Excuse me, sirs, I pray — I can’t yet speak  
I’m crying now—and have been all the week.  
“Tis not alone this nourning suit,” good masters :  
“I’ve that within”—for which there are no plasters!  
Pray, would you know the reason why I’m crying ?  
The Comic Muse, long sick, is now a-dying!  
And if she goes, my tears will never stop;  
For as a player, I can’t squeeze out one drop :  
I am undone, that’s, all—shall lose my bread—  
I’d rather, but that’s nothing—lose my head.

Comparisons between Goldsmith’s and Sheridan’s prologues (which followed



four years later) are inviting, and it is interesting how both make extensive use of the world of the stage, In Sheridan's prologue, Mrs Bulkey (who spoke it) pointed to the figure of Comedy in Covent Garden Theatre. *In She Stoops of Conquer*, Garrick refers to fellow actor Ned Shuter (who plays Mr Hardcastle) : "Poor Ned and I and dead to all intents."

There are other references embedded throughout the text of the play, which may not be easily accessible to<sup>1</sup> a modern-day audience. However, what is of universal appeal is the essentially farcical premise of the play that develops out of a series of mistakes and misunderstandings. While some of Goldsmith's contemporaries (such as Horace Walpole) deplore the farcical element, it is important to realise that Goldsmith's primary agenda went somewhat beyond writing a play that would merely be a commercial success. Rather, Goldsmith took upon himself the task of reclaiming the dramatic territory lost by "laughing comedy". At the same time, he had to be careful not to give offence, to avoid the trap of bawdy humour or the belly-laugh of a Falstaff. As he wrote in *An Essay on the Theatre* :

"Humour at present is seen to be departing from the stage, and it will soon happen that our comic players will have nothing left for it but a fine coat and a song. It depends upon the audience whether they will actually drive those poor, merry creatures from the stage, or sit at a play as gloomy as the Tabernacle. It is not easy to recover an art when once lost; and it will be a just punishment, that when, by our being too fastidious, we have banished humour from the stage, we should ourselves be deprived of the art of laughing."

#### **1.4.2 Tony Lumpkin :**

Given such an agenda, it is possible to regard the character of Tony Lumpkin in the play as the most visible symbol of what Goldsmith was trying to achieve. He is the active agent of most of the mischief done in the play—it is he who misdirects Marlow and Hastings to Mr. Hardcastle's (his stepfather) house when they ask to be directed to an inn. In fact, Tony's status as an inveterate practical joker is established in the very first act of the play, in which his parents are discussing him :

**Mrs. HARDCASTLYE.** Humour, my dear; nothing but humour. Come, Mr. Hardcastle, you must allow the boy a little humour. **HARDCASTLE.** I'd sooner allow him a horse-pond. If burning the footmen's shoes, frightening the maids, and worrying the kittens be humour, he has it. It was .but yesterday he fastened my wig to the back of my chair, and when I went to make a bow, I popt my bald head in Mrs. Frizzle's face.

Note the indulgent tone of Mrs, Hardcastle (Tony's natural mother) which, nevertheless, does not protect her from being tormented by Tony on various occasions. But Goldsmith took good care-to portray Mrs. Hardcastle as an unsympathetic character whose indulgent affection towards her son alternates with fits of fury when she loses control of Tony's life. Thus the audience is invited to look upon Tony with a forgiving eye and secretly applaud him for being the Lord of Misrule in the play. Tonys manic comic energy is reminiscent of that of Puck and his propensity for sowing confusion is a throwback to Elizabethan and Restoration comedies. Like Puck, Tony delights in placing obstacles in the path of lovers, in this case the Marlow-Kate and Hastings-Constance pairs.

After Kate (Mr. Hardcastle's daughter) is told by her father she should prepare to receive Marlow, her suitor, later that evening, the scene shifts to The Three Pigeons, where Tony holds court. Already Mr. Hardcastle has dismissed the place as the haunt of a low, paltry set of fellows"—Dick Muggins, the excise man. Jack Slang, the horse doctor and so on. The song he sings at the public house is in praise of "good liquor", a Dionysiac paean (song of praise of triumph) to the vine which takes good-humoured swipes at everything he finds oppressive, such as classical learning and Methodist preachers :

When methodist preachers come down,  
A-preaching that drinking is sinful,  
I'll wager the rascals a crown,  
They always peach best with a skinful.

The song is followed by a chorus of approval from the listeners. But at this point, Goldsmith also cannot resist a none-too-subtle dig at the genteel audiences who have sustained sentimental drama at the cost of laughing comedy :

**SECOND FELLOW.** I loves to hear him sing, bekeays he never gives us nothing that's low.

**THIRD FELLOW. O** damn anything that's low, I cannot bear it.

**FOURTH FELLOW.** The genteel thing is the genteel thing any time : if so be that a gentleman bees is a Concatenation accordingly

But Tony's companions, at the pub are not the only representatives of their class in the play. The "four awkward servants" at the beginning of Act II in Mr. Hardcastle's establishment and the confusion anticipate the tumult into which the Hardcastle family will soon be plunged, In one of the most hilarious scenes of the play, Marlow and Hastings on the one hand and Mr. Hardcastle on the other continue to talk at cross purposes. Even when Hastings realises the mistake, he deliberately withholds the information from Marlow, fearing that he would leave in mortification and prevent him from wooing Constance.

**The theme of mistaken Identities** continues in act three as tongue-tied and Reserved" Marlow shows considerably more enterprise in courting Kate in the guise of a barmaid. Kate's disguising herself is in the tradition of heroines like Rosalind and Viola and the charm and wit with which she teaches to Marlow to love her is one of the high points of the play. Tfeewgh hetvfathen Mr. Hardcastle, had more or less made up his mind that Kate Should Marry Charles Marlow's son (though Marlow's 'impudence' did create second thoughts-later), Kate wants- to find out for herself whether *she'fyants* to marry Marlow, She thus takes her marriage into her own hands and agrees to accept Marlow only after subjecting him to a test of love,

### **1.4.3 Youth Against Age :**

Katharine Worth has suggested that all the three younger characters of the play-Kate, Constance and Tony—are in a state of revolt against the older generation : "A triple sexual revolt is carried out.... by the power of wit and play-acting. Of the three sets of lovers (we may think of Bet Bouncer as Tony's off-stage love), Hastings and Constance come closest to being the conventional lovers of sentimental comedy, but Goldsmith makes real people of them, thus giving extra weight to their rebellion." (A similar couple is the Julia-Fulkland pair in Sheridan's *The Rivals*), But Tony's revolt is perhaps the most significant as he exposes the

uneasy relationship between property and marriage which runs throughout the play. By plotting to steal the jewels in his mother's keeping and hand them over to Constance and Hastings, he is able to enlist the audience's sympathy despite his disruptive activities. Sometimes, he borders on the verge of cruelty—when his mother is on the verge of — nervous breakdown in the last act — but his targets usually deserve the comeuppance that is in store for them. In the case of Mrs Hardcastle, it is easy to convince the audience that this is so : on two occasions, she is shown to be a greedy, grasping woman. Once, when she lies to Constance about having misplaced the jewels ; finally when it is revealed that Tony has already come of age contrary to what mother has told him.

Appropriately, it is Tony Lumpkin's generosity towards Constance and Hastings that assures the play of a happy ending. Despite the title referring to Kate (The She of *She Stoops of Conquer*), it is Tony Lumpkin whose values emerge triumphant at the end of the play. And with him, forgotten gusts of laughter come back, to the English stage.

---

## 1.5 COMPREHENSION EXERCISE

---

### A. Essay-type

1. Comment of the aptness (or otherwise) of the title of the play *She Stoops to Conquer*.
2. How does Goldsmith set about rehabilitating “laughing comedy” in *She Stoops to Conquer* ?
3. Examine the importance of disguise, mistaken identity and practical jokes in the play.
4. Give a short account of the 18th century stage.
5. Assess the role of Tony Lumpkin in *She Stoops to Conquer*.

### B. Short-type

1. Do you feel Goldsmith has been unduly harsh towards Mrs Hardcastle?
2. Comment on the prologue -in light of the contemporary theatre scene.

3. Examine the relationship between Tony Lunipkin and other members of the Hardcastle family.
4. Assess the contribution of David Garrick to English theatre.
5. Write a brief note on the Stage licensing Act, 1737 and its effects.
6. Write a brief note on the audience of the 18th century theatre.

---

## 1.6 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

1. Ginger, J., *The Notable Man ; The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith* (Hamilton, 1977).
2. Lamb, Charles, "On the Artificial Comedy of the last Century", *London Magazine* (April, 1 X22). reprinted in *Essays of Elia* (1823; London : Dent, '1906), pp. 165-72.
3. Mudrick, Marvin, 'Restoration Comedy and Comedy and Later; in K. Wimsatt, Jnr (ed.), *English Stage Comedy: Six Essays* (Columbia University Press, 1955), pp. 115-220.
4. Rousseau, G.S. (ed). *Goldsmith : The Critical Heritage* (Routledge, Scogan Paul, 1974).
5. Worth, Katharine, *Sheridon and Goldsmith* (Macmillan, 1992).

---

## **MODULE-3 □ PRÉCIS WRITING**

---

### **Structure**

#### **1.0 Objectives**

#### **1.1 Introduction to Precis.**

#### **1.2 Worked out Passages**

#### **1.3 Passages for Practice**

---

### **1.0 OBJECTIVES**

---

This Unit is aimed at providing the learner with a first hand practical knowledge of how to go about writing a precis. It is complete with solved out passages and comprehension exercises.

---

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION TO PRECIS**

---

A précis, (pronounced: pray-see) is a short summary of the essential points of some longer text.

- A précis should be clear, brief and precise.
- It should have the facts or points as they appear and preferably in the order in which they appear in the original passage.
- The-length of a précis is roughly one-third of the original passage.
- It should convey the ideas expressed in the original passage so that the reader who may not have read the original passage has no difficulty in understanding the message.
- Though a précis should be brief it shouldn't be a number of disjointed sentences.
- As far as possible one should avoid using the vocabulary of the original.
- It is best to write in the same tense as the original.
- The précis should be written in indirect speech.

- The original passage may contain pieces of conversation. While summarizing, sentences in direct speech must be changed to indirect.
- A short and neat title should be given to the précis.
- In order to have the correct word limit it is advisable to use a grid.

The contents of the passages will vary greatly, but they may broadly be classified into two classes, firstly the narrative and factual and secondly the reflective and thoughtful. The first category of narrative and factual passages usually comprises renderings of travel and adventure and straightforward accounts of incidents, encounters and experiences. They also include passages dealing with issues like science and technology, or matters relating to business, commerce, or social science. The second category which deals with-reflective writing on any'-subject lends itself more naturally to substance writing. In substance writing the emphasis is on representing-the core idea of the passage, and unlike the précis, substance writing may call for a rearrangement of the order in which ideas are presented in the original passage.

Précis writing is above all a practical art. It is an exercise in mental discipline which helps the student, to distinguish between what is essential and non-essential. Student cannot afford to pay attention to some parts and neglect other parts of the passage. The following is the first passage to be worked out.

---

## **1.2 WORKED OUT PASSAGES**

---

*The saving of certain wild animals from extinction has for many years been a problem for zoologists and other specialists; but more recently the problem has become so acute, and has received so much publicity, that most people are now concerned about it. This may at first seem strange because one of the most gratifying developments of recent-times has been the passing of strict laws to protect wild animals and the decline of hunting of big game for sport Yet rare wild animals are still threatened with extinction and the less rare ones are rapidly declining in number.*

*One reason for this is the march of civilization. When an area is wholly cleared of vegetation to make room for new towns, factory sites or hydroelectric plants, the natural home of several species is destroyed. The displaced animals must either migrate to another area or perish. Even the clearing of land for a road or an airfield may involve pushing back the jungle and the smaller the area in which wild animals compete for a living, the smaller the number that can hope to survive.*

*Civilization brings too, swift and easy transport and so assists those who are determined to break the various protective laws. Thieves can elude the game wardens, shoot animals and be miles away from the site of the crime before the dead or the dying victim is even discovered. (233 words)*

One must be alert while reading the passage. The passage must be read once, twice or thrice till it has well understood, then the main points may be picked out or underlined in the following manner:

*The saving of certain wild animals from extinction has for many years been a problem for zoologists and other specialists; but more **recently the problem has become so acute**, and has received so much publicity, **that most people are now concerned about it**. This may at first seem strange because one of the most gratifying developments of recent times has been **the passing of strict laws to protect wild animals and the decline of hunting of big game for sport**. Yet **rare wild animals are still threatened with extinction and the less rare ones are rapidly declining in number**.*

*One reason for this is the **march of civilization**. When an area is wholly cleared of vegetation **to make room for new towns**, factory sites or hydroelectric plants, the natural home of several species is destroyed. The displaced animals must either migrate to another area or perish. Even the clearing of land for a road or an airfield may involve pushing back the jungle and the **smaller the area in which wild animals compete for a living, the smaller the number that can hope to survive**.*

*Civilization brings too, swift **and easy transport and** so assists **those who are determined to break the various protective laws**. Thieves can elude the game wardens, shoot animals and be miles away from the site of the crime **before the dead or the dying victim is even discovered**.*



## **THE FIRST DRAFT**

The first draft which tries to put together the main points may exceed the word limit. A first draft may look like this :

*The saving of wild animals had been the work of specialists in the past, but the acuteness of this problem makes it the concern of most of us at present. Yet despite the strict legislation and decline of game hunting rare animals are still threatened with extinction and others are rapidly declining in number. The reason for this is the progress of civilization which needs more space for urban development destroying the natural habitats of wildlife. Lawbreakers assisted by swift and easy transport can kill animals and escape without detection. (90 words)*

The aim of the precis is to convey thoughts in the most precise manner. At this stage words which can be replaced with more appropriate words or discarded have to be considered.

So phrases which need to be changed or may be omitted are marked out on this draft before moving on to the final draft. One may mark them out on the first draft shown above like this.

## **THE FIRST DRAFT MARKED OUT**

*The saving of wild animals had been the work of specialists in the past, but the acuteness of this problem makes it the concern of most of us at present. Yet despite the strict legislation and decline of game hunting rare animals are still threatened with extinction and others are rapidly declining in number. The reason for this is the progress of civilization which needs more space for urban development destroying the natural habitats of wildlife. Lawbreakers assisted by swift and easy transport can kill animals and escape without detection, (90 words)*

## **USING A GRID**

Drawing a grid to write the precis helps to keep track of the word limit, A grid with five columns makes it easy to calculate the number of words. There is also space enough for the longer words. The final version of the precis has been worked in the grid below :

In	the	past	saving	wildlife
was	the	specialists'	problem	but
now	it	has	become	a
matter	of	public	concern	Despite
strict	legislation	and	decline	of
game	hunting	rare	animals	are
still	threatened	with	extinction	and
are	declining	in	number	This
is	because	civilization	progresses	utilizing
more	and	more	space	for
projects	like	urban	development	destroying
thereby	the	natural	habitat	of
wildlife	Progress	also	helps	lawbreakers
assisted	by	swift	and	ea&y
transport	to	kill	animals	and
escape	without	detection.		(78 words)

Finally the precis reads like a well finished piece of writing. A title like *CONSERVING WILDLIFE TODAY* has to be given to this passage.

Sometimes a passage may combine factual and reflective writing the, like this one,

### **THE ORIGINAL PASSAGE**

*Usually a volcano explodes, and in doing so causes terrible devastation and death. Then it sits there, calmly presiding over the havoc it has caused. But uniquely Krakatoa did no such, thing. For many years, Krakatoa had been an island of no consequence. But in August 1883 this little island went mad and disappeared. Six cubic miles of rock most of the island's build, just vanished, either blown into the atmosphere, or collapsed into the sea,-and with the most thunderous roar and the greatest loss of life ever recorded. The,reasons why this happened have occupied the minds of geologists around the world for all the long years since.*

*Krakatoa is a stark reminder of Will Duraht's famous saying: "Civilization exists by geologic consent, subject to change without notice." Yet geology - which is a rational science allows us to step back from our shock and dismay at such events to accept a longer view - and to be awed by something rather different: that this planet in fact enjoys a large and extraordinarily fortunate situation. The simple, very obvious features of the earth - its location in space, its size, the processes that included volcanic eruptions like Krakatoa - are suited perfectly, when taking the long view, to the sustenance and maintenance of life. Almost all our neighbour planets are, so far as is known, volcanically lifeless. They are also biologically lifeless. (230 words)*

(adapted from Simon Winchester's *Krakatoa : The Day the World Exploded*)  
It is helpful to mark out the important points.

## **THE PASSAGE MARKED OUT**

*Usually a volcano explodes, and in doing so causes terrible devastation and death. Then it sits there, calmly presiding over the havoc it has caused. But uniquely **Krakatoa** did no such thing. For many years, Krakatoa had been an island of no consequence. **But in August 1883 this little island** went mad and **disappeared**. Six cubic miles, of rock most of the island's build, just vanished, either blown into the atmosphere, or collapsed into the sea, and with the most thunderous roar and the **greatest loss of life ever recorded**. The reasons why this happened have occupied the minds of geologists around the world for all the long years since.*

*Krakatoa is a stark reminder of Will Durant's famous saying: "**Civilization exists by geologic consent**, subject to change without notice " Yet geology - which is a rational science allows us to step back from, our shock and dismay at such events to accept **a longer view** — and to be awed by something rather different: that this planet in fact enjoys a large and extraordinarily fortunate situation. The simple, very obvious features of the earth - its location in space, its size, the processes **that included volcanic eruptions** like Krakatoa - are suited perfectly,*

*when taking the long view, to the sustenance and maintenance of life Almost all our neighbour They are also biologically planets are, so far as is known, volcanically lifeless, lifeless.*

This is the finished precis headed with a title.

### ***VOLCANOES ENSURE LIFE ON EARTH***

Usually	a	volcano	causes	great	destruction	then	becomes	calm	Krakatoa
was	different	In	August	1883	almost	all	of	Krakatoa	vanished
either	blown	into	the	air	or	collapsed	into	the	sea
causing	the	greatest	loss	of	lift	ever	recorded	This	event
has	always	intrigued	geologists	Geology	opens	our	eyes	to	the
fact	that	the	earth	is	a	very	fortunate	planet	Its
size	position	in	space	together	with	processes	like	volcanic	eruptions
help	to	sustain	biological	life	on	this	Earth.		(78 word*)

### **A REFLECTIVE PASSAGE**

The next passage worked out is a reflective passage

*Suppose we take some writer who really may be considered flawless and beyond reproach. In this context we must surely ask ourselves in general terms, with reference to both poetry and prose, which is superior, grandeur accompanied by a few flaws or mediocre correctness, entirely sound and free from error though it may be. Yes and further whether in literature the first place should rightly be given to the greater number of virtues, or to virtues which are 'greater in themselves. For these questions are proper to a study of sublimity, and for every reason they 'should be resolved.*

*Now I am well aware that the highest genius is very far from being, flawless, for entire accuracy runs at the risk of triviality, whereas in the grand manner; as in the possession of great wealth, something is bound to be neglected. Again it may be inevitable that men of humble or mediocre endowments, who never run any risks and never aim at the heights, should in the normal course of events enjoy a greater freedom from error; while great abilities remain subject to danger by reason of their very greatness. (Longinus, On the Sublime, Chapter 33)*

Instead of marking the points, they can be jotted down.

### THE POINTS JOTTED DOWN

1. Flawless writing has no faults
  2. Writing which is mediocre may be free from errors or have few faults
  3. Writing which is superior or grander may have a greater number of faults
  4. The writer draws our attention to the two different kinds of writing and talks about rating them against each other while trying to decide which is more sublime, they both possess different kinds of merit
  5. The highest genius by reason of its very greatness may neglect entire accuracy
- The finished precis will read like this.

### *FLAWED SUBLIMITY IS BETTER THAN FLAWLESS MEDIOCRITY*

*Perfect writing is flawless. Writing, in both prose and poetry, may have grandeur though it has a few flaws, while writing which is mediocre may lay claim to greater correctness. Whether literature that displays greater talent is of greater value is a question relevant to the study of sublimity. Highest genius that is flawed may display greatness at the risk of a few inaccuracies. (64 words)*

### A PASSAGE WITH CONVERSATION

A passage may consist of conversation like the following one.

*The interview [with Mr Hilton Cubitt] left Sherlock Holmes very thoughtful and several times in the next few days I saw him take his slip of paper from his notebook and look long and earnestly at the curious figures inscribed upon it. He made no allusion to the affair, however, until one afternoon a fortnight or so later. I was going out when he called me back.*

*“You had better stay here, Watson.”*

*“Why?”*

*“Because I had a wire from Hilton Cubitt this morning. You remember Hilton Cubitt, of the dancing men. He was to reach Liverpool street at one-twenty. He may be here at any moment I gather from his wire that there may have been some new incidents of importance,”*

*We had not long to wait, for our Norfolk squire came straight from the station as fast as a hansom cab could bring him\* He was looking worried and depressed, with tired eyes and a lined forehead.*

*“It’s getting on my nerves, this business Mr Holmes,” said he as he sank, like a wearied man into an armchair. “It’s bad enough to feel that you are surrounded by unseen, unknown folk, who have some kind of design upon you, but when, in addition to that, you know that it is just killing your wife by inches, then it becomes as much as flesh and blood can endure. She is wearing away under it -just wearing away before my eyes.” 241words [from *The Adventure of the Dancing Men* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle]*

## **POINTS MARKED OUT**

The important point are marked out at first.

*The interview [with **Mr Hilton Cubitt**] left **Sherlock Holmes** very thoughtful and several times in the next few days I saw him take his **slip of paper from his notebook** and look long and earnestly at **the curious figures inscribed upon it**. He made no allusion to the affair; however, until **one afternoon** a fortnight or so later.*

*I was going out when he called me **back**.*

*“You had better stay here, Watson.”*

*“Why?” .*

*“Because I had from **Hilton Cubitt a wire this morning**. You remember Hilton Cubitt, of the dancing men. He was to reach Liverpool street at one-twenty. He may be here at any moment. I gather from his wire that there may have been some new incidents of importance.”*

*We had not long to wait, for our Norfolk squire came straight from the station as fast as a hansom cab could bring him. He was **looking worried and depressed**, with tired eyes and a lined forehead,*

*“It’s getting on my nerves, this business Mr Holmes,” said he as he sank, like a wearied man into an armchair; “It’s bad enough to feel that you are surrounded by unseen, unknown folk, who have some kind of design upon you, but when, in addition to that, you know that it is just killing your wife by inches, then it becomes as much as flesh and blood can endure. She is wearing away under it -just wearing away before my eyes,”*

Direct speech is to be reported as indirect speech in the precis. This is the finished precis.

## **A CURIOUS PUZZLE FOR HOLMES**

*After the interview with Mr Cubitt Sherlock Holmes was preoccupied with the slip of paper that had curious figures inscribed upon it. One afternoon, as Watson is going out, Holmes called him back because he was expecting Cubitt, who arrived soon, looking worried and depressed. Mr Cubitt told Holmes that he was troubled by the feeling that there were unknown folk surrounding him but what was most unbearable for him was that his these circumstances were wearing his wife out, (80 words)*

### **1.3 PASSAGES FOR PRACTICE**

The following passages may be used for practice.

1. Persistent efforts are being made by nations to bring about a new social system in which men will be provided with at least the bare necessities of life, so that in a century or so there should be no poor man in the world. Old prejudices and customs, no doubt, take time to disappear, but it is recognized by every civilized government today that every citizen has a right to be comfortable. It is estimated that in the eighteenth century eight percent of the people of England were poor; hat is to say, they had no certain means of livelihood, could not afford two meals a day, or clothe themselves properly. Today the number of such people is very small, and even the number is looked after by the state. Even in India poverty is on

the decrease; and its worst form which resulted from famine, has been rooted out. There are canals to guard against uncertain rainfall. The means of transport have been developed to carry foodstuffs from one area to another when the crops fail. 180 words (2006, Calcutta University, Compulsory English, Humanities Group)

2. How strange is the lot of us mortals! Each of us is here for a brief sojourn: for what purpose he knows not though he sometimes thinks he senses it. But without deeper reflection one knows from daily life that one exists for other people first of all for those upon whose smiles and well-being our own happiness is wholly dependent, and then for the many, unknown to us, to whose destinies we are bound by the ties of sympathy. A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labours of other men, living and dead, and I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving. I am strongly drawn to a frugal life and am often oppressively aware that I am engrossing an undue amount of labour of my fellowmen. 151 words ( 2004, English Honours, Third Paper)
3. Man appeared on earth half a million years ago. Then he was little more than an animal. Even so, early man had some big advantages over the animals. He had a large brain, he had an upright body, with nimble hands; and he had in his brain a special groups of nerve cells, not present in animals, that enabled him to invent a language and to use it to communicate with his fellow men. This ability to speak was of supreme value because it allowed men to share ideas , and to plan together, so that tasks impossible for a single person could be successfully undertaken by intelligent teamwork. Speech also enabled ideas to be passed on from generation to generation so that the stock of human knowledge slowly increased. It was these special advantages that put men far ahead of all other living creatures in the struggle for existence. They .can pit their wits against their difficulties and master them. Since those far-off times, when he first made his appearance, man has achieved a great deal. 176 words (2006, Calcutta University, Compulsory English, Humanities Group)



4. The course of the boat had been altered at right-angles to the stream, and the carved dragon-head of its prow was pointing now at a gap in the fringing bushes of the bank. It glided through, brushing the overhanging twigs, and disappeared from the river like some slim and amphibious creature leaving the water for its lair in the forests.

The narrow creek was like a ditch: tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom under the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven. Immense trees soared up, invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers. Here and there, near the glistening blackness of the water, a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, black and dull, writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake. The short words of the paddlers reverberated loudly between the thick and somber walls of vegetation. Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the creepers, from behind the great fantastic and unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests. 186 words (From *The Lagoon*, by Joseph Conrad)

5. Rabindranath did not write a central educational treatise, and his ideas must be gleaned through his various writings and educational experiments at Santiniketan. In general, he envisioned an education that was deeply rooted in one's immediate surroundings but connected to the cultures of the wider world, predicated upon pleasurable learning and individualized to the personality of the child. He felt that a curriculum should revolve organically around nature with classes held in the open air under the trees to provide for a spontaneous appreciation of the fluidity of the plant and animal kingdoms, and seasonal changes. Children sat on hand-woven mats beneath the trees, which they were allowed to climb and run beneath between classes. Nature walks and excursions were a part of the curriculum and students were encouraged to follow the life cycles of insects, birds and plants. Class schedules were made flexible to allow for shifts in the weather or special attention to natural phenomena, and seasonal festivals were created for the children by Tagore. 167 words [from: O'ConneU, K. M. (2003) 'Rabindranath Tagore on education', *the encyclopaedia of informal education*, [http:// www.infed.org/thinkers/tagore.htm](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/tagore.htm).]

6. When an individual persists in use of alcohol or other 'drugs despite problems related to the substance it is diagnosed as substance dependence. Drug abuse, including alcohol and prescription drugs can induce symptoms which resembles mental illness. These symptoms occur both in the intoxicated state and also during the withdrawal state. In some cases the substance induced psychiatric disorders can persist long after detoxification. There is a high rate of suicide alcoholics and other drug abusers. The reasons believed to cause the increased risk of suicide in cases of long-term abuse of alcohol and other drugs are the physiological distortions of brain chemistry as well as social isolation. Drug abuse which may affect the central nervous system and other systems of the body results in a number of. social and other problems like morbidity, violence, motor accidents, homicide, suicide, psychological addictions and physical dependence. Suicide is also very common in adolescent alcohol abusers. Alcohol abuse is also associated with increased risks of committing criminal offences including child abuse, domestic violence,, rapes and burglaries. (175 words)