

Renaissance Drama- Unit I

1 Background

2 The Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages

3 Offshoots of Renaissance Drama

4 Major poets of this Age

5 Elizabethan Prose

6 Elizabethan Drama

7 Other Playwrights during this period

8 Conclusion

9 Important Questions

1 Background

1.1 Introduction to Renaissance Drama:

Renaissance" literally means "rebirth." It refers especially to the rebirth of learning that began in Italy in the fourteenth century, spread to the north, including England, by the sixteenth century, and ended in the north in the mid-seventeenth century (earlier in Italy). During this period, there was an enormous renewal of interest in and study of classical antiquity.

Yet the Renaissance was more than a "rebirth." It was also an age of new discoveries, both geographical (exploration of the New World) and intellectual. Both kinds of discovery resulted in changes of tremendous import for Western civilization. In science, for example, Copernicus (1473-1543) attempted to prove that the sun rather than the earth was at the center of the planetary system, thus radically altering the cosmic world view that had dominated antiquity and the Middle Ages. In religion, Martin Luther (1483-1546) challenged and ultimately caused the division of one of the major institutions that had united Europe throughout the Middle Ages--the Church. In fact, Renaissance thinkers often thought of themselves as ushering in the modern age, as distinct from the ancient and medieval eras

Study of the Renaissance might well center on five interrelated issues. First, although Renaissance thinkers often tried to associate themselves with classical antiquity and to dissociate themselves from the Middle Ages, important continuities with their recent past, such as belief in the Great Chain of Being, were still much in evidence. Second, during this period, certain significant political changes were taking place. Third, some of the noblest ideals of the period were best expressed by the movement known as Humanism. Fourth, and connected to Humanist ideals, was the literary doctrine of "imitation," important for its ideas about how literary works should be created. Finally, what later probably became an even more far-reaching influence, both on literary creation and on modern life in general, was the religious movement known as the Reformation.

Renaissance thinkers strongly associated themselves with the values of classical antiquity, particularly as expressed in the newly rediscovered classics of literature, history, and moral philosophy. Conversely, they tended to dissociate themselves from works written in the Middle Ages, a historical period they looked upon rather negatively. According to them, the Middle Ages were set in the "middle" of two much more valuable historical periods, antiquity and their own. Nevertheless, as modern scholars have noted, extremely important continuities with the previous age still existed.

1.1.1 The Great Chain of Being

Among the most important of the continuities with the Classical period was the concept of the Great Chain of Being. Its major premise was that every existing thing in the universe had its "place" in a divinely planned hierarchical order, which was pictured as a chain vertically extended. ("Hierarchical" refers to an order based on a series of higher and lower, strictly ranked gradations.) An object's "place" depended on the relative proportion of "spirit" and "matter" it contained--the less "spirit" and the more "matter," the lower down it stood. At the bottom, for example, stood various types of inanimate objects, such as metals, stones, and the four elements (earth, water, air, fire). Higher up were various members of the vegetative class, like trees and flowers. Then came animals; then humans; and then angels. At the very top was God. Then within each of these large groups, there were other hierarchies. For example, among metals, gold was the noblest and stood highest; lead had less "spirit" and more matter and so stood lower.

(Alchemy was based on the belief that lead could be changed to gold through an infusion of "spirit.") The various species of plants, animals, humans, and angels were similarly ranked from low to high within their respective segments. Finally, it was believed that between the segments themselves, there was continuity (shellfish were lowest among animals and shaded into the vegetative class, for example, because without locomotion, they most resembled plants).

Besides universal orderliness, there was universal interdependence. This was implicit in the doctrine of "correspondences," which held that different segments of the chain reflected other segments. For example, Renaissance thinkers viewed a human being as a microcosm (literally, a "little world") that reflected the structure of the world as a whole, the macrocosm; just as the world was composed of four "elements" (earth, water, air, fire), so too was the human body composed of four substances called "humours," with characteristics corresponding to the four elements. (Illness occurred when there was an imbalance or "disorder" among the humours, that is, when they did not exist in proper proportion to each other.) "Correspondences" existed everywhere, on many levels. Thus the hierarchical organization of the mental faculties was also thought of as reflecting the hierarchical order within the family, the state, and the forces of nature. When things were properly ordered, reason ruled the emotions, just as a king ruled his subjects, the parent ruled the child, and the sun governed the planets. But when disorder was present in one realm, it was correspondingly reflected in other realms. For example, in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the simultaneous disorder in family relationships and in the state (child ruling parent, subject ruling king) is reflected in the disorder of Lear's mind (the loss of reason) as well as in the disorder of nature (the raging storm). Lear even equates his loss of reason to "a tempest in my mind."

Though Renaissance writers seemed to be quite on the side of "order," the theme of "disorder" is much in evidence, suggesting that the age may have been experiencing some growing discomfort with traditional hierarchies. According to the chain of being concept, all existing things have their precise place and function in the universe, and to depart from one's proper place was to betray one's nature. Human beings, for example, were pictured as placed between the beasts and the angels. To act against human nature by not allowing reason to rule the emotions--was to descend to the level of the beasts. In the other direction, to attempt to go above one's proper place, as Eve did when she was tempted by Satan, was to court disaster. Yet

Renaissance writers at times showed ambivalence towards such a rigidly organized universe. For example, the Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola, in a work entitled *On the Dignity of Man*, exalted human beings as capable of rising to the level of the angels through philosophical contemplation. Also, some Renaissance writers were fascinated by the thought of going beyond boundaries set by the chain of being. A major example was the title character of Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus*. Simultaneously displaying the grand spirit of human aspiration and the more questionable hunger for superhuman powers, Faustus seems in the play to be both exalted and punished. Marlowe's drama, in fact, has often been seen as the embodiment of Renaissance ambiguity in this regard, suggesting both its fear of and its fascination with pushing beyond human limitations.

1.1.2 Political Implications of the Chain of Being

The fear of "disorder" was not merely philosophical--it had significant political ramifications. The proscription against trying to rise beyond one's place was of course useful to political rulers, for it helped to reinforce their authority. The implication was that civil rebellion caused the chain to be broken, and according to the doctrine of correspondences, this would have dire consequences in other realms. It was a sin against God, at least wherever rulers claimed to rule by "Divine Right." (And in England, the King was also the head of the Anglican Church.) In Shakespeare, it was suggested that the sin was of cosmic proportions: civil disorders were often accompanied by meteoric disturbances in the heavens. (Before Halley's theory about periodic orbits, comets, as well as meteors, were thought to be disorderly heavenly bodies.)

The need for strong political rule was in fact very significant, for the Renaissance had brought an end for the most part to feudalism, the medieval form of political organization. The major political accomplishment of the Renaissance, perhaps, was the establishment of effective central government, not only in the north but in the south as well. Northern Europe saw the rise of national monarchies headed by kings, especially in England and France. Italy saw the rise of the territorial city-state often headed by wealthy oligarchic families. Not only did the chain of being concept provide a rationale for the authority of such rulers; it also suggested that there was ideal behavior that was appropriate to their place in the order of things. It is no wonder then that

much Renaissance literature is concerned with the ideals of kingship, with the character and behavior of rulers, as in Machiavelli's *Prince* or Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

Other ideals and values that were represented in the literature were even more significant. It was the intellectual movement known as Humanism that may have expressed most fully the values of the Renaissance and made a lasting contribution to our own culture.

1.1.3 Humanism

A common oversimplification of Humanism suggests that it gave renewed emphasis to life in this world instead of to the otherworldly, spiritual life associated with the Middle Ages. Oversimplified as it is, there is nevertheless truth to the idea that Renaissance Humanists placed great emphasis upon the dignity of man and upon the expanded possibilities of human life in this world. For the most part, it regarded human beings as social creatures who could create meaningful lives only in association with other social beings.

In the terms used in the Renaissance itself, Humanism represented a shift from the "contemplative life" to the "active life." In the Middle Ages, great value had often been attached to the life of contemplation and religious devotion, away from the world (though this ideal applied to only a small number of people). In the Renaissance, the highest cultural values were usually associated with active involvement in public life, in moral, political, and military action, and in service to the state. Of course, the traditional religious values coexisted with the new secular values; in fact, some of the most important Humanists, like Erasmus, were Churchmen. Also, individual achievement, breadth of knowledge, and personal aspiration (as personified by Doctor Faustus) were valued. The concept of the "Renaissance Man" refers to an individual who, in addition to participating actively in the affairs of public life, possesses knowledge of and skill in many subject areas. (Such figures included Leonardo Da Vinci and John Milton, as well as Francis Bacon, who had declared, "I have taken all knowledge to be my province.") Nevertheless, individual aspiration was not the major concern of Renaissance Humanists, who focused rather on teaching people how to participate in and rule a society (though only the nobility and some members of the middle class were included in this ideal). Overall, in consciously attempting to revive the thought and culture of classical antiquity, perhaps the most

important value the Humanists extracted from their studies of classical literature, history, and moral philosophy was the social nature of humanity.

1.1.4 Imitation:

Another concept derived from the classical past (though it was present in the Middle Ages too), was the literary doctrine of "imitation." Of the two senses in which the term had traditionally been used, the theoretical emphasis of Renaissance literary critics was less on the "imitation" that meant "mirroring life" and more on the "imitation" that meant "following predecessors." In contrast to our own emphasis on "originality," the goal was not to create something entirely new. To a great extent, contemporary critics believed that the great literary works expressing definitive moral values had already been written in classical antiquity.

Theoretically, then, it was the task of the writer to translate for present readers the moral vision of the past, and they were to do this by "imitating" great works, adapting them to a Christian perspective and milieu. (Writers of the Middle Ages also practiced "imitation" in this sense, but did not have as many classical models to work from.) Of course Renaissance literary critics made it clear that such "imitation" was to be neither mechanical nor complete: writers were to capture the spirit of the originals, mastering the best models, learning from them, then using them for their own purposes. Nevertheless, despite the fact that there were a great many comments by critics about "imitation" in this sense, it was not the predominant practice of many of the greatest writers. For them, the faithful depiction of human behavior--what Shakespeare called holding the mirror up to nature--was paramount, and therefore "imitation" in the mimetic sense was more often the common practice.

The doctrine of "imitation" of ancient authors did have one very important effect: since it recommended not only the imitation of specific classical writers, but also the imitation of classical genres, there was a revival of significant literary forms. Among the most popular that were derived from antiquity were epic and satire. Even more important were the dramatic genres of comedy and tragedy. In fact, Europe at this time experienced a golden age of theater, led by great dramatists such as Shakespeare.

1.1.5 The Protestant Reformation:

Finally, as it developed during the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation was a movement that had profound implications, not only for the modern world in general, but specifically for literary history. Just as Renaissance Humanists rejected medieval learning, the Reformation seemed to reject the medieval form of Christianity. (It should be noted, however, that both Catholics and Protestants were Humanists, though often with different emphases.) In the early sixteenth century, the German monk Martin Luther reacted against Church corruption, the sort depicted, for example, by Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Many Catholics like Erasmus wanted to reform the Church from within. However, Luther's disagreements with Church policy ultimately led him to challenge some of the most fundamental doctrines of the Church, which in turn led him and his followers to break away from the Catholic Church in protest; hence they were known as Protestants. The Reformation had significant political ramifications, for it split Europe into Protestant and Catholic countries which often went to war with each other during this period. Protestantism broke up the institution that had for so long unified all Europe under the Pope (though there were also national struggles with the Papacy that had little to do with Protestantism).

Among the most important tenets of Protestantism was the rejection of the Pope as spiritual leader. A closely related Protestant doctrine was the rejection of the authority of the Church and its priests to mediate between human beings and God. Protestants believed that the Church as an institution could not grant salvation; only through a direct personal relationship with God--achieved by reading the Bible--could the believer be granted such. Many scholars argue that this emphasis on a personal, individual connection with God spawned the modern emphasis on individualism in those cultures affected by Protestantism. On the other hand, some Protestants also believed that after the Fall of Adam in Eden, human nature was totally corrupted as far as human spiritual capabilities were concerned. (Early Protestantism's emphasis on human depravity distinguishes it sharply from Renaissance Humanism.) Humans therefore are incapable of contributing to their salvation, for instance through good deeds; it could only be achieved through faith in God's grace. Overall, there is a good deal of ambivalence regarding many of the Protestant positions, and in fact the disagreement among the many Christian sects may be precisely what distinguishes Renaissance from Medieval religion.

1.1.6 Literary Ramifications

Among the literary ramifications of the Reformation, two stand out. First, the Protestant rejection of the authority of Church representatives resulted in placing that authority entirely on the Bible, at least in theory. Consequently, Protestants stressed the need for all believers to read the Bible for themselves. To help make that possible, they were active in translating the Bible into the vernacular languages so that all laymen could read it. This practice was opposed by the Catholic Church, which insisted on preserving the Bible in Latin. At the same time, Protestants also stressed the need to understand the Bible in its original languages (Hebrew and Greek) so that it could be properly translated. In their interest in such learning, particularly of ancient languages, Protestants were similar to Humanists. This emphasis on the Bible had a significant impact on literature because the Bible became a renewed source of literary inspiration, both in literary form and subject matter; it also became a rich source of symbols.

The other way the Reformation impacted on literature was perhaps more subtle, and the effects did not appear till much later in literary history. Certainly the emphasis on inner feeling found later in the Romantic Movement received at least some of its inspiration and reinforcement from the religious thrust of the Protestant Reformation.

English Renaissance theatre, also known as early modern English theatre, or (commonly) as Elizabethan theatre, refers to the theatre of England between 1562 and 1642. This is the style of the plays of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson. It is considered to be the most brilliant period in the history of English theatre.

English Renaissance theatre encompasses the period between 1562 (performance at the Inner Temple during the Christmas season of 1561 of *Gorboduc*, the first English play using blank verse) and 1642 (ban on theatrical plays enacted by the English Parliament).

The phrase Elizabethan theatre is used at times improperly (especially in languages other than English) to mean English Renaissance theatre, even though in a strict sense this only applies to 1603. Strictly speaking one distinguishes within English Renaissance theatre between Elizabethan theatre from 1562 to 1603, Jacobean theatre from 1603 to 1625 and Caroline theatre from 1625 to 1642

Along with the economics of the profession, the character of the drama changed 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

Theatrical life was largely centered in London, but plays were performed by touring companies all over England. English companies even toured and performed English plays abroad, e.g. in Germany and in Denmark. The period starts before the establishment of the first permanent theatres. Two types of locations which were used for performing plays before the establishment of permanent theatres and continued to be used all through the period even after permanent theatres were established were the courtyards of inns and the Inns of Court such as the Inner Temple. The first permanent English theatre, the 'Red Lion' opened in 1567 but it was a short-lived failure. The first successful theatres, such as The Theatre started operation in 1576.

The establishment of large and profitable public theatres was an essential enabling factor in the success of English Renaissance drama. Once they were in operation, drama could become a fixed and permanent rather than a transitory phenomenon. Their construction was prompted when the Mayor and Corporation of London first banned plays in 1572 as a measure against the plague, and then formally expelled all players from the city in 1575. This prompted the construction of permanent playhouses outside the jurisdiction of London, in the liberties of Halliwell/Holywell in Shoreditch and later the Clink, and at Newington Butts near the established entertainment district of St. George's Fields in rural Surrey. The Theatre was constructed in Shoreditch in 1576 by James Burbage with his brother-in-law John Brayne (the owner of the unsuccessful Red Lion playhouse of 1567) and the Newington Butts playhouse was set up, probably by Jerome Savage, some time between 1575 and 1577. The Theatre was rapidly followed by the nearby Curtain Theatre (1577), the Rose (1587), the Swan (1595), the Globe (1599), the Fortune (1600), and the Red Bull (1604).

Archaeological excavations on the foundations of the Rose and the Globe in the late twentieth century showed that all the London theatres had individual differences; yet their common function necessitated a similar general plan. The public theatres were three stories high, and built around an open space at the centre. Usually polygonal in plan to give an overall rounded effect (though the Red Bull and the first Fortune were square), the three levels of inward-facing galleries overlooked the open center, into which jutted the stage—essentially a platform surrounded on three sides by the audience, only the rear being restricted for the entrances and exits of the actors and seating for the musicians. The upper level behind the stage could be used as a balcony, as in *Romeo and Juliet* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, or as a position from which an actor could harangue a crowd, as in *Julius Caesar*.

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

A different model was developed with the Blackfriars Theatre, which came into regular use on a long-term basis in 1599. The Blackfriars was small in comparison to the earlier theatres and roofed rather than open to the sky; it resembled a modern theatre in ways that its predecessors did not. Other small enclosed theatres followed, notably the Whitefriars (1608) and the Cockpit (1617). With the building of the Salisbury Court Theatre in 1629 near the site of the defunct Whitefriars, the London audience had six theatres to choose from: three surviving large open-air "public" theatres, the Globe, the Fortune, and the Red Bull, and three smaller enclosed "private" theatres, the Blackfriars, the Cockpit, and the Salisbury Court. Audiences of the 1630s benefited from a half-century of vigorous dramaturgical development; the plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare and their contemporaries were still being performed on a regular basis (mostly at the public theatres), while the newest works of the newest playwrights were abundant as well (mainly at the private theatres).

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 price¹ (Ticket prices at the private theatres were five or six times higher)

The literary decline after Chaucer's death was due in considerable measure to political reasons. The dispute about the throne, which culminated in the War of Roses, dissipated the energy and resources of the country and finally destroyed in large measure the noble families. The art and literature depended on their patronage. The accession of Henry VII in 1485 brought about a period of quiet and recovery. Henry VII established a strong monarchy and restored social and political order. He curtailed the powers and privileges of barons and patronized the new rich class. The country resumed its power among European nations, and began through them to feel the stimulus of the Renaissance. Caxton's press, which was established in 1476 in London, was the earliest forerunner of Renaissance in England. Rickett remarks: The Renaissance had come with Caxton. It began in London with the publication of English masterpieces that awakened a sense of their national life in the minds of the people.

King Henry VIII, who acceded to the throne of England in 1509, began an era of significant and purposeful changes. He ruled in the spirit of modern statecraft. He encouraged trade and manufacturers, and increased the wealth of the country. He hastened the decline of feudalism by allowing men of low birth to high positions. Thus the court became the field for the display of individual ambition. Men of talent and learning found honourable place in his court. During his reign England contributed her part to the spread of the new civilization and new learning. Education was popularized. Cardinal's College and Christ Church College at Oxford were founded.

The Reign of Henry VIII also expedited the Reformation which had begun in England nearly two centuries before with Wycliffe. The spirit of emancipation of conscience from priestly control was strengthened by the example of German and Swiss reformers. In 1534 Henry VII enforced political separation from Rome on the occasion of the annulment of his first marriage. It provided an opportunity for radical theological reforms. Hugh Latimer was a powerful spokesman of the spirit of Reformation. His writings represent a development of popular English prose. The Reformation and various religious and political controversies gave rise to the

writing of pamphlets, serious and satirical. The translation of the Bible by William Tyndale and Miles Caverdale is a significant development in English prose. During Henry's reign the court emerged as a great patron of learning, art and literature. The atmosphere of peace and calm which began to prevail after long turmoil and chaos paved the way for extraordinary development of literary activity.

Edward VI ruled from 1547 to 1553. The reign of Queen Mary from 1553 to 1558 was marred by religious conflicts. She restored Roman Catholicism in England. Creative activity was arrested during her time but it was replenished with much greater vigour in the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558 – 1603).

The above historical overview is just an introduction to the socio-political and religious conditions leading to the golden period which is called the Age of Elizabeth.

The English Renaissance covers a long span of time, which is divided for the sake of convenience into the following three periods: i) The Beginning of Renaissance (1516 – 1558). ii) The Flowering of Renaissance (1558 – 1603). It is actually called the Age of Elizabeth. iii) The Decline of Renaissance (1603 – 1625). It is also termed the Jacobean Age.

Let's see these literary periods through different perspectives.

2 THE ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEOAN AGES

Both the Elizabethan and Jacobean Periods in the history of English literature are also known as The Age of Shakespeare. This span of time is the golden age of literature. It extends from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 to the death of James I in 1625. It was an era of peace, of economic prosperity, of stability, of liberty and of great explorations. It was an age of both contemplation and action. It was an era which was illustrious for the unprecedented development of art, literature and drama. John Milton calls England, during this age, as —a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks.¶ Let's see the main characteristics of this age.

This is the most remarkable epoch for the expansion of both mental and geographical horizons. It was an age of great thought and great action. It is an age which appeals to the eye, the imagination and the intellect. New knowledge was pouring in from all directions. The great voyagers like Hawkins, Frobisher, Raleigh and Drake brought home both material and intellectual treasures from the East and the West. The spirit of adventure and exploration fired the imagination of writers. The spirit of action and adventure paved the way for the illustrious development of dramatic literature. Drama progresses in an era of action and not of speculation. It has rightly been called the age of the discovery of the new world and of man.

Influence of Foreign Fashions

Italy, the home of Renaissance, fascinated the Elizabethans. All liked to visit Italy and stay there for some time. People were not only fond of Italian books and literature, but also of Italian manners and morals. Consequently the literature of England was immensely enriched by imitating Italian classics.

2.1 Contradictions and Set of Oppositions

It was an age of great diversity and contradictions. It was an age of light and darkness, of reason and of unreason, of wisdom and of foolishness, of hope and of despair. The barbarity and backwardness, the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages still persisted. Disorder, violence, bloodshed and tavern brawls still prevailed. Highway robberies, as mentioned in Henry IV, Part I, were very common. The barbarity of the age is seen in such brutal sports as bear baiting, cock and bull fighting, to which numerous references are found in the plays of Shakespeare. Despite the advancement of science and learning people still believed in superstitions, ghosts, witches, fairies, charms and omens of all sorts.

In spite of great refinement and learning it was an age of easy morals. People did not care for high principles of morality and justice. Bribery and intentional delays of justice were common evils. Material advancement was by fair means or foul, the main aim of men in high places. Hardly anyone of the public men of this age had a perfectly open heart and very few had quite clean hands.

In spite of the ignorance and superstition, violence and brutality, easy morals and lax values, Elizabethan Age was an age in which men lived very much, thought intensely and wrote strongly.

Let's discuss the literary tendencies of the age.

2.2 Literary Tendencies:

Both the Elizabethan and Jacobean Periods in the history of English literature are also known as The Age of Shakespeare. This span of time is the golden age of literature. It extends from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 to the death of James I in 1625. It was an era of peace, of economic prosperity, of stability, of liberty and of great explorations. It was an age of both contemplation and action. It was an era which was illustrious for the unprecedented development of art, literature and drama. John Milton calls England, during this age, as —a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks.¶ Let's see the main characteristics of this age.

2.2.1 Political Peace and Stability

Elizabeth brilliantly framed and followed the policy of balance and moderation both inside and outside the country. A working compromise was reached with Scotland. The rebellious northern barons were kept in check. She, therefore, could successfully establish peace in traditionally disturbed border areas. Under her able administration the English national life rapidly and steadily progressed.

2.2.2 Social Development

It was an age of great social contentment. The rapid rise of industrial towns gave employment to thousands. Increasing trade and commerce enriched England. The wealthy were taxed to support the poor. This created the atmosphere for literary activities.

2.2.3 Religious Tolerance

It was an era of religious tolerance of peace. Upon her accession she found the whole nation divided against itself. The north was largely Catholic, and the South was strongly Protestant. Scotland followed the Reformation intensely. Ireland followed its old traditional religion. It was Elizabeth who made the Anglican Church a reality. Anglicanism was a kind of compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. Both the Protestants and the Catholics accepted the Church. All Englishmen were influenced by the Queen's policy of religious tolerance and were united in a magnificent national enthusiasm. The mind of man, now free from religious fears and persecutions, turned with a great creative impulse to other forms of activity. An atmosphere of all pervading religious peace gave great stimulus to literary activity.

2.2.4 Sense and Feeling of Patriotism

It was an age of patriotism. Queen Elizabeth loved England ardently and she made her court one of the most brilliant courts in Europe. The splendour of her court dazzled the eyes of the people. Her moderate policies did much to increase her popularity and prestige. Worship of the Virgin Queen became the order of the day. She was Spenser's Gloriana, Raleigh's Cynthia, and Shakespeare's —fair vestal throned by the West.¶ Even the foreigners saw in her —a keen calculating intellect that baffled the ablest statesmen in Europe.¶

Elizabeth inspired all her people with the unbounded patriotism which exults in Shakespeare and with the personal devotion which finds a voice in the Faery Queen. Under her administration the English national life progressed faster not by slow historical and evolutionary process. English literature reached the very highest point of literary development during her period.

2.2.5 Discovery, Exploration and Expansion

This is the most remarkable epoch for the expansion of both mental and geographical horizons. It was an age of great thought and great action. It is an age which appeals to the eye, the imagination and the intellect. New knowledge was pouring in from all directions. The great voyagers like Hawkins, Frobisher, Raleigh and Drake brought home both material and intellectual treasures from the East and the West. The spirit of adventure and exploration fired the imagination of writers. The spirit of action and adventure paved the way for the illustrious

development of dramatic literature. Drama progresses in an era of action and not of speculation. It has rightly been called the age of the discovery of the new world and of man.

Influence of Foreign Fashions

Italy, the home of Renaissance, fascinated the Elizabethans. All liked to visit Italy and stay there for some time. People were not only found of Italian books and literature, but also of Italian manners and morals. Consequently the literature of England was immensely enriched by imitating Italian classics.

2.2.6 Contradictions and Set of Oppositions

It was an age of great diversity and contradictions. It was an age of light and darkness, of reason and of unreason, of wisdom and of foolishness, of hope and of despair. The barbarity and backwardness, the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages still persisted. Disorder, violence, bloodshed and tavern brawls still prevailed. Highway robberies, as mentioned in Henry IV, Part I, were very common. The barbarity of the age is seen in such brutal sports as bear baiting, cock and bull fighting, to which numerous references are found in the plays of Shakespeare. Despite the advancement of science and learning people still believed in superstitions, ghosts, witches, fairies, charms and omens of all sorts.

In spite of great refinement and learning it was an age of easy morals. People did not care for high principles of morality and justice. Bribery and intentional delays of justice were common evils. Material advancement was by fair means or foul, the main aim of men in high places. Hardly anyone of the public men of this age had a perfectly open heart and very few had quite clean hands.

In spite of the ignorance and superstition, violence and brutality, easy morals and lax values, Elizabethan Age was an age in which men lived very much, thought intensely and wrote strongly.

2.3 THE LITERARY TENDENCIES OF THE AGE

Foreign Influences

England was under the full effect of the revival of learning. It was now not confined to the scholars alone at the universities and to the privileged ones at the court. The numerous translations of the celebrated ancient classics were now available for common people who could not read the original classics. Then it came under the all pervading influence of humanism, openness of mind, love of beauty and freedom.

The knowledge of the world of antiquity exercised a great influence on the literature of this period. It was obtained through the recovery of the writings and works of art of the classical period. The idea presented in the literature of Athens and Rome that life was to be lived for its many sided development and fullest enjoyment, had a powerful influence on the literature of the period. The writers and artists cultivated the artistic forms used by classical poets, orators, sculptors and architects. In the year 1453, when the Turk Vandals invaded Constantinople, many Greek scholars, took shelter along with their manuscripts and libraries in Italy. Italy became the centre of classical literature and culture. Italy, thus, became the teacher of Europe in philosophy, art and literature.

Influence of Reformation

Both the Renaissance and the Reformation greatly influenced the literature of this age. Hudson says, —While the Renaissance aroused the intellect and the aesthetic faculties, the Reformation awakened the spiritual nature; the same printing press which diffused the knowledge of the classics, put the English Bible into the hands of the people; and a spread in the interest of religion was accompanied by a deepening of moral earnestness.¶ All the great writers and dramatists of the Elizabethan Age were influenced by both the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Ardent Spirit of Adventure

An ardent spirit of adventure characterized this age. The new discoveries and explorations beyond the seas by voyagers kindled human imagination and popular curiosity. The entire literature of this period, especially the plays of the university Wits and Shakespeare, are imbued with the spirit of adventure and imagination.

Abundance of Output

It was an age rich in literary productions of all kinds. In Elizabethan Age treatises, pamphlets, essays, prose romances, sonnets, both Petrarchan and Shakespearean, Lyric, plays etc. were abundantly written. The output of literary productions was very wide.

Several important foreign books were translated into English. By the end of Elizabeth's reign, many of the great books of modern times had been translated into English. Many translations were as popular as the original works. Many celebrated writers, including Shakespeare, derived the plots of their works from translations. Sir Thomas North translated Plutarch's Lives John Florio translated Montaigne's Essais.

It was an era of peace and of general prosperity of the country. An intense patriotism became the outstanding characteristic of the age. It is the greatest and golden period of literature in English which developed all genres of literature.

3.0 OFFSHOOTS OF THE RENASSIANCE DRAMA:

3.1 ELIZABETHAN POETRY

One of the literary historians called Elizabethan age as a nest of singing birds about the composition of poetry in this period. There were many poets who contributed to develop this form of literature and it reached the peak of its development. The poets not only adopted and innovated the forms of poetry and wrote on the varied themes. The poetry of Elizabethan era mirrors the spirit of Age. It reflects the spirit of conquest and self-glorification, humanism and vigorous imagination, emotional depth and passionate intensity. Sublimity was considered to be the essential quality of poetry. Spenser, Shakespeare and Marlowe had the immense power to exalt and sublimate the lovers of poetry.

The poetry of his period is remarkable for the spirit of independence. The poets refused to follow set rules of poetic composition. Consequently, new poetic devices and new linguistic modes developed. All varieties of poetic forms like lyric, elegy, eclogue, ode, sonnet etc. were successfully attempted. Thematically, the following main divisions of poetry existed during this period:

Love Poetry

The love poetry is characterized by romance, imagination and youthful vigour, Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, Spenser's *Amoretti*, Daniel's *Delia*, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and his sonnets are noticeable love poems of this period.

Patriotic Poetry

The ardent note of patriotism is the distinctive characteristic of Elizabethan poetry. Warner's *Abbicen's England*, Daniel's *Civil Wars of York and Lancaster*, Drayton's *The Barons War* and *The Ballad of Agincourt* are some memorable patriotic poems.

Philosophical Poetry

Elizabethan age was a period both of action and reflection. Action found its superb expression in contemporary drama. People thought inwardly. The tragedies of Shakespeare represent this aspect of national life. Brooke's poems, *On Human Learning*, *On Wars*, *On Monarchy*, and *On Religion* have philosophical leanings.

Satirical Poetry

It came into existence after the decline of the spirit of adventure and exploration, of youthful gaiety and imaginative vigour towards the end of Elizabeth's reign. Donne's *Satires* and Drummond's *Sonnets* are some fine examples of this type of poetry. In the reign of James I life's gaiety was lost. A harsh cynical realism succeeded. Poetry had grown self-conscious. Poetry had crept under the shadow of the approaching civil conflicts.

The poetry of this age is original. The early classical and Italian influences were completely absorbed and the poetry of this period depicts the typical British character and temperament.

4.0 MAJOR POETS OF THIS AGE:

Wyatt and Surrey traveled widely in Italy. They brought to England the Italian and classic influence. They modeled their poetry on Italian pattern. They are the first harbingers of the

Renaissance in English poetry. They are the first modern poets. The book that contains their poems is Songs and Sonnets, known as the Tottle's Miscellany. The brief introduction of the major poets of the age is necessary to be discussed along with their remarkable works.

I. Sir Thomas Wyatt.

Wyatt brought to English poetry grace, harmony and nobility. He followed the Italian models and attempted a great variety of metrical experiment – songs, sonnets, madrigals and elegies. He was the first poet, who introduced sonnet, which was a favorite poetical form in England with Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Arnold and many others. He first of all introduced personal or autobiographical note in English poetry. Wyatt's true ability as a poet is revealed not by the sonnets but by a number of lyrics and songs that he composed.

II. Earl of Surrey

Surrey is a disciple of Wyatt rather than an independent poetical force. His sonnets are more effective than those of Wyatt. The former followed the Petrarchan pattern of sonnet, whereas the latter modified it and made it typical English. The Petrarchan form is perhaps more impressive, the modified English form the more expressive. Shakespeare followed the English pattern of sonnet, introduced by Surrey. He was the first poet to use blank verse in his translation of Aeneid.

III. Thomas Sackville

Sackville was a great humanist whose only contribution to England poetry is The Induction. He has a sureness of touch and a freedom from technical errors which make him superior to Wyatt and Surrey.

IV. Sir Philip Sidney

Sidney was the most celebrated literary figure before Spenser and Shakespeare. As a man of letters he is remembered for Arcadia (a romance), Apology For Poetry (a collection of critical and literary principles) and Astrophel and Stella (a collection of sonnets). These 108 love sonnets are the first direct expressions of personal feelings and experience in English poetry. He

analyses the sequence of his feelings with a vividness and minuteness. His sonnets owe much to Petrarch and Ronsard in tone and style.

V. Edmund Spenser

Edmund Spenser is rightly called the poet's poet because all great poets of England have been indebted to him. C. Rickett remarks, —Spenser is at once the child of the Renaissance and the Reformation. On one side we may regard him with Milton as —the sage and serious Spenser, on the other he is the humanist, alive to the finger tips with the sensuous beauty of the Southern romance.

Spenser's main poetical works are: The Shepherd's Calendar (1579), two eclogues, March and December, are prescribed in your syllabus for detailed study. Amoretti (1595), a collection of eighty eight Petrarchan sonnets Epithalamion (1599), a magnificent ode written on the occasion of his marriage with Elizabeth Boyle Prothalamion (1596), an ode on marriage Astrophel (1596), an elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sidney Four Hymns (1576) written to glorify love and honour His epic, The Faerie Queen (1589 – 90).

Spenser's finest poetry is characterized by sensuousness and picturesqueness. He is a matchless painter in words. His contribution to poetic style, diction and versification is memorable. He evolved a true poetic style which the succeeding generations of English poets used. The introduction of Spenserian stanza is Spenser's most remarkable contribution to poetry. He is great because of the extraordinary smoothness and melody, his verse and the richness of his language, a golden diction which he drew from every source – new words, old words, obsolete words. Renwick says, —Shakespeare himself might not have achieved so much, if Spenser had not lived and laboured. Dryden freely acknowledged that Spenser has been his master in English. Thompson referred to him as —my master Spenser. Wordsworth praises him as the embodiment of nobility, purity and sweetness. Byron, Shelley and Keats are his worthy followers. The Pre- Raphaelites were inspired by Spenser's word-painting and picturesque descriptions. Therefore he is aptly called Poet's poet.

VI. Christopher Marlowe and George Chapman

The Hero and Leander was left incomplete due to Marlowe's untimely death. It was completed by Chapman. This poem is remarkable for felicity of diction and flexibility of versification. The poets show great skill in effectively using words and images. Besides completing Hero and Leander, Chapman also translated Iliad and Odyssey and composed some sonnets.

VII. William Shakespeare

Shakespeare composed many beautiful sonnets and two long poems – Venus and Adonis and The Rape of Lucrece. In the former the realistic passions are expressed through equally realistic pictures and episodes. It is remarkable for astonishing linguistic beauty. The latter is a contrast to the former. Having painted the attempts of an amorous woman, Shakespeare now proceeded to represent the rape of a chaste wife.

VIII. Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson was a pioneer in the field of poetry. His poetic work consists of short pieces, which appeared in three collections – Epigrammes, The Forest and The Underwood. He is a first-rate satirist in Elizabethan poetry. The spirit of satire looms large in these three collections of his poetry. He presents vivid sarcastic portraits in ten or twenty lines. His moral satires were nobler in tone and more sincere in expression than of Hall or Marston.

Ben Jonson was the first English poet to write Pindaric odes. His Ode to Himself is a fine example of this genre. His poetic style is lucid, clear and free from extravagances. He is also the forerunner of neo-classicism, which attained perfection in the works of Dryden and Pope. To Celia, Echo's Song and A Song are his memorable lyrics.

IX. John Donne

As the pioneer of the Metaphysical Poetry, Donne stands unrivalled. His contribution to poetry will be discussed along with the metaphysical Poetry. (For detailed study refer unit 2 of this book.)

Apart from the above major poets, there are few poets whose names need to be mentioned. They are Joseph Hall, John Marsten, George Wither, and William Browne because they contributed or verse satire to the literature of Elizabethan period.

1.4.6 Songs and Lyrics in Elizabethan Poetry

The Elizabethan England was the golden age of songs and lyrics. A number of poetical miscellanies, consisting of short lyrics and songs by various poets, appeared. Some famous anthologies are Tottle's Miscellany (1557), The Paradise of Dainty Devices, A Handful of Pleasant Delights, The Phoenix Nest, The Passionate Pilgrim and England's Helicon. These collections contain countless songs and lyrics composed by various poets. Nearly two hundred poets are recorded in the short period from 1558 to 1625. Here we can consider only those poets who have infinite riches in a little room.

Various factors contributed to the unique development of lyricism during this period. The feeling of stability, peace and contentment enabled poets to compose songs and lyrics full of zest for life. Everybody, down from the flowery courtier to the man in the street, wrote lyrics. Translations from other languages inspired the people to write. The Elizabethans loved music. Music and lyric are closely related. It was an age of romance which also contributed to the development of lyricism. The Elizabethan lyrical poetry seeks expression in a great variety of poetical forms. The lyric itself appears, now under the pastoral convention, now as sonnet and sonnet sequence, now in various composite literary forms.

The Elizabethan songs were of various kinds. They were love songs, religious songs, patriotic songs, fantastic songs, war songs, philosophical songs and religious songs. They were composed in every mood, grave, romantic, fantastic, sentimental, mocking and cynical. Even the plays and prose romances are full of songs and lyrics. Form and expression were joined together and the lyrics became an expression of the soul. Love is the main theme of Elizabethan songs and lyrics. It is fanciful love, love that laughs and entreats and sighs. The pastoral elements like shepherds' feasts, shepherds' loves and joys of countryside characterize most of the songs and lyrics of this period. Sir Philip Sidney wrote many songs which are characterized by depth of passion,

exquisite beauty, romance and fancifulness. He inserted songs in the Shepherd's Calendar. His songs are characterized by loftiness, sensuousness, picturesqueness and superb musical quality.

Marlowe's genius was lyrical. He sang songs in the pastoral strain: —Come with me and be my love. Shakespeare's comedies and romances are littered with songs. His songs have rare originality and spontaneity. Freshness and rustic realism runs in many of his songs. Some of his songs are fanciful and fantastic. Some of his songs express the poignant feelings of love. His songs have a magic of their own and are noticeable for spontaneity and sweetness.

Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists also incorporated songs in their plays. Thomas Dekker composed two beautiful songs. Beaumont and Fletcher contributed —Lay a garland on my horse and —Hence, all our vain delights. Ben Jonson's masques and comedies have many lovely songs. Lyly's songs are remembered for their delicate melody, flawless diction, and light and refined note. Green's songs are full of English feelings, pastoral and Renaissance fancies. Peele's lyrics survive for their melody and cadence, and Nash's are now frolicking and open, and gain musically melancholy. Lodge's songs are more varied and more inclined to pastoralism. Breton's songs are fresh, copious and are imbued with fine artistic feeling.

Thomas Campion deserves praises for his attractive lyrics and songs, which he himself adopted to musical requirement. He was stirred to rapture by sacred and profane love alike. His songs and lyrics are characterized by the deft use of sweet and apt phrases, musical quality of a high order and a mastery of complicated metres. He could express fantastic areas with great ease, spontaneity and felicity.

Samuel Daniel has to his credit a sonnet series called Delia, a romance entitled The Complaint of Rosamund, a long historical poem The Civil War and a large number of masques. Daniel is a master of closet lyric. Drayton wrote many lyrics, verse tales and pastorals. Purity of his poetic style is admirable. He simplified English language by removing eccentricities and arbitrary inventions. The Elizabethan lyric is light and airy. It is an expression of the holiday mood of its author. What distinguishes the lyrics of this period is their musical quality, the flight of fancy and the note of gay and joyous abandonment.

Elizabethan Sonnets and Sonneteers

The sonnet originated in Italy in the fourteenth century. It is particularly associated with the name of Petrarch, though it had been used before him by Dante. It was originally a short poem, recited to the accompaniment of music. The word sonnet is derived from the Italian word —sonnettol, meaning a little sound or strain. In course of time it became a short poem of fourteen lines with a set rhyme scheme. The sonnets of Petrarch and Dante were love sonnets. Petrarch addressed his sonnets to Laura and Dante to Beatrice. It enjoyed great popularity in Italy during the fifteenth century

In England Wyatt and Surrey began sonnet writing in imitation of the Italian sonnet. Wyatt introduced the Petrarchan model. He wrote 31 sonnets on the theme of love of rare beauty. Surrey gave a new turn to sonnet writing by introducing a new pattern which Shakespeare used later. His love sonnets were addressed to Lady Geraldine. They were marked by a note of melancholy and sadness. Wyatt and Surrey introduced the personal note in English sonnet.

Thomas Watson was the earliest Elizabethan to make a reputation as a sonneteer. In 1582 he published one hundred —passions or —poems of love which were described as sonnets, though many of them were of eighteen lines long. However, Watson's second volume of poems entitled *The Tears of Fancy or Love Disdained* were strictly confined to fourteen lines.

The publication of Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* marks the real beginning of Elizabethan sonnet. His sonnets clearly show the influence of Petrarch, Ronsard and Watson. Petrarch wrote his sonnets for his beloved Laura. Sidney's sonnets express his ardent passion for his beloved Penelope, the Stella of his sonnets. His sonnets are effusions of personal passion. These sonnets are remarkable for their sincerity. He was the first English poet to indicate the lyric capacity of the sonnet. Sidney followed the Petrarchan scheme of sonnet. His example was followed by Daniel in *Delia*, Constable in *Diana*, Drayton in *Idea* and Spenser in *Amoretti*.

Spenser's *Amoretti*, a collection of 88 sonnets is memorable contribution to the art of sonnet writing. They are addressed to Elizabeth Boyle, whom he married. So an intimate, personal or autobiographical note runs in all of them. Spenser's sonnets are unique for their purity. They tell a story of love without sin or remorse.

Shakespeare is the greatest writer of the sonnet form. His sonnets are the most precious pearls of Elizabethan lyricism, some of them unsurpassed by any lyricism. The form he chose was not the Italian or the Petrarchan form. He preferred the Spenserian pattern, consisting of three quatrains, each rhyming alternately, and rhyming couplet to conclude. Thomas Thorpe printed a collection of 154 sonnets of Shakespeare in 1609. It was dedicated to a —Mr. W.H.‡ and to a Dark Lady. The poet loved both of them dearly. The poet makes every allowance for the man, his youth, his attraction, his inexperience. He feels more bitterly towards the woman. She, he feels had turned his friend from him in sheer wantonness of spirit. He prefers the companionship of his friend to the company of the mistress. Some of his sonnets are conventional literary exercises on conventional themes. His sonnets are noticeable for rare beauty of images and the flawless perfection of style and versification. Henry Constable's sonnets are remarkable for melody, beauty and sensuousness. Daniel's collection of sonnets, known as Delia, is based on the conventional theme of love and has stock devices of contemporary sonnet writing. The language of his sonnets is pure and versification is correct.

Drayton is a distinguished sonneteer of Elizabethan Age. His sonnet sequence, known as Idea represents Platonic idea of beauty. He wrote fifty two sonnets. He uses typical stock devices. Dryton for the first time imparted dramatic element to sonnet writing. His sonnets suffer from lack of sincerity and artificiality. The other sonnet writers are Lodge, Fletcher and Percy. The Age of Shakespeare was the golden age of sonnet. Each poet contributed something new to the art of sonnet writing. The average Elizabethan sonnet illustrates the temper of the age. It bears graphic witness to the Elizabethan tendency to borrow from foreign literary sources.

5.0 ELIZABETHAN PROSE

The Age of Elizabeth was also conspicuous for the remarkable development of prose, which was variously written with great stylistic and linguistic excellence. The following prose genres developed during this period.

Prose in Early Renaissance

The prose of early Renaissance consists largely of translations. The writers of this period were educationists and reformers rather than creative writers. The following major writers need to be considered in a nutshell:

Sir Thomas More

He was one of the early humanists and the first prose writer of great literary significance. His famous work *Utopia* was written in Latin, but it was translated into English in 1551 by Ralph Robinson. It is the —true prologue of Renaissance.‖ It shows the influence of Plato. *Utopia* has been called —the first monument of modern socialism.‖ Thomas More extols democratic communism – people’s state, elected government, equal distribution of wealth and nine hours’ work a day. In it we find for the first time the foundation of civilized society, the three great words – Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. More advocates religious tolerance. In English literary history Thomas More is not remembered for his contribution to style but for the originality of his ideas.

Roger Ascham

He was a great educationist. His first work *The School of Shooting* was written in English. Commenting on the state of English language he writes: —Everything has been done excellently well in Greek and Latin, but in the English tongue so meanly that no man can do worse.‖ But —I have written this English matter, in the English tongue for Englishmen.‖ His second work, *The School Master* contains intellectual instructions for the young. Ascham’s prose style is conspicuous for economy and precision. He was the first writer who wrote —the English speech for the Englishmen.‖ He is —the first English stylist.‖

Sir Thomas Elyot and Sir John Cheke

Elyot’s *The Governor* is a treatise on moral philosophy and education. His prose does not concern the common man but it is restrained and classical. Cheke was a teacher of Greek art at Cambridge. He wrote *The Heart of Seditio* which shows the influence of classicism and antiquity. To him both form and matter were equally important. His prose is vigorous, argumentative, eloquent and humorous.

The Essay

The Essay, which Montaigne began in France, was a very popular prose form during this Age. It has been variously defined. An essay is a short composition more or less incomplete. It is like lyric in poetry. It may be written on any subject under the sun. The year 1597, when Bacon published his ten essays, marks the beginning of essay writing in English literature.

Sir Francis Bacon

Bacon occupies a dominant place in English prose. He wrote varied type of prose. He is philosophical in *The Advancement of Learning*, historical in the *History of Henry VII*, and speculative in *New Atlantis*.

Bacon occupies a permanent place in English prose due to his *Essays*, ten in number, which appeared in 1597. The second edition and the third edition raised the number to 38 and 58 respectively. They are on familiar subjects and they represent the meditations of trained and learned mind. They contain utilitarian wisdom and are written in lucid, clear and aphoristic style. Bacon began the vogue of essay writing in English. His essays introduced a new form of literature into English literature.

He was the first English writer who employed a style that is conspicuous for lucidity, clarity, economy, precision, directness, masculinity and mathematical plainness. His images and figures of speech are simple and clearly illustrate the ideas that he wishes to communicate.

Ben Jonson

Ben Jonson wrote aphoristic essays which are compiled in *The Timber of Discoveries* which was published posthumously about 1641. His essays are moral and critical. Jonson's style is noticeable for lucidity, terseness and strength. He treats a subject in a simple and plain manner.

John Selden

John Selden's Table Talk abounds in sharp, acid-natured aphorisms, exhibiting tough common sense and little imagination. As a practitioner of aphoristic essay he stands next to Bacon and Ben Jonson. He also wrote The Titles of Honour and The History of Titles.

Character Writers

The seventeenth century witnessed the origin and development of another kind of essay, known as character writing. The character writers were influenced by Theophrastus, Seneca and dramatists. They are also highly indebted to Bacon who provided them with a pattern of style – concise, pointed and sententious. The following are the character writers: I. Thomas Dekker wrote the Bellman of London and A Strange Horse Race which are noticeable for the portrayal of vivid character sketches. In character sketch the sentences are unusually short. II. Joseph Hall wrote the Good Magistrate and Virtues and Vices. He was endowed with the qualities required for character writing. Satire distinguishes his character sketches.

Thomas Overbury's Characters is a collection of numerous well – portrayed characters. He usually packs the characters to some trade or occupation. The character takes colour from the occupation from which it draws its virtues and vices. His style is artificial and he subordinates substance to form, matter to manner. IV. Earle is superior to both Hall and Overbury as a character writer. His Microcosmography is his collection of well portrayed characters. It is written in a delightful and witty style. His style is easy, vigorous and fluent. V. George Herbert differs from all other character writers of his time. His famous work A Priest in the Temple or A Country Parson is not a collection of unconnected sketches, but a short treatise in thirty seven chapters. Each of the characters delineates a phase of parson's life – his knowledge, his praying, his preaching, his comforting etc. He aims at imparting reality to his character. His aim is to recommend religion by the portrayal of a charming and saintly life. VI. Thomas Fuller in his Holy War and Profane State does not follow the Theophrastian model. He belongs to a school of his own. What distinguishes Fuller is his boundless humanity which is visible in every page. He mixes his character sketches with interesting stories. He also imparts personal touch to his essays. His characters of virtues and vices are not merely fanciful exercises but they are real and concrete. His style is condensed and discursive.

Religious Prose

During this period religious controversy was in vogue. It gave rise to fine English prose and it also contributed to the evolution of English prose style. The religious prose writers are as under:

I. Sir John Tyndale is remembered for the Translation of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. This translation formed the basis for The Authorized Version of the Bible (1611). It is written in traditional prose, purged from, ornateness and triviality. Its style is remarkable for simplicity, clarity, lucidity and directness because Tyndale's aim was to make the Bible readable even to peasants. II. Latimer's Sermon on the Ploughers and others were written in plain and straightforward English.

III. Richard Hooker wrote The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity which is an outstanding contribution in the field of theology and prose style. Hooker's style is highly Latinised but it is free from pedantry and vulgarity. It is logical and convincing, musical and cadenced, clear and vigorous.

Prose Romances

The writing of prose romances is a remarkable development of this period. They anticipated novel which came into being during the eighteenth century. The prose romances of this period consisted of tales of adventure as well as of romance. They dealt with contemporary life and events of the past, with the life at the court and the life of the city. It was by turns humorous and didactic, realistic and fanciful. In short, it represented the first rough drafts of English novel. The prose romances of varied forms and shapes were written by many writers.

I. George Gascoigne wrote the Adventures of Master E.J. which depicts a lively sketch of English country – house life. It has well-portrayed characters.

II. John Lyly is the pioneer of the English novel, the first stylist in prose, and the most popular writer of the age. His famous work Euphues is incidentally —the first novell in English language. It deals with love and romance. It foretells the rise of the novel of manners. It moves away from the fanciful idealism of medieval romance of manners. It moves away from the

fanciful idealism of medieval romance and suggests an interest in contemporary life. Euphues is especially remarkable for its style, which is based on alliteration, play upon words, and antithesis. Lyly aimed at precision and emphasis by carefully balancing his words and phrases.

III. Sir Philip Sidney wrote a prose romance *arcadia* (1590) which represents the restless spirit of adventure of the age of chivalry. It is a dream world compounded of Sidney's knowledge of classicism and Christianity, medieval chivalry and Renaissance luxury. Its style is full of affectations and artificiality. It is highly poetical.

IV. As a writer of prose romances, Robert Greene is remembered for *Pandosta*, *Mamitia* and *Menaphone*. His romances are in moral tone and their style is imitative of Lyly. He has a sense of structural unity, restraint and verisimilitude. What distinguishes Greene is the skilful portraiture of women characters. Besides, these romances, Greene strikes a realistic note in *Mourning of Garment* and *Never Too Late*.

V. Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590) is a pastoral romance, written in imitation of the ornate style of Euphues. It is considered to be the source of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

VI. Thomas Nashe is the first great realist who graphically depicted contemporary London life and its manners. His descriptions of respectable roguery are tinged with satire. Nash's memorable work is *The Unfortunate Traveler or The Life of Jack Wilton* (1594) which has the rare distinction of being the first picaresque or rogue novel. It combines both comedy and tragedy. It may also be called the first historical novel. His prose style is clear, lucid, simple and forceful. VII. Thomas Deloney was a realist, who in his works *Thomas of Reading*, *Jack of Newbury* and *the Gentle Craft*, realistically depict contemporary bourgeois life. His style is remarkable for simplicity, clarity, directness and spontaneity. His prose runs easily into spirited dialogue. VIII. Robert Burton was a humanist whose *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) is a distinguished work of philosophical prose. His style changes with the subject. It is lucid, tense, precise and rhetorical.

6.0 ELIZABETHAN DRAMA :

The period marks the real beginning of drama. It is the golden age of English drama. The renewed study of classical drama shaped English drama in its formative years. Seneca influenced the development of English tragedy, and Plautus and Terence directed the formation of comedy. The classical drama gave English drama its five acts, its set scenes and many other features. Regular English tragedy, comedy and historical play were successfully written during this period.

Nichola Idal's *Relph Roister Doister* (1553) is the first English comedy of the classical school, which is divided into acts and scenes. *Gamar Gurton's Needle* (1575), written by an unknown writer is another comedy in the classical style. The first complete tragedy of the Senecan type is *Gorbuduc* (1562), which was written by Thomas Morton and Thomas Sackville. The example of *Gorbuduc* was followed by Thomas Hughes in *The Misfortunes of Arthus* (1588) and George Gascoigne's *Jocasta* (1566). All these tragedies were influenced by Seneca both in style and treatment of theme.

Another dramatic genre, which emerged during this period, is tragic-comedy, which mixes lamentable tragedy with pleasant mirth. Some memorable plays of this type are *Whetstone's Right Excellent and Famous History*, *Preston's A Lamentable Tragedy*, *Richard Edward's Demons and Rithias* and *R.B.'s Apius and Virginia*. Historical plays too were written during this period. Famous among the early historical plays are – *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* (1590), *Tragedy of Richard, the Third* (1590 – 94), *The Victories of Henry the Fifth* (1588) and *the Chroniete History of Lear* (1594).

6.1 The University Wits

Lyly, Peele, Greene, Lodge, Nashe, Kyd and Marlowe are known as the university Wits because they came either from Cambridge or from Oxford. They were romantic by nature and they represented the spirit of Renaissance. The great merit of the University Wits was that they came with their passion and poetry, and their academic training. They paved the way for the successive writers like Shakespeare to express his genius. The contribution of the university Wits to the development of drama needs to be highlighted:

I. John Lyly: Lyly wrote eight comedies, of which the best are Campaspe, Endymion, Grallathia, Midas and Love's Metamorphosis. He wrote for the private theatres. His writing is replete with genuine romantic atmosphere, humour, fancy for romantic comedy, realism, classicism and romanticism. Lyly established prose as an expression of comedy. He deftly used prose to express light feelings of fun and laughter. He also used a suitable blank verse for the comedy. High comedy demands a nice sense of phrase, and Lyly is the first great phrase maker in English. He gave to English comedy a witty phraseology. He also made an important advance at successful comic portrayal. His characters are both types and individuals. Disguise as a device was later popularized by Shakespeare in his plays especially in his comedies. The device of girl dressed as a boy is traced back to Lyly. The introduction of songs, symbolical of the mood owes its popularity to Lyly.

II. George Peele: His work consists of The Arraignment of Paris, The Battle of Alcazar, The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe and The Old Wives' Tales. He has left behind a pastoral, a romantic tragedy, a chronicle history and a romantic satire. He juxtaposes romance and reality in his plays. As a humorist he influenced Shakespeare. In The Old Wives' Tales he for the first time introduced the note of satire in English drama.

III. Robert Greene: Greene wrote The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon and Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay. Greene was the first master of the art of plot construction in English drama. In his plays Greene has three distinct worlds mingled together – the world of magic, the world of aristocratic life, and the world of the country. There is peculiar romantic humour and rare combination of realism and idealism in his plays. He is the first to draw romantic heroines. His heroines Margaret and Dorothea anticipate Shakespeare's Rosalind and Celia.

IV. Thomas Kyd: Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, a Senecan tragedy, is an abiding contribution to the development of English tragedy. It is a well constructed play in which the dramatist has skillfully woven passion, pathos and fear until they reach a climax. Kyd succeeded in producing dialogue that is forceful and capable. He introduced the revenge motif into drama. He, thus, influenced Shakespeare's Hamlet and Webster's The Duchess of Malfi. The device of play within play, which Shakespeare employed in Hamlet, is used for the first time in The Spanish

Tragedy. He also introduced the hesitating type of hero, suffering from bouts of madness, feigned or real, in the character of Hieronimo, who anticipates the character of Hamlet.

V. Christopher Marlowe: Marlowe's famous plays Tamburlaine, the Great, Dr. Faustus, Edward II and The Jew of Malta give him a place of preeminence among the University Wits. Swinburne calls him —the first great poet, the father of English tragedy and the creator of blank verse.¶ He is, indeed, the protagonist of tragic drama in English and the forerunner of Shakespeare and his fellows. Marlowe provided big heroic subjects that appealed to human imagination. He for the first time imparted individuality and dignity to the tragic hero. He also presented the tragic conflict between the good and evil forces in Dr. Faustus. He is the first tragic dramatist who used the device of Nemesis in an artistic and psychological manner. Marlowe for the first time made blank verse a powerful vehicle for the expression of varied human emotions. His blank verse, which Ben Jonson calls, —Marlowe's Mighty Line¶ is noticeable for its splendour of diction, picturesqueness, vigour and energy, variety in pace and its responsiveness to the demands of varying emotions. Marlowe has been termed the father of English tragedy. He was in fact the first to feel that romantic drama was the sole form in harmony with the temperament of the nation. He created authentic romantic tragedy in English and paved the way for the full blossoming of Shakespeare's dramatic genius.

6.2 Dramatic Activity of Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was not of an age but of all ages. He wrote 37 plays, which may be classified as tragedies, comedies, romances or tragic-comedies and historical plays. The period of Shakespeare's dramatic activity spans twenty four years (1588 – 1612) which is divided into the following four sub-periods:

i) The First Period (1588 – 96): It is a period of early experimentation. During this period he wrote Titus Andronicus, First Part of Henry VI, Love's Labour Lost, The Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Richard II and Richard III and King John. His early poems The Rape of Lucrece and Venus and Adonis belong to this period.

ii) The Second Period (1596 – 1600): Shakespeare wrote his great comedies and chronicled plays during this period. The works of this period are The Merchant of Venice, The Taming of

the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing As You Like It, The Twelfth Night, Henry IV, Part I & II, and Henry V.

iii) The Third Period (1601 – 08): It is a period of great tragedies Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear Othello, Julius Caesar, and of somber and better comedies All's Well That Ends Well, Measure For Measure and Troilus and Cressida.

iv) The Fourth Period (1608 – 1613) : Shakespeare's last period begins with Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Timon of Athens, Henry VII and Pericles. What distinguishes Shakespeare's last period is the reawakening of his first love romance in Cymbeline, The Tempest and The Winter's Tale.

6.3 Shakespearean Comedy

Shakespeare brought perfection to the writing of romantic comedy. His comedies are classified into the following three categories.

i) The Early Comedies: They are The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour Lost and The Two Gentlemen of Verona. The plays show signs of immaturity. The plots are less original, the characters are less finished and the style is also vigorous. The humour lacks the wide human sympathy of his mature comedies.

ii) The Mature Comedies: Shakespeare's comic genius finds expression in Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, The Merchant of Venice and As You Like It. These plays are full of love and romance, vigour and vitality, versatility of humour, humanity and well-portrayed characters.

iii) The Somber Comedies: All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure and Troilus and Cressida belong to the period of great tragedies. These comedies have a serious and somber time.

6.4 Characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy

Shakespearean comedy is pre-eminently romantic. His predecessors – Lyly, Greene and Peele influenced his art of writing comedy. The main characteristics of Shakespearean comedy are given below:

i) Romance and Realism: Shakespearean comedy is romantic. The classical unities of time, place and action are not observed in it. The settings are all imaginative. The action takes place in some remote far off place, and not in familiar surroundings. According to Raleigh Shakespearean comedy is a —rainbow world of love in idleness. What distinguishes Shakespearean comedy is the fine and artistic blend of romance and realism. All his comedies are related to real life. There are contemporary figures and contemporary fashions in Love's Labour Lost. Bottom and his companions exist with fairies; Sir Toly Belch and Sir Andrew are companions of Viola and Olivia.

Shakespeare's characters are real. His dramatic personages are ordinary human beings and incidents are such as occurring in every day life. The romantic main plot and the realistic sub plot are harmoniously put together in As You Like It, Twelfth Night and A Midsummer Night's Dream. Charlton writes: —Shakespearean comedies are not satiric; they are poetic. They are not conservative, they are creative.¶

ii) Love: Shakespearean comedy is essentially a comedy of love, which ends with the ringing of the marriage bells. Wooing distinguishes it from classical comedy. The entire atmosphere is surcharged with love. Not only the hero and the heroine are in love but all are in love. The Shakespearean comedy ends not with the celebration of one marriage but with many marriages.

Shakespeare has vividly exhibited carried manifestations of love in his comedies. In As You Like It he has described the love at first sight between Orlando and Rosalind, thoughtful love between Celia and Oliver, pastoral love between Phebo and Silvius. The men and women who love truly have become superb representations of human nature. True love is spiritual. It is a union of minds and hearts.

iii) Shakespeare's Heroines: Heroines in Shakespearean comedy play leading roles and surpass their male counterparts. Ruskin's remark that —Shakespeare has only heroines and no heroes¶ is certainly true to his comedies. Shakespeare's heroines Rosalind Portia, Viola, Beatrice etc. are

endowed with wit, common sense, human feelings and noble qualities of head and heart. They are wise, winning and charming. They have beautiful feelings, thoughts and emotions. They radiate joy, peace and spirit of harmony. Male characters in Shakespearean comedy only play a second fiddle. His heroines know how to fulfill their desires and resolve crisis. All heroines in Shakespearean comedy are guided by infinitive insight.

iv) Disguise: The use of dramatic device of disguise is common to all the comedies of Shakespeare. In *The Merchant of Venice* Jessica disguises herself in —the lovely garnish of a boy, and Portia and Nerissa likewise don masculine attire. This device is also employed for instance, in *I As You Like It* Rosalind and Celia become Ganymede and Aliena, and in *All's Well That Ends Well*. Helena passes off in bed as Diana. v) Humour: Humour is the soul of Shakespearean comedy. It arouses thoughtful laughter. It is full of humane and genial laughter. Shakespeare's wit lacks malice and his mockery has no bite. Brilliant wit mingles with kindly mirth and genial humour.

Shakespeare's humour is many sided. He can arouse laughter from the mumblings of a drunkard and the intelligent repartees of leading women. The alert wit and bright good sense of a Rosalind arouse exquisite pleasure. His all pervasive spirit of mirth gains much from the presence of the Fool. Bottom and his companions, Feste, Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, Touchstone, Dogberry, Verges and Falstaff are Shakespeare's memorable fools, who not only create humour and laughter, but they also interlink the main and the subplots, and provide a running commentary on character and action. Falstaff is a superb comic character of Shakespeare.

vi) Admixture of Tragic and Comic Elements: Shakespearean comedy differs from the classical comedy in the sense that in it the comic and the tragic elements are commingled. However, the tragic note does not dominate and the play ends on a note of joy. For example, *The Merchant of Venice* is pervaded by the tragic element from the signing of the bond to the end of the trial scene. Ultimately the play ends happily, as Antonio, whose life has been threatened by Shylock, feels happy at heart as his life has been saved.

vii) Music and Song: Since music is the food of love. Shakespearean comedy is abundantly full of song and music. *The Twelfth Night* opens with a note of music which strikes the keynote of

the play. Several romantic songs are scattered all over *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

viii) **The Role of Fortune:** —The course of true love never runs smooth. Lovers have to face the hostilities of parents, friends or relatives; and consequently, there are much tears and sighs, before the final union takes place. But all these difficulties and complications are unexpectedly removed by the benign power of Fortune.

Shakespearean comedy radiates the spirit of humanity and a broad vision of life. It is large – hearted in the conception, sympathetic in its tone and humanitarian in its idealism. Shakespeare created his own hallmark on the comedies in English drama.

6.5 Shakespearean Tragedy

Shakespearean comedy is romantic and not classical. It observes the fundamental requirements of tragedy expounded by Aristotle in *The Poetics*. The main characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy are as follows:

i) **Tragic Hero:** Shakespearean tragedy is pre-eminently the story of one person, the hero or the protagonist. It is, indeed, a tale of suffering and calamity resulting in the death of the hero. It is concerned always with persons of high degree, often with Kings or princes or with leaders in the state like *Coriolanus*, *Brutus* and *Antony*. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are not only great men, they also suffer greatly, their calamity and suffering are exceptional. The sufferings and calamities of an ordinary man are not worthy of note, as they affect his own life. The story of the prince like *Hamlet*, or the King like *Lear*, or the generals like *Macbeth* or *Othello* has a greatness and dignity of its own. His fate affects the fate of a whole nation or empire. When he falls from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast of the powerlessness of man. His fall creates cathartic effects on the audience.

Shakespeare's tragic hero is endowed with noble qualities of head and heart. He is built on a grand scale. For instance, *Macbeth* has —vaulting ambition, *Hamlet* noble inaction, *Othello* credulity and rashness in action, and *Lear* the folly and incapacity to judge human character.

Owing to this —fatal flaw the hero falls from a state of prosperity and greatness into adversity and unhappiness, and ultimately dies.

ii) Tragic Waste: In Shakespearean tragedy we find the element of tragic waste. All exceptional qualities of the protagonist are wasted. At the end of the tragedy, the Evil does not triumph. It is expelled but at the cost of much that is good and admirable. The fall of Macbeth does not only mean the death of evil in him, but also the waste of much that is essentially good and noble. In Hamlet and King Lear the good is also destroyed along with the evil. There is no tragedy in the expulsion of evil, the tragedy is that it involves the waste of good.

iii) Fate and Character: The actions of the protagonist are of great importance as they lead to his death. What we do feel strongly as the tragedy advances to its close is that the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of man, and that the main source of these deeds is character. But to call Shakespearean tragedy the story of human character is not the entire truth. Shakespeare's tragedies, as Nicoll points out are —tragedies of character and destiny. There is a tragic relationship between the hero and his environment. A. C. Bradley also points out that with Shakespeare —character is destiny is an exaggeration of a vital truth. Fate or destiny places the protagonist in just those circumstances and situations with which he is incapable of dealing. The flaw in the character of the protagonist proves fatal for him in the peculiar circumstances in which cruel Destiny has placed him. The essence of Shakespearean tragedy, therefore, is that Fate presents a problem which is difficult for the particular hero at a time when he is least fitted to tackle it. The tragic relationship between the hero and his surroundings is a significant factor in Shakespearean tragedy. So, both character and destiny are responsible for the hero's tragic end.

iv) Abnormal Psychology: Some abnormal conditions of mind as insanity, somnambulism and hallucinations affect human deeds. Lear and Ophelia become victims of insanity. Lady Macbeth suffers from somnambulism and her husband Macbeth from hallucinations.

v) The Supernatural Element: The supernatural agency plays a vital role in Shakespearean tragedy. It influences the thoughts and deeds of the hero. In the age of Shakespeare ghosts and

witches were believed to be far more real than they are today. It is the supernatural agency that gives the sense of failure in Brutus, to the half formed thoughts of guilt in Macbeth and to suspicion in Hamlet. Supernatural agency has no power to influence events unless by influencing persons

vi) Chance: In most of Shakespeare's tragedies chance or accident exerts an appreciable influence at some point in the action. For instance it may be called an accident the pirate ship attacked Hamlet's ship, so that he was able to return forthwith to Denmark; Desdemona drops her handkerchief at the most fatal of moments; Edgar arrives in the prison just too late to save Cordelia's life.

vii) Conflict: Conflict is an important element in Shakespearean tragedy. According to Aristotle it is the soul of tragedy. This conflict may arise between two persons, e.g. the hero and the villain, or between two rival parties or groups in one of which the hero is the leading figure. This is called the external conflict. In Macbeth the hero and the heroine are opposed to King Duncan. There is also an —inner conflict, an inward struggle, in the mind of the hero and, it is this inner conflict which is of far greater importance in the case of the Shakespearean tragedy. In it there is invariably such as inner conflict in the mind of one or more of the characters. In Macbeth, according to Bradley, we find that —treasonous ambition in Macbeth collides with loyalty and patriotism in Macduff and Malcolm: here is the outward conflict. But these powers and principles equally collide in the soul of Macbeth of himself; here is the inner.

viii) Catharsis: Shakespearean tragedy is cathartic. It has the power of purging and thus easing us of some of the pain and suffering which is the lot of us all in the world. Compared to the exceptionally tragic life of the hero before our eyes, our own sufferings begin to appear to us little and insignificant. In a Shakespearean tragedy the spectacle of the hero's sufferings is terrible and it arouses the emotions of pity and terror. It is truly cathartic, as it purges the audience of the emotions of self-pity and terror.

ix) No Poetic Justice: Shakespearean tragedy is true to life. So, it excludes —poetic justice which is in flagrant and obvious contradiction of the facts of life. Although villainy is never ultimately triumphant in Shakespearean tragedy, there is yet an idea that the fortunes of the

persons should correspond to their deserts and dooms. We feel that Lear ought to suffer for his folly and for his unjust treatment of Cordelia, but his sufferings are out of all proportion to his misdeeds. In Shakespearean tragedy we find that the doer must suffer. We also find that villainy never remains victorious and prosperous at the end.

Nemesis overtakes Macbeth and all evil characters in Shakespearean tragedy.

x) Moral Vision: Shakespearean tragedy is not depressing. It elevates, exalts and ennobles us. Shakespeare shows in his tragedies that man's destiny is always determined to a great extent by his own character. He is an architect of his own fate. It always reveals the dignity of man and of human endeavour over the power of evil, which is ultimately defeated. Shakespearean tragedy ends with the restoration of the power of the good.

Shakespeare's Historical Plays

The historical plays were immensely popular in Elizabethan England. They reflected the spirit of the age. The people were intensely patriotic and were very proud of the achievements of their ancestors or the foreign fields. The newly awakened spirit of patriotism and nationalism enables the people to take keen interest in the records of bygone struggle against foreign invasion and civil disunion.

Shakespeare's historical plays span a period of 350 years of English history, from 1200 to 1550. His famous historical plays are Henry VI, Parts I, II & III, Richard II, Richard III, King John, Henry IV, Parts I & II and Henry V. He borrowed the raw material of his historical plays from the chronicles of Hall, Showe and Holinshed.

Shakespeare's historical plays are suffused with the spirit of patriotism. They show his love for authority and discipline. He considers law and authority necessary for civilized life, he fears disorder for it leads to chaos.

6.6 Shakespeare's Last Plays

Shakespeare's last plays known as dramatic romances form a class apart. His last four plays – Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest are neither comedies nor tragedies.

All of them end happily but all fetch happiness to shore out of shipwreck and suffering. These last plays have a lot in common. It is appropriate to call them —dramatic romances or tragicomedies. They contain incidents which are undoubtedly tragic but they end happily.

Shakespeare's last plays breathe a spirit of philosophic calm. They are stories of restoration, reconciliation, moral resurrection and regeneration.

7.0 Other Playwrights during this period:

I. Ben Jonson and the Comedy of Humours

Ben Jonson was a classicist in Elizabethan England, which was romantic both in character and temper. Jonson was the first great neo-classic. Like Donne, he revolted against the artistic principles of his contemporaries, and he sought a measure for the uncontrolled, romantic exuberance of Elizabethan literature in the classical literature. In all branches of his writings he is the conscious artist and reformer. To him the chief function of literature was to instruct and educate the audience and readers.

All plays of Ben Jonson are neo-classic in spirit. They aim at reforming and instructing society and individuals. He is primarily a writer of the comedies of humour. His famous comedies are *The Case is Altered*, *Every Man in His Humour*, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *Epicure or The Silent Woman*, *The Alchemist*, *The Bartholomew Fair*, *The Devil is an Ass*, *The Light Heart*, *Humour Reconciled* and *A Tale of A Tub*. Ben Jonson also wrote two tragedies *Sejanus* and *Cataline*.

Jonson propounded the theory of the comedy of humours. To him the purpose of the comedy is corrective and cathartic. The corrective and moral tone necessitated the presence of satire in his comedies. The audience must laugh to some end and the play must deal with some folly and cure it by its ridiculous and comic presentation. To him a comedy was a —comical satire. He derived the idea of humours from medieval medical science. In the older physiology the four major humours corresponding with the four elements and possessing the qualities of moisture, dryness, heat and cold. These elements, in different combinations, formed in each body and declare his character. Variations in the relative strength of these humours showed the individual

differences. The disturbance of the natural balance is dangerous and it results in different ailments of body. In order to restore the natural balance of the body many purgings, bleedings and other painful reductions were affected in medieval times.

Ben Jonson used this term to include vices as well as follies, cruelty as well as jealousy. It was also used in the sense of mere caprice or trick of manner or peculiarity of chess. It also included vanity and affectation. In *Every Man Out of His Humour* he lucidly explained the term—humour. As when someone peculiar quality Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw All his effects, his spirits and his powers, In his confluxions, all to run are way.

This may be truly said to be a humour. Jonson regarded it as one of the main functions of the comedy to expose the excesses, vanities and human affectations, which disturbed the balance of human personality. Jonsonian comedy of humours is classical and intellectual. He is the forerunner of the Restoration comedy of manners.

II. John Webster and the Revenge Tragedy

Webster's two tragedies *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* have earned for him an outstanding place in British drama. In subtlety of thought and reality of tragic passion he is second to Shakespeare. Both his tragedies are based on the revenge motif. In them he emerges as a painstaking artist who had refined the material and motives of the earlier tragedies of blood and gloom. He had converted melodrama into tragedy. He imparted moral vision, psychological subtlety and emotional depth to the tragedy of revenge and horror.

III. Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher combined to produce a great number of plays. Their typical comedies are *A King and No King*, *The Knight of Burning Pestle* and *The Scornful Lady*. They wrote two tragedies – *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster*.

IV. George Chapman

George Chapman was a classicist like Jonson. His two comedies *All Fools' Day* and *Eastward Ho* are remarkable for Jonsonian humour. His historical plays dealing with nearly contemporary

history are *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, *Charles, Duke of Byron* and *The Tragedy of Chabot*.

V. Thomas Middleton

Thomas Middleton was one of the most original dramatists of his time. His light farcical comedies like *A Mad World My Masters* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* are remarkable for vivacity. His other memorable plays *Women Beware Women*, *Changeling* and *The Witch*. *The Spanish Gypsy* is a romantic comedy which reminds us of *As You Like It*.

8 CONCLUSION:

In this unit we have studied the importance of English Renaissance which exercised a great impact on the development of English literature. We have taken an outline of the socio-political milieu of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age including the literary features of these ages. Further we studied the different kinds of poetry like love poetry, patriotic poetry, philosophic poetry and satirical poetry to name few. You have also been introduced with the important poets of the age. The unit continues with the peculiarities of the Elizabethan prose and its various forms: essay, character writing, religious writing and prose romances. This prose writing projected the novel writing in the later ages

The final part of the unit focuses on the dramatic art developed by the Elizabethan playwrights. It includes the University wits and their contributions to drama, and as to how they pave the way for Shakespeare.

Performances

The acting companies functioned on a repertory system; unlike modern productions that can run for months or years on end, the troupes of this era rarely acted the same play two days in a row. Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess* ran for nine straight performances in August 1624 before it was closed by the authorities—but this was due to the political content of the play and was a unique, unprecedented, and unrepeatable phenomenon. Consider the 1592 season of Lord Strange's *Men at the Rose Theatre* as far more representative: between 19 Feb. and 23 June the

company played six days a week, minus Good Friday and two other days. They performed 23 different plays, some only once, and their most popular play of the season, *The First Part of Hieronimo*, (based on Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*), 15 times. They never played the same play two days in a row, and rarely the same play twice in a week. The workload on the actors, especially the leading performers like Edward Alleyn, must have been tremendous.

One distinctive feature of the companies was that they included only males. Female parts were played by adolescent boy players in women's costume.

Costumes

Costumes were often bright in colour and visually entrancing. Costumes were expensive, however, so usually players wore contemporary clothing regardless of the time period of the play. Otherwise, costumes would be recycled and used in multiple different plays multiple times until it was too worn to be used. Occasionally, a lead character would wear a conventionalized version of more historically accurate garb, but secondary characters would nonetheless remain in contemporary clothing.

Playwrights

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 men (no women were professional dramatists in this era) who wrote these plays were primarily self-made men from modest backgrounds. Some of them were educated at either Oxford or Cambridge, but many were not. Although William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were actors, the majority do not seem to have been performers, and no major author who came on to the scene after 1600 is known to have supplemented his income by acting.

Not all of the playwrights fit modern images of poets or intellectuals. Christopher Marlowe was killed in an apparent tavern brawl, while Ben Jonson killed an actor in a duel. Several probably were soldiers.

Playwrights 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.

The profession of dramatist was challenging and far from lucrative. 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 writers 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 part 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 Brome 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. (The truism that says, diversify your investments, may have worked for the Elizabethan play market as for the modern stock market.) Of the 70-plus known works in the canon of Thomas Dekker, roughly 50 are collaborations; in a single year, 1598, Dekker worked on 16 collaborations for impresario Philip Henslowe, and earned £30, or a little under 12 shillings per week—roughly twice as much as the average artisan's income of 1s. per day.[18] At the end of his career, Thomas Heywood would famously claim to have had "an entire hand, or at least a main finger" in the authorship of some 220 plays. A solo artist usually needed months to write a play (though Jonson is said to have done *Volpone* in five weeks); Henslowe's Diary

indicates that a team of four or five writers could produce a play in as little as two weeks. Admittedly, though, the Diary also shows that teams of Henslowe's house dramatists—Anthony Munday, Robert Wilson, Richard Hathwaye, Henry Chettle, and the others, even including a young John Webster—could start a project, and accept advances on it, yet fail to produce anything stageworthy. (Modern understanding of collaboration in this era is biased by the fact that the failures have generally disappeared with barely a trace; for one exception to this rule, (Sir Thomas More.). Most playwrights, like Shakespeare for example, wrote in verse.

Genres

Genres of the period included the history play, which depicted English or European history. Shakespeare's plays about the lives of kings, such as Richard III and Henry V, belong to this category, as do Christopher Marlowe's Edward II and George Peele's Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First. History plays dealt with more recent events, like A Larum for London which dramatizes the sack of Antwerp in 1576.

. The audiences particularly liked revenge dramas, such as Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy. The four tragedies considered to be Shakespeare's greatest (Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Tragedy was an amazingly popular genre. Marlowe's tragedies were exceptionally popular, such as Dr. Faustus and The Jew of Malta Macbeth) were composed during this period, as well as many others (see Shakespearean tragedy).

Comedies were common, too. A sub-genre developed in this period was the city comedy, which deals satirically with life in London after the fashion of Roman New Comedy. Examples are Thomas Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday and Thomas Middleton's A Chaste Maid in Cheapside.

Though marginalised, the older genres like pastoral (The Faithful Shepherdess, 1608), and even the morality play (Four Plays in One, ca. 1608-13) could exert influences. After about 1610, the new hybrid sub-genre of the tragicomedy enjoyed an efflorescence, as did the masque throughout the reigns of the first two Stuart kings, James and Charles

Printed texts

Only a minority of the plays of English Renaissance theatre were ever printed; of Heywood's 220 plays noted above, only about 20 were published in book form. A little over 600 plays were published in the period as a whole, most commonly in individual quarto editions. (Larger collected editions, like those of Shakespeare's, Ben Jonson's, and Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, were a late and limited development.) Through much of the modern era, it was thought that play texts were popular items among Renaissance readers that provided healthy profits for the stationers who printed and sold them. By the turn of the 21st century, the climate of scholarly opinion shifted somewhat on this belief: some contemporary researchers argue that publishing plays was a risky and marginal business though this conclusion has been disputed by others.] Some of the most successful publishers of the English Renaissance, like William Ponsonby or Edward Blount, rarely published plays.

A small number of plays from the era survived not in printed texts but in manuscript form.

End of English Renaissance theater: ban on plays by the English Parliament

The rising Puritan movement was hostile toward theatre, as they felt that "entertainment" was sinful. Politically, playwrights and actors were clients of the monarchy and aristocracy, and most supported the Royalist cause. The Puritan faction, long powerful in London, gained control of the city early in the First English Civil War, and on 2 September 1642, the Parliament, pushed by the Parliamentary party, under Puritan influence, banned the staging of plays in the London theatres[24] though it did not, contrary to what is commonly stated, order the closure, let alone the destruction, of the theatres themselves:

The text of the act is as follows: *Whereas the distressed Estate of Ireland, steeped in her own Blood, and the distracted Estate of England, threatened with a Cloud of Blood by a Civil War, call for all possible Means to appease and avert the Wrath of God, appearing in these Judgements; among which, Fasting and Prayer, having been often tried to be very effectual, having been lately and are still enjoined; and whereas Public Sports do not well agree with Public Calamities, nor Public Stage-plays with the Seasons of Humiliation, this being an Exercise of sad and pious Solemnity, and the other being Spectacles of Pleasure, too commonly expressing lascivious Mirth and Levity: It is therefore thought fit, and Ordained, by the Lords*

and Commons in this Parliament assembled, That, while these sad causes and set Times of Humiliation do continue, Public Stage Plays shall cease, and be forborn, instead of which are recommended to the People of this Land the profitable and seasonable considerations of Repentance, Reconciliation, and Peace with God, which probably may produce outward Peace and Prosperity, and bring again Times of Joy and Gladness to these Nations.

Note that the Act purports the ban to be temporary ("...while these sad causes and set Times of Humiliation do continue, Public Stage Plays shall cease and be forborn") but does not assign a time limit to it.

After 1642, during the English Civil War and the ensuing Interregnum (English Commonwealth), even after the Puritan mandated banning of the performance of plays, theatrical activity which continued English Renaissance theatre could be seen to some extent, e.g. in the form of short comical plays called Drolls that *were* allowed by the authorities, while proper full-length plays were banned. The theatres were not closed. The buildings were used for purposes other than staging plays.

The performance of plays remained banned for most of the next eighteen years, becoming allowed again after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The theatres started again performing many of the plays of the previous era, though often in adapted forms; new genres of Restoration comedy and spectacle soon evolved, giving English theatre of the later seventeenth century its distinctive character.

9 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. What are the characteristics of Elizabethan Age?
- 2 How does poetry reflect the Spirit of Age in Elizabethan England? Discuss.
3. Write an account of the evolution of English poetry during the Age of Shakespeare.
4. What roles do Wyatt and Surrey play in the development of English poetry? Describe.
5. Give an account of Songs and Lyrics in Elizabethan Poetry.

6. Write a note on Elizabethan sonnets and sonneteers.
7. Discuss briefly the development of Elizabethan prose.
8. Discuss the development of drama during the Elizabethan Age.
9. Discuss the characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy.
10. What are the main characteristics of Shakespearean comedy? Discuss.
11. Write a note on the contemporary playwrights of Shakespeare and their contribution to development of drama.

12. Write Short Notes on the following:

I. Character Writers in Elizabethan Period

ii. Prose Romances

iii. Love and Patriotic Poetry

iv. Elizabethan Poets.

v. Contemporary playwrights of Shakespeare

vi. University Wits.

The Jew of Malta

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Chapter wise Analysis

3.0 Analysis of Major Characters:

4.0 Explanation of Quotations

5.0 Study Questions

6.0 Themes

7.0 Motifs

1.0 Introduction:

The Jew of Malta was written by Christopher Marlowe, who died by getting stabbed in the eye. His father was just a shoemaker. But Kit was bright, and he won a scholarship to Cambridge. There, rumor has it, he was recruited by one of the secret intelligence services working for Queen Elizabeth as playwright *and* superspy. In any case, Marlowe had a legitimate career as a writer. But by the time of his cringe-inducing death in 1593, he had the reputation for being not only a spy, but also an atheist, a bar-brawler and a homosexual. *The Jew of Malta* was produced at least 36 times between February 1592 (when it was first published) and June 1596. First of all, people just thought it was a good show—Barabas was played by Edward Alleyn, who was Elizabethan England's version of Robert Downey, Jr. But even without a star-powered cast the story is just plain entertaining.

The Jew of Malta also touched a live wire within the English imagination. Although there hadn't officially been any Jews in England since Edward I kicked them out in 1290, people were still not too fond of them. (Think a cross between the bogeyman and terrorists, and you'll get a sense of how people felt about Jews.) And anti-Semitism flared up when Queen Elizabeth's personal physician, a converted Jew named Roderigo Lopez, was executed for trying to poison her. Elizabeth had only recently laid the smackdown to the Spanish Armada; the Ottomans were covetously eyeing the Mediterranean; and, lest we forget, her own country had switched national religions four times in the last century. While the events of *The Jew of Malta* are far-fetched,

they were inspired by the rapidly changing, very real world 16th century Britons saw around them.

1.1 About The Author:

Christopher Marlowe was born in 1564 in Canterbury, England. The son of a shoemaker, Marlowe attended King's School, Canterbury before he gained a scholarship to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge at the age of sixteen. During his years at university, Marlowe was writing short plays and literary works that suggested an early interest in drama. Although he was awarded his B.A. in 1584, Elizabeth I's Privy Council had to intervene in 1587 to secure him an M.A. degree. Even at this stage, Marlowe was courting controversy as a result of his long absences from college; many people believed he had fled to France in order to study at a Catholic university.

Controversy followed Marlowe throughout his life, particularly while he was living in London. James R. Siemon notes that from 1587–1593 the playwright had been arrested five times and charged with crimes ranging from assault and counterfeiting money to promoting atheism. Simultaneously, Marlowe was writing his four major dramatic works: *Tamburlaine* in 1587, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward II* and *Doctor Faustus* (dates for the last three plays are uncertain). However, despite his outward respectability, Marlowe never shook off the stigma of criminality and the suggestion that he was somehow involved in underhanded dealings. Along with modern historians and scholars, many of his contemporaries believed that Marlowe was a spy working as part of the great espionage network created by Elizabeth I's secretary of state, Sir Francis Walsingham.

Even Marlowe's death was shrouded in rumors of conspiracy. The playwright was brought before Star Chamber (the royal court of equity) on 20 May 1593 for undisclosed crimes—probably relating to blasphemy or atheism. He was told to report back every day. Ten days later, Marlowe died during a tavern brawl in Deptford, London, when he was stabbed through the eye with his own dagger by a man named Ingram Friser. Marlowe had gone to the tavern to meet some men who, like himself, were suspected of espionage or traitorous activities. Interestingly,

Friser was pardoned on the excuse that his actions were in self-defense, spawning rumors of a high-level cover-up that have survived to this day.

Marlowe was a hugely popular playwright, although many regarded him as a suspicious and Machiavellian character. In particular, *The Jew of Malta* was a resounding success, with the famous actor Edward Alleyn initially playing the lead role. Although it is uncertain what year the play was written, many scholars suggest a date preceding 1591. James R. Siemon argues that the play may be counted as a great favorite with Elizabethan theatergoers as it was performed thirty-six times between February 1592 and June 1596. Although there are no recorded performances between the early seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, the play was revived in 1818 by Edmund Kean and its profile has risen ever since.

The Jew of Malta resonates with themes of racial tension, religious conflict, and political intrigue, all of which share parallels with sixteenth century England. Although there were no professed Jews in England during this time (they had been banished in 1290 and would be readmitted in 1656 only as converts to Christianity) the play deals with anti-Semitic sentiment that was rife throughout Europe. The play's theme of religious heterodoxy appears highly significant when one remembers that Elizabethan England was dealing with its own religious divisions. Following the failure of the Spanish Armada in 1588, many English Protestants were wary of the allegiance of their Catholic counterparts. Thus, although the play is grounded on a real historical event (the 1565 Turkish invasion of Malta), its characterization appeals to a general sense of fear that many English Protestants felt toward those whom they considered outsiders—be these Muslims, Jews, or Catholics. With Barabas's sly allusions to biblical stories and his ironic treatment of Christian doctrine, one sees how Marlowe raises questions about state religion that would have had deeper significance in a country fraught by its own religious tensions.

Marlowe's writing also captures the anti-Machiavellian feeling that was rife in Elizabethan England. Niccolò Machiavelli was the author of works such as *The Prince*, which argued that a ruler protected his political power through might and that religion was used as a tool to keep unruly subjects in line. As an avaricious merchant, Barabas displays the kind of strategic cunning that is at odds with Christian notions of altruism but shares much with Machiavellian self-

advancement. The play garners a deeply ambivalent response from its audience: on the one hand, we admire Barabas's clever duplicity but on the other, we resent him for his unfeeling manipulation of human beings. In many respects, Marlowe is similar to his protagonist in that the playwright was also decried as a Machiavellian schemer with little loyalty towards his country. It is for readers to determine whether *The Jew of Malta* is Marlowe's attempt at discrediting Machiavelli, or whether the playwright is satirizing Elizabethan England's stereotyped view of this author.

1.2 Summary:

The play opens with a Prologue narrated by Machevill, a caricature of the author Machiavelli. This character explains that he is presenting the "tragedy of a Jew" who has become rich by following Machiavelli's teachings. Act I opens with a Jewish merchant, called Barabas, waiting for news about the return of his ships from the east. He discovers that they have safely docked in Malta, before three Jews arrive to inform him that they must go to the senate-house to meet the governor. Once there, Barabas discovers that along with every other Jew on the island he must forfeit half of his estate to help the government pay tribute to the Turks. When the Barabas protests at this unfair treatment, the governor Ferneze confiscates all of Barabas's wealth and decides to turn Barabas's house into a convent. Barabas vows revenge but first attempts to recover some of the treasures he has hidden in his mansion. His daughter, Abigail, pretends to convert to Christianity in order to enter the convent. She smuggles out her father's gold at night.

Ferneze meets with Del Bosco, the Spanish Vice-Admiral, who wishes to sell Turkish slaves in the market place. Del Bosco convinces Ferneze to break his alliance with the Turks in return for Spanish protection. While viewing the slaves, Barabas meets up with Ferneze's, Lodowick. This man has heard of Abigail's great beauty from his friend (and Abigail's lover) Mathias. Barabas realizes that he can use Lodowick to exact revenge on Ferneze, and so he dupes the young man into thinking Abigail will marry him. While doing this, the merchant buys a slave called Ithamore who hates Christians as much as his new master does. Mathias sees Barabas talking to Lodowick and demands to know whether they are discussing Abigail. Barabas lies to Mathias, and so Barabas deludes both young men into thinking that Abigail has been promised to them. At home, Barabas orders his reluctant daughter to get betrothed to Lodowick. At the end of the

second Act, the two young men vow revenge on each other for attempting to woo Abigail behind one another's backs. Barabas seizes on this opportunity and gets Ithamore to deliver a forged letter to Mathias, supposedly from Lodowick, challenging him to a duel.

Act III introduces the prostitute Bellamira and her pimp Pilia-Borza, who decide that they will steal some of Barabas's gold since business has been slack. Ithamore enters and instantly falls in love with Bellamira. Mathias and Lodowick kill each other in the duel orchestrated by Barabas and are found by Ferneze and Katherine, Mathias's mother. The bereaved parents vow revenge on the perpetrator of their sons' murders. Abigail finds Ithamore laughing, and Ithamore tells her of Barabas's role in the young men's deaths. Grief-stricken, Abigail persuades a Dominican friar Giacomo to let her enter the convent, even though she lied once before about converting. When Barabas finds out what Abigail has done, he is enraged, and he decides to poison some rice and send it to the nuns. He instructs Ithamore to deliver the food. In the next scene, Ferneze meets a Turkish emissary, and Ferneze explains that he will not pay the required tribute. The Turk leaves, stating that his leader Calymath will attack the island.

Jacomo and another friar Bernardine despair at the deaths of all the nuns, who have been poisoned by Barabas. Abigail enters, close to death, and confesses her father's role in Mathias's and Lodowick's deaths to Giacomo. She knows that the priest cannot make this knowledge public because it was revealed to him in confession.

Act IV shows Barabas and Ithamore delighting in the nuns' deaths. Bernardine and Giacomo enter with the intention of confronting Barabas. Barabas realizes that Abigail has confessed his crimes to Giacomo. In order to distract the two priests from their task, Barabas pretends that he wants to convert to Christianity and give all his money to whichever monastery he joins. Giacomo and Bernardine start fighting in order to get the Jew to join their own religious houses. Barabas hatches a plan and tricks Bernardine into coming home with him. Ithamore then strangles Bernardine, and Barabas frames Giacomo for the crime. The action switches to Bellamira and her pimp, who find Ithamore and persuade him to bribe Barabas. The slave confesses his master's crimes to Bellamira, who decides to report them to the governor after Barabas has given her his money. Barabas is maddened by the slave's treachery and turns up at Bellamira's home disguised

as a French lute player. Barabas then poisons all three conspirators with the use of a poisoned flower.

The action moves quickly in the final act. Bellamira and Pilia-Borza confess Barabas's crimes to Ferneze, and the murderer is sent for along with Ithamore. Shortly after, Bellamira, Pilia-Borza and Ithamore die. Barabas fakes his own death and escapes to find Calymath. Barabas tells the Turkish leader how best to storm the town. Following this event and the capture of Malta by the Turkish forces, Barabas is made governor, and Calymath prepares to leave. However, fearing for his own life and the security of his office, Barabas sends for Ferneze. Barabas tells him that he will free Malta from Turkish rule and kill Calymath in exchange for a large amount of money. Ferneze agrees and Barabas invites Calymath to a feast at his home. However, when Calymath arrives, Ferneze prevents Barabas from killing him. Ferneze and Calymath watch as Barabas dies in a cauldron that Barabas had prepared for Calymath. Ferneze tells the Turkish leader that he will be a prisoner in Malta until the Ottoman Emperor agrees to free the island.

1.3 Analysis:

In the 16th century, Malta mattered. Both the Ottoman Empire and the Western, Christian world wanted to control the Mediterranean, and Malta became a small but important point of contention in their turf war. This means two settings at once in *The Jew of Malta*: the little one, where Barabas is toodling around various places in Malta (senate house, slave market, etc) and the big, bigone, with a major geopolitical struggle between warring nations and religions.

Sure, it starts out as a symbol of his wealth (we imagine he'd be one of those people on MTV Cribs who has, like, heated floors and lights that turn on and off when you clap your hands). But the second Ferneze confiscates his wealth, the house becomes nunnery. It then takes on a whole new set of meanings—the persecution of Barabas's Judaism, the exile he faces from Maltese society, and the loss of his wealth and (eventually) his daughter.

Another thing to remember is that we aren't just *on* Malta—we're *in* Malta. That is, we're inside the city walls. One of the play's major events is when Barabas, playing dead, is chucked over the city walls. Once *outside* the city, the first thing he does is strike a deal with Calymath to help the invading Turks get into the city.

The Jew of Malta is Malta is politically most vulnerable when it's apparently healthy and whole. The Maltese are totally at the mercy of the Turks, and are facing imminent destruction. At the end, though, once Malta has had the tar kicked out of it (with cannonballs, no less), Ferneze is large and in charge: "No, Sultan of Turkey *you* listen."

Malta is an island in the middle of the Mediterranean. But this is pre-yacht days; instead of a relaxing vacation spot, Malta is an international hub of cultures, trade and politics. Barabas is both the wealthiest merchant around and a member of Malta's "alien" Jewish community. Barabas has two priorities: money, and his only daughter, Abigail. Between these two, he's done pretty well for himself, even managing to live peacefully with Malta's Christian government, led by Governor Ferneze and the Knights of Malta.

Malta is in a tricky political situation. Even though it's home to a majority Western, Christian population, it lives under shadow of the Ottoman Empire. To stay safe, Malta pays a monetary tribute to the Turks. In exchange for this protection money, the Turks protect them. From themselves. But they haven't paid the money in the decade, and Calymath, the son of the Turkish Sultan, is getting impatient.

Barabas and his fellow Jews are rounded up and brought before the Senate house, where they are given a choice. They must either:

- give up half of their wealth and property on the spot
- convert to Christianity
- if they neither convert *nor* fork over half their estate, they lose all their estate

Barabas refuses, obviously, so Ferneze immediately confiscates all of his property and turns his house into a nunnery—complete with a hidden stash of gold that Barabas hasn't 'fessed up to. But Barabas has a plan: Abigail will pretend that she wants to convert to Christianity and join the nunnery. Oh, and meanwhile? Ferneze is striking a deal with the Spanish navy to fight the Turks.

With his recovered gold, Barabas buys a slave, Ithamore. At the market where he's buying Ithamore, he talks to two guys: Lodowick and Mathias. Both these guys are really into his daughter Abigail, and Barabas separately promises to hook each of them up with Abigail. What

about Abigail? She actually digs Mathias, but Barabas doesn't care. He actually wants the two guys to kill each other. And they do, when they fight a duel because they both think they're engaged to Abigail.

Abigail thinks this is not too cool, and she decides to become a nun for real. Barabas is Not Happy, and he and his new partner-in-really-horrifying-albeit-creative-crimes, Ithamore, arrange to poison the entire nunnery. In her death throes, Abigail clues the friar Bernadine in to what Barabas has been doing, and he, along with fellow friar Jacomo, go to confront Barabas.

But Barabas has a plan. He pretends to convert to Christianity and the two friars actually get into a bidding war over who gets to accept Barabas (and his money) into his respective monastery. Big mistake. Barabas kills Bernadine and then successfully frames Jacomo for it—and then the government executes Jacomo for murder. Bellamira (local prostitute) and Pilia-Borza (her pimp) are plot to get at Barabas's wealth. So, Bellamira seduces Barabas's loyal (and evil) servant Ithamore. Then, she and Pilia-Borza convince him to start blackmailing Barabas for money.

But Barabas has this sitch under control, too. He comes to Bellamira's house dressed as a fiddling clown, and convinces her to take his flowers. Which are poisoned. They don't take effect immediately, but we think the body count is about to get higher.

Ferneze is prepping Malta's fortifications for the oncoming Turkish siege, when Bellamira and Pilia-Borzacome to him and accuse Barabas of all the murders. Ithamore throws in his own testimony. Ferneze throws everyone in prison just to be safe, but surprise! All of them die. Guess the poisoned flowers really did work. Except for Barabas, of course. Barabas has taken one of those nifty I'm-Not-Dead-I-Just-Look-Dead potions, so he's still very much alive when Ferneze has his body tossed over the walls. Calymath, the Turkish leader, is ambling about the outer walls of Malta, trying to figure out how to best invade the city when he comes across Barabas, now wide awake and rarin' for some payback. They strike a deal: Barabas will help the Turks invade Malta, and Calymath will make Barabas governor.

But Barabas *still* isn't finished. He secretly makes a deal with Ferneze to kill all of the Turks in Malta in return for a huge sum of money, which Ferneze raises from the other Maltese citizens. Unfortunately for Barabas, this plan doesn't go so well. It *almost* works, until Ferneze betrays

him at the last minute. In the resulting chain of events, the Turkish army is destroyed (exploded, actually); Barabas is killed in the trap he devised for Calymath; and Calymath emerges as the Last Turk Standing. And by Standing, we mean Utterly At Ferneze's Mercy, because, hello, no more army. Ferneze, once again large and in charge, declares his intention to ransom Calymath (his dad's the Sultan of Turkey) for the restoration of Malta.

The Jew of Malta is cynical and depressing. But, come on, it's also hilarious. Barabas is going around killing people, but he does it with a smile on his face and a song in his heart. He gets a lot of joy out of the planning and execution of his devious and creative plots. If he can get into the groove of things, the audience will, too.

So, along with the unfairness and hypocrisy you see at every turn, there's also a lot of morbid humor. And when we say morbid, we mean it. Take, for instance, Ithamore's remark when Barabas is mixing up the porridge with which he's going to poison Abigail and the rest of her nunnery: "Why, master, will you poison her with a mess of rice porridge that will preserve life, make her round and plump, and batten more than you are aware?" (3.4.64-66). Ithamore is playing on the idea that the nuns and friars were all getting busy making babies with each other. Ithamore's implication? Abigail is eating for two. What makes this even more macabre is that, even though Abigail *is* chaste, it's not because the friars have squeaky clean morals. When Abigail announces that she dies as a Christian, Friar Jacomo remarks, "Ay, and a virgin too; that grieves me most" (3.6.41). It's ugly, it's dark, but if you can get onboard the Marlowe Ship of Macabre Jokes, you might just find yourself laughing at what T.S. calls the "savage comic humor" of this play.

2.0 Chapter wise Analysis:

Prologue; (I.i)

Prologue

The narrator Machevill introduces the play. The renowned author on statecraft says that although everyone thinks Machevill is dead, his soul has crossed the Alps to "frolic"—cause mischief—with friends in England. Machevill mentions the Duke of Guise's death in passing to suggest that

political considerations have reached England, thus contradicting those who maintain that the country is unaffected by such concerns. The narrator dismisses religion as a "childish toy" and disdains popular superstition. He asserts that those who follow his lead will attain political success; according to Machevill "might" or manifest strength in a leader is more necessary than knowledge of "letters." As he paints his picture of evil megalomania, Machevill suddenly states the real reason for his presence: to introduce the "tragedy of a Jew." The narrator states that this man's riches were gained through close adherence to Machevill's own recommended methods. He concludes by hoping that his subject is not treated badly, since the Jew "favors" him.

(I.i)

This scene introduces Barabas, the play's Jewish protagonist. The action is set in a counting house filled with piles of gold; Barabas starts to speak as if in mid-sentence. We discover that he is a Maltese merchant whose ships have arrived safely from the East. A merchant asks the protagonist to come and pay customs duties on his goods, saying that this cost alone is worth more than the wealth of many traders. Barabas dismisses him after enquiring about his "argosy" or ship that is bringing him luxurious goods from the East. Another merchant enters and explains that the argosy has arrived safely, having lost sight of the other ships after it ran into the Spanish fleet chased by Turkish galleys. Barabas tells the man to leave and bring his goods ashore. The protagonist then launches into a speech about his great fortune and personal wealth, deciding that he would rather be rich and hated (as a Jew) than poor and pitied (as a Christian). Thus, Barabas rejects traditional notions of Christian charity. He further disparages Christianity by noting that those who are truly pious live in penury and that he sees nothing in the religion but "malice, falsehood, and excessive pride." The protagonist talks about the success of Jewish people, even though they are a "scattered nation." He notes that all he wants is peaceful rule so that he can accrue wealth to leave to his only daughter.

Three Jews enter seeking Barabas's advice. They state that a Turkish fleet is blocking their sea-passage and that an embassy has come ashore to meet with the Maltese rulers. Barabas instructs the men not to worry, saying that they will either conquer the Turks if they make war or let them go in peace if they have not come to fight. However, in an aside, Barabas states that he does not care about other Maltese, or even his fellow Jews, so long as the Turks "spare me, my daughter,

and my wealth." Barabas reassures the men that Turkey and Malta are in league and that officials must be discussing some other matter—such as the invasion of Venice. The men inform Barabas that all Jews must go to the "senate- house" for a meeting, to which the wealthy merchant responds that he will look out for their interests, but, again in an aside, Barabas states that he will only protect his own. The Jews leave, and Barabas hypothesizes to himself that the Turks have come to raise the tribute demanded from Malta. He concludes by asserting that he would let the foreigners invade rather than help his rulers out with any money.

Analysis

In the prologue, Marlowe introduces themes of Machiavellian scheming and disrespect for religion that run throughout the play. The narrator Machevill is a scheming, covetous strategist who bears little resemblance to the real Machiavelli, the Italian author of the *Discourses* and *The Prince*. He represents a caricature of the type of man the English most feared—a self-interested politician who advocates tyrannical rule to exact obedience from his subjects. The narrator states that the Jew of the play's title "favors" him, indicating that the men resemble one another or that Barabas follows him in teaching. Machevill's rejection of religion anticipates the derogatory remarks the protagonist makes about Christianity throughout the play. The narrator suggests that those who wish to gain power or wealth must place earthly concerns before spiritual ones. He even states that those who "attain / to Peter's chair"—i.e. those who want to become Pope—do so by following his teaching; spurning his lead, they find themselves poisoned by others with similar ambitions. This comment refers to the murder of Pope Alexander VI in 1503, supposedly by his son Cesare Borgia. Machevill also mentions the death of the Duke of Guise, a French nobleman. There is evidence to suggest that Elizabethan audiences regarded Machiavelli as evil and took as evidence all the foul political dealings on the continent that sprang from Machiavellian ambitions in Popes, princes, and state leaders. They would have accepted Machevill as an accurate characterization of real scheming figures in Europe. Thus, Marlowe weaves historical facts into his prologue in order to lend credibility to his play's themes of political strategy and self-interest.

These themes come to the fore in Act I, scene i. Although Barabas rejoices in the safe return of his precious horde of "spice and silks" from the East, which has earned him a fortune, he

prepares to guard his riches from any outsiders—be these the rulers of Malta, Turkish troops, or even his fellow Jews who come seeking advice. (In the next scene Marlowe shows that, just as delegations from these states argue over tribute, so Barabas manipulates and prevaricates in an attempt to avoid losing money.) The protagonist refuses to concede anything to anyone. The only exception is his daughter, Abigail, who will receive her father's fortune on his death. Barabas thus appears unashamedly self-serving and strategic. Although he reassures his three friends that he will protect their own interests, he mutters in an aside that he will only "look unto myself." From the opening scene, Marlowe makes it clear that Barabas is more interested in his profits than he is in his religion. This makes the persecution he encounters as a Jew all the more ironic. Throughout the play, characters use Barabas's faith as an excuse to cheat him out of his money. Instead of being a "childish toy" as Machevill asserts, Marlowe will show how religion—and particularly religious hypocrisy—may be used as a tool to earn a profit.

The characters speak in blank verse in the Prologue and in Act I, scene i, as they do throughout the play. This adds a blunt force to the characters' speech—particularly Machevill's—and highlights the crudeness of their motives.

(I.ii)

The governor of Malta, Ferneze, meets with the "Bashaws." The Turkish leader Calymath demands that ten years' worth of tribute be paid and agrees to give Ferneze one month to collect the dues. After instructing the governor to keep his promise, Calymath leaves with his troops. Shortly afterward, the Jews enter accompanied by Barabas, and Ferneze sets out to explain the situation. Barabas attempts to stall Ferneze's inevitable request for money by pointing out that the Jews cannot help him fight. Despite this and other interjections, Barabas's disingenuousness does not pay off: Ferneze commands that all the Jews give one half of their estate to pay the tribute or else convert to Christianity. In response to Barabas's disbelieving question, "Are strangers with your tribute to be taxed?", the governor replies that Jews are damned in the sight of heaven and thus subject to heavy penalties. Barabas now changes tack and requests that he not be forced into giving up half of his estate since this is worth a "city's wealth" and was not earned effortlessly. Ferneze reminds the merchant that he has to agree to the decree or lose all his wealth; Barabas blasphemes and again asks to be treated more fairly, at which point Ferneze

states that he is appropriating all of the Jew's estate. Barabas protests at this unjust treatment, querying whether Christianity is a religion based on coercion and "theft." An argument then ensues between Barabas, the governor, and a knight about the "inherent sin" of the Jews and whether or not the merchant will be able to regain his fortune. Barabas holds that stealing is a worse sin than "covetousness." The knight convinces Ferneze to convert the protagonist's mansion into a nunnery. The governor's officers return and state that Barabas's riches have been seized. In response to Barabas's assertion that it would be better if the governor had taken his life, Ferneze rather hypocritically replies that it would be against Christian morality to "stain our hands with blood." All the men then leave from Barabas and the three Jews.

The protagonist rails against the "policy" of the Christian leaders, which is shrewd strategy in the guise of moral superiority. Although his companions entreat him to be patient, Barabas berates them for their lack of support against the governor. The merchant rejects the men's request that he be like Job; Barabas argues that Job did not have nearly the number of goods he himself possessed. The Jew then asks his friends to leave him in his misery, and the men leave. Barabas's daughter Abigail enters, despairing at her father's loss. Barabas reveals that there is hidden treasure in his house, and the two hatch a plot to get Abigail admitted to the new nunnery so that she can recover these goods. Barabas enjoins his daughter to dissemble well and reveals that the money is hidden under floorboards in the upper chamber of his mansion. When two friars, Jacomo and Bernardine appear along with an Abbess and a nun, Abigail pretends to confess her sins, and all agree that she should enter the convent, all the while Barabas makes an elaborate show of renouncing his daughter. In asides to each other, Abigail and her father plan that Barabas will come early the next morning to the nunnery to take away the recovered riches. The group leaves, and their departure is witnessed by Mathias, a young man in love with Abigail. He tells his friend, Ferneze's son Lodowick, what he has just seen Abigail and describes her incomparable beauty as being ill-suited to a convent. Lodowick's curiosity is stirred, and the two men agree to visit Barabas's daughter as soon as possible.

Analysis

In this scene, Marlowe conveys the importance of wealth to Barabas even more forcefully than in Act I, scene i. The merchant is distraught at the loss of his estate; his verse sounds like an

incantation when he cries, "My gold, my gold, and all my wealth is gone." Like a true Machiavellian, finance and politics are closely linked in Barabas's mind. Following his loss, the protagonist is consumed by notions of strategy; he speculates on his own actions and what policy he will pursue as well as decrying the hypocritical "policy" of the Maltese rulers.

Marlowe suggests that his protagonist is a subtler tactician than any Christian. In many respects Barabas is also more honest, for he does not hide his motives behind any religious creed. Although he is undeniably greedy, it is understandable that the merchant is upset at Ferneze's hypocrisy. Despite the hard work that has gone into earning his fortune, Barabas's estate is taken from him on the basis of faith alone. While the officials blithely assure him that he can earn it all back, the merchant remains unconvinced. Unlike the governor, Barabas is fully aware that money does not come from nowhere, stating a proverbial "[o]f nought is nothing made." Barabas sets no store by lofty definitions of morality; for him, worth is a discrete quality measured in economic terms. This allows the protagonist to compare the theft of his worldly riches with dying at the hands of Ferneze. Ironically, "Barabas" was the name of the thief freed by Pontius Pilate in place of Jesus. Elizabethan audiences would have been aware of this association, and the deeper religious connotations of Barabas's name.

The protagonist suggests that his very life amounts to nothing if he is left without money. While this is not the most moving of sentiments, it nonetheless inspires us with a sense of how harshly Barabas has been treated. The protagonist is not being punished for his immorality or persecuted for his religion—he is being victimized for his wealth. Rather astutely, the protagonist points this out to Ferneze when he argues, "Preach me not out of my possessions Some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are." The protagonist seems to be the only one capable of seeing beyond the bounds of religion. Marlowe leaves it to us to determine whether this marks him as sacrilegious or the only character unaffected by religious hypocrisy.

The idea of nothing—particularly as it relates to the creation or accumulation of wealth—is a recurring motif within this scene and throughout *The Jew of Malta*. It hints at the biblical story of Genesis, but neither in support nor in denial of this doctrine. Marlowe leaves us to determine whether something can be created out of nothing. As such, this is one instance in the text where Marlowe's writing may be read as a defense of Christianity or an atheistic rejection of Christian

doctrine. Certainly, the protagonist can afford to be outspoken in his blasphemies, and Barabas frequently rails against Christianity, both in the ideas he voices and the words he uses to express them. For example, exclamations such as "Corpo di Dio!" meaning "Body of God" in Italian, are clearly something the Maltese Catholics would not use. Therefore, in his words and actions, Barabas stands outside of society as defined by its religious parameters. While his Judaism brands him as a "stranger" or foreigner in Malta, it also allows him the freedom to criticize the values of that society.

Marlowe introduces a wealth of characters in this scene that will come to play important roles later. We are familiarized with Ferneze and are made aware of Barabas's acute desire for vengeance. The theme of revenge will come to dominate the text along with religion. Marlowe also presents Mathias and Lodowick, who are in love with and intrigued by Abigail, respectively. This plot element will ultimately develop into a love triangle, culminating in a plot orchestrated by Barabas in which the two men kill each other in a duel.

(II.i); (II.ii)

(II.i)

Act II opens with Barabas again bemoaning the loss of his money as he approaches what used to be his mansion in the dead of night. He compares himself to a man close to death or a soldier who is scarred with the memory of his "former riches." The protagonist's anguish is alleviated somewhat by Abigail, who appears above him having retrieved his hidden stash. She throws down the treasure, and in his ecstasy Barabas shouts, "Oh girl, oh gold, oh beauty, oh my bliss!" as he hugs the moneybags. Abigail warns her father to leave as the nuns will soon be arising for the day's first worship. Barabas exits, still eulogizing over his daughter and the dawn. He vows to sing over his recovered gold as the "morning lark" does her young.

(II.ii)

The action returns to the governor, Ferneze, who is meeting the vice-admiral of Spain, Martin del Bosco. He states that he has many Turkish slaves to sell, captured during a skirmish between some of his ships and those of the Ottoman fleet. Ferneze regrets that the slaves cannot be sold in

Malta, since there is an alliance between his state and the Turks. Bosco persuades the governor to break this alliance, saying that the Spanish king will send military support if Malta's enemies attack. The governor agrees to this proposal and appoints Bosco Malta's general. The Spaniard points to the behavior of the garrison at Rhodes, whom he says fought to the death in order to repel the Turkish forces. Both statesmen agree to give their lives to defend the island against Calymath, and Ferneze leaves pronouncing a neat rhyme, "we are resolved, / Honour is bought with blood and not with gold."

Analysis

In Act II, scene i, Barabas appears to be a caricature of Machiavellian avariciousness as perceived by Elizabethan society. Barabas states that he is more grieved by the loss of his wealth than he would be at the loss of his life. Light and dark imagery plays a key role in this short scene. Barabas stalks through the darkness of the night, alluding to his own black mood, and awaits reunion with his gold. When this happens, Barabas's language changes completely; he launches into a poetic rapture that dazzles with overblown emotion and light imagery. Implicitly, Barabas compares the glow of dawn to that of gold when he pronounces, "Now Phoebus ope the eyelids of the day." Marlowe suggests that Barabas's love for his daughter is intertwined with his joy at recovering his money. Indeed, it is difficult to determine what it is that Barabas rejoices at, since his language is quite ambiguous. His exclamations of "[o]h girl, oh gold" are similar in many ways to lines in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, where a character asserts that he overheard "Shylock" shout "O my ducats! Oh my daughter!" In this instance, however, Barabas's cries are those of elation rather than despair. Marlowe thus highlights his protagonist's emotive response to money. The belief that others (both within the play and, more pointedly, in sixteenth-century England) place in religion is secularized in the character of Barabas; he is a man with faith after all, but his hopes of redemption are rooted in financial gain rather than heavenly salvation.

In the next scene, the first of many oaths are broken that will be foresworn within the play. Ferneze breaks his league with the Turks in order to gain material advantage and military protection from the Spanish. Although this is really an example of shrewd statecraft as Machiavelli might have supported—the Spanish are bound by religion and trade interests to help

the Maltese—Del Bosco and Ferneze disguise the financial motivations behind their agreement by couching it in terms of honor and morality. The governor's last lines are misleading, for in fact the two men have struck a commercial deal by which the Turkish slaves will be sold for Spanish profit. In turn, the Maltese will be freed from their financial obligations to the Turks. Ferneze is not alone in his careful accounting of benefits and disadvantages. This motif of calculation—both for self-interest and the interest of the state—runs throughout the play and is employed by nearly all of its characters. Everyone knows what it is that he or she wants and will scheme to get it, disguising his or her real intentions if necessary.

(II.iii)

Summary

Officers enter the market place with their horde of Turkish slaves. Barabas appears and describes the new mansion that his recovered wealth has bought. However, Barabas is still bitter at the loss of his fortune and vows revenge on Ferneze. Lodowick enters looking for Barabas; the young man approaches the merchant because he wants to meet Abigail. Barabas knows what the governor's son is doing and decides to mislead him. Although the Jew professes to help the young suitor woo his daughter, Barabas tells the audience that he is doing so to exact revenge on Ferneze. The protagonist makes Lodowick feel uncomfortable by criticizing Ferneze's actions and making innuendoes about the chastity of nuns and friars. Barabas invites Lodowick back to his home, although he wishes to first buy a slave. Barabas rejects a young slave in favor of Ithamore, an older man from Arabia who will cost less to feed because he is "leaner." As Barabas leads Ithamore away and assures Lodowick to "be no stranger at my house," Mathias enters with his mother Katherine. Mathias is suspicious of what the Jew and his friend have been discussing. In an aside, Barabas informs us that although Abigail loves Mathias, Barabas will "frustrate" the couple's hopes to gain vengeance against the governor. Barabas approaches Mathias as his mother examines slaves, and Barabas assures Mathias that he was not talking about Abigail with Lodowick. While men pretend to discuss a book in order not to make Katherine suspicious, Barabas instructs Mathias to visit his home as soon as he can.

Barabas returns to Ithamore. He instructs the slave not to feel sympathy and to "smile when the Christians moan." Ithamore expresses his admiration for Barabas. The protagonist illustrates his pitilessness in dramatic fashion, stating, "I walk abroad a-nights / And kill sick people groaning under wells." The merchant describes his youth, how he learned "physic," and killed both "friend and enemy with my stratagems." In Charles V's wars against France. Ithamore explains how he razed Christian villages, slit the throats of Christian travelers, and maimed pilgrims in Jerusalem. Listening closely, Barabas recognizes a kindred spirit in the slave and exclaims, "we are villains both we hate Christians both." Barabas promises Ithamore that he will become wealthy, if Ithamore remains loyal to him. Lodowick arrives, and Barabas instructs Abigail to welcome him into their house and accept his offer of marriage. Abigail remonstrates that she loves Mathias not Lodowick, but her father remains unmoved and waits outside on the pretext of reading a letter from his agent.

Mathias appears, and Barabas explains that Lodowick has been trying to woo Abigail by sending her letters and jewelry. Mathias threatens to enter the house and fight his friend, but Barabas persuades him not to and so the young man stalks off. When Abigail and Lodowick appear, the protagonist tells the young man that Mathias has sworn his death. Once again, Barabas promises Lodowick his daughter's hand but tells Abigail that she must keep her heart for Mathias. Barabas cleverly reasons that it is not sinful to betray a Christian, since Christians believe that "[f]aith is not to be held with heretics." More deceit ensues as Mathias shows up again and Barabas persuades Lodowick not to exact immediate revenge. Both young men leave, and Abigail returns to the house. Barabas instructs Ithamore to deliver a forged letter proposing a duel from Lodowick to Mathias. Barabas leaves to convey a similar lie to Lodowick.

Analysis

Much happens in this scene that prepares the way for later plots and intrigues. Ithamore is introduced as a wily character perfectly suited to admire his master's duplicity. Ironically, Barabas chooses the Arabian because he feels Ithamore would be easier to feed, a consideration that should be redundant given the protagonist's massive wealth. As always, Marlowe shows that the merchant is thinking about money. Barabas even regards the life of another human being as a business investment, (although this makes him no different from the other Maltese such as

Katherine). Ithamore hates Christians and possesses a ruthless nature that Barabas recognizes may be put to his advantage. Although he is as merciless and immoral as Barabas, Ithamore lacks the careful planning instinct that renders Barabas's plans so successful. The slave seems more of a crude villain than his master, although both men delight in callous acts of violence. For example, while Barabas professes to have studied in Italy and thwarted the plans of both the German and French armies in his youth, Ithamore was a common cutthroat who murdered unsuspecting travelers at his inn. A master tactician, Barabas appears in absolute control of everyone around him. Mathias and Lodowick appear as hotheaded, if not foolish, youths in contrast with the coolly speculative Barabas. The protagonist sums up his philosophy of revenge when he entreats Ithamore to deliver his false letter to Mathias, stating "be not rash, but do it cunningly." Marlowe shows how the merchant is willing to wait to exact his revenge; patience is clearly one of Barabas's virtues aiding in his pursuit of vice.

If the foreground of this scene is taken up with the protagonist's reasoned machinations, then the background remains one of emotion and suppressed sensibilities. Abigail's feelings towards Mathias are downplayed by Barabas, who values vengeance over his daughter's felicity. Despite her promptings to stand by Mathias and reconcile him with Lodowick, Abigail displays a strong sense of duty as she does what Barabas instructs. Later, when Abigail discovers what Barabas has done, it becomes clear that her love for her father cannot override the disgust she feels for his crimes. However, at this stage Abigail seems cowed into submission; she accepts her father's authority, even at the expense of her and her lover's happiness. Every character seems driven forward by the momentum of Barabas's scheming.

(III.i); (III.ii); (III.iii)

(III.i)

This scene introduces the courtesan Bellamira and her pimp Pilia-Borza. While the prostitute complains about the lack of business after the Turkish blockade of Malta (no ships can get through, and so no merchants have arrived from Italy), Pilia-Borza appears and throws her a moneybag of silver. He explains how he entered Barabas's counting house at night, was disrupted by a noise, and ran off with only one bag, although there was plenty of gold to be had.

The friends are interrupted by the appearance of Ithamore; Pilia-Borza warns Bellamira not to stare at him. It is too late, however, because the slave has seen the prostitute and fallen in love with her. He knows that she is a courtesan by her clothing and states that he would give "a hundred of the Jew's crowns" to have her. Ithamore mentions that he has delivered the challenge to Mathias, and only awaits the duel where the young man and Lodowick will kill one another.

(III.ii)

Mathias and Lodowick meet to duel. Lodowick enters reading a letter—no doubt forged like the one Barabas sent to Mathias—which is in some manner offensive. The men start fighting, observed by Barabas from a balcony. Barabas jeers at the men as they fight. After they have killed each other, Ferneze and Mathias's mother, Katherine, enter and find their dead children. Both vow revenge, but, realizing that their sons have killed one another, they seek to find it in the person who set the young men against one another. The bereaved Ferneze suggests the young men should be buried together in a monument, where he can "offer up / My daily sacrifice of sighs and tears" and force heaven to reveal what caused these events. Ferneze then suggests to Katherine that they "take equal share."

(III.iii)

Ithamore meets Abigail and boasts about the success of his and Barabas's cunning plot. While the slave cackles in self-congratulation and lauds the "bravest policy" of his master, Abigail shows no reaction. She asks Ithamore to fetch her any friar from the order of "St Jacques" (i.e. a Dominican priest). The slave leaves, and Abigail is left to rail against her "hard-hearted" father and despair at what he has done to Mathias, Lodowick, and herself. Ithamore then enters with the priest Giacomo, and Abigail asks if she can be admitted to his convent. Although the priest brings up the fact that she was admitted before and "didn't like holy life," Abigail blames this on her father. She states that experience "purchased with grief" has taught her the error of her ways. When the friar asks her why Barabas is to be blamed, Abigail refuses to say and states to herself that she will be loyal to her father unto death. She leaves saying that her "duty" is now to the priest.

Analysis

The introduction of the prostitute and her pimp add an ordinary criminal element into the plot. Bellamira and Pilia-Borza have no money because business has been slack; thus, they are attracted to the relatively easy pickings of Barabas's gold. Ithamore's vow to spend 100 "crowns" of his master's money hints at his growing lust for gold, although this is directed toward buying Bellamira. In some ways, this scene is reminiscent of Act II, scene iii, where Lodowick describes Abigail as a diamond that he wants to buy. Although Ithamore responds to the prostitute's beauty, his mind turns immediately to the money that would be required to purchase her. Throughout the play, the language of money is used in connection with the language of love. Characters express their romantic sentiments with a keen eye to striking a deal, and figures such as Bellamira and Barabas are fully aware of this reality. Just as Barabas bought Ithamore in Act II, scene iii, so the slave now seeks to procure Bellamira. Most characters in the play ascribe to the philosophy that money can get you what you want; if this also involves lying to or betraying someone else, so much the better. In fact, Marlowe uses this scene as the first link in the chain of events that will lead to Ithamore betraying and attempting to bribe Barabas in Act IV, scene ii.

Vengeance again comes to the fore in Act III, scene ii. In their grief, both Ferneze and Katherine vow to avenge their sons' deaths and look to heaven for divine retribution. This contrasts with Abigail's reaction to news of the men's deaths in the next scene. Rather than railing against the world, she decides to enter a convent in atonement for her sins. Abigail remains outwardly composed while experiencing turbulent emotions; her reasoned response to Ithamore's callous joking shows her ability to keep a cool head. Abigail is different from the play's other characters in that she does not turn to vengeance as a means of channeling her grief. However, one suspects that Abigail's conversion to Christianity and her comment, "I perceive there is no love on earth, / Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks," are intended to be heavily ironic. The Catholic clergy is so obviously corrupt that Abigail's decision to convert appears naïve, not to say ridiculous. Marlowe warns us not to take this scene at face value when Ithamore states, "Why, was there ever seen such villainy, / So neatly plotted, and so well performed?" Seemingly, while Ithamore congratulates himself on his crimes, the playwright slyly commends his own stage work. We cannot ignore the sense that Marlowe is toying with his audience's expectations, as he does throughout the play. The playwright uses improbable events, such as Abigail's conversion, to make ironic statements about religious hypocrisy and society's prejudiced status quo.

(III.iv); (III.v); (III.vi)

Summary

(III.iv)

Barabas enters reading a letter which informs him of Abigail's conversion. In it, his daughter begs him to repent. Barabas is enraged and condemns Abigail, saying that because she thinks differently than Barabas does about morality she cannot really love him. When Ithamore appears, Barabas offers him warm words of greeting saying, "I now have no hope but even in thee." The slave informs his master that Abigail met with the priest. Barabas makes another biblical allusion to Cain being cursed by his father Adam and calls Abigail "false." Ithamore cajoles Barabas's with gentle flattery, saying that he will do anything for his "sweet sake." Barabas promises to make Ithamore his heir and bequeaths half his wealth to him straight away, but Barabas does not actually give the slave the keys to his money. Barabas instructs Ithamore to bring him a pot of rice from the fire. The slave does so, and Barabas informs him of his intention to kill Abigail by poisoning the rice. Barabas explains that the poison he is using is a powder from Ancona, which takes effect forty hours after it is ingested. Ithamore must carry the pot to the convent and leave it there as alms, taking care that no one sees him. Barabas curses the pot before Ithamore leaves, comparing it to the "draught great Alexander drunk" and "Borgia's wine, / Whereof his sire, the Pope, was poisoned." Ominously, Barabas vows to pay Ithamore "with a vengeance" for his faithful service.

(III.v)

Ferneze meets with the Bashaw (a Turkish emissary) who has come to collect the agreed-upon tribute. The governor states that he will not pay what he has promised, and so the Bashaw states that Calymath will attack Malta. Ferneze instructs his officers to prepare the fortress for battle, declaring "nought is to be looked for now than wars, / And nought to us more welcome is than wars."

(III.vi)

Two friars, Jacomo the Dominican and Bernardine, discuss the poisoning of the convent. Although both are panicked, they talk about visiting dying nuns in a way that suggests they will be doing more than hearing the women's last confessions. Jacomo leaves, and Abigail arrives looking for him. Barabas's daughter agrees to confess to Bernardine because she is about to die. Abigail tells him all about her father's role in Mathias's and Lodowick's deaths and gives him a paper describing in it more detail. Although Bernardine is disgusted, he recognizes he cannot make public what he has learned in a confession. Abigail dies beseeching the priest to try and convert her father, saying, "witness that I die a Christian." Bernardine only regrets that she has died a virgin. Jacomo reappears and informs the priest that all the nuns are dead. Bernardine tells Jacomo that they must denounce "the Jew" for the terrible thing he has done. The Dominican asks whether Barabas has "crucified a child" to which Bernardine replies that it is a worse crime but that he cannot reveal the details of it.

Analysis

Vengeance and betrayal are in the foreground of Act III, scene iv, but still remain secondary to the theme of money. Barabas vows revenge against his daughter and even threatens Ithamore at the end of the scene. As shrewd as ever, the protagonist promises to make Ithamore his heir but does not give him the keys to his money chests. Marlowe makes it clear that even in his despair at Abigail's conversion, Barabas has enough presence of mind to jealously guard his wealth. Undeniably, money is the protagonist's primary concern. Ithamore's dedication to his master increases as he realizes that he will profit by faithful service, and the slave becomes positively ingratiating in his bid to garner Barabas's admiration. For example, before Barabas poisons the rice, Ithamore says, "Pray do, and let me help you master. Pray let me taste first." This scene reinforces how enslaved Barabas and Ithamore are to the idea of money and how this affects their personal motivations.

The playwright returns to his motif of nothing in Act III, scene v. The governor states that there is "nought" to expect but "war," reinforcing a sense of lack that seems to hang over the text. While all of the characters scramble for gold, not one seems the least bit content. Ferneze decides to fight Turkey because he does not want to lose his money—or more accurately, the riches he coerced from the Maltese Jews—in tribute to Calymath. Thus, the governor has a great deal

more than nothing. Although the governor's speech is distractingly heroic as he entreats his "men of Malta" to "courageously encounter" the Ottoman army, the comment which most aptly sums up the situation is Ferneze's request that his officers "profitably take up arms" in battle.

In Act III, scene vi, Marlowe makes several jibes against the celibacy of priests. Bernardine rues the fact that Abigail died a virgin, and both friars are on intimate terms with the nuns—for example, Jacomo leaves to visit "fair Maria" in her lodgings. Despite this vice, Bernardine is self-righteously indignant when he hears of Barabas's plot to kill Mathias and Lodowick, describing it as a "monstrous villainy." Jacomo's question as to whether the protagonist killed a child could well have been taken seriously by Elizabethan audiences, who believed in the blood libel perpetrated by Christians against Jews in Europe. Since the Medieval period, stories abounded about Jews poisoning wells at night (such as Barabas admits to in Act II, scene iii) and murdering Christian children. But Bernardine's response to Jacomo is telling: Barabas is worse than other Jews, since the crime he committed is apparently more heinous than butchering a child. It is hard to say whether Marlowe is sending up common preconceptions about Jews, or if he is playing on the fear their demonized role within society would have aroused in contemporary audiences. We might recall Barabas's statement in Act I, scene ii that he should not be held accountable for the "transgression" of his "tribe." Once again, we see that Barabas's criminal nature is being associated with his Jewish identity.

(IV.i);(IV.ii)

(IV.i)

Act IV begins with Barabas congratulating himself on the success of his plan to poison the nuns. Ithamore fears that they will be caught, but Barabas reminds him that only the two of them know they are to blame for the deed. The merchant says that he will cut the slave's throat if he confesses to anyone. Barabas admits that he is not upset at Abigail's death, although he still despairs that she converted to Christianity. The friars Jacomo and Bernardine enter and clumsily try to make Barabas confess his role in the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick. The dialogue between the three men is rather comic as Barabas keeps interrupting the stammering priests only to confess to irrelevant crimes. For example, when Bernardine states, "Thou hast committed,"

Barabas interrupts with "Fornication? / But that was in another country: / And besides, the wench is dead." When the merchant realizes that his plot against the young men has been uncovered he changes tack and starts to "dissemble." Barabas assures the friars that he wants to convert to Christianity and atone for his sins, slyly promising that he will donate his wealth to whichever religious denomination he joins. Of course, the two priests start trying to persuade the protagonist to join each's own monastery. They denounce the strict rules of each other's groups. Barabas assures Bernardine that he will join his monastery, but, after the friar has left with Ithamore, the merchant promises Giacomo that he will join the Dominicans. Giacomo leaves after swearing that he will not tell anyone in his convent about Barabas's decision.

Barabas then decides to murder Giacomo in retribution for Abigail's conversion, and to kill Bernardine because he knows too much. Ithamore tells his master that Bernardine is asleep and that there is no way he can escape from the merchant's house. Bernardine makes Ithamore strangle the priest with his own belt, and the two murderers leave the corpse propped up on his staff outside in the street. Giacomo appears, sees Bernardine, and deduces that the friar was lying in wait to intercept him. Giacomo hits Bernardine over the head with a staff, not realizing that Bernardine is already dead. Barabas and Ithamore suddenly appear and accuse Giacomo of killing the friar. Barabas pretends that he wanted to join Giacomo's monastery but states he will not do so given the bad example the friar has set. Barabas says he cannot let the terrified Giacomo escape because the "law must have his course." The men leave to hand the priest over to officials.

(IV.ii)

Pilia-Borza returns from delivering a letter to Ithamore from Bellamira. The pimp tells Bellamira that he met the slave at the gallows, where Ithamore was watching Giacomo's execution. It will emerge that Pilia-Borza and Bellamira plan to use Ithamore to get to Barabas's money. Ithamore then arrives at Bellamira's house, having been instructed to go there in the letter. He is totally bewildered by the respect the courtesan and the pimp show toward him. Bellamira professes her love for Ithamore, and Ithamore tells himself that he should leave and get money from Barabas to improve his appearance. The prostitute encourages Ithamore to stay and beguiles him into bribing his master. The slave writes a letter to Barabas, demanding 300 crowns or else he will confess about their crimes. While all this is happening, Bellamira and Pilia- Borza make

disparaging remarks about Ithamore in asides to each other. The pimp leaves to deliver the ultimatum to Barabas. The prostitute promises to marry the slave, at which point he breaks off into poetic rhapsodies about their future together. Pilia-Borza returns and says that the merchant "laughed and jeered" about Ithamore's loyalty and only gave the pimp ten crowns. The slave writes another letter to Barabas, requesting 500 crowns for himself and 100 for Pilia-Borza. The pimp leaves, and Bellamira throws away the ten crowns Ithamore has offered her in an attempt to convince him of her (false) love. She kisses the slave before inviting him to sleep with her.

Analysis

Duplicity and cunning play a central role in the first and second scenes of Act IV. Barabas attains new heights of iniquity as he manages to kill both priests, leaving his role in Mathias's and Lodowick's deaths undisclosed. Barabas also has some sport with the friars as he enjoys watching them insult one another in a futile attempt to gain his wealth. As in previous scenes, such as Act III, scene vi, the clergymen come across as highly flawed individuals who care more about earthly riches than heavenly concerns. Interestingly, Marlowe chooses to have Barabas call the friars' weakness and inherent vice to our attention. When Barabas witnesses the priests' brawl he does not step in to separate them, as Ithamore suggests, but pronounces instead, "This is mere frailty, brethren, be content." However, Barabas's jocularly is deadly rather than good-humored and he shows no remorse about letting Giacomo hang for a murder the friar did not commit. Clearly, it is the protagonist's intelligence as well as his sheer cunning that lets him get away with his acts. The merchant displays his legal knowledge when he notes to Ithamore that they must show officials the staff used by Giacomo to hit Bernardine, since "[l]aw wills that each particular be shown." Coming after Barabas's successful plots to gain revenge on Ferneze and poison the nuns, the completion of his new scheme underscores his genius as a criminal mastermind. This great villain delights in plotting for its own sake, since the gains he achieves through crime are merely a bonus. Barabas thus displays Machiavellian principles applied to the extreme. Rather than the end justifying the means, as Machiavelli holds, the means become an end in themselves as the criminal revels in his own villainy.

Although less malevolent than Barabas, Bellamira and Pilia-Borza show themselves to be similarly unscrupulous in their manipulation of Ithamore. Although the slave is not an innocent

character—in fact, as a murderer, he is more cunning than many people he encounters—he is out of his depth when confronted by Bellamira's wily seduction. He even seems naïve on occasion, particularly when he rhapsodizes about what his future will be like with the courtesan. In a fine example of romantic self-delusion, Ithamore assures Bellamira, "Where woods and forests go in goodly green, / I'll be Adonis, thou shalt be Love's Queen." However, while he professes to love the courtesan, Marlowe suggests that Ithamore lusts after money. He is perhaps too quick to jump at the chance of bribing Barabas; Ithamore's loyalty vanishes in an instant as he realizes he can coerce his master for gold. Truth has a price—and Barabas must pay to keep it undisclosed. Marlowe shows how those who are willing to trade on truth may profit.

(IV.iii); (IV.iv)

Summary

(IV.iii)

Barabas reads the letter Ithamore sent in an attempt to bribe him. The protagonist vows to kill Ithamore and scathingly describes Pilia-Borza as a "shaggy tottered staring slave." On cue, the pimp appears with Ithamore's second demand for 500 crowns. Barabas tries to get Pilia-Borza to send for the slave; when this fails, Barabas requests that the pimp stay for dinner and in an aside makes it clear that he wants to poison him. Pilia-Borza refuses this invitation and asks for the money. After some prevaricating in which Barabas claims he has lost his keys and bemoans the fact that Ithamore has betrayed him, the pimp receives his crowns. After Pilia-Borza leaves, Barabas realizes that Ithamore will probably confess to his master's crimes anyway. The protagonist hatches a plan to visit Ithamore in disguise and kill the slave, the pimp, and Bellamira.

(IV.iv)

Bellamira and Ithamore sit around drinking. Ithamore tries to show Bellamira how much he loves her by drinking a lot of wine. Ithamore confesses to Pilia-Borza what he and Barabas have done—namely, poisoning the nuns and causing Mathias's and Lodowick's deaths. The pimp says in an aside to Bellamira that he will tell the governor; she replies that they should get more

money off Barabas first. Barabas enters, disguised as a French lute-player. Pilia-Borza asks for the "posy" in his hat and gives it to Bellamira. Unfortunately, the flowers have been poisoned. In a series of asides, Barabas vents his anger over the theft of his gold. He calls Pilia-Borza a "villain" and is enraged by the false things Ithamore says about him. For example, Ithamore asserts that the merchant "lives upon pickled grasshoppers" and that he never changes his shirt. The pimp and the prostitute ask Ithamore to demand more of Barabas's gold. Ithamore decides to send a message by "word of mouth" to his old master, this time demanding 1000 crowns.

Analysis

Plots and intrigue abound in these scenes as Bellamira and Pilia-Borza scheme, and Barabas vows revenge on Ithamore. In contrast to Barabas's fatal machinations, the pimp and the prostitute are straightforward villains: they seek money, not vengeance. Barabas recognizes Pilia-Borza's crudeness and tries to divert him from his task with clever speeches. However, although the pimp is less subtle than Barabas, Pilia-Borza sees through such trickery. In his own way, Pilia-Borza is too wise to be fooled. The pimp's comment, "Here's many words but no crowns; the crowns," evidences his hardnosed materialism and lack of patience with the Jew's wiles. Pilia-Borza may even be described as an honest villain, for he does not hide his avarice behind elaborate language. The protagonist describes him as a "shag-rag knave," and indeed, in comparison to Barabas, the pimp's villainy is relatively uncomplicated.

The same might be said for Ithamore. Although the slave parallels Barabas as a pitiless criminal, his love (or lust) for Bellamira indicates that he is more fallible than the protagonist. It is for us to decide whether this makes Ithamore a more sympathetic character. These two scenes also raise the question of what we should feel for Barabas. We might feel pleased that he is being schemed against or strangely saddened at his betrayal by Ithamore. Our emotional response is further complicated by the obvious humor employed in Act IV, scene iv. The comic value of Barabas's appearance as a French lute-player should not be overlooked. Although *The Jew of Malta* purports to be a tragedy, the play is cut through by deeper ironies that undermine the seriousness of events. It is not hard to imagine how contemporary English audiences must have laughed to hear Barabas's ridiculous impersonation of a Frenchman, particularly when the protagonist states, "Must tuna my lute for sound, twang twang first." This humor undercuts the horror of Barabas's

crimes; similarly, the poisoned flower suggests that the protagonist is more of a villainous clown than a psychopathic murderer.

Just as Marlowe manipulates his audience's responses to Barabas, so do his characters toy with one another. A sense of Machiavellian double-crossing pervades these scenes, for while Ithamore is betraying Barabas, Bellamira and Pilia-Borza are deceiving Ithamore. Ithamore justifies his behavior by reverting to religious hypocrisy, saying, "To undo a Jew is charity, and not sin." Surprisingly, the slave has defected to join two Christians, even though he told Barabas in Act II, scene iii that he delighted in harming members of this religion. This reinforces the play's larger themes of religious hypocrisy and strategic double-crossing: having abandoned Barabas, Ithamore makes prejudicial remarks against Jews in general, just as he did against Christians in Act II, scene iii. Thus, as well as joining a different criminal faction, Marlowe suggests that Ithamore has changed sides with regard to the Christian/Non-Christian divide. In particular, the word "charity" calls to mind ideals of Christian morality that the slave previously rejected. But although religion is a prominent theme, it takes second place (as always) to money. All the characters in Act IV, scenes iii and iv come across as agents of immorality, tainted by their lust for gold. Although Marlowe's treatment of individual characters is ambiguous, he makes it clear that all have been corrupted by avarice.

(V.i); (V.ii)

Summary

(V.i)

Ferneze enters, instructing his soldiers to fortify the town in the face of an impending Turkish assault. Bellamira and Pilia-Borza appear and reveal Barabas's crimes to the governor. Ferneze orders that the protagonist be brought to him, along with Ithamore, who will provide proof of Barabas's crimes. When the two men arrive, Barabas tries to deny the charges, but Ithamore admits to everything. The merchant pleads with Ferneze to "let me have law," to which the governor replies, "you shall have law." Barabas leaves, mumbling that he hopes the poisoned flowers will work soon.

Katherine arrives, and Ferneze tells her the truth about Mathias's death. She is vitriolic about Barabas, but the governor assures her that he is in jail waiting to receive justice. An officer tells Ferneze that both of the prisoners, along with the pimp and the prostitute, are dead. The governor orders that Barabas's body be thrown over the city walls to "be a prey for vultures and wild beasts." Once this has happened, Barabas gets up and explains that he feigned death by taking a sleeping draught. He vows to help Calymath and be revenged on the Christians in Malta. Barabas finds Calymath and explains that he knows a secret passage whereby 500 troops can enter the city and open its gates. Calymath promises to make Barabas governor if he is telling the truth. The merchant states "let me die" if Calymath finds he has lied.

(V.ii)

A victorious Calymath enters with his Maltese captives. He assures Ferneze that the prisoners will "under Turkish yokes groaning bear the burden of our ire," before he tells Barabas that he has been made governor. Ferneze despairs at this appointment and at Barabas's treachery, crying, "What greater misery could Heaven inflict?" Calymath leaves, promising the new governor that he will be guarded by his "Janizaries." Barabas sends the captives to prison and wonders about his security. He concludes that many people hate him and that his life would be under threat as governor of Malta. Barabas concludes that he will only maintain his position "bravely by firm policy."

Barabas calls back Ferneze. Barabas asks him what he thinks will come of the state, and Ferneze replies that he sees "no reason but of Malta's wrack." The protagonist assures Ferneze that he will help free Malta and her captured soldiers. Amazed, Ferneze assures Barabas that he will give him an enormous sum of money if the Jew will "[d]eal truly with us as thou intimatest." The protagonist explains that he will invite Calymath to a feast at which Ferneze will only have to perform "one strategem" in order to rid Malta of the Turks. The Ferneze offers Barabas his hand and states that he will deliver his money in the evening. Ferneze departs, and Barabas assures himself that he will make "a profit of my policy." Barabas leaves to plan the details of his deadly feast.

Analysis

Once again, Barabas finds himself brought before the governor. Barabas meets his accusers in Act V, scene i with a measure of proud disdain, asserting, "I'll go alone; dogs, do not hale me thus." Clearly, his cold reserve contrasts with the self-righteous emotion displayed by the other characters. Ferneze, who dramatically orders Barabas away from him with the words "his sight is death to me," appears particularly pompous and moralistic. Society's prejudice is shown by the fact that Barabas is only referred to as "the Jew" in this scene, even though he is not the only Jewish person in Malta. Our reaction to Barabas's unmasking is thus ambiguous. A measure of relief that he is being brought to justice is countered by a sense of disgust at society's hypocrisy.

Marlowe levels a charge of legalism—meaning a pedantic observance of the letter rather than the spirit of the law—against Barabas in Act V, scene i. The protagonist's demand to "have law" echoes Shylock's determination to have his pound of flesh in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Barabas knows that none of the charges against him "can prejudice my life." Are we to believe Barabas, or has the Barabas deluded himself into thinking he is invincible? The playwright leaves his audience to decide whether Barabas's knowledge of the law is accurate, or if he has lost whatever grasp of reality he has had left. Ferneze's response is typically evasive: the governor seems to promise everything and nothing. Barabas appears almost comically homicidal by the end of this scene; even as he is led to jail he mumbles his hope that the "poisoned flowers will work anon." The audience is left wondering whether the great criminal mastermind has become a murmuring madman.

Our fears that Barabas will simply fizzle out of the play are soon put to rest. The ugliness of Ferneze's comment that Barabas's body should be slung over the town walls "[t]o be a prey for vultures and wild beasts" is countered by the farcical speed with which the protagonist recovers and continues about his scheming. As always, Marlowe balances the humorous elements of his play with its darker undertones of prejudice and racial hatred. These tensions even play out on the stage of international conflict and diplomacy. Barabas's decision to aid the Turkish and be revenged on the whole "accursed town" of Malta suggests how dangerous and all-encompassing his game of vengeance has become. While Elizabethan theatergoers might have chuckled at the poisoning of a convent of lusty nuns in Act III, scene iv, Marlowe clearly intends for them to blanch at the prospect of Christian "children" and "wives" dying at the hands of Malta's enemies.

In the next scene, the stage widens to include God as a participant in the conflict. The governor calls on Heaven to suggest that human events are determined by Divine Providence. Ferneze's comment, "Oh fatal day, to fall into the hands / Of such a traitor and unhallowed Jew! / What greater misery could Heaven inflict?" is particularly suggestive. It foreshadows his comments at the end of the play that God is to be thanked for Malta's deliverance. Marlowe seems to be juxtaposing the idea of human strategy with divine will, posing the question of which has more influence on events in the world.

(V.iii);(V.iv);(V.v)

Summary

(V.iii)

Calymath finishes inspecting the island's fortifications and states that he is confident it cannot be conquered. A messenger brings an invitation from Barabas, inviting Calymath to a feast at Barabas's "homely citadel." Calymath says that he does not want to bring all his soldiers to this banquet given that the town has recently been pillaged. The messenger replies that Barabas has a "pearl so big" that its worth would feed the troops for a month. When Calymath wonders how Barabas will fit all the soldiers inside the city walls, the messenger replies that the troops will eat in a monastery outside of the town; only the "Selim" and his "Bashaws" will feast at Barabas's house. Calymath agrees to the plan and says that they will have the feast that evening.

(V.iv)

In this short scene, Ferneze tells his knights to come to his aid only when they hear a cannon fired. A knight replies that they will risk anything to avoid living "as Turkish thralls."

(V.v)

Barabas enters with a group of carpenters, who have just built some kind of apparatus that will be used to kill Calymath. Barabas pays the workers and tells them to go and drink some wine that he has poisoned. After they leave, the messenger appears and informs Barabas that Calymath will be feasting with him. Ferneze enters and gives the protagonist 100,000 pounds. Barabas

explains how he has planted gunpowder underneath the floor of the monastery where most of the Turkish troops will feast. He also states that he has rigged the floor of the gallery of his home so that it will collapse, plunging Calymath into a "deep pit past recovery." Barabas instructs Ferneze to cut a cord holding up the balcony when he hears a trumpet sound. Barabas refuses to take Ferneze's money until his plan has been successfully executed. As the Turks enter, Barabas delights in his deceit saying, "tell me, worldlings, underneath the sun, / If greater falsehood ever has been done."

Barabas greets the Turkish leader and invites him and his soldiers to climb the stairs to the gallery. At this point, Ferneze steps in and warns Calymath not to move. A knight sounds a trumpet, the cord is cut, and Barabas falls through the trapdoor he himself created into a cauldron below. Calymath is bemused, but Ferneze explains that Barabas's fate was meant for him. The Turkish leader cries "treason" and prepares to leave, but Ferneze persuades him to stay and watch Barabas die. Neither man helps Barabas. Barabas confesses to his crimes against Ferneze and Calymath, and dies cursing "Damned Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels."

Calymath prepares to leave, but Ferneze stops him. Ferneze explains how Barabas has killed all the Turkish troops feasting at the monastery. Ferneze tells Calymath that he cannot depart until his father "hath made good / The ruins done to Malta and to us." The Turk remonstrates, but Ferneze stands firm and says that the Turk is now his prisoner. Ferneze concludes the play by stating "let due praise be given / Neither to fate nor fortune, but to heaven."

Analysis

The closing scenes of Act V are filled with drama and move quickly towards the play's unexpected denouement. Ferneze appears ready to move ahead with Barabas's plan as he instructs his officers to wait for the sound of cannon-fire before attacking. Similarly, the protagonist is preparing his house for a final scene of mass destruction; his decision to poison the carpenters just seems like a warm-up for the planned climax.

In Act V, scene v, Barabas asks his audience, "is not this / A kingly kind of trade to purchase towns / By treachery, and sell 'em by deceit?" In his final scene, Marlowe makes it clear that plotting is simply another type of business transaction for his protagonist. Just as he fears for and

rejoices at the safe return of his precious "argosy" in Act I, scene i, so too does Barabas relish the perils and gains that accompany his schemes as a statesman. As the new governor, Barabas is simply a speculator in a political arena. However, Marlowe suggests that his protagonist's motivation has changed since the beginning of the play. Money is no longer Barabas's paramount concern. This is indicated by the fact that he does not touch the gold that Ferneze brings. Instead, Barabas seems wholly preoccupied with the intricacies of his plot. He marvels at his own cunning, and even asks Ferneze "will not this be brave?" We are left to speculate about Barabas's real intention in murdering the Turkish troops. Marlowe suggests the motiveless nature of Barabas's crimes when he asserts, "For so I live, perish may all the world." It is clear that hate is Barabas's chief motivation but hatred towards what or whom is uncertain. It seems that the protagonist's motives are more complicated than they once were; instead of seeking vengeance against one specific individual, Barabas now wants to destroy the entire world. As always, Barabas's final scheme is meticulously prepared, and Act V, scene iii shows that Barabas has anticipated every objection Calymath could raise about the feast, so that the messenger cannot fail but persuade him to attend.

Throughout the play, we see that Barabas's main delight lies in thwarting his enemies, even if he is not entirely sure who these are. This is certainly true of the final scene, where the protagonist is plotting against everyone and yet no one in particular. Barabas shouts before he dies, "I would have brought confusion on you all." At the play's end we are left asking just who is the moral victor or unbiased commentator on events. Clearly, it is not Barabas, for he dies shouting "Damned Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels." However, Ferneze's prejudice is also revealed in his comments to Calymath, "Now Selim note the unhallowed deeds of Jews" and "A Jew's courtesy: / For he that did by treason work our fall, / By treason hath delivered thee to us." We are left shocked and bewildered by the characters' honest admission of their own racial hatred, plotting, and double-crossing. No one emerges untarnished from the ruin of Barabas's plot.

Thus, even though the play appears to end positively—Malta's fortunes have turned, Barabas is dead and Calymath is captured—Marlowe concludes the action on a deeply ambivalent note. Fittingly, a dark irony permeates this scene: Marlowe leaves us to determine whether Divine Providence (God's will) or changing human fortunes (Machiavellian tactics) have had more influence on events. As always, we are left to provide the answers. Quite simply, *The Jew of*

Malta leaves us draw our own conclusions, positing God and Machiavelli in a struggle for dominance over men's minds.

3.0 Analysis of Major Characters:

Barabas

Barabas stands out because of his differences. The fact that he is rich, Jewish, and secretive alienates him from Christian Maltese society. Initially, Barabas's only motivation is money. Gradually, however, he grows to loathe his Christian enemies and notions of vengeance begin to consume him. The protagonist goes on a killing spree and murders an entire convent of nuns, along with his daughter, his slave, two young men, two priests, a pimp, and a prostitute. It becomes apparent that Barabas kills because of desire and not because of need. Although the narrator suggests in the *Prologue* that Barabas is a Machiavellian—Machevill states that his "money was not got without my means"—in reality Barabas has little in common with the real political author. He does, however, personify all the traits that an Elizabethan audience would have understood as quintessentially Machiavellian. He is strategic, dishonest, power-hungry (at least in the sense that he desires to have power over his enemies) and irreligious. But as a dramatic amalgamation of all these different evils, Barabas is a slippery protagonist. A profound ambiguity lies at the heart of his character. His introduction as a comic glutton who "smiles to see how full his bags are crammed" has little in common with his later characterization as a vengeance-obsessed psychopath. Barabas is simultaneously a scheming manipulator who feels no pity for his hapless victims and a greedy old man who jealously guards his wealth.

Marlowe's ambiguous characterization is complicated by the fact that Barabas often earns our commiseration, if not our sympathy. In a society of religious hypocrites, the protagonist is refreshingly honest about his own motives. Although he is accused of being a traitor in Act V, scene ii, earlier scenes show that he was never accepted as a citizen of Malta from the start. He is avaricious, jealous, resentful, and controlling, but he also professes great love for his daughter Abigail. The protagonist is deeply embittered by her conversion and by Ithamore's treachery, which leaves him without an heir. Marlowe intends for our reaction to his character to be

profoundly uncertain. At the play's end, Barabas declares his own fantastical notions of destroying the world and dies uttering, "I would have brought confusion on you all, / Damned Christians, dogs, and Turkish infidels." Marlowe's treatment of his character is thus deeply ironic, for we never know whether the playwright is taking stereotypes of Jews or Machiavellians seriously. Marlowe's readers must decide whether he is pandering to these stereotypes or undermining them through satire.

He starts out as a successful Jewish businessman, who lives peacefully with the Christians, even if he doesn't invite them over to dinner. But once Governor Ferneze confiscates all of his property, Barabas embarks upon a creative and diverse killing spree (young men, friars and nuns, his daughter—Barabas has an admirable anti-discrimination policy when it comes to murder). He is willing to play a little dirty to get back some of his money, and murdering Lodowick makes plenty of sense when you take into account that Lodowick's dad Ferneze has basically ruined Barabas's life.

But then things get weird. Why kill Mathias? How does he go from professing that his daughter Abigail is the one person he cares about to remorselessly murdering her the moment she becomes a nun? Barabas's motives have been confusing critics for centuries, so put on your thinking caps and let's get analyzing.

The Jews were officially expelled from England in 1290 by Edward I and weren't readmitted until 1656, so at the point that this play is being written and performed there haven't been Jews in England for several centuries. When he and Ithamore are getting to know each other in Act 2 Scene 3, Barabas gives a famous speech where he lists off all of his crimes, among them poisoning wells; killing sick homeless people; and, oh yeah, extorting the poor as an usurer (money-lender who charges interest).

These aren't just any crimes, though. To an Elizabethan (read: prejudiced) audience, they're specifically Jewish crimes. Lots of people think that Barabas is actually lying here, because it seems implausible that the business-focused merchant we see in Act 1 is also moonlighting as a really proactive, extremely stereotypical Jewish sociopath. Basically, Barabas is the Tim Tebow of Jewish Villains: a little too good to be true.

Barabas is a Machiavellian villain before we meet him as Machiavelli himself tells us: in the Prologue, Machiavelli's ghost introduces Barabas as a man who "favors" him, and who's used his tricks to achieve his wealth (Prologue 32). In the Prologue Spoken at Court, the reader says to the audience, "You shall find him still, / In all his projects, a sound Machevill; / And that's his character" (PSaC.7-9). These days, we tend to think of characters as being unique individuals with their own special motives and flaws, but in early modern times you frequently saw stock characters on the stage—that is, types of characters that always conformed to a certain literary convention, like *The Malcontent* or *The Fool*.

No one knows what is the plan of Barabas. At first he doesn't present as all that complicated a guy: the first thing we ever learn about Barabas is that he "smiles to see how full his bags are crammed" (Prologue.31). Money is what makes him happy and his life is about getting more of it. The minute after Barabas finds himself houseless, gold-less, and business-less, he pledges to regain his wealth. Makes sense, right? So he goes and recovers some of his money.

And this is where it gets weird, because he doesn't end there. If all he cares about is money, then he should take what he's recovered and go out and make more. Instead, he decides he's going to get Lodowick killed, along with Mathias. Sure, Lodowick is Ferneze's son, and Barabas definitely has a beef with Ferneze. That said, Lodowick's murder is about the last point at which you really know what's going with Barabas. Why murder Mathias too? How can he kill Abigail without blinking an eye when he's previously confessed that she's the only person he loves?

In 16th century Europe, there was a lot of anxiety about the "obduracy" of the Jews. That was the idea that, even if Jews converted to Christianity, they were still secretly holding out for Judaism and refusing to change in any case, Barabas epitomizes Jewish obduracy, not just in his refusal to convert to Christianity, but in his general attitude towards his new situation. Even when his fellow Jews tell him he's got to roll with the punches after Ferneze confiscates his wealth, Barabas says:

*What, will you thus oppose me, luckless stars,
To make me desperate in my poverty,
And, knowing me impatient in distress,*

*Think me so mad as I will hang myself,
That I may vanish o'er the earth in air
And leave no memory that e'er I was?
No, I will live, nor loath I this my life
And since you leave me in the ocean thus
To sink or swim, and put me to my shifts,
I'll rouse my senses and awake myself. (1.2.256-66)*

So much for accepting his circumstances with grace. Barabas is arming himself for battle. To him, the situation isn't Christians vs. Jews; it's The World vs. Barabas, and he's not going down without a fight. Barabas is constantly hustling people and then saying "but this is what I *really* think," such that ultimately nobody knows what's going on with Barabas except for Barabas. Nobody knows him.

Abigail

Abigail is Barabas's 14-year-old daughter, and may very well have been the only character in this play you actually liked. Early on, Barabas claims that the only things in the world that he cares about are Abigail and money, but if you've read the whole play you know how that turns out.

Abigail loves her father dearly, and when she finds out that Ferneze has taken all of Barabas's wealth and possessions she's willing to do whatever to help her father. She pretend-converts to a nun so that she can enter Barabas's house-turned-nunnery to recover his hidden stash of gold, and later goes along with the instructions he gives her in the course of his plot against Mathias and Lodowick.

When she finds out that Barabas has tricked the two guys into killing each other, though, Abigail literally has a Come To Jesus Moment. She's not happy about Lodowick's murder, but she's *really* unhappy about Mathias.

This is the moment where she loses faith not only in her father, but in worldly society in general, saying "But I perceive there is no love on earth, / Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks" (3.3.47-8).

Since all of these groups of people have proved to be equally terrible, Abigail turns to Christianity.

Something to note, though: she's not turning towards the *Christians*, exactly, since she's not going to be living as a normal citizen with people like Katherine and Ferneze. Instead, she wants to be a nun. She's effectively turning away from the "loveless earth," telling Friar Jacomo that she "was chained to the follies of the world" (3.3.60) but now truly wants to become a nun. In the big picture, Abigail does two main things:

First, she shows up hypocrisy of basically every other person on Malta. Abigail calls it like she sees it. She's furious with Ferneze for screwing over her father, but she also recognizes that Barabas is seriously crossing a line when he arranges the deaths of Mathias and Lodowick. So, she does the only thing that she can do: become a nun. The only non-bigoted major character of this play has to leave the earthly world of Turks, Jews and Christians to maintain her moral integrity.

Second, she tells us a lot about Barabas. Barabas introduces himself by stating that he cares about two things: money and Abigail. But watch all the moments where Barabas conflates the two: when she manages to sneak his hidden stash of gold out of the nunnery to him, he giddily rambles "Oh my girl, / my gold, my fortune, my felicity/...Oh girl, oh gold, oh beauty, oh my bliss" (2.2. 48-55).

And later, when craftily arranging with Lodowick to hook him up with Abigail, Barabas repeatedly refers to Abigail, his virgin daughter, as an "unfoiled diamond." In other words, Abigail is going to inherit his wealth by she's also a *part* of his wealth. To get out from this hopelessly money-obsessed system, she has to cut herself off both from her father and society at large.

Abigail is the only character who displays genuine love, loyalty, and selflessness in the play. Above all, she remains unmotivated by money and appears to have some kind of moral code (although she is willing to dissemble if it will serve her father's ends). Abigail's dedication to Barabas is proved by her vow to remain loyal to him, following her conversion to Christianity.

Marlowe uses Abigail's conversion to make a heavily ironic point about the corruption of the Catholic clergy—why would anyone seek to join a religion with such flawed affiliates as Bernardine and Jacomo? It even remains doubtful whether Abigail is a true religious convert at all, for she seems to appropriate Christian prejudice rather than Christian virtues. Her comment, "there is no love on earth, / Pity in Jews, nor piety in Turks," suggests that for all her moral worth, Barabas's daughter is as bigoted as the other Maltese. As James R. Siemon notes, Abigail undergoes a final "anagnoresis" or recognition of her own predicament that is a feature of tragic drama. She states "experience, purchased with grief, / Has made me see the difference of things." The "difference" that she refers to is a religious or racial difference. Thus, Marlowe suggests that Abigail converts to Christianity in a bid to reject her heritage, rather than through true religious belief.

However, Abigail is in many ways a romantic heroine whose relative goodness contrasts with the depravity of those around her—Jew and Christian alike. As with his other characters, Marlowe obscures Abigail's morals and motivations in order to complicate our responses to this character.

Bellamira is just trying to turn a profit. With her body. She's the local prostitute, but don't look for a heart of gold here. While everybody else is freaking out about the Turkish siege, Bellamira's only upset because it's slowing down business, whining that her "gain grows cold."

Bellamira ends up doing a solid for Malta, even though all she wants is some of Barabas's gold. How? She pretends to be super into Ithamore so that he'll blackmail Barabas and share the proceeds with her and her pimp, Pilia-Borza. But she and Pilia-Borza eventually take the dirty info on Barabas to Ferneze. Unfortunately, Bellamira turns out not to be so good at plotting. Not only does Ferneze her in prison, but Barabas manages to kill her with poisoned flowers.

Pilia-Borza

Pilia-Borza is Bellamira's pimp. True to pimp form, he's all about the stealing, lying and cheating. For a while, it seems like his plot with Bellamira to blackmail Barabas will work out: Pilia-Borza coerces Barabas to fork over a fair bit of money, and, in a really good move, declines Barabas's invitation to dinner. (We're pretty sure that would have ended with a poisoned pimp.)

In any case, you can't play a player, and Pilia-Borza just isn't good enough. A furious Barabas poisons him and his co-conspirators when he sneaks into their house in disguise. True, the poison doesn't kick in until after Pilia-Borza and Bellamira have run to Ferneze with the truth about his involvement in all the recent murders. But we're still calling a moral victory for Barabas.

But who *is* Pilia-Borza? What does he want? We don't get too many clues, except for this one hint that he drops on his way over to Barabas's house. Pilia-Borza says of Barabas that he'll "use him in his kind," where "in his kind" roughly translates to "as he deserves."

So, does Pilia-Borza mean "I'll go be a jerk to Barabas because he's a Jew"? Or does he mean, "I'm going to go be extra-cunning and wily because I'm dealing with a fellow schemer"? If the second one is the case, we'd think that Pilia-Borza and Barabas are of the same "kind."

Ithamore

He is the main antagonist of the play. Barabas couldn't have picked a better Turkish captive. Ithamore hates Christians, has zero problem with deceit and murder and, even better, has zero affiliations or friends in Malta. Before you decide that Barabas just got ridiculously lucky at the slave market, though, let's take a closer look at that first meeting. But he's not quite a blank slate. He was born in Thrace (Thracians had a rep for being cruel and barbaric) and is totally down when Barabas explains the following pre-reqs for working with him:

First, be thou void of these affections:

Compassion, love, vain hope, and heartless fear.

Be moved at nothing, see thou pity none,

But to thyself smile when the Christians moan. (2.3.170-73)

So basically, be a cruel, murderous psychopath, just like Barabas. And after Barabas spins his own history of stereotypical Jewish evil-doing, Ithamore in turn tells Barabas all about how he's burned down Christian villages, murdered random travellers and crippled religious pilgrims.

Ferneze

Barabas's great enemy. As the governor of Malta, Ferneze is presented as the merchant's moral opponent—he is Christian, law-abiding, and anti-Machiavellian. However, events in the play undermine this dichotomous characterization, suggesting that Ferneze is as morally bankrupt and Machiavellian as Barabas. In reality, the governor schemes and is dishonest about his motives. This is shown by his decision to tax the Maltese Jews in order to pay the tribute and later, when he breaks his alliance with the Turks. Essentially, Ferneze is a religious hypocrite who hides his lust for power behind ideals of Christian morality.

Ferneze is the Christian Governor of Malta, and father to the ill-fated Lodowick. In big picture terms, he bookends the main action of play: he's both the guy who gets the ball rolling (his confiscation of Barabas's wealth is what sets everything in motion) and the one who eventually puts an end to all the mayhem (he betrays Barabas at the last minute, resulting in Barabas's death).

On one hand, he's Barabas's main enemy, and since Barabas is (at least by time he kills Lodowick and Matthias) an indisputably terrible person, you kind of feel like you should be on Ferneze's side.

"A wise prince ought not to keep his faith when the observation thereof is hurtful unto him and that occasions for which he gave it be taken away" (*Prince*)

Ferneze is clearly on board with this one: he swears that he'll have ten years of tribute money ready for Calymath by the end of the month, but the minute the Spanish navy offers to help him out (and therefore the "occasion"—Malta's total military vulnerability—disappears) he goes back on his promise and tells Calymath to suit up for a siege.

"A prince above all things ought to wish and desire to be esteemed devout, though he be not so indeed" (*Prince*)

Okay, this one's a little tricky, because it's tough to gauge Ferneze's real religious commitment. Bottom line, though, is that Ferneze is definitely prepared to publically espouse Christian values (and, more importantly, Christian prejudices) to get what he wants. People die left and right in

the play, but one of the nastiest scenes is still that first bit where Ferneze is telling everyone how *righteous* he's being by confiscating the Jews' wealth.

He, of course, just needs their money because he's gotten himself into a bad situation with the Turks, but the way he tells it you'd think God had personally asked Ferneze to take Barabas's property. In Barabas's words, Ferneze "preaches the Jews out of their possessions" (1.2.11).

"Cruelty which tendeth to a good end is not to be reprehended" (Discourses)

You can get behind Ferneze's "good end"—he's pretty consistently pushing for a stable and peaceful Malta, whereas Barabas seems to just want to stay alive while killing off everyone else. That said, think of what he does to get there: he shamelessly exploits the minority Jewish population, breaks his promise to Calymath, betrays Barabas, and then ransoms Calymath to extort the Turkish Sultan.

Ultimately, Ferneze does indeed regain control of Malta, finish off Barabas, and make a pretty solid plan to rebuild the city. That said, when you look at the way he accomplishes all that, he ends up looking pretty morally dubious?

Calymath, the son of the Turkish Sultan, is the leader of the Turkish army that first demands the tribute from Ferneze and later invades Malta. Even though the Turks (a.k.a. the Ottoman Empire) were the Big Bad Wolf of Renaissance geopolitics, Calymath doesn't come off as all that bad a guy. While Ferneze and Barabas align themselves with Machiavelli, Calymath is the guy who opts for leniency and comes through on his promises. When Ferneze first begs him for a month to rustle up the money for the tribute, Calymath gives it to him, saying "'tis more kingly to obtain by peace/ Than to enforce conditions by constraint" (1.2.25-6). And later, Calymath agrees to make Barabas Governor of Malta if Barabas gets the Turkish army into the city.

Once the army has taken control of Malta, Calymath actually honors the agreement. And then he does one better by throwing in a few janizeries (kind of the Turkish version of a soldier-cum-ninja) as a thank-you gift. But this play is way too cynical to let the good guy win. Calymath expects Barabas and Ferneze to play by the same rules he does, so obviously he just ends up as Ferneze's captive after Barabas has blown up his entire army.

Jacomo

Jacomo is the friar who converts Barabas's daughter Abigail into a nun. Twice. And that's his high point: later, he and Friar Bernadine both get caught up in one of Barabas's murder plots after they (really awkwardly and incompetently) confront him about his involvement in the recent deaths in Malta.

And that's not to mention his greed. Jacomo and Bernadine are from rival orders, and when Barabas pretends to want to convert they resort to really petty squabbling over whose order will get to receive him and, more importantly, his money. Jacomo is ultimately a pretty sleazy guy. He all but licks his lips over Barabas's wealth. And then, when Barabas tricks him into believing that he's murdered Bernadine, his first thought is how to escape punishment. He even claims that, since he's a "sacred person," Barabas can't touch him.

In the end, Jacomo's brilliant plan of running away doesn't work. Barabas successfully frames him for Bernadine's murder before the Maltese court and Ithamore later attends his execution.

Even though Jacomo isn't actually responsible for Bernadine's death, you're not exactly crying when you find out he's been executed.

Bernadine

Bernadine is another ill-fated friar. (You'd almost think that Marlowe has a grudge against the Catholic Church.) He's all buddy-buddy with fellow man of God Jacomo—until, of course, money comes between them.

After Abigail spills about her dad to Bernadine, Bernadine and Jacomo confront Barabas about his crimes. Like Jacomo, Bernadine loses interest in his ever-so-noble quest for justice when Barabas offers to convert to Christianity and, oh yeah, bring his money to whichever monastery he joins.

So we're not too surprised when Bernadine eats it in the end. (By eats it, we mean "ends up strangled.") Bernadine, like Giacomo, is just one more hypocrite. Although he's supposed to be selfless, devout, and celibate, he's just as self-serving and corrupt as everyone else.

Lodowick

Lodowick makes the really bad move of being the son of Barabas's arch-nemesis, Governor Ferneze. After recovering some of his gold, Barabas's first order of business is to kill Lodowick, on account of having major hate for his dad. Lodowick ends up dying in a duel against his friend, Mathias, when Barabas tricks them into fighting over his daughter.

Lodowick, while more or less a not-terrible-person, definitely has some personality flaws. He's never even seen Abigail before he gets Barabas to fix them up in Act 2, and he's only trying to get with her because (1) he knows that Mathias is interested in her and (2) he thinks she's a babe. Even though marrying somebody you met two seconds ago is par for the course in Renaissance Drama, going after Abigail when he knows Mathias digs her is kind of a major violation of the bro-code. When he meets Barabas, Lodowick introduces himself as the Governor's son, apparently hoping that'll up his chances of making a move on Abigail. Oops. He's really just painting a huge target on his back. It doesn't get better when he calls Mathias a "base-born peasant" (2.3.281). Everything goes downhill from there, and Barabas cultivates the men's enmity until they kill each other in a duel.

Our verdict? Sure, Lodowick doesn't deserve to die. But he's still not someone we want to bring home to mom.

Mathias

Mathias is a Maltese Christian who's in love with Abigail. Even though his mother, Katherine, isn't keen on having her son marry a Jewish girl, Mathias is still dead set on marrying this girl

He has the rare distinction in this play of being totally innocent. Really—this guy doesn't do anything wrong; he just gets caught up in Barabas's plots. Out of Mathias and Lodowick, it's

Mathias's death that matters more. When Abigail finds out about how the two men died, she gets a little ticked off at her dad:

*Admit thou lov'dst not Lodowick for his sin,
Yet Don Mathias ne'er offended thee.
But thou wert set upon extreme revenge
Because the Prior disposed thee once,
And couldst not venge it but upon his son,
Nor on his son but by Mathias's means,
Nor on Mathias but by murdering me. (3.3.40-46)*

In other words, Abigail points out that Lodowick was understandably on Barabas's hit list because he's the son of his enemy Ferneze. With the murder of Mathias, though, Barabas is really crossing a line from the land of reasonable revenge to this scary other place where nobody, including Abigail herself, is safe from his plots. So, poor Mathias is basically there to (1) make us feel really sorry for Abigail, and (2) show us how cray-cray Barabas is.

Katherine

Katherine is Mathias's mom. Her main role is to warn her son to stay away from Barabas and, after his death, be distraught all over the place while vowing to avenge her son's death.

While not a bad lady, Katherine is, like the other Maltese Christians, narrow-minded and prejudiced. When she sees Mathias talking with Barabas at the slave market, she tells him, "Converse not with him: he is cast off from heaven" (2.3.158).

Katherine is one of the many minor characters of the play who, while they haven't really done anything *wrong*, per se, and are victimized by Barabas, still aren't completely innocent. Her cheerful bigotry may be justified in Barabas's case, but it's still a major problem for the hypocritical, deeply prejudiced society of Malta.

4.0 Explanation of Quotations:

MACHEVILL I count religion but a childish toy, And hold there is no sin but ignorance. Birds of the air will tell of murders past? I am ashamed to hear such fooleries: Many will talk of title to a crown. What right had Caesar to the empire? Might first made kings, and laws were then most sure When like the Draco's they were writ in blood. (Prologue. 14–21) But whither am I bound, I come not, I, To read a lecture here in Britaine, But to present the tragedy of a Jew, Who smiles to see how full his bags are crammed, Which money was not got without my means. I crave but this, grace him as he deserves, And let him not be entertained the worse Because he favors me. (Prologue. 28–35)

In this passage, Marlowe introduces a theme of Machiavellian strategy that runs throughout his play. The Prologue satirizes Machiavelli's theory of statecraft as the narrator holds religion to a "childish toy" and regards ignorance as the only sin. Machevill notes that Barabas "favors" him, which could mean that Barabas either resembles Machiavelli or advocates his tactics. Either way, before we are even introduced to Barabas, Marlowe associates his protagonist with the most notorious political schemer of his day. The audience is effectively forewarned to expect such Machiavellian-style duplicity in the play itself.

BARABAS Bring you scripture to confirm your wrongs? Preach me not out of my possessions. Some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are: But say the tribe that I descended of Were all in general cast away for sin, Shall I be tried by their transgression? The man that dealeth righteously shall live: And which of you can charge me otherwise? (I.ii.111–118)

This passage comes from the scene in which Ferneze has cheated Barabas out of his estate. Barabas makes barbed comments about Christian hypocrisy and suggests that Ferneze is using scripture as false justification for his actions. The protagonist reiterates his identity as an individual as well as a member of a race when he asks if he will be tried by the transgressions of his "tribe." Barabas knows that the Maltese are after his wealth and that Ferneze is only using his Jewish identity as an excuse to steal it. Barabas's prejudice towards his persecutors shows through in the line, "Some Jews are wicked, as all Christians are." The protagonist suggests the importance of judging each man on his own merit when he notes, "The man that dealeth

righteously shall live." Concluding his speech with a biblical proverb, Barabas uses the governor's tactics against him through quoting scripture.

ITHAMORE Why, was there ever seen such villainy, So neatly plotted, and so well performed?
(III.iii.1–2)

This quote displays the current of irony that runs throughout the play. Ostensibly, Ithamore is referring to the success of Barabas's plot to kill Lodowick and Mathias. However, his comment is also a sly reference to Marlowe's skill at "plotting" the course of his drama, which is now being "performed" in front of an audience. Although there are no explicit references to theater within *The Jew of Malta*, as there are within other Renaissance plays, Marlowe uses this quote to deepen the self-referential irony of his text.

ABIGAIL Then were my thoughts so frail and unconfirmed, And I was chained to follies of the world: But now experience, purchasèd with grief, Has made me see the difference of things. My sinful soul, alas, hath paced too long The fatal labyrinth of misbelief, Far from the Son that gives eternal life. (III.iii.61–67)

This quote is filled with Christian terminology that supports Abigail's sincere desire to convert. A sense of Christian humility and self-humiliation is conveyed in phrases such as, "I was chained to follies of the world," and "My sinful soul," making Abigail's speech sound overblown and stagy. We wonder if she is converting because she really believes, or if she feels alienated from her Jewish heritage because of Barabas's acts. In particular, Abigail's comment about seeing the "difference of things" reinforces the pathos of her conversion. This line is a sickening euphemism for becoming prejudiced. It is tragic that Abigail, who seemed the only unbigoted character within the text, has become narrow-minded and discriminatory because of her disgust toward Barabas.

FERNEZE So march away, and let due praise be given Neither to fate nor fortune, but to heaven.
(V.v.123–124)

The play's last two lines hint at the nature of the conflict the actors have just dramatized. *The Jew of Malta* toys with the idea that God has less influence on the affairs of man than other men do.

Strange things happen within the play that do not accord with a hierarchical, Christian understanding of the world: the clergy are corrupt, Muslims invade a Christian stronghold, and a Jew becomes governor. We are left wondering just who is responsible for the way things have turned out—has Divine Providence ruled that events should pan out as they do, or is Ferneze suggesting that the characters' Machiavellian scheming was simply a tool for God's will? In these two lines the governor distances himself from his past acts and lauds God as being the driving force behind human affairs. Ironically, the rest of the play seems to suggest that God has less influence on earthly events than men do—particularly if men scheme and wile to achieve their own ends.

5.0 Study Questions

The play is also known by its full title *The Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*. In which ways can the play be understood as a tragedy, and how does its heavily ironic tone support or undermine its tragic elements?

The Jew of Malta may be described as tragicomic. Its profoundly ironic tone suggests that it plays on features of tragedy in order to highlight the strategies that underlie men's actions. These features include Barabas's blindness to his own mistakes, the play's intricacy of plot, its many catastrophic climaxes—such as Lodowick's and Mathias's deaths, Abigail's conversion, and Barabas's arrest—and dramatic conclusion. However, Marlowe puts a spin on traditional tragic forms by creating an unsympathetic protagonist. Although we share Barabas's disgust at the religious hypocrisy of his peers, he often appears to be nothing more than a monstrous caricature. The play's ironic tone further undermines its tragic elements, for it suggests nothing is quite as it appears. Deaths and murders are humorous more often than they are heartrending, and many relationships seem tainted by the participants' lust for gold.

Is Barabas wholly evil? In what ways does Marlowe complicate our response to his protagonist, and how does this response affect the play's moral tone?

Initially, we are tempted to pity Barabas because of his unjust and discriminatory treatment by Ferneze. However, it becomes clear that the protagonist knows how to defend himself—or at least, how to exact vengeance on his enemies. Clearly, Barabas is a pitiless criminal mastermind.

His murderous scheming marks him as ruthless, although Marlowe suggests he feels fatherly affection for Abigail. Barabas only wishes to be left alone to enjoy his wealth and prosperity. As he notes in Act I, scene i, he seeks "peaceful rule" that will allow him to become "on every side enriched."

There is no clear moral divide between Barabas and the Maltese Christians. Prejudice is rife, and people hide avaricious motives beneath a veneer of religious sincerity. Ferneze is particularly hypocritical and duplicitous, as he cites Christian virtues but does not practice them. Barabas alone recognizes the shallowness of his conscience; he does not pretend to care about the needs of other people because he does not need to. No one looks to Barabas for sympathy. It may be said that Marlowe's protagonist only fulfills the role crafted for him by Christian prejudice and intolerance. One could argue that Barabas poisons, strangles, and deceives because he has no means of openly fighting his enemies. His requests to be treated fairly in Act I, scene ii are ignored; similarly, his demands to "have law" in Act V, scene i are treated rather evasively by the governor. The ambiguity of the play's moral tone depends upon the ambivalent response Barabas elicits from the audience. Barabas commits evil acts in a way that highlights society's evils as well as Barabas's immorality.

What parallels does Marlowe draw between the scheming of the Maltese islanders and the "policy" of Malta, Spain, and Turkey?

Just as Barabas, Ithamore, Bellamira, and Pilia-Borza conspire against each other, so, too, do Ferneze, Calymath, and Del Bosco strategize in the name of "policy." Calymath's ultimatum—that Ferneze pay ten years' worth of tribute or Turkey will invade Malta—is nothing more than a trumped up bribe. Marlowe thus compares politics to a web of commercial deals. Although Ferneze trumpets that "[h]onour is bought with blood, and not with gold," it is clear that he is motivated by financial concerns. Ferneze's decision to break the league with Calymath and sell Turkish slaves in the marketplace attests that mercenary interests determine state policy. Del Bosco's comment that the governor can "keep the gold" if he goes to war against Turkey, further suggests the importance of money in international politics.

This same "desire of gold" motivates Bellamira, Pilia-Borza, and Ithamore (although the slave professes to bribe Barabas in the name of love). Marlowe thus compares the acquisitiveness of statesmen—particularly aristocratic statesmen such as Ferneze—with the cupidity of common criminals. Ironically, Barabas is the only character whose crimes are motivated by more than a need for money. In the final act, Marlowe shows how Barabas's essentially motiveless crimes affect the course of international politics. When the protagonist becomes governor, the nature of his plots remains the same—to conspire murder—except that these schemes are played out in a larger arena. Ultimately, Barabas's goals do not vary much from Ferneze's; while the protagonist seeks to profit by Calymath's death, the governor attempts to gain by his capture. /ANSWER.

Why is Ithamore so quick to scheme against his master? Are we to believe that it is all because of the slave's love for Bellamira, or is a deeper avarice to blame?

What role does Abigail play within the text—is she a tragic heroine, a disloyal daughter, or a victim to the prejudice of her peers?

Religious and racial differences dominate *The Jew of Malta*. Is Marlowe's treatment of these differences ultimately even-handed or biased?

Does Barabas receive divine retribution in the play's final scene, or is Barabas undermined by the same duplicity and Machiavellian double-crossing he used to wreak vengeance on others?

6.0 Themes

Religious Hypocrisy

Although the Maltese Christians—particularly Ferneze and the two priests—present themselves as agents of morality, Marlowe makes it clear that these men are frauds and hypocrites. This complicates Barabas's role within the play, for it challenges his status as the obvious villain. There is no clear struggle between good and evil, although the Maltese demonize Barabas. Instead, the major characters are presented as strategists who maneuver themselves into positions of strength or weakness depending on their ability to deceive. Even the Catholic priests turn their

backs on religious morals when it suits them, shown in their attempts to outmaneuver each other to win Barabas's money.

Machiavellian Strategy

This is an overarching theme that ties in with many others within the play, particularly religious hypocrisy. Essentially, the characters display an ability to strategize that is alien to ideals of religious sincerity. As Machiavelli asserts in the Prologue, "religion [is] but a childish toy." Instead of religion and the power of Divine Providence, many characters place their trust in schemes and strategies. Marlowe treats this subject ambiguously. Although the Prologue satirizes Machiavellian scheming, the rest of the play suggests that statesmen must manipulate to protect their own interests. For example, Ferneze is only able to survive and free Malta by outmaneuvering Barabas. In turn, Barabas avoids capture for a long period of time through anticipating other people's moves and motives. Marlowe ultimately leaves us wondering whether or not he believes in Machiavellian tactics. The play's heavily ironic tone could support the view that man is driven by his own motives. Alternatively, it might suggest that our ability to control events always comes second to God's will—which would make political scheming redundant.

Vengeance and Retribution

This theme dominates the play as it grows to consume Barabas. Notions of vengeance obsess the protagonist, and what Barabas qualifies as a personal injury becomes increasingly broad as the play progresses. Barabas turns from specific wrongs done him by individuals—such as Ferneze—to focus on wrongs done him by Christian society and the world in general. Even those characters who have been loyal to Barabas, or who have brought him great advantages, come under fire. Calymath is a notable example, for the protagonist repays the Turk's generosity with treachery. Barabas even threatens Ithamore at a point when the slave is most loyal to his master, saying, "I'll pay thee with a vengeance, Ithamore." The protagonist's all-consuming wrath has a momentum unlike anything else within the play, including the motivations of the other characters. As a theme, vengeance contributes to the stagy feel and self-referential theatricality of *The Jew of Malta*.

7.0 Motifs

Deception and Dissimulation

Most characters in *The Jew of Malta* deceive and dissemble, mostly for political expediency or criminal purposes. Abigail is the only exception, as she pretends to convert to Christianity in order to help her father recover his gold. In the scene where they plan this false conversion, father and daughter use the word "dissemble" three times in as many lines. In response to Abigail's assurance, "Thus father shall I much dissemble," Barabas replies, "As good dissemble that thou never mean'st / As first mean truth and then dissemble it." As far as the Barabas is concerned, it is no worse to deceive when you know you are lying than it is to do something honestly and later become hypocritical. Marlowe has Barabas—who is never troubled by his false actions—stand by this maxim throughout the play. Other characters, such as Ferneze, also try to conceal their own motives but meet with variable success. The priests Bernardine and Giacomo are prime examples of poor dissimulators. A clear example is Act IV, scene i, where the priests pretend to have Barabas's best interests at heart but really want his gold in their coffers. It is no coincidence that these men of faith have impure motivations—Barabas stands out in comparison as an able strategist, precisely because he does not espouse false moral ideals. The protagonist regards dissembling as a strategic tool to achieve political ends; he remains unconcerned about the immorality of such duplicity.

Proverbs and Biblical Allusions

Barabas's (and by extension Marlowe's) use of biblical and classical allusions is heavily ironic. Barabas refers to the story of Cain when he hears of Abigail's conversion to Christianity, exclaiming "perish underneath my bitter curse / Like Cain by Adam, for his brother's death." While Barabas's allusions display the breadth of his knowledge, they are often used mockingly to undermine the seriousness of events. Ithamore uses proverbs in a more overtly jocular way, as shown by his comment, "he that eats with the Devil had need of a long spoon." Also, both allusions and proverbs serve to bridge the world of the stage and the audience. They form part of a cultural dialogue that traverses the gulf between theater and real life. When Pilia-Borza knowingly asserts, "Hodie tibi, cras mihi," (Today you, tomorrow me) Marlowe is speaking to the minds of his contemporaries about the unpredictability of fate. Although the play pertains to

be about past events in Malta, such proverbial wit suggests that it dramatizes the tensions and concerns of contemporary Elizabethan England.

Symbols

Gold

Gold symbolizes power and success as well as wealth. Barabas is ecstatic when he recovers his hidden gold in Act II, scene i. As the Turkish bashaw states to Ferneze, the Turkish army are driven by "[t]he wind that bloweth all the world besides, / Desire of gold." In sixteenth century Malta, as in our modern era, money makes the world go round. Gold symbolizes faith in the terrestrial world—its schemes, profits and rewards—as opposed to the spiritual realm's less immediate rewards.

Barabas's nose

Most of the comments about Barabas's nose are made by Ithamore, who makes puns on the idea of smelling and having a nose for things. For example, he says, "Oh brave, master, I worship your nose for this." The slave expresses his admiration for this feature along with Barabas's qualities of character, stating, "I have the bravest, gravest, secret, subtle, bottle-nosed knave to my master, that ever gentleman had." And yet, Ithamore's gentle jibing is not always comic—it can turn nasty. In Act IV he mutters as an aside, "God-a-mercy nose," in response to Barabas's comment that he smelt the priests "ere they came." Marlowe is undoubtedly playing on Jewish stereotypes with this unconventional symbol.

The fact that Ithamore focuses on Barabas' nose symbolizes his need to define the Jew as different, through selecting this feature as a mark of distinction. By saying that Barabas has a nose for crime, Ithamore is somehow connecting what he perceives to be a Jewish identity with a criminal identity. It is unlikely that Marlowe agrees with Ithamore. The slave's comments are so ridiculous—as is Barabas's comment that he could smell the priests before they appeared—that we cannot ignore their sharply ironic tone. While the character of Ithamore might be saying these things in all seriousness, the playwright uses them to deepen the play's darkly comic flavor. Barabas's nose is a symbol of the satire that permeates *The Jew of Malta*. Just as tragic events in

the play are undercut by humor, so its jokes have serious implications about the state of human relationships.

Theme:

The Jew of Malta opens with the ghost of Niccolò Machiavelli, the man who literally wrote the book on playing dirty to achieve and maintain power. With that kind of introduction, it shouldn't surprise you that most characters in this play are down with lying and cheating. For some characters, like Ferneze, deceit is mostly a means to an end; with Barabas, though, it feels like deceit becomes an end unto itself. Barabas goes from devising plots to achieve recognizable goals (get back his money, kill Lodowick) to living for the plots themselves

The Jew of Malta hits us with two levels of prejudice: First, your run-of-the-mill every racial/religious group hating on every other racial/religious group. Second, the fact that this play is about a man who gleefully embraces every anti-Semitic stereotype the Maltese can come up with. Seriously, Shmoopers—we're talking people are afraid to even stage this play because it's so racist. But is the *play* racist? We're not so sure. At the beginning of the play, Ferneze is spouting baldly racist rhetoric, but probably not a single member of the audience is thinking, "Yeah, that guy sure is right to steal from those Jews." And Barabas is ultimately made out to be so over-the-top and so different from the other Jews in the play that he emerges not as a representative of the Jewish community, but a representative of prejudices against Jews.

Our characters aren't out buying Ferraris or \$3,333.33 ice cream sundaes; they're buying cities and people. Money doesn't just buy you cool stuff in *The Jew of Malta*: it buys you power. And in this play, power is the coolest thing of all. Ferneze has to pay off the Turks to keep Malta safe; Barabas gets the friars off his back by offering them money; the Spanish offer to help Malta largely so that they can sell slaves on the island. It's definitely a rich man's world. In a universe where having the upper hand is way more important than being moral, money ends up being the main indicator of advantage.

Religion: it brings people together; it ties us to our past; it encourages us to be kinder and more loving. Right? Well, not in *The Jew of Malta*. In Marlowe's play, religion is just one more way to make people hate each other. Religion and race are so closely tied that we can't tell if the fight with the Turks is a political battle or a religious battle—or if there's any difference. And take

Barabas: do the Maltese Christians hate him because they truly think his religion is wrong, or do they just need someone to blame and steal money from? One thing is sure: by the end of the play, we're not feeling particularly worshipful.

h, hypocrisy: the gift that keeps giving. Well, if you're on Malta, anyway. Generally speaking, hypocrisy is claiming you have one set of moral standards and then acting according to a different set of rules. Sounds bad, right? Sure. But remember that *The Jew of Malta* is presided over by Machiavelli, a guy who thought that hypocrisy was fine and dandy as long as it kept you in power. For a politician like Ferneze, hypocrisy lets you have your gold and bathe in it too: you sound good, because you openly espouse Christian morals, but you also get the luxury of doing really immoral things.

f Barabas were a teenager, he'd be stomping off to his room to slam the door and scream, "It's not fair." And it's not. The events of *The Jew of Malta* are set off by one moment of blatant unfairness, when Ferneze basically steals the Jews' property to pay off Malta's debt to the Turks. But Ferneze packages this action not just as right, but as legal. So, we have some questions. Is law just a political tool? Or is it a safeguard of justice? Is there any true justice to be found? Or is everything that happens simply the outcome of various power plays?

Jews weren't popular in Renaissance Europe. They frequently faced the decision of either converting to Christianity or being expelled from their country. Remind you of anybody? Ferneze's Convert Or Fork Over Your Wealth bargain, even though it sounds crazy, would have sounded relatively normal at the time *The Jew of Malta* was being performed. But the ordeal didn't end with conversion. There was a lot of paranoia over whether or not these Jews had really converted or were still practicing Judaism in secret—being *obdurate*. Barabas is a prime example of exactly what the Christian world was losing sleep over. He absolutely refuses to convert, wholeheartedly embraces every horrendous Jewish stereotype, and is really, really (really really really) hard to take down.

The Jew of Malta might not be a full-on revenge tragedy but we definitely agree that revenge is a major theme in this play—the first murder of the play, Lodowick's, is an act of vengeance against Ferneze's father. Malta is a dead center in a huge geopolitical struggle between East and West. The Turks are threatening to invade the defenseless city, and Ferneze is making deals left

and right to try to make sure Malta doesn't get torn apart. By the time *The Jew of Malta* ends, you're left wondering what exactly makes a good politician—and it may not involve squeaky-clean ethics. Politics are so relentlessly brutal that only those who are willing to break the rules can survive, much less ensure civic harmony. In the game of Maltese politics, one either wins or die.

William Shakespeare

1.0 Introduction

2.0 A Brief summary of some of major plays

3.0 Major Themes

4.0 Acting and the Theatre

5.0 Famous Characters

6.0 Critics:

7.0 Questions for practice

1.0 Introduction:

1.1 The Elizabethan Age

Shakespeare lived during a remarkable period of English history, during the period of relative political stability that followed and preceded eras of extensive upheaval. Elizabeth I became the Queen of England in 1558, six years before Shakespeare's birth. During her 45-year reign, London became a cultural and commercial center where learning and literature thrived. When Queen Elizabeth ascended to the throne, there were violent clashes throughout Europe between Protestant and Catholic leaders and their followers. Though Elizabeth honored many of the Protestant edicts of her late father, King Henry VIII, she made significant concessions to Catholic sympathizers, which kept them from attempting rebellion. But when compromise was not possible, she was an exacting and determined leader who did not shy away from conflict. With the naval defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, England was firmly established as a leading military and commercial power in the Western world. Elizabeth supported and later knighted Sir Francis Drake, the first sailor to circumnavigate the globe. She also funded Sir Walter Raleigh's exploration of the New World, which brought new wealth to her country in the form of tobacco and gold from Latin America.

Queen Elizabeth also recognized the importance of the arts to the life and legacy of her nation. She was fond of the theater, and many of England's greatest playwrights were active during her reign, including Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare. With her permission, professional theaters were built in England for the first time, attracting 15,000 theatergoers per week in London, a city of 150,000 to 250,000. In addition to Shakespeare's masterpieces of the stage, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, and Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* were all written during this golden age in the literary arts. The Shakespearean sonnet, Spenserian stanza, and dramatic blank verse also came into practice during the period.

1.2 The Age of Shakespeare (1564-1616)

The great age of English poetry opened with the publication of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*, in 1579, and closed with the printing of Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, in 1671. Within this period of little less than a century English thought passed through many changes, and there were several successive phases of style in our imaginative literature. Milton, who acknowledged Spenser as his master, and who was a boy of eight years at Shakespeare's death, lived long enough to witness the establishment of an entirely new school of poets, in the persons of Dryden and his contemporaries. But, roughly speaking, the dates above given mark the limits of one literary epoch, which may not improperly be called the Elizabethan. In strictness the Elizabethan age ended with the queen's death, in 1603. But the poets of the succeeding reigns inherited much of the glow and splendor which marked the diction of their forerunners; and "the spacious times of great Elizabeth" have been, by courtesy, prolonged to the year of the Restoration (1660). There is a certain likeness in the intellectual products of the whole period, a largeness of utterance and a high imaginative cast of thought which stamp them all alike with the queen's seal.

The expression "Victorian poetry" has a rather absurd sound when one considers how little Victoria counts for in the literature of her time. But in Elizabethan poetry the maiden queen is really the central figure. She is Cynthia, she is Thetis, great queen of shepherds and of the sea; she is Spenser's Gloriana, and even Shakespeare, the most impersonal of poets, paid tribute to her in *Henry VIII.*, and, in a more delicate and indirect way, in the little allegory introduced into *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

That very time I saw—but thou could'st not—
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all armed. A certain aim he took
At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passed on
In maiden meditation, fancy free

an allusion to Leicester's unsuccessful suit for Elizabeth's hand.

The praises of the queen, which sound through all the poetry of her time, seem somewhat overdone to a modern reader. But they were not merely the insipid language of courtly compliment. England had never before had a female sovereign, except in the instance of the gloomy and bigoted Mary. When she was succeeded by her more brilliant sister the gallantry of a gallant and fantastic age was poured at the latter's feet, the sentiment of chivalry mingling itself with loyalty to the crown. The poets idealized Elizabeth. She was to Spenser, to Sidney, and to Raleigh, not merely a woman and a virgin queen, but the champion of Protestantism, the lady of young England, the heroine of the conflict against popery and Spain. Moreover Elizabeth was a great woman. In spite of the vanity, caprice, and ingratitude which disfigured her character, and the vacillating, tortuous policy which often distinguished her government, she was at bottom a sovereign of large views, strong will, and dauntless courage. Like her father, she "loved a *man*," and she had the magnificent tastes of the Tudors. She was a patron of the arts, passionately fond of shows and spectacles, and sensible to poetic flattery. In her royal progresses through the kingdom, the universities, the nobles, and the cities vied with one another in receiving her with plays, revels, masques, and triumphs, in the mythological taste of the day. "When the queen paraded through a country town," says Warton, the historian of English poetry, "almost every pageant was a pantheon. When she paid a visit at the house of any of her nobility, at entering the hall she was saluted by the *penates*. In the afternoon, when she condescended to walk in the garden, the lake was covered with tritons and nereids; the pages of the family were converted

into wood-nymphs, who peeped from every bower; and the footmen gamboled over the lawns in the figure of satyrs. When her majesty hunted in the park she was met by Diana, who, pronouncing our royal prude to be the brightest paragon of unspotted chastity, invited her to groves free from the intrusions of Acteon." The most elaborate of these entertainments of which we have any notice were, perhaps, the games celebrated in her honor by the Earl of Leicester, when she visited him at Kenilworth, in 1575. An account of these was published by a contemporary poet, George Gascoigne, *The Princely Pleasures at the Court of Kenilworth*, and Walter Scott has made them familiar to modern readers in his novel of *Kenilworth*. Sidney was present on this occasion, and, perhaps, Shakespeare, then a boy of eleven, and living at Stratford, not far off, may have been taken to see the spectacle; may have seen Neptune riding on the back of a huge dolphin in the castle lake, speaking the copy of verses in which he offered his trident to the empress of the sea; and may have

heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song.

That knightly gentleman, Philip Sidney, was a true type of the lofty aspiration and manifold activity of Elizabethan England. He was scholar, poet, courtier, diplomatist, soldier, all in one. Educated at Oxford and then introduced at court by his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, he had been sent to France when a lad of eighteen, with the embassy which went to treat of the queen's proposed marriage to the Duke of Alençon, and was in Paris at the time of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, in 1572. Afterward he had traveled through Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, had gone as ambassador to the emperor's court, and every-where won golden opinions. In 1580, while visiting his sister Mary, Countess of Pembroke, at Wilton, he wrote, for her pleasure, the *Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, which remained in manuscript till 1590. This was a pastoral romance, after the manner of the Italian *Arcadia* of Sanazzaro, and the *Diana Enamorada* of Montemayor, a Portuguese author. It was in prose, but intermixed with songs and sonnets, and Sidney finished only two books and a portion of the third. It describes the adventures of two cousins, Musidorus and Pyrocles, who were wrecked on the coast of Sparta. The plot is very involved and is full of the stock episodes of romance: disguises, surprises, love intrigues, battles, jousts and single combats. Although the insurrection of the Helots against the Spartans forms a

part of the story, the Arcadia is not the real Arcadia of the Hellenic Peloponnesus, but the fanciful country of pastoral romance, an unreal clime, like the fairy land of Spenser.

Sidney was our first writer of poetic prose. The poet Drayton says that he

did first reduce

Our tongue from Lyly's writing, then in use,
Talking of stones, stars, plants, of fishes, flies,
Playing with words and idle similes.

Sidney was certainly no Euphuist, but his style was as "Italianated" as Lyly's, though in a different way. His English was too pretty for prose. His "Sidneian showers of sweet discourse" sowed every page of the *Arcadia* with those flowers of conceit, those sugared fancies which his contemporaries loved, but which the taste of a severer age finds insipid. This splendid vice of the Elizabethan writers appears in Sidney, chiefly in the form of an excessive personification. If he describes a field full of roses, he makes "the roses add such a ruddy show unto it, as though the field were bashful at his own beauty." If he describes ladies bathing in the stream, he makes the water break into twenty bubbles, as "not content to have the picture of their face in large upon him, but he would in each of those bubbles set forth a miniature of them." And even a passage which should be tragic, such as the death of his heroine, Parthenia, he embroiders with conceits like these: "For her exceeding fair eyes having with continued weeping got a little redness about them, her round sweetly swelling lips a little trembling, as though they kissed their neighbor Death; in her cheeks the whiteness striving by little and little to get upon the rosiness of them; her neck, a neck of alabaster, displaying the wound which with most dainty blood labored to drown his own beauties; so as here was a river of purest red, there an island of perfectest white," etc.

The *Arcadia*, like *Euphues*, was a lady's book. It was the favorite court romance of its day, but it surfeits a modern reader with its sweetness, and confuses him with its tangle of adventures. The lady for whom it was written was the mother of that William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, to whom Shakespeare's sonnets are thought to have been dedicated. And she was the subject of Ben Jonson's famous epitaph.

Underneath this sable herse
Lies the subject of all verse,
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother;
Death, ere thou hast slain another
Learn'd and fair and good as she,
Time shall throw a dart at thee.

Sidney's *Defense of Poesy* composed in 1581, but not printed till 1595, was written in manlier English than the *Arcadia*, and is one of the very few books of criticism belonging to a creative and uncritical time. He was also the author of a series of love sonnets, *Astrophel and Stella*, in which he paid Platonic court to the Lady Penelope Rich (with whom he was not in love), according to the conventional usage of the amourists.

Sidney died in 1586, from a wound received in a cavalry charge at Zutphen, where he was an officer in the English contingent sent to help the Dutch against Spain. The story has often been told of his giving his cup of water to a wounded soldier with the words, "Thy necessity is yet greater than mine." Sidney was England's darling, and there was hardly a poet in the land from whom his death did not obtain "the meed of some melodious tear." Spenser's *Ruins of Time* were among the number of these funeral songs; but the best of them all was by one Matthew Royden, concerning whom little is known.

A popular class of books in the 17th century were "characters" or "witty descriptions of the properties of sundry persons," such as the Good Schoolmaster, the Clown, the Country Magistrate; much as in some modern *Heads of the People*, where Douglas Jerrold or Leigh Hunt sketches the Medical Student, the Monthly Nurse, etc. A still more modern instance of the kind is George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, which derives its title from the Greek philosopher, Theophrastus, whose character-sketches were the original models of this kind of literature. The most popular character-book in Europe in the 17th century was La Bruyère's *Caractères*. But this was not published till 1688. In England the fashion had been set in 1614, by the *Characters* of Sir Thomas Overbury, who died by poison the year before his book was printed. One of Overbury's sketches—the *Fair and Happy Milkmaid*—is justly celebrated for its old-world sweetness and quaintness. "Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of

June, like a new-made hay-cock. She makes her hand hard with labor, and her heart soft with pity; and when winter evenings fall early, sitting at her merry wheel, she sings defiance to the giddy wheel of fortune. She bestows her year's wages at next fair, and, in choosing her garments, counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and bee-hive are all her physic and surgery, and she lives the longer for it. She dares go alone and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none; yet to say truth, she is never alone, but is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts and prayers, but short ones. Thus lives she, and all her care is she may die in the spring-time, to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet."

There were also private companies of actors maintained by wealthy noblemen, like the Earl of Leicester, and bands of strolling players, who acted in inn-yards and bear-gardens. It was not until stationary theaters were built and stock companies of actors regularly licensed and established, that any plays were produced which deserve the name of literature. In 1576 the first London play-houses, known as the Theater and the Curtain, were erected in the suburb of Shoreditch, outside the city walls. Later the Rose, the Hope, the Globe, and the Swan were built on the Bankside, across the Thames, and play-goers resorting to them were accustomed to "take boat." These locations were chosen in order to get outside the jurisdiction of the mayor and corporation, who were Puritans, and determined in their opposition to the stage. For the same reason the Blackfriars, belonging to the company that owned the Globe—the company in which Shakespeare was a stockholder—was built, about 1596, within the "liberties" of the dissolved monastery of the Blackfriars.

These early theaters were of the rudest construction. The six-penny spectators, or "groundlings," stood in the yard or pit, which had neither floor nor roof. The shilling spectators sat on the stage, where they were accommodated with stools and tobacco pipes, and whence they chaffed the actors or the "opposed rascality" in the yard. There was no scenery, and the female parts were taken by boys. Plays were acted in the afternoon. A placard, with the letters "Venice," or "Rome," or whatever, indicated the place of the action. With such rude appliances must Shakespeare bring before his audience the midnight battlements of Elsinore and the moonlit garden of the Capulets. The dramatists had to throw themselves upon the imagination of their public, and it says much for the imaginative temper of the public of that day, that it responded to

the appeal. It suffered the poet to transport it over wide intervals of space and time, and "with aid of some few foot and half-foot words, fight over York and Lancaster's long jars." Pedantry undertook, even at the very beginnings of the Elizabethan drama, to shackle it with the so-called rules of Aristotle, or classical unities of time and place, to make it keep violent action off the stage and comedy distinct from tragedy. But the playwrights appealed from the critics to the truer sympathies of the audience, and they decided for freedom and action, rather than restraint and recitation. Hence our national drama is of Shakespeare and not of Racine. By 1603 there were twelve play-houses in London in full blast, although the city then numbered only one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants.

Fresh plays were produced every year. The theater was more to the Englishmen of that time than it has ever been before or since. It was his club, his novel, his newspaper, all in one. No great drama has ever flourished apart from a living stage, and it was fortunate that the Elizabethan dramatists were, almost all of them, actors, and familiar with stage effect. Even the few exceptions, like Beaumont and Fletcher, who were young men of good birth and fortune, and not dependent on their pens, were probably intimate with the actors, lived in a theatrical atmosphere, and knew practically how plays should be put on.

William Shakespeare was the greatest dramatic poet of the world and very little is known that it has been possible for ingenious persons to construct a theory—and support it with some show of reason—that the plays which pass under his name were really written by Bacon or some one else. There is no danger of this paradox ever making serious headway, for the historical evidence that Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare's plays, though not overwhelming, is sufficient. But it is startling to think that the greatest creative genius of his day, or perhaps of all time, was suffered to slip out of life so quietly that his title to his own works could even be questioned only two hundred and fifty years after the event. That the single authorship of the Homeric poems should be doubted is not so strange, for Homer is almost prehistoric. But Shakespeare was a modern Englishman, and at the time of his death the first English colony in America was already nine years old. The important known facts of his life can be told almost in a sentence. He was born at Stratford-on-Avon in 1564, married when he was eighteen, went to London probably in 1587, and became an actor, play writer, and stockholder in the company which owned the Blackfriars and the Globe theaters. He seemingly prospered, and retired about 1609 to Stratford, where he

lived in the house that he had bought some years before, and where he died in 1616. His *Venus and Adonis* was printed in 1593, his *Rape of Lucrece* in 1594, and his *Sonnets* in 1609. So far as is known, only eighteen of the thirty-seven plays generally attributed to Shakespeare were printed during his life-time. These were printed singly, in quarto shape, and were little more than stage books, or librettos. The first collected edition of his works was the so-called "First Folio" of 1623, published by his fellow-actors, Heming and Condell. No contemporary of Shakespeare thought it worth while to write a life of the stage-player. There is a number of references to him in the literature of the time; some generous, as in Ben Jonson's well-known verses; others singularly unappreciative, like Webster's mention of "the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare." But all these together do not begin to amount to the sum of what was said about Spenser, or Sidney, or Raleigh, or Ben Jonson. There is, indeed, nothing to show that his contemporaries understood what a man they had among them in the person of "Our English Terence, Mr. Will Shakespeare." The age, for the rest, was not a self-conscious one, nor greatly given to review writing and literary biography. Nor is there enough of self-revelation in Shakespeare's plays to aid the reader in forming a notion of the man. He lost his identity completely in the characters of his plays, as it is the duty of a dramatic writer to do. His sonnets have been examined carefully in search of internal evidence as to his character and life, but the speculations founded upon them have been more ingenious than convincing.

Shakespeare probably began by touching up old plays. *Henry VI.* and the bloody tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*, if Shakespeare's at all, are doubtless only his revision of pieces already on the stage. *The Taming of the Shrew* seems to be an old play worked over by Shakespeare and some other dramatist, and traces of another hand are thought to be visible in parts of *Henry VIII.*, *Pericles*, and *Timon of Athens*. Such partnerships were common among the Elizabethan dramatists, the most illustrious example being the long association of Beaumont and Fletcher. The plays in the First Folio were divided into histories, comedies, and tragedies, and it will be convenient to notice them briefly in that order.

It was a stirring time when the young adventurer came to London to try his fortune. Elizabeth had finally thrown down the gage of battle to Catholic Europe, by the execution of Mary Stuart, in 1587. The following year saw the destruction of the colossal Armada, which Spain had sent to

revenge Mary's death; and hard upon these events followed the gallant exploits of Grenville, Essex, and Raleigh.

That Shakespeare shared the exultant patriotism of the times, and the sense of their aloofness from the continent of Europe, which was now born in the breasts of Englishmen, is evident from many a passage in his plays.

This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in a silver sea,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
England, bound in with the triumphant sea!

His English histories are ten in number. Of these *King John* and *Henry VIII.* are isolated plays. The others form a consecutive series, in the following order: *Richard II.* the two parts of *Henry IV.*, *Henry V.*, the three parts of *Henry VI.*, and *Richard III.* This series may be divided into two, each forming a tetralogy, or group of four plays. In the first the subject is the rise of the house of Lancaster. But the power of the Red Rose was founded in usurpation. In the second group, accordingly, comes the Nemesis, in the civil wars of the Roses, reaching their catastrophe in the downfall of both Lancaster and York, and the tyranny of Gloucester. The happy conclusion is finally reached in the last play of the series, when this new usurper is overthrown in turn, and Henry VII., the first Tudor sovereign, ascends the throne and restores the Lancastrian inheritance, purified, by bloody atonement, from the stain of Richard II.'s murder. These eight plays are, as it were, the eight acts of one great drama; and, if such a thing were possible, they should be represented on successive nights, like the parts of a Greek trilogy. In order of composition the second group came first. *Henry VI.* is strikingly inferior to the others. *Richard III.* is a good acting play, and its popularity has been sustained by a series of great tragedians, who have taken the part of the king. But, in a literary sense, it is unequal to *Richard II.*, or the two parts of *Henry IV.* The latter is unquestionably Shakespeare's greatest historical tragedy, and it contains his master-creation in the region of low comedy, the immortal Falstaff.

The constructive art with which Shakespeare shaped history into drama is well seen in comparing his *King John* with the two plays on that subject which were already on the stage. These, like all the other old "Chronicle histories," such as *Thomas Lord Cromwell* and the *Famous Victories of Henry V.*, follow a merely chronological, or biographical, order, giving events loosely, as they occurred, without any unity of effect, or any reference to their bearing on the catastrophe. Shakespeare's order was logical. He compressed and selected, disregarding the fact of history oftentimes, in favor of the higher truth of fiction; bringing together a crime and its punishment as cause and effect, even though they had no such relation in the chronicle, and were separated, perhaps, by many years.

Shakespeare's first two comedies were experiments. *Love's Labour's Lost* was a play of manners, with hardly any plot. It brought together a number of *humors*, that is, oddities and affectations of various sorts, and played them off on one another, as Ben Jonson afterward did in his comedies of humor. Shakespeare never returned to this type of play, unless, perhaps, in the *Taming of the Shrew*. There the story turned on a single "humor," Katharine's bad temper, just as the story in Jonson's *Silent Woman* turned on Morose's hatred of noise. The *Taming of the Shrew* is, therefore, one of the least Shaksperian of Shakespeare's plays; a *bourgeois* domestic comedy, with a very narrow interest. It belongs to the school of French comedy, like Molière's *Malade Imaginaire*, not to the romantic comedy of Shakespeare and Fletcher.

Shakespeare did not abandon comedy when writing tragedy, though he turned it to a new account. The two species graded into one another. Thus *Cymbeline* is, in its fortunate ending, really as much of a comedy as *Winter's Tale*—to which its plot bears a resemblance—and is only technically a tragedy because it contains a violent death. In some of the tragedies, as in *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, the comedy element is reduced to a minimum. But in others, as *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*, it heightens the tragic feeling by the irony of contrast. Akin to this is the use to which Shakespeare put the old Vice, or Clown, of the moralities. The Fool in *Lear*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, and Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*, are a sort of parody of the function of the Greek chorus, commenting the action of the drama with scraps of bitter, or half-crazy, philosophy, and wonderful gleams of insight into the depths of man's nature.

The earliest of Shakespeare's tragedies, unless *Titus Andronicus* be his, was, doubtless, *Romeo and Juliet*, which is full of the passion and poetry of youth and of first love. It contains a large proportion of riming lines, which is usually a sign in Shakespeare of early work. He dropped rime more and more in his later plays, and his blank verse grew freer and more varied in its pauses and the number of its feet. *Romeo and Juliet* is also unique, among his tragedies, in this respect, that the catastrophe is brought about by a fatality, as in the Greek drama. It was Shakespeare's habit to work out his tragic conclusions from within, through character, rather than through external chances. This is true of all the great tragedies of his middle life, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, in every one of which the catastrophe is involved in the character and actions of the hero. This is so, in a special sense, in *Hamlet*, the subtlest of all Shakespeare's plays, and, if not his masterpiece, at any rate the one which has most attracted and puzzled the greatest minds. It is observable that in Shakespeare's comedies there is no one central figure, but that, in passing into tragedy, he intensified and concentrated the attention upon a single character. This difference is seen even in the naming of the plays; the tragedies always take their titles from their heroes, the comedies never.

Shakespeare is the most universal of writers. He touches more men at more points than Homer, or Dante, or Goethe. The deepest wisdom, the sweetest poetry, the widest range of character, are combined in his plays. He made the English language an organ of expression unexcelled in the history of literature. Yet he is not an English poet simply, but a world-poet. Germany has made him her own, and the Latin races, though at first hindered in a true appreciation of him by the canons of classical taste, have at length learned to know him. An ever-growing mass of Shakespearian literature, in the way of comment and interpretation, critical, textual, historical, or illustrative, testifies to the durability and growth of his fame. Above all, his plays still keep, and probably always will keep, the stage. It is common to speak of Shakespeare and the other Elizabethan dramatists as if they stood, in some sense, on a level. But in truth there is an almost measureless distance between him and all his contemporaries. The rest shared with him in the mighty influences of the age. Their plays are touched here and there with the power and splendor of which they were all joint heirs. But, as a whole, they are obsolete. They live in books, but not in the hearts and on the tongues, of men.

The most remarkable of the dramatists contemporary with Shakespeare was Ben Jonson, whose robust figure is in striking contrast with the other's gracious impersonality. Jonson was nine years younger than Shakespeare. He was educated at Westminster School, served as a soldier in the low countries, became an actor in Henslowe's company, and was twice imprisoned—once for killing a fellow-actor in a duel, and once for his part in the comedy of *Eastward Hoe*, which gave offense to King James. He lived down to the time of Charles I (1635), and became the acknowledged arbiter of English letters and the center of convivial wit combats at the Mermaid, the Devil, and other famous London taverns.

What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid; heard words that have been
So nimble and so full of subtle flame,
As if that every one from whom they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had resolved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life.

The inscription on his tomb in Westminster Abbey is simply

O rare Ben Jonson!

Francis Beaumont. *Letter to Ben Jonson*.

Jonson's comedies were modeled upon the *vetus comædia* of Aristophanes, which was satirical in purpose, and they belonged to an entirely different school from Shakespeare's. They were classical and not romantic, and were pure comedies, admitting no admixture of tragic motives. There is hardly one lovely or beautiful character in the entire range of his dramatic creations. They were comedies not of character, in the high sense of the word, but of manners or humors. His design was to lash the follies and vices of the day, and his *dramatis personæ* consisted for the most part of gulls, impostors, fops, cowards, swaggering braggarts, and "Pauls men." In his first play, *Every Man in his Humor* (acted in 1598), in *Every Man out of his Humor*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and, indeed, in all of his comedies, his subject was the fashionable affectations, the whims, oddities, and eccentric developments of London life. His procedure was

to bring together a number of these fantastic humorists, and "squeeze out the humor of such spongy souls," by playing them off upon each other, involving them in all manner of comical misadventures, and rendering them utterly ridiculous and contemptible. There was thus a perishable element in his art, for manners change; and, however effective this exposure of contemporary affectations may have been before an audience of Jonson's day, it is as hard for a modern reader to detect his points as it will be for a reader two hundred years hence to understand the satire upon the aesthetic craze in such pieces of the present day as *Patience*, or the *Colonel*. Nevertheless, a patient reader, with the help of copious footnotes, can gradually put together for himself an image of that world of obsolete humors in which Jonson's comedy dwells, and can admire the dramatist's solid good sense, his great learning, his skill in construction, and the astonishing fertility of his invention. His characters are not revealed from within, like Shakespeare's, but built up painfully from outside by a succession of minute, laborious particulars. The difference will be plainly manifest if such a character as Slender, in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, be compared with any one of the inexhaustible variety of idiots in Jonson's plays; with Master Stephen, for example, in *Every Man in his Humor*; or, if Falstaff be put side by side with Captain Bobadil, in the same comedy, perhaps Jonson's masterpiece in the way of comic caricature. *Cynthia's Revels* was a satire on the courtiers and the *Poetaster* on Jonson's literary enemies. The *Alchemist* was an exposure of quackery, and is one of his best comedies, but somewhat overweighted with learning. *Volpone* is the most powerful of all his dramas, but is a harsh and disagreeable piece; and the state of society which it depicts is too revolting for comedy. The *Silent Woman* is, perhaps, the easiest of all Jonson's plays for a modern reader to follow and appreciate. There is a distinct plot to it, the situation is extremely ludicrous, and the emphasis is laid upon a single humor or eccentricity, as in some of Molière's lighter comedies, like *Le Malade Imaginaire*, or *Le Médecin malgré lui*.

In spite of his heaviness in drama, Jonson had a light enough touch in lyric poetry. His songs have not the careless sweetness of Shakespeare's, but they have a grace of their own. Such pieces as his *Love's Triumph*, *Hymn to Diana*, the adaptation from Philostratus,

Drink to me only with thine eyes,

and many others entitle their author to rank among the first of English lyrists. Some of these occur in his two collections of miscellaneous verse, the *Forest* and *Underwoods*; others in the numerous masques which he composed. These were a species of entertainment, very popular at the court of James I., combining dialogue with music, intricate dances, and costly scenery. Jonson left an unfinished pastoral drama, the *Sad Shepherd*, which contains passages of great beauty; one, especially, descriptive of the shepherdess

Earine,
Who had her very being and her name
With the first buds and breathings of the spring,
Born with the primrose and the violet
And earliest roses blown.

About the author:

1.3 William Shakespeare (1564-1616), 'The Bard of Avon', English poet and playwright wrote the famous 154 *Sonnets* and numerous highly successful oft quoted dramatic works including the tragedy of the Prince of Denmark, *Hamlet*;

*"Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: to thine ownself be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell: my blessing season this in thee!"*
--Lord Polonius, *Hamlet* Act I, Scene 3

While Shakespeare caused much controversy, he also earned lavish praise and has profoundly impacted the world over in areas of literature, culture, art, theatre, and film and is considered one of the best English language writers ever. From the Preface of the *First Folio* (1623) "To the

memory of my beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare: and what he hath left us"--Ben Jonson;

*"Thou art a Monument, without a tombe
And art alive still, while thy Booke doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give."*

Over the centuries there has been much speculation surrounding various aspects of Shakespeare's life including his religious affiliation, sexual orientation, sources for collaborations, authorship of and chronology of the plays and sonnets. Many of the dates of play performances, when they were written, adapted or revised and printed are imprecise. This biography attempts only to give an overview of his life, while leaving the more learned perspectives to the countless scholars and historians who have devoted their lives to the study and demystification of the man and his works.

England's celebration of their patron Saint George is on 23 April, which is also the day claimed to be the birth date of Shakespeare. Although birth and death dates were not recorded in Shakespeare's time, churches did record baptisms and burials, usually a few days after the actual event. The infant William was baptised on 26 April 1564 in the parish church Holy Trinity of Stratford upon Avon. He lived with his fairly well-to-do parents on Henley Street, the first of the four sons born to John Shakespeare (c1530-1601) and Mary Arden (c1540-1608), who also had four daughters. John Shakespeare was a local businessman and also involved in municipal affairs as Alderman and Bailiff, but a decline in his fortunes in his later years surely had an effect on William.

In his younger years Shakespeare attended the Christian Holy Trinity church, the now famous elegant limestone cross shaped cathedral on the banks of the Avon river, studying the Book of Common Prayer and the English Bible. In 1605 he became lay rector when he paid 440 Pounds towards its upkeep, hence why he is buried in the chancel. Early on Shakespeare likely attended the Elizabethan theatrical productions of travelling theatre troupes, come to Stratford to entertain the local official townsmen, including the Queen's Men, Worcester's Men, Leicester's Men, and

Lord Strange's Men. There is also the time when Queen Elizabeth herself visited nearby Kenilworth Castle and Shakespeare, said to have been duly impressed by the procession, recreated it in some of his later plays.

Although enrolment registers did not survive, around the age of eleven Shakespeare probably entered the grammar school of Stratford, King's New School, where he would have studied theatre and acting, as well as Latin literature and history. When he finished school he might have apprenticed for a time with his father, but there is also mention of his being a school teacher. The next record of his life is in 1582, when still a minor at the age of eighteen and requiring his father's consent, Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway (1556; 1623) married in the village of Temple Grafton. Baptisms of three children were recorded; Susanna (1583-1649), who went on to marry noted physician John Hall, and twins Judith (1585-1662) who married Richard Quiney, and Hamnet (1585-1596) his only son and heir who died at the age of eleven.

Shakespeare wrote most of his plays as 'quarto texts', that being on a sheet of paper folded four ways. A few of his plays were printed in his lifetime, though they appeared more voluminously after his death, sometimes plagiarised and often changed at the whim of the printer. *First Folio* would be the first collection of his dramatic works, a massive undertaking to compile thirty-six plays from the quarto texts, playbooks, transcriptions, and the memories of actors. The approximately nine hundred page manuscript took about two years to complete and was printed in 1623 as *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*. It also featured on the frontispiece the famous engraved portrait of Shakespeare said to be by Martin Droeshout (1601-1651).

The hard facts of Anne Hathaway's life can be summed up in a paragraph. She was born in Shottery in 1556. She married William Shakespeare at some point prior to the birth of their first daughter, Susanna, in May of 1583. In 1585, she bore him two more children, the twins Hamnet and Judith. While Shakespeare made his reputation in London, Anne stayed behind in Stratford. She lived for over a decade with Shakespeare's family in their house on Henley Street, then afterward in New Place when Shakespeare purchased it in 1597. She outlived her husband, dying in August of 1623, and is buried in the chancel of Stratford's Holy Trinity church next to Shakespeare.

It's important to understand how truly little we know about Anne Shakespeare because there is simply so much conjecture about her. Scholars and authors over the centuries have attempted to paint various portraits of Anne. Some suggest a cuckolded, bumpkin wife left behind in Stratford. Others draw a more favorable caricature, such as the love that inspired Shakespeare's muse. Two of the most recent contributions to the field, Stephen Greenblatt's *Will in the World* and Germaine Greer's *Shakespeare's Wife*, offer diametrically opposed viewpoints on the subject. To Greenblatt, Shakespeare hated his wife. To Greer, Anne is a heroine systematically wronged by history. Both viewpoints, whatever their authors' best intentions, must ultimately be recognized for what they are: pure speculation. Learned speculation, perhaps, but speculation nonetheless. For facts, we can only rely on two references: Shakespeare's marriage license and his will.

Poetry

It is generally agreed that most of the Shakespearean Sonnets were written in the 1590s, some printed at this time as well. Others were written or revised right before being printed. 154 sonnets and "A Lover's Complaint" were published by Thomas Thorpe as *Shakespeare's Sonnets* in 1609. The order, dates, and authorship of the Sonnets have been much debated with no conclusive findings. Many have claimed autobiographical details from them, including sonnet number 145 in reference to Anne. The dedication to "Mr. W.H." is said to possibly represent the initials of the third earl of Pembroke William Herbert, or perhaps being a reversal of Henry Wriothesly's initials. Regardless, there have been some unfortunate projections and interpretations of modern concepts onto centuries old works that, while a grasp of contextual historical information can certainly lend to their depth and meaning, can also be enjoyed as valuable poetical works that have transcended time and been surpassed by no other.

Shakespeare's works were collected and printed in various editions in the century following his death, and by the early eighteenth century his reputation as the greatest poet ever to write in English was well established. The unprecedented admiration garnered by his works led to a fierce curiosity about Shakespeare's life; but the paucity of surviving biographical information has left many details of Shakespeare's personal history shrouded in mystery. Some people have concluded from this fact that Shakespeare's plays in reality were written by someone else—

Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford are the two most popular candidates—but the evidence for this claim is overwhelmingly circumstantial, and the theory is not taken seriously by many scholars. In the absence of definitive proof to the contrary, Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the 37 plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to affect profoundly the course of Western literature and culture ever after.

The Sonnets

Shakespeare's sonnets are very different from Shakespeare's plays, but they do contain dramatic elements and an overall sense of story. Each of the poems deals with a highly personal theme, and each can be taken on its own or in relation to the poems around it. The sonnets have the feel of autobiographical poems, but we don't know whether they deal with real events or not, because no one knows enough about Shakespeare's life to say whether or not they deal with real events and feelings, so we tend to refer to the voice of the sonnets as "the speaker"—as though he were a dramatic creation like Hamlet or King Lear.

There are certainly a number of intriguing continuities throughout the poems. The first 126 of the sonnets seem to be addressed to an unnamed young nobleman, whom the speaker loves very much; the rest of the poems (except for the last two, which seem generally unconnected to the rest of the sequence) seem to be addressed to a mysterious woman, whom the speaker loves, hates, and lusts for simultaneously. The two addressees of the sonnets are usually referred to as the "young man" and the "dark lady"; in summaries of individual poems, I have also called the young man the "beloved" and the dark lady the "lover," especially in cases where their identity can only be surmised. Within the two mini-sequences, there are a number of other discernible elements of "plot": the speaker urges the young man to have children; he is forced to endure a separation from him; he competes with a rival poet for the young man's patronage and affection. At two points in the sequence, it seems that the young man and the dark lady are actually lovers themselves—a state of affairs with which the speaker is none too happy. But while these continuities give the poems a narrative flow and a helpful frame of reference, they have been

frustratingly hard for scholars and biographers to pin down. In Shakespeare's life, who were the young man and the dark lady?

Historical Mysteries

Of all the questions surrounding Shakespeare's life, the sonnets are perhaps the most intriguing. At the time of their publication in 1609 (after having been written most likely in the 1590s and shown only to a small circle of literary admirers), they were dedicated to a "Mr. W.H.," who is described as the "onlie begetter" of the poems. Like those of the young man and the dark lady, the identity of this Mr. W.H. remains an alluring mystery. Because he is described as "begetting" the sonnets, and because the young man seems to be the speaker's financial patron, some people have speculated that the young man *is* Mr. W.H. If his initials were reversed, he might even be Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, who has often been linked to Shakespeare in theories of his history. But all of this is simply speculation: ultimately, the circumstances surrounding the sonnets, their cast of characters and their relations to Shakespeare himself, are destined to remain a mystery.

Tragedies

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

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

Romeo and Juliet 1594-95 (1597),

Hamlet 1600-01 (1603),

Julius Caesar 1600-01 (1623),

Othello 1604-05 (1622),

Antony and Cleopatra 1606-07 (1623),

King Lear 1606 (1608),

Coriolanus 1607-08 (1623), derived from Plutarch

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

Histories

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

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

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

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

King John 1596-97 (1623);

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

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

King Henry V 1598-99 (1600);

Richard II 1600-01 (1597);

Richard III 1601 (1597); and

King Henry VIII 1612-13 (1623)

Comedies, again listed in chronological order of performance.

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

Comedy of Errors 1594 (1623),

Two Gentlemen of Verona 1594-95 (1623),

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

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

Merchant of Venice 1596-1597 (1600),

Much Ado About Nothing 1598-1599 (1600),

As You Like It 1599-00 (1623),

Merry Wives of Windsor 1600-01 (1602),
Troilus and Cressida 1602 (1609),
Twelfth Night 1602 (1623),
All's Well That Ends Well 1602-03 (1623),
Measure for Measure 1604 (1623),
Pericles, Prince of Tyre 1608-09 (1609),
Tempest (1611),
Cymbeline 1611-12 (1623),
Winter's Tale 1611-12 (1623).

Major Plays:

Shakespeare had written 37 plays out of which nineteen plays in Shakespeare's canon had appeared in quarto format before the publication of the First Folio in 1623. With the exception of *Othello* (1622), all of the quartos were published prior to the date of Shakespeare's retirement from the theatre in about 1611. It is unlikely that Shakespeare was involved directly with the printing of any of his plays, although it should be noted that two of his poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* were almost certainly printed under his direct supervision.

2.0 A Brief summary of some of major plays:

Julius Caesar:

Two tribunes, Flavius and Murellus, find scores of Roman citizens wandering the streets, neglecting their work in order to watch Julius Caesar's triumphal parade: Caesar has defeated the sons of the deceased Roman general Pompey, his archrival, in battle. The tribunes scold the citizens for abandoning their duties and remove decorations from Caesar's statues. Caesar enters with his entourage, including the military and political figures Brutus, Cassius, and Antony. A Soothsayer calls out to Caesar to "beware the Ides of March," but Caesar ignores him and proceeds with his victory celebration (I.ii.19, I.ii.25).

Cassius and Brutus, both longtime intimates of Caesar and each other, converse. Cassius tells Brutus that he has seemed distant lately; Brutus replies that he has been at war with himself. Cassius states that he wishes Brutus could see himself as others see him, for then Brutus would

realize how honored and respected he is. Brutus says that he fears that the people want Caesar to become king, which would overturn the republic. Cassius concurs that Caesar is treated like a god though he is merely a man, no better than Brutus or Cassius. Cassius recalls incidents of Caesar's physical weakness and marvels that this fallible man has become so powerful. He blames his and Brutus's lack of will for allowing Caesar's rise to power: surely the rise of such a man cannot be the work of fate. Brutus considers Cassius's words as Caesar returns. Upon seeing Cassius, Caesar tells Antony that he deeply distrusts Cassius.

That night, Rome is plagued with violent weather and a variety of bad omens and portents. Brutus finds letters in his house apparently written by Roman citizens worried that Caesar has become too powerful. The letters have in fact been forged and planted by Cassius, who knows that if Brutus believes it is the people's will, he will support a plot to remove Caesar from power. A committed supporter of the republic, Brutus fears the possibility of a dictator-led empire, worrying that the populace would lose its voice. Cassius arrives at Brutus's home with his conspirators, and Brutus, who has already been won over by the letters, takes control of the meeting. The men agree to lure Caesar from his house and kill him. Cassius wants to kill Antony too, for Antony will surely try to hinder their plans, but Brutus disagrees, believing that too many deaths will render their plot too bloody and dishonor them. Having agreed to spare Antony, the conspirators depart. Portia, Brutus's wife, observes that Brutus appears preoccupied. She pleads with him to confide in her, but he rebuffs her.

Caesar prepares to go to the Senate. His wife, Calpurnia, begs him not to go, describing recent nightmares she has had in which a statue of Caesar streamed with blood and smiling men bathed their hands in the blood. Caesar refuses to yield to fear and insists on going about his daily business. Finally, Calpurnia convinces him to stay home—if not out of caution, then as a favor to her. But Decius, one of the conspirators, then arrives and convinces Caesar that Calpurnia has misinterpreted her dreams and the recent omens. Caesar departs for the Senate in the company of the conspirators.

As Caesar proceeds through the streets toward the Senate, the Soothsayer again tries but fails to get his attention. The citizen Artemidorus hands him a letter warning him about the conspirators, but Caesar refuses to read it, saying that his closest personal concerns are his last priority. At the

Senate, the conspirators speak to Caesar, bowing at his feet and encircling him. One by one, they stab him to death. When Caesar sees his dear friend Brutus among his murderers, he gives up his struggle and dies.

The murderers bathe their hands and swords in Caesar's blood, thus bringing Calpurnia's premonition to fruition. Antony, having been led away on a false pretext, returns and pledges allegiance to Brutus but weeps over Caesar's body. He shakes hands with the conspirators, thus marking them all as guilty while appearing to make a gesture of conciliation. When Antony asks why they killed Caesar, Brutus replies that he will explain their purpose in a funeral oration. Antony asks to be allowed to speak over the body as well; Brutus grants his permission, though Cassius remains suspicious of Antony. The conspirators depart, and Antony, alone now, swears that Caesar's death shall be avenged.

Brutus and Cassius go to the Forum to speak to the public. Cassius exits to address another part of the crowd. Brutus declares to the masses that though he loved Caesar, he loves Rome more, and Caesar's ambition posed a danger to Roman liberty. The speech placates the crowd. Antony appears with Caesar's body, and Brutus departs after turning the pulpit over to Antony. Repeatedly referring to Brutus as "an honorable man," Antony's speech becomes increasingly sarcastic; questioning the claims that Brutus made in his speech that Caesar acted only out of ambition, Antony points out that Caesar brought much wealth and glory to Rome, and three times turned down offers of the crown. Antony then produces Caesar's will but announces that he will not read it for it would upset the people inordinately. The crowd nevertheless begs him to read the will, so he descends from the pulpit to stand next to Caesar's body. He describes Caesar's horrible death and shows Caesar's wounded body to the crowd. He then reads Caesar's will, which bequeaths a sum of money to every citizen and orders that his private gardens be made public. The crowd becomes enraged that this generous man lies dead; calling Brutus and Cassius traitors, the masses set off to drive them from the city.

Meanwhile, Caesar's adopted son and appointed successor, Octavius, arrives in Rome and forms a three-person coalition with Antony and Lepidus. They prepare to fight Cassius and Brutus, who have been driven into exile and are raising armies outside the city. At the conspirators' camp, Brutus and Cassius have a heated argument regarding matters of money and honor, but they

ultimately reconcile. Brutus reveals that he is sick with grief, for in his absence Portia has killed herself. The two continue to prepare for battle with Antony and Octavius. That night, the Ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus, announcing that Brutus will meet him again on the battlefield. Octavius and Antony march their army toward Brutus and Cassius. Antony tells Octavius where to attack, but Octavius says that he will make his own orders; he is already asserting his authority as the heir of Caesar and the next ruler of Rome. The opposing generals meet on the battlefield and exchange insults before beginning combat.

Cassius witnesses his own men fleeing and hears that Brutus's men are not performing effectively. Cassius sends one of his men, Pindarus, to see how matters are progressing. From afar, Pindarus sees one of their leaders, Cassius's best friend, Titinius, being surrounded by cheering troops and concludes that he has been captured. Cassius despairs and orders Pindarus to kill him with his own sword. He dies proclaiming that Caesar is avenged. Titinius himself then arrives—the men encircling him were actually his comrades, cheering a victory he had earned. Titinius sees Cassius's corpse and, mourning the death of his friend, kills himself.

Brutus learns of the deaths of Cassius and Titinius with a heavy heart, and prepares to take on the Romans again. When his army loses, doom appears imminent. Brutus asks one of his men to hold his sword while he impales himself on it. Finally, Caesar can rest satisfied, he says as he dies. Octavius and Antony arrive. Antony speaks over Brutus's body, calling him the noblest Roman of all. While the other conspirators acted out of envy and ambition, he observes, Brutus genuinely believed that he acted for the benefit of Rome. Octavius orders that Brutus be buried in the most honorable way. The men then depart to celebrate their victory.

Midsummer Night's Dream:

Theseus the duke of Athens, is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, A courtier seeks the Duke's intervention because his daughter, Hermia, will not agree to his choice of Demetrius as a husband: she's in love with Lysander. The Duke tells Hermia to obey her father, or either die or accept a life as a nun in Diana's temple. Lysander and Hermia plan to elope, and they tell Helena, who is in love with Demetrius, but he hates her and loves Hermia. The lovers run away from Athens but get lost in the woods. They are followed by Demetrius, and then by Helena, who has told him of their intentions.

Oberon, king of the fairies, who lives in the woods, has quarrelled with his queen, Titania, over an Indian boy she refuses to give him. Oberon overhears Helena and Demetrius arguing and sends his mischievous servant, Puck, to get a flower whose juice has the power to make people fall in love with the first creature they see when the juice is placed on their eyelids while asleep. He instructs Puck to put some drops on Demetrius' eyes. Mistaking the Athenian he seeks, Puck puts the flower juice on the eyes of the sleeping Lysander so that when he is woken by Helena he immediately falls in love with her and rejects Hermia.

Some artisans are rehearsing a play about the tragic love-story of Pyramus and Thisbe to present before Theseus on his wedding day. Bottom, the weaver, is to play the lover, Pyramus, while Flute, the bellows-mender, is to play Thisbe. The others play the parts of the Moon, the Wall and the Lion and they are directed by Quince, the carpenter. Puck overhears their rehearsals in the wood and he plays a trick on them by giving Bottom an ass's head which frightens the others away. Bottom is lured towards the sleeping Titania whom Oberon has treated with the flower juice. On waking, she falls in love with the ass and entertains him with her fairies, but when Bottom falls asleep beside her, Oberon restores Titania's sight and wakes her. She is appalled at the sight of what she has been in love with and is reunited with Oberon.

Puck removes the ass's head and Bottom returns to Athens and rejoins his friends as they prepare to perform their play. Meanwhile the lovers' arguments tire them out as they chase one another through the woods and when Demetrius rests, Oberon puts magic juice on his eyes so that both he and Lysander pursue Helena until the fourlovers fall asleep, exhausted. Puck puts juice on Lysander's eyes before the lovers are woken by Theseus and Hippolyta and their dawn hunting party. Happily reunited to each other, Lysander with Hermia, Demetrius with Helena, they agree to share the Duke's wedding day. The rustics perform the play of Pyramus and Thisbe before the wedding guests. As the three couples retire Puck and the fairies return to bless the palace and its people.

Antony and Cleopatra

After defeating Brutus and Cassius, following the assassination of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony becomes one of the three rulers of the Roman Empire, together with Octavius Caesar and

Lepidus, and is responsible for the eastern part of the empire. He falls in love with Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, and settles in Alexandria. However, he is compelled to return to Rome when the empire is threatened by the rebellion of Sextus Pompey, the son of Pompey, who had been defeated by Julius Caesar.

As his wife has just died Antony marries Octavius' sister, Octavia, in an attempt to heal the rift between the two emperors. They make peace with Pompey. When Cleopatra hears about Antony's marriage she flies into a jealous rage but knows that Antony does not love Octavia. Antony goes to Athens but when war breaks out between Caesar and Pompey, Antony sends Octavia back to Rome and returns to Egypt.

Caesar is incensed with Antony's behaviour and he declares war on both Antony and Cleopatra. When the Romans arrive Antony is offered a choice of how to fight and, despite being renowned as the world's greatest soldier, he chooses to fight on sea. The Egyptian navy is inadequate and when Cleopatra's navy turns and flees, Antony follows them and Caesar defeats him.

Cleopatra goes to her tomb and sends a message to Antony that she is dead. Antony is devastated and decides to kill himself. He botches the suicide and wounds himself without dying. His followers take him to Cleopatra's tomb, where he dies in her arms.

Cleopatra's life is in tatters. Having lost Antony and being at the mercy of Caesar, she resolves to commit suicide. She has someone bring her some poisonous snakes and incites them to bite her. Caesar arrives just after her death and orders that the two lovers be buried together.

King Lear:

he Earl of Gloucester introduces his illegitimate son, Edmund, to the Earl of Kent at court. Lear, King of Britain, enters. Now that he is old Lear has decided to abdicate, retire, and divide his kingdom between his three daughters. Each will receive a portion of the kingdom according to how much they love him. Goneril, Duchess of Albany, the oldest, and Regan, Duchess of Cornwall, the second, both speak eloquently and receive their portion but Cordelia, the youngest, can say nothing. Her declaration that she loves him according to a daughter's duty to a father enrages him and she is disowned.

One of Cordelia's suitors, the Duke of Burgundy, rejects her once she is dowerless but the King of France understands her declaration and takes her as his wife, while the Earl of Kent is banished for taking Cordelia's part against the King. The kingdom is shared between Goneril and Regan. Lear tells them that he intends to live alternately with each of them.

Meanwhile, Edmund is determined to be recognised as a rightful son of Gloucester and persuades his father that his legitimate brother, Edgar, is plotting against Gloucester's life, using a deceitful device. Edmund warns Edgar that his life is in danger. Edgar flees and disguises himself as a beggar. Goneril becomes increasingly exasperated by the behaviour of Lear's hundred followers, who are disturbing life at Albany's castle. Kent has returned in disguise and gains a place as a servant to Lear, supporting the King against Goneril's ambitious servant, Oswald. Lear eventually curses Goneril and leaves to move in with Regan.

Edmund acts as a messenger between the sisters and is courted by each in turn. He persuades Cornwall that Gloucester is an enemy because, through loyalty to his King, Gloucester assists Lear and his devoted companion, the Fool, when they are turned away by Regan and told to return to Goneril's household. Despairing of his daughters and regretting his rejection of Cordelia, Lear goes out into the wilderness during a fierce storm. He goes mad. Gloucester takes them into a hut for shelter and seeks the aid of Kent to get them away to the coast, where Cordelia has landed with a French army to fight for her father against her sisters and their husbands.

Edgar, pretending to be mad, has also taken refuge in the shelter and the Fool, the mad king and the beggar are companions until Edgar finds his father wandering and in pain. Gloucester has been blinded by Regan and Cornwall for his traitorous act in helping Lear. Cornwall has been killed by a servant after blinding Gloucester but Regan continues to rule with Edmund's help. Not recognised by his father, Edgar leads him to the coast and helps him, during the journey, to come to an acceptance of his life. Gloucester meets the mad Lear on Dover beach, near Cordelia's camp and, with Kent's aid, Lear is rescued and re-united with Cordelia. Gloucester, although reconciled with Edgar, dies alone.

The French forces are defeated by Albany's army led by Edmund, and Lear and Cordelia are captured. Goneril has poisoned Regan in jealous rivalry for Edmund's attention but Edgar, disguised now as a loyal knight, challenges Edmund to a duel and wounds him mortally. Seeing no way out, Goneril kills herself. The dying Edmund confesses his crimes, but it is too late to save Cordelia from the hangman. Lear's heart breaks as he carries the body of his beloved daughter in his arms, and Albany and Edgar are left to re-organise the kingdom.

Othello:

In the opening scene, Iago complains to Roderigo that Othello, his Commander, has passed him over to promote the handsome young Cassio to be his Lieutenant. He vows to get revenge. Iago first asks Roderigo to tell Desdemona's father, Brabantio, that his daughter has left to marry Othello, a marriage Brabantio opposes because Othello is a Moor. Brabantio confronts Othello, and they take their argument to the Duke, who has summoned Othello to ask him to sail to Cyprus to stop a Turkish invasion. Convinced by Othello and Desdemona that they love each other deeply despite their differences, the Duke gives Desdemona permission to travel with Othello. By the time they reach Cyprus the foreign threat has gone.

Iago manipulates Cassio to make him drunk and gets Roderigo to draw him into a street fight. Iago has his revenge on Cassio when Othello strips Cassio of his rank for misbehavior. Then Iago decides to make Othello believe his wife is unfaithful. He encourages Cassio to ask Desdemona to plead with Othello to be reinstated. Iago suggests to Othello that Desdemona is Cassio's lover. Trusting Iago, and mad with jealousy, Othello promotes Iago and asks Iago to help him kill Cassio and Desdemona.

Iago plants Desdemona's handkerchief in Cassio's room. Cassio gives it to his mistress, Bianca. Othello believes Bianca's possession of the handkerchief is proof that Desdemona and Cassio are lovers. He verbally abuses his wife in front of others, who are shocked at the change in the noble and powerful man.

Iago has manipulated Roderigo into trying to kill Cassio. The attempt goes wrong, and Cassio wounds Roderigo; Iago stabs Cassio in the leg. Othello hears Cassio cry out and thinks Iago has killed him. He returns home, ready to kill Desdemona. Meanwhile, Iago "finds" the wounded

Cassio and accuses Bianca of causing Cassio's injury. Iago quietly kills Roderigo and sends Emilia (Iago's wife) to Desdemona with news of what has happened.

Othello reaches the sleeping Desdemona first. He kisses her, wakes her, and accuses her again. Over her protests that she loves him and is innocent, he smothers her. Emilia enters and Desdemona revives for a moment, declaring herself guiltless but saying, as she dies, that Othello is innocent of her death. Iago and others enter, and Emilia defends Desdemona's innocence, recognizing that Iago is behind the tragedy. Othello sees the truth and tries to kill Iago. Iago kills Emilia and flees; Othello condemns himself and commits suicide. Iago is seized and taken away.

Romeo & Juliet:

On a hot morning fighting by young servants of the Capulet and Montague families is stopped by the Prince who tells them that the next person who breaks the peace will be punished with death.

Capulet plans a feast to introduce his daughter, Juliet, who is almost fourteen, to the Count Paris who would like to marry her. By a mistake of the illiterate servant Peter, Montague's son, Romeo, and his friends Benvolio and the Prince's cousin Mercutio, hear of the party and decide to go in disguise. Romeo hopes he will see his adored Rosaline but instead he meets and falls in love with Juliet.

Juliet's cousin Tybalt recognises the Montagues and they are forced to leave the party just as Romeo and Juliet have each discovered the other's identity. Romeo lingers near the Capulet's house and talks to Juliet when she appears on her balcony. With the help of Juliet's Nurse the lovers arrange to meet next day at the cell of Friar Lawrence when Juliet goes for confession, and they are married by him.

Tybalt picks a quarrel with Mercutio and his friends and Mercutio is accidentally killed as Romeo intervenes to try to break up the fight. Romeo pursues Tybalt in anger, kills him and is banished by the Prince for the deed. Juliet is anxious that Romeo is late meeting her and learns of the fighting from her Nurse. With Friar Lawrence's help it is arranged that Romeo will spend the night with Juliet before taking refuge at Mantua.

To calm the family's sorrow at Tybalt's death the day for the marriage of Juliet to Paris is brought forward. Capulet and his wife are angry that Juliet does not wish to marry Paris, not knowing of her secret contract with Romeo.

Friar Lawrence helps Juliet by providing a sleeping potion that will make everyone think she's dead. Romeo will then come to her tomb and take her away. When the wedding party arrives to greet Juliet next day they think she is dead. The Friar sends a colleague to warn Romeo to come to the Capulet's family monument to rescue his sleeping wife but the message doesn't get through and Romeo he returns to Verona and goes to the tomb where he surprises and kills the mourning aring instead that Juliet is dead, buys poison in Mantua. Paris. Romeo takes the poison and dies just as Juliet awakes from her drugged sleep. She learns what has happened from Friar Lawrence but she refuses to leave the tomb and stabs herself as the Friar returns with the Prince, the Capulets and Romeo's father. The deaths of their children lead the families to make peace, promising to erect a monument in their memory.

The Taming of the Shrew:

The play opens as the student Lucentio arrives in Padua. He hears that the merchant Baptista has two daughters, but the younger, prettier daughter, Bianca, cannot be married before her strong-willed sister, Katherina. On seeing Bianca Lucentio falls in love with her and changes identities with his servant Tranio. Bianca already has two suitors, but doesn't like either. The elderly Gremio hires Lucentio, disguised as a Latin tutor, to woo Bianca on his behalf, while Hortensio disguises himself as a musician to get access to her. Meanwhile Petruchio, a young adventurer from Verona, arrives to visit his friend Hortensio. He learns about Katherina and decides to woo her, aided by both Gremio and Hortensio.

Baptista is enthusiastic about Petruchio's suit because the feisty Katherina is a burden to him and is continually quarrelling with her sister and with him. Petruchio will not be put off as he woos Kate and he fixes their wedding day. At the church, where Kate unwillingly awaits him, Petruchio arrives in an absurd outfit and after the ceremony he leaves for Verona immediately, with his new wife. On reaching there Kate is mistreated by Petruchio and his servants, and is denied food and sleep. To teach her to obey him Petruchio does not allow her new clothes or a

hat. Eventually, worn down by her husband's relentless eccentricity, Kate submits and accepts all his eccentricities. They set off to visit her father in Padua.

On the journey the couple meet Vincentio, Lucentio's wealthy father, who is subjected to a strange conversation as Petruchio tests Kate's obedience. The three reach Padua where Hortensio, rejected by Bianca, has married a widow and Baptista has been tricked into believing a passing stranger is Tranio's rich father. While Vincentio attempts to unravel the complexities of the situation his son Lucentio returns from a secret wedding with Bianca.

Nevertheless, Baptista holds a wedding feast for both his daughters. As the men relax after their meal Petruchio devises a competition to prove whose wife is the most obedient. Bianca and the widow fail to come to their husbands when called while Kate lectures the women on the duties of a wife.

3.0 Major Themes:

The theme of a play is the underpinning issue or idea that propels and sustains the play. Gibson refers to themes as, the underlying motifs that give shape, pattern and significance to a play. The commonly used themes of Shakespearean plays are as follows:

A. Through Language

The theme is conveyed most powerfully through language. This may be through individual words uttered repetitiously throughout a play such as 'blood', 'honest' or 'nothing' or through the use of a particular language device such as antithesis and oxymoron.

B. Through Recurring Images

For the audience, imagery builds up a sense of deep preoccupation of the play. Images of light and darkness in 'Romeo and Juliet' are but one example; suffering bodies in 'King Lear'; the theme of false appearance in 'Macbeth' are others.

As time passes, different generations look at the themes in Shakespeare with new eyes, redefining and reinterpreting as influenced by the political, social and cultural conditions of each

era. How you interpret the play we explore this semester will depend on your own cultural and societal values and mores and how you see the characters and issues that they face.

Four Common Themes

1. Conflict

Here lies the essence of all drama and in Shakespeare's drama, conflict can take many forms. It may be rivals in love and war, quarrels within families or quarrels between families, historical and political quarrels.

2. Appearance and reality

Shakespeare is a master of making people and things appear what they are not. Women pretend to be men, others pretend to be friends whilst planning treachery, characters pretend to be mad; identities are mistaken. In some plays, the idea of appearance and reality lies at the very heart of what the play is about. 'Measure for Measure' is depends on the notion of 'appearance' whilst in 'Macbeth' and 'Hamlet' there is also deceit and treachery.

Consider some of these lines:

There's daggers in men's smiles

Some that smile have in their hearts, I fear, millions of mischief

Why, I can smile and murder whiles I smile

I did not smile till now

One may smile, and smile, and be a villain

Shakespeare loved the idea of disguise and used it often. One of his favourite variants on this idea was to have girls disguise themselves as boys. (as men only played women in Shakespeare's time, this added even more complexity to the issue). Here are some of the most significant of his usage of disguise:

Order, Disorder and Change

Another common element in Shakespeare's plays is the idea of stability giving way to confusion. This may happen to a person (King Lear goes mad), to society (England is divided by civil war), or nature (storms and tempests fractured the lives of people and societies). (adapted from Gibson p.132) The ultimate ending in these plays is restoration - restoration to all that has been destroyed, insight to those who have been in misery or madness. Indeed, Shakespearean scholars have argued diversely about whether Shakespeare ends his plays with all restored or that disorder still exists. What we do know is that in every play characters change in this way. This may be from life to death or the development of new insights and empathy.

Here are some examples as outlined by Gibson:

Nick Bottom is magically transformed into an ass in 'Midsummer's Night's Dream'.

In 'Twelfth Night', a false letter tricks Malvolio into changing from a puritan steward to a foolish would be lover

Sometimes change happens in unique contexts: the woods, a heath, an island or a near magical setting of some kind.

Time usually underlines the changes witnessed in the plays.

Levels

Gibson points out that themes work at three different levels in each play:

1. The individual level (psychological, personal). Personal conflict, mental or spiritual disorder may be experienced by a specific character/s
2. The social level (family, nation, society)
3. The natural level (cosmic, supernatural or nature). This can be witnessed in the forms of storms, witches, ghosts or nature itself. Disruptions and conflict in the life of the characters is mirrored by disruptions in nature which are then often restored by the end of the play.

Some Particular Themes

1. *Macbeth*. ambition, evil, order and disorder, appearance and reality, violence and tyranny, guilt and conscience, witchcraft and magic
2. *Romeo and Juliet*. love and hate, fate and free will, life and death, youth against age, fortune.
3. *The Tempest*. nature V nurture, imprisonment and freedom, colonialism, illusion and magic, forgiveness and reconciliation, sleep and dreams, transformation
4. *Hamlet*. procrastination, madness, revenge, sin and salvation, poison, theatre and acting, corruption
5. *King Lear*. justice, nature, sight and blindness, the tortured and broken body
6. *Othello*. jealousy, racism, self-deception

4.0 Acting and the Theatre

Shakespeare was intrigued with the profession of acting and he wrote all his plays of the human condition with one recurring theme - that the world is a stage, that humankind, like actors, make a fleeting and brief appearance on earth/stage to 'play their part.'

Consider this wonderful piece of work from 'As you Like It' that compares the journey of the individual through life to the differing parts an actor plays on stage:

All the world's a stage,

And all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their entrances,

And one man in his time plays many parts,

*His Acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.*

*Then, the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous I honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
even in the cannon's mouth. And then, the justice,
In fair round belly, with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances,
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again towards childish treble pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last Scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything. (in Gibson, p.137)*

William Shakespeare's tragedies are often gripping plays with bloody endings that leave the audiences and readers breathless. Set in places like Rome, Venice, and even Denmark; these tragedies tend to end with all the cards lying on the table, or in other words, all the main characters are dead. Not all tragedies however, have to necessarily be self-contained tragic plays; in fact, many plays on Romance and Fantasy also have tragic characters, as we shall see in the upcoming examples. William Shakespeare not only creates tragedies within plays, but he creates tragic events within characters' lives, which inevitably draws the audience in. Shakespeare uses tragedies to reveal the consequences of a leader's actions and emotions.

A.C. Bradley, who wrote *Shakespearean Tragedy* sums up the plot of a true tragedy in perhaps one of the best ways. First, he suggests that there is a "circle of events"(www.clicknotes.com) to all Shakespearean tragedies that "lead up to, and include, the death of the hero". Secondly, there has to be a fall of the conspicuous person (such as Iago and Aaron), and third, the tragic character/hero must be a great man. Shakespeare definitely follows these rules, or more importantly, he created them, and in the meantime, set the standard for the modern day tragic hero as well.

Perhaps one of the best know Shakespeare plays is Hamlet, where the premise is focused on a young Prince who has lost his father through the devious actions of his Uncle, who has also become his new stepfather. Readers can see many examples of a leader or a character in a leadership role fall from grace because of the way the characters all seem to go through role changes.

The critic Michael Mangan has many insights into the character of Hamlet in his book *A Preface to Shakespeare's Tragedies* by revealing the "role-playing"(139) aspect of the character. This ties-in nicely to the idea that Shakespeare creates a character that will inevitably fall due to his own actions, as it is the preempted acting that drives Hamlet's family and friends to change his life for him. Sometimes Shakespeare will repeat individual theme words throughout the play. In *Macbeth* the most frequent word is 'blood,' 'Blood' is a word with a multitude of meanings. At its most dramatic it refers to violence, something that's very prominent in the play. There is a lot of killing, a lot of blood seen, and the characters use the word in everything they say. It's here

that Shakespeare invents the word 'bloody', turning 'blood' into an adjective for the first time. 'Blood' also refers to family, as in blood relatives. Macbeth is the cousin of Duncan, whom he murders. Immediately after the murder the word 'blood' is dramatised by the indelible blood on his hands. Blood also suggests such things as courage, youth, and anger.

King Lear is a play that explores the concept of possession and identity. Lear is stripped of both. The word 'nothing' ripples through the text. Also in *King Lear*, there is a great deal of cruelty. There is also a great deal of tenderness and healing. Shakespeare repeats the word 'hands' throughout. The human hand is used both for cruelty and tenderness and we see images of physical cruelty with hands ripping and tearing, clawing and wounding. Regan, for example, rips Gloucester's eyes out with her hands. We also see hands raising someone up, blessing and stroking. 'Hands' is used for expressing both themes and, in addition, the theme of good versus evil.

In some plays Shakespeare uses a particular language device throughout. In *Measure for Measure* things are being balanced all the time. One of the main themes in the play is justice, and so we see everything being balanced against something else, reflecting that theme.

Recurring images is another device Shakespeare uses. In *Romeo and Juliet* there are recurring images that contrast light and darkness, reflecting young love doomed to death.

It's not possible to say definitively what Shakespeare's themes are because each generation finds something that speaks to their generation. In previous centuries when European countries invaded and ruthlessly killed or exploited the inhabitants of the places they colonised that was universally regarded as acceptable. We don't accept that anymore and politicians now apologise for it. Scholars of the present generation now look at *The Tempest* with new eyes. Instead of Caliban being only a horrible and detestable monster, we see him also as the dispossessed and enslaved inhabitant of the island that belongs to him. We now take the question 'who does this island belong to?' seriously, which previous generations did not. The generations that follow us will find things in Shakespeare's plays that concern them deeply but of which we are not aware.

It's possible to see common themes that appear in all the plays. The four most prominent are: *appearance and reality*; *change*; *order and disorder*; and *conflict*. Those were matters that deeply affected Shakespeare as he walked about and observed the world around him. In his

declining years he became interested in the refreshment that the countryside brings as an antidote to the evils and corruption of city life. When he became the grandfather of a little girl he became interested in the redeeming effect that the youngest generation has on the oldest and we see that in plays like *The Tempest*, the *Winter's Tale* and *Pericles*, where there are all young girls who bring about the redemption of the corruption perpetrated by the old, worn-out generation, still pursuing their greedy ambitions.

5.0 Famous Characters:

Men:

Brutus was the most complex character in *Julius Caesar* and is also the play's tragic hero. In his soliloquies, the audience gains insight into the complexities of his motives. He is a powerful public figure, but he appears also as a husband, a master to his servants, a dignified military leader, and a loving friend. The conflicting value systems that battle with each other in the play as a whole are enacted on a microcosmic level in Brutus's mind. Even after Brutus has committed the assassination with the other members of the conspiracy, questions remain as to whether, in light of his friendship with Caesar, the murder was a noble, decidedly selfless act or proof of a truly evil callousness, a gross indifference to the ties of friendship and a failure to be moved by the power of a truly great man.

Brutus's rigid idealism is both his greatest virtue and his most deadly flaw. In the world of the play, where self-serving ambition seems to dominate all other motivations, Brutus lives up to Antony's elegiac description of him as "the noblest of Romans." However, his commitment to principle repeatedly leads him to make miscalculations: wanting to curtail violence, he ignores Cassius's suggestion that the conspirators kill Antony as well as Caesar. In another moment of naïve idealism, he again ignores Cassius's advice and allows Antony to speak a funeral oration over Caesar's body. As a result, Brutus forfeits the authority of having the last word on the murder and thus allows Antony to incite the plebeians to riot against him and the other conspirators. Brutus later endangers his good relationship with Cassius by self-righteously condemning what he sees as dishonorable fund-raising tactics on Cassius's part. In all of these episodes, Brutus acts out of a desire to limit the self-serving aspects of his actions; ironically,

however, in each incident he dooms the very cause that he seeks to promote, thus serving no one at all.

Julius Caesar

The conspirators charge Caesar with ambition, and his behavior substantiates this judgment: he does vie for absolute power over Rome, reveling in the homage he receives from others and in his conception of himself as a figure who will live on forever in men's minds. However, his faith in his own permanence—in the sense of both his loyalty to principles and his fixture as a public institution—eventually proves his undoing. At first, he stubbornly refuses to heed the nightmares of his wife, Calpurnia, and the supernatural omens pervading the atmosphere. Though he is eventually persuaded not to go to the Senate, Caesar ultimately lets his ambition get the better of him, as the prospect of being crowned king proves too glorious to resist.

Caesar's conflation of his public image with his private self helps bring about his death, since he mistakenly believes that the immortal status granted to his public self somehow protects his mortal body. Still, in many ways, Caesar's faith that he is eternal proves valid by the end of the play: by Act V, scene iii, Brutus is attributing his and Cassius's misfortunes to Caesar's power reaching from beyond the grave. Caesar's aura seems to affect the general outcome of events in a mystic manner, while also inspiring Octavius and Antony and strengthening their determination. As Octavius ultimately assumes the title Caesar, Caesar's permanence is indeed established in some respect.

Antony

Antony proves strong in all of the ways that Brutus proves weak. His impulsive, improvisatory nature serves him perfectly, first to persuade the conspirators that he is on their side, thus gaining their leniency, and then to persuade the plebeians of the conspirators' injustice, thus gaining the masses' political support. Not too scrupulous to stoop to deceit and duplicity, as Brutus claims to be, Antony proves himself a consummate politician, using gestures and skilled rhetoric to his advantage. He responds to subtle cues among both his nemeses and his allies to know exactly how he must conduct himself at each particular moment in order to gain the most advantage. In both his eulogy for Caesar and the play as a whole, Antony is adept at tailoring his words and

actions to his audiences' desires. Unlike Brutus, who prides himself on acting solely with respect to virtue and blinding himself to his personal concerns, Antony never separates his private affairs from his public actions.

Hamlet

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

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

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

It is also important to note that Hamlet is extremely melancholy and discontented with the state of affairs in Denmark and in his own family—indeed, in the world at large. He is extremely disappointed with his mother for marrying his uncle so quickly, and he repudiates Ophelia, a

woman he once claimed to love, in the harshest terms. His words often indicate his disgust with and distrust of women in general. At a number of points in the play, he contemplates his own death and even the option of suicide.

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

Claudius

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

Romeo

The name Romeo, in popular culture, has become nearly synonymous with “lover.” Romeo, in *Romeo and Juliet*, does indeed experience a love of such purity and passion that he kills himself when he believes that the object of his love, Juliet, has died. The power of Romeo’s love, however, often obscures a clear vision of Romeo’s character, which is far more complex. Even Romeo’s relation to love is not so simple. At the beginning of the play, Romeo pines for Rosaline, proclaiming her the paragon of women and despairing at her indifference toward him. Taken together, Romeo’s Rosaline-induced histrionics seem rather juvenile. Romeo is a great reader of love poetry, and the portrayal of his love for Rosaline suggests he is trying to re-create the feelings that he has read about. After first kissing Juliet, she tells him “you kiss by the book,” meaning that he kisses according to the rules, and implying that while proficient, his kissing lacks originality (1.5.107). In reference to Rosaline, it seems, Romeo loves by the book. Rosaline, of course, slips from Romeo’s mind at first sight of Juliet. But Juliet is no mere replacement. The love she shares with Romeo is far deeper, more authentic and unique than the clichéd puppy love Romeo felt for Rosaline. Romeo’s love matures over the course of the play from the shallow desire to be in love to a profound and intense passion. One must ascribe Romeo’s development at least in part to Juliet. Her level-headed observations, such as the one about Romeo’s kissing, seem just the thing to snap Romeo from his superficial idea of love and to inspire him to begin to speak some of the most beautiful and intense love poetry ever written.

Yet Romeo’s deep capacity for love is merely a part of his larger capacity for intense feeling of all kinds. Put another way, it is possible to describe Romeo as lacking the capacity for moderation. Love compels him to sneak into the garden of his enemy’s daughter, risking death simply to catch a glimpse of her. Anger compels him to kill his wife’s cousin in a reckless duel to avenge the death of his friend. Despair compels him to suicide upon hearing of Juliet’s death. Such extreme behavior dominates Romeo’s character throughout the play and contributes to the ultimate tragedy that befalls the lovers. Had Romeo restrained himself from killing Tybalt, or waited even one day before killing himself after hearing the news of Juliet’s death, matters might have ended happily. Of course, though, had Romeo not had such depths of feeling, the love he shared with Juliet would never have existed in the first place.

Among his friends, especially while bantering with Mercutio, Romeo shows glimpses of his social persona. He is intelligent, quick-witted, fond of verbal jousting (particularly about sex), loyal, and unafraid of danger.

Othello

Beginning with the opening lines of the play, Othello remains at a distance from much of the action that concerns and affects him. Roderigo and Iago refer ambiguously to a “he” or “him” for much of the first scene. When they begin to specify whom they are talking about, especially once they stand beneath Brabantio’s window, they do so with racial epithets, not names. These include “the Moor” (I.i.57), “the thick-lips” (I.i.66), “an old black ram” (I.i.88), and “a Barbary horse” (I.i.113). Although Othello appears at the beginning of the second scene, we do not hear his name until well into Act I, scene iii (I.iii.48). Later, Othello’s will be the last of the three ships to arrive at Cyprus in Act II, scene i; Othello will stand apart while Cassio and Iago supposedly discuss Desdemona in Act IV, scene i; and Othello will assume that Cassio is dead without being present when the fight takes place in Act V, scene i. Othello’s status as an outsider may be the reason he is such easy prey for Iago.

Although Othello is a cultural and racial outsider in Venice, his skill as a soldier and leader is nevertheless valuable and necessary to the state, and he is an integral part of Venetian civic society. He is in great demand by the duke and senate, as evidenced by Cassio’s comment that the senate “sent about three several quests” to look for Othello (I.ii.46). The Venetian government trusts Othello enough to put him in full martial and political command of Cyprus; indeed, in his dying speech, Othello reminds the Venetians of the “service” he has done their state (V.ii.348).

Those who consider Othello their social and civic peer, such as Desdemona and Brabantio, nevertheless seem drawn to him because of his exotic qualities. Othello admits as much when he tells the duke about his friendship with Brabantio. He says, - “[Desdemona’s] father loved me, oft invited me, / Still questioned me the story of my life / From year to year” (I.iii.127–129). - Othello is also able to captivate his peers with his speech. The duke’s reply to Othello’s speech

about how he wooed Desdemona with his tales of adventure is: “I think this tale would win my daughter too” (I.iii.170).

Othello sometimes makes a point of presenting himself as an outsider, whether because he recognizes his exotic appeal or because he is self-conscious of and defensive about his difference from other Venetians. For example, in spite of his obvious eloquence in Act I, scene iii, he protests, “Rude am I in my speech, / And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace” (I.iii.81–82). While Othello is never rude in his speech, he does allow his eloquence to suffer as he is put under increasing strain by Iago’s plots. In the final moments of the play, Othello regains his composure and, once again, seduces both his onstage and offstage audiences with his words. The speech that precedes his suicide is a tale that could woo almost anyone. It is the tension between Othello’s victimization at the hands of a foreign culture and his own willingness to torment himself that makes him a tragic figure rather than simply Iago’s ridiculous puppet.

Iago

Possibly the most heinous villain in Shakespeare, Iago is fascinating for his most terrible characteristic: his utter lack of convincing motivation for his actions. In the first scene, he claims to be angry at Othello for having passed him over for the position of lieutenant (I.i. 7–32). At the end of Act I, scene iii, Iago says he thinks Othello may have slept with his wife, Emilia: “It is thought abroad that ’twixt my sheets / He has done my office” (I.iii.369–370). Iago mentions this suspicion again at the end of Act II, scene i, explaining that he lusts after Desdemona because he wants to get even with Othello “wife for wife” (II.i.286). None of these claims seems to adequately explain Iago’s deep hatred of Othello, and Iago’s lack of motivation—or his inability or unwillingness to express his true motivation—makes his actions all the more terrifying. He is willing to take revenge on anyone—Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Roderigo, even Emilia—at the slightest provocation and enjoys the pain and damage he causes.

Iago is often funny, especially in his scenes with the foolish Roderigo, which serve as a showcase of Iago’s manipulative abilities. He seems almost to wink at the audience as he revels in his own skill. As entertained spectators, we find ourselves on Iago’s side when he is with

Roderigo, but the interactions between the two also reveal a streak of cowardice in Iago—a cowardice that becomes manifest in the final scene, when Iago kills his own wife (V.ii.231–242).

Iago's murder of Emilia could also stem from the general hatred of women that he displays. Some readers have suggested that Iago's true, underlying motive for persecuting Othello is his homosexual love for the general. He certainly seems to take great pleasure in preventing Othello from enjoying marital happiness, and he expresses his love for Othello frequently and effusively. It is Iago's talent for understanding and manipulating the desires of those around him that makes him both a powerful and a compelling figure. Iago is able to take the handkerchief from Emilia and know that he can deflect her questions; he is able to tell Othello of the handkerchief and know that Othello will not doubt him; he is able to tell the audience, "And what's he then that says I play the villain," and know that it will laugh as though he were a clown (II.iii.310). Though the most inveterate liar, Iago inspires all of the play's characters the trait that is most lethal to Othello: trust.

Antonio

Although the play's title refers to him, Antonio is a rather lackluster character. He emerges in Act I, scene i as a hopeless depressive, someone who cannot name the source of his melancholy and who, throughout the course of the play, devolves into a self-pitying lump, unable to muster the energy required to defend himself against execution. Antonio never names the cause of his melancholy, but the evidence seems to point to his being in love, despite his denial of this idea in Act I, scene i. The most likely object of his affection is Bassanio, who takes full advantage of the merchant's boundless feelings for him. Antonio has risked the entirety of his fortune on overseas trading ventures, yet he agrees to guarantee the potentially lethal loan Bassanio secures from Shylock. In the context of his unrequited and presumably unconsummated relationship with Bassanio, Antonio's willingness to offer up a pound of his own flesh seems particularly important, signifying a union that grotesquely alludes to the rites of marriage, where two partners become "one flesh."

Further evidence of the nature of Antonio's feelings for Bassanio appears later in the play, when Antonio's proclamations resonate with the hyperbole and self-satisfaction of a doomed lover's

declaration: “Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care not” (III.iii.35–36). Antonio ends the play as happily as he can, restored to wealth even if not delivered into love. Without a mate, he is indeed the “tainted wether”—or castrated ram—of the flock, and he will likely return to his favorite pastime of moping about the streets of Venice (IV.i.113). After all, he has effectively disabled himself from pursuing his other hobby—abusing Shylock—by insisting that the Jew convert to Christianity. Although a sixteenth-century audience might have seen this demand as merciful, as Shylock is saving himself from eternal damnation by converting, we are less likely to be convinced. Not only does Antonio’s reputation as an anti-Semite precede him, but the only instance in the play when he breaks out of his doldrums is his “storm” against Shylock (I.iii.132). In this context, Antonio proves that the dominant threads of his character are melancholy and cruelty.

Shylock

Although critics tend to agree that Shylock is *The Merchant of Venice*’s most noteworthy figure, no consensus has been reached on whether to read him as a bloodthirsty bogeyman, a clownish Jewish stereotype, or a tragic figure whose sense of decency has been fractured by the persecution he endures. Certainly, Shylock is the play’s antagonist, and he is menacing enough to seriously imperil the happiness of Venice’s businessmen and young lovers alike. Shylock is also, however, a creation of circumstance; even in his single-minded pursuit of a pound of flesh, his frequent mentions of the cruelty he has endured at Christian hands make it hard for us to label him a natural born monster. In one of Shakespeare’s most famous monologues, for example, Shylock argues that Jews are humans and calls his quest for vengeance the product of lessons taught to him by the cruelty of Venetian citizens. On the other hand, Shylock’s coldly calculated attempt to revenge the wrongs done to him by murdering his persecutor, Antonio, prevents us from viewing him in a primarily positive light. Shakespeare gives us unmistakably human moments, but he often steers us against Shylock as well, painting him as a miserly, cruel, and prosaic figure.

Macbeth

Because we first hear of Macbeth in the wounded captain's account of his battlefield valor, our initial impression is of a brave and capable warrior. This perspective is complicated, however, once we see Macbeth interact with the three witches. We realize that his physical courage is joined by a consuming ambition and a tendency to self-doubt—the prediction that he will be king brings him joy, but it also creates inner turmoil. These three attributes—bravery, ambition, and self-doubt—struggle for mastery of Macbeth throughout the play. Shakespeare uses Macbeth to show the terrible effects that ambition and guilt can have on a man who lacks strength of character. We may classify Macbeth as irrevocably evil, but his weak character separates him from Shakespeare's great villains—Iago in *Othello*, Richard III in *Richard III*, Edmund in *King Lear*—who are all strong enough to conquer guilt and self-doubt. Macbeth, great warrior though he is, is ill equipped for the psychic consequences of crime.

Before he kills Duncan, Macbeth is plagued by worry and almost aborts the crime. It takes Lady Macbeth's steely sense of purpose to push him into the deed. After the murder, however, her powerful personality begins to disintegrate, leaving Macbeth increasingly alone. He fluctuates between fits of fevered action, in which he plots a series of murders to secure his throne, and moments of terrible guilt (as when Banquo's ghost appears) and absolute pessimism (after his wife's death, when he seems to succumb to despair). These fluctuations reflect the tragic tension within Macbeth: he is at once too ambitious to allow his conscience to stop him from murdering his way to the top and too conscientious to be happy with himself as a murderer. As things fall apart for him at the end of the play, he seems almost relieved—with the English army at his gates, he can finally return to life as a warrior, and he displays a kind of reckless bravado as his enemies surround him and drag him down. In part, this stems from his fatal confidence in the witches' prophecies, but it also seems to derive from the fact that he has returned to the arena where he has been most successful and where his internal turmoil need not affect him—namely, the battlefield. Unlike many of Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, Macbeth never seems to contemplate suicide: “Why should I play the Roman fool,” he asks, “and die / On mine own sword?” (5.10.1–2). Instead, he goes down fighting, bringing the play full circle: it begins with Macbeth winning on the battlefield and ends with him dying in combat.

King Lear

Lear's basic flaw at the beginning of the play is that he values appearances above reality. He wants to be treated as a king and to enjoy the title, but he doesn't want to fulfill a king's obligations of governing for the good of his subjects. Similarly, his test of his daughters demonstrates that he values a flattering public display of love over real love. He doesn't ask "which of you doth love us most," but rather, "which of you shall we say doth love us most?" (1.1.49). Most readers conclude that Lear is simply blind to the truth, but Cordelia is already his favorite daughter at the beginning of the play, so presumably he knows that she loves him the most. Nevertheless, Lear values Goneril and Regan's fawning over Cordelia's sincere sense of filial duty.

An important question to ask is whether Lear develops as a character—whether he learns from his mistakes and becomes a better and more insightful human being. In some ways the answer is no: he doesn't completely recover his sanity and emerge as a better king. But his values do change over the course of the play. As he realizes his weakness and insignificance in comparison to the awesome forces of the natural world, he becomes a humble and caring individual. He comes to cherish Cordelia above everything else and to place his own love for Cordelia above every other consideration, to the point that he would rather live in prison with her than rule as a king again.

Edmund

Of all of the play's villains, Edmund is the most complex and sympathetic. He is a consummate schemer, a Machiavellian character eager to seize any opportunity and willing to do anything to achieve his goals. However, his ambition is interesting insofar as it reflects not only a thirst for land and power but also a desire for the recognition denied to him by his status as a bastard. His serial treachery is not merely self-interested; it is a conscious rebellion against the social order that has denied him the same status as Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar. "Now, gods, stand up for bastards," Edmund commands, but in fact he depends not on divine aid but on his own initiative (1.2.22). He is the ultimate self-made man, and he is such a cold and capable villain that it is entertaining to watch him work, much as the audience can appreciate the clever wickedness of Iago in *Othello*. Only at the close of the play does Edmund show a flicker of weakness. Mortally wounded, he sees that both Goneril and Regan have died for him, and

whispers, “Yet Edmund was beloved” (5.3.238). After this ambiguous statement, he seems to repent of his villainy and admits to having ordered Cordelia’s death. His peculiar change of heart, rare among Shakespearean villains, is enough to make the audience wonder, amid the carnage, whether Edmund’s villainy sprang not from some innate cruelty but simply from a thwarted, misdirected desire for the familial love that he witnessed around him.

Mark Antony

Throughout the play, Antony grapples with the conflict between his love for Cleopatra and his duties to the Roman Empire. In Act I, scene i, he engages Cleopatra in a conversation about the nature and depth of their love, dismissing the duties he has neglected for her sake: “Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall” (I.i.35–36). In the very next scene, however, Antony worries that he is about to “lose [him]self in dotage” (I.ii.106) and fears that the death of his wife is only one of the ills that his “idleness doth hatch” (I.ii.119). Thus, Antony finds himself torn between the Rome of his duty and the Alexandria of his pleasure. The geographical poles that draw him in opposite directions represent deep-seated conflicts between his reason and emotion, his sense of duty and his desire, his obligations to the state and his private needs.

Antony’s understanding of himself, however, cannot bear the stress of such tension. In his mind, he is first and foremost a Roman hero of the first caliber. He won his position as one of the three leaders of the world by vanquishing the treacherous Brutus and Cassius, who conspired to assassinate his predecessor, Julius Caesar. He often recalls the golden days of his own heroism, but now that he is entangled in an affair with the Egyptian queen, his memories do little more than demonstrate how far he has strayed from his ideal self. As he points out to Octavia in Act III, scene iv, his current actions imperil his honor, and without his honor—the defining characteristic of the Roman hero—he can no longer be Antony: “If I lose my honor, / I lose myself. Better I were not yours / Than yours so branchless” (III.iv.22–24). Later, having suffered defeat at the hands of both Caesar and Cleopatra, Antony returns to the imagery of the stripped tree as he laments, “[T]his pine is barked / That overtopped them all” (IV.xiii.23–24). Rather than amend his identity to accommodate these defeats, Antony chooses to take his own life, an act that restores him to his brave and indomitable former self. In suicide, Antony manages to

convince himself and the world (as represented by Cleopatra and Caesar) that he is “a Roman by a Roman / Valiantly vanquished” (IV.xvi.59–60).

Octavius Caesar

Octavius Caesar is both a menacing adversary for Antony and a rigid representation of Roman law and order. He is not a two-dimensional villain, though, since his frustrations with the ever-neglectful Antony seem justified. When he complains to Lepidus that he resents having to “bear / So great weight in [Antony’s] lightness,” we certainly understand his concern (I.iv.24–25). He does not emerge as a particularly likable character—his treatment of Lepidus, for instance, betrays the cruel underside of Caesar’s aggressive ambitions—but he is a complicated one. He is, in other words, convincingly human. There is, perhaps, no better example of Caesar’s humanity than his conflicted feelings about Antony. For a good deal of the play, Caesar seems bent, rather ruthlessly, on destroying Antony. When he achieves this desired end, however, he does not relish the moment as we might expect. Instead, he mourns the loss of a great soldier and musters enough compassion to be not only fair-minded but also fair-hearted, commanding that the lovers be buried beside one another.

Prospero

Prospero is one of Shakespeare’s more enigmatic protagonists. He is a sympathetic character in that he was wronged by his usurping brother, but his absolute power over the other characters and his overwrought speeches make him difficult to like. In our first glimpse of him, he appears puffed up and self-important, and his repeated insistence that Miranda pay attention suggest that his story is boring her. Once Prospero moves on to a subject other than his absorption in the pursuit of knowledge, Miranda’s attention is riveted.

The pursuit of knowledge gets Prospero into trouble in the first place. By neglecting everyday matters when he was duke, he gave his brother a chance to rise up against him. His possession and use of magical knowledge renders him extremely powerful and not entirely sympathetic. His punishments of Caliban are petty and vindictive, as he calls upon his spirits to pinch Caliban when he curses. He is defensively autocratic with Ariel. For example, when Ariel reminds his master of his promise to relieve him of his duties early if he performs them willingly, Prospero

bursts into fury and threatens to return him to his former imprisonment and torment. He is similarly unpleasant in his treatment of Ferdinand, leading him to his daughter and then imprisoning and enslaving him.

Despite his shortcomings as a man, however, Prospero is central to *The Tempest's* narrative. Prospero generates the plot of the play almost single-handedly, as his various schemes, spells, and manipulations all work as part of his grand design to achieve the play's happy ending. Watching Prospero work through *The Tempest* is like watching a dramatist create a play, building a story from material at hand and developing his plot so that the resolution brings the world into line with his idea of goodness and justice. Many critics and readers of the play have interpreted Prospero as a surrogate for Shakespeare, enabling the audience to explore firsthand the ambiguities and ultimate wonder of the creative endeavor.

Prospero's final speech, in which he likens himself to a playwright by asking the audience for applause, strengthens this reading of the play, and makes the play's final scene function as a moving celebration of creativity, humanity, and art. Prospero emerges as a more likable and sympathetic figure in the final two acts of the play. In these acts, his love for Miranda, his forgiveness of his enemies, and the legitimately happy ending his scheme creates all work to mitigate some of the undesirable means he has used to achieve his happy ending. If Prospero sometimes seems autocratic, he ultimately manages to persuade the audience to share his understanding of the world—an achievement that is, after all, the final goal of every author and every play.

5.1 Women:

Portia:

Quick-witted, wealthy, and beautiful, Portia embodies the virtues that are typical of Shakespeare's heroines—it is no surprise that she emerges as the antidote to Shylock's malice. At the beginning of the play, however, we do not see Portia's potential for initiative and resourcefulness, as she is a near prisoner, feeling herself absolutely bound to follow her father's dying wishes. This opening appearance, however, proves to be a revealing introduction to Portia, who emerges as that rarest of combinations—a free spirit who abides rigidly by rules. Rather

than ignoring the stipulations of her father's will, she watches a stream of suitors pass her by, happy to see these particular suitors go, but sad that she has no choice in the matter. When Bassanio arrives, however, Portia proves herself to be highly resourceful, begging the man she loves to stay a while before picking a chest, and finding loopholes in the will's provision that we never thought possible. Also, in her defeat of Shylock Portia prevails by applying a more rigid standard than Shylock himself, agreeing that his contract very much entitles him to his pound of flesh, but adding that it does not allow for any loss of blood. Anybody can break the rules, but Portia's effectiveness comes from her ability to make the law work for her.

Portia rejects the stuffiness that rigid adherence to the law might otherwise suggest. In her courtroom appearance, she vigorously applies the law, but still flouts convention by appearing disguised as a man. After depriving Bassanio of his ring, she stops the prank before it goes too far, but still takes it far enough to berate Bassanio and Gratiano for their callousness, and she even insinuates that she has been unfaithful.

Cleopatra

The assortment of perspectives from which we see Cleopatra illustrates the varying understandings of her as a decadent foreign woman and a noble ruler. As Philo and Demetrius take the stage in Act I, scene i, their complaints about Antony's neglected duties frame the audience's understanding of Cleopatra, the queen for whom Antony risks his reputation. Within the first ten lines of the play, the men declare Cleopatra a lustful "gipsy," a description that is repeated throughout the play as though by a chorus (I.i.10). Cleopatra is labeled a "wrangling queen" (I.i.50), a "slave" (I.iv.19), an "Egyptian dish" (II.vi.123), and a "whore" (III.vi.67); she is called "Salt Cleopatra" (II.i.21) and an enchantress who has made Antony "the noble ruin of her magic" (III.x.18).

But to view Cleopatra as such is to reduce her character to the rather narrow perspective of the Romans, who, standing to lose their honor or kingdoms through her agency, are most threatened by her. Certainly this threat has much to do with Cleopatra's beauty and open sexuality, which, as Enobarbus points out in his famous description of her in Act II, scene ii, is awe-inspiring. But

it is also a performance. Indeed, when Cleopatra takes the stage, she does so as an actress, elevating her passion, grief, and outrage to the most dramatic and captivating level.

Whether whispering sweet words of love to Antony or railing at a supposedly disloyal servant, Cleopatra leaves her onlookers breathless. As Antony notes, she is a woman “[w]hom everything becomes—to chide, to laugh / To weep” (I.i.51–52). It is this ability to be the perfect embodiment of all things—beauty and ugliness, virtue and vice—that Cleopatra stands to lose after her defeat by Caesar. By parading her through the streets of Rome as his trophy, he intends to reduce her character to a single, base element—to immortalize her as a whore. If Antony cannot allow his conception of self to expand to incorporate his defeats, then Cleopatra cannot allow hers to be stripped to the image of a boy actor “squeaking Cleopatra . . . / I’th’ posture of a whore” (V.ii.216–217). Cleopatra often behaves childishly and with relentless self-absorption; nevertheless, her charisma, strength, and indomitable will make her one of Shakespeare’s strongest, most awe-inspiring female characters.

Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare’s most famous and frightening female characters. When we first see her, she is already plotting Duncan’s murder, and she is stronger, more ruthless, and more ambitious than her husband. She seems fully aware of this and knows that she will have to push Macbeth into committing murder. At one point, she wishes that she were not a woman so that she could do it herself. This theme of the relationship between gender and power is key to Lady Macbeth’s character: her husband implies that she is a masculine soul inhabiting a female body, which seems to link masculinity to ambition and violence. Shakespeare, however, seems to use her, and the witches, to undercut Macbeth’s idea that “undaunted mettle should compose / Nothing but males” (1.7.73–74). These crafty women use *female* methods of achieving power—that is, manipulation—to further their supposedly male ambitions. Women, the play implies, can be as ambitious and cruel as men, yet social constraints deny them the means to pursue these ambitions on their own.

Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband with remarkable effectiveness, overriding all his objections; when he hesitates to murder, she repeatedly questions his manhood until he feels that

he must commit murder to prove himself. Lady Macbeth's remarkable strength of will persists through the murder of the king—it is she who steadies her husband's nerves immediately after the crime has been perpetrated. Afterward, however, she begins a slow slide into madness—just as ambition affects her more strongly than Macbeth before the crime, so does guilt plague her more strongly afterward. By the close of the play, she has been reduced to sleepwalking through the castle, desperately trying to wash away an invisible bloodstain. Once the sense of guilt comes home to roost, Lady Macbeth's sensitivity becomes a weakness, and she is unable to cope. Significantly, she (apparently) kills herself, signaling her total inability to deal with the legacy of their crimes.

Gertrude

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

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

are her *only* characteristics, and her reliance on men appears to be her sole way of capitalizing on her abilities.

Juliet

Having not quite reached her fourteenth birthday, Juliet is of an age that stands on the border between immaturity and maturity. At the play's beginning however she seems merely an obedient, sheltered, naïve child. Though many girls her age—including her mother—get married, Juliet has not given the subject any thought. When Lady Capulet mentions Paris's interest in marrying Juliet, Juliet dutifully responds that she will try to see if she can love him, a response that seems childish in its obedience and in its immature conception of love. Juliet seems to have no friends her own age, and she is not comfortable talking about sex (as seen in her discomfort when the Nurse goes on and on about a sexual joke at Juliet's expense in Act 1, scene 3).

Juliet gives glimpses of her determination, strength, and sober-mindedness, in her earliest scenes, and offers a preview of the woman she will become during the four-day span of *Romeo and Juliet*. While Lady Capulet proves unable to quiet the Nurse, Juliet succeeds with one word (also in Act 1, scene 3). In addition, even in Juliet's dutiful acquiescence to try to love Paris, there is some seed of steely determination. Juliet promises to consider Paris as a possible husband to the precise degree her mother desires. While an outward show of obedience, such a statement can also be read as a refusal through passivity. Juliet will accede to her mother's wishes, but she will not go out of her way to fall in love with Paris.

Juliet's first meeting with Romeo propels her full-force toward adulthood. Though profoundly in love with him, Juliet is able to see and criticize Romeo's rash decisions and his tendency to romanticize things. After Romeo kills Tybalt and is banished, Juliet does not follow him blindly. She makes a logical and heartfelt decision that her loyalty and love for Romeo must be her guiding priorities. Essentially, Juliet cuts herself loose from her prior social moorings—her nurse, her parents, and her social position in Verona—in order to try to reunite with Romeo. When she wakes in the tomb to find Romeo dead, she does not kill herself out of feminine weakness, but rather out of an intensity of love, just as Romeo did. Juliet's suicide actually

requires more nerve than Romeo's: while he swallows poison, she stabs herself through the heart with a dagger.

Juliet's development from a wide-eyed girl into a self-assured, loyal, and capable woman is one of Shakespeare's early triumphs of characterization. It also marks one of his most confident and rounded treatments of a female character.

Desdemona

Desdemona is a more plausible, well-rounded figure than much criticism has given her credit for. Arguments that see Desdemona as stereotypically weak and submissive ignore the conviction and authority of her first speech ("My noble father, / I do perceive here a divided duty" [I.iii.179–180]) and her terse fury after Othello strikes her ("I have not deserved this" [IV.i.236]). Similarly, critics who argue that Desdemona's slightly bizarre bawdy jesting with Iago in Act II, scene i, is either an interpolation not written by Shakespeare or a mere vulgarity ignore the fact that Desdemona is young, sexual, and recently married. She later displays the same chiding, almost mischievous wit in Act III, scene iii, lines 61–84, when she attempts to persuade Othello to forgive Cassio.

Desdemona is at times a submissive character, most notably in her willingness to take credit for her own murder. In response to Emilia's question, "O, who hath done this deed?" Desdemona's final words are, "Nobody, I myself. Farewell. / Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell" (V.ii.133–134). The play, then, depicts Desdemona contradictorily as a self-effacing, faithful wife and as a bold, independent personality. This contradiction may be intentional, meant to portray the way Desdemona herself feels after defending her choice of marriage to her father in Act I, scene iii, and then almost immediately being put in the position of defending her fidelity to her husband. She begins the play as a supremely independent person, but midway through she must struggle against all odds to convince Othello that she is not *too* independent. The manner in which Desdemona is murdered—smothered by a pillow in a bed covered in her wedding sheets—is symbolic: she is literally suffocated beneath the demands put on her fidelity. Since her first lines, Desdemona has seemed capable of meeting or even rising above those demands. In the end, Othello stifles the speech that made Desdemona so powerful.

Tragically, Desdemona is apparently aware of her imminent death. She, not Othello, asks Emilia to put her wedding sheets on the bed, and she asks Emilia to bury her in these sheets should she die first. The last time we see Desdemona before she awakens to find Othello standing over her with murder in his eyes, she sings a song she learned from her mother's maid: "She was in love; and he proved mad / And did forsake her. She had a song of willow. / . . . / And she died singing it. That song tonight / Will not go from my mind" (IV.iii.27–30). Like the audience, Desdemona seems able only to watch as her husband is driven insane with jealousy. Though she maintains to the end that she is "guiltless," Desdemona also forgives her husband (V.ii.133). Her forgiveness of Othello may help the audience to forgive him as well.

Cordelia

Cordelia's chief characteristics are devotion, kindness, beauty, and honesty—honesty to a fault, perhaps. She is contrasted throughout the play with Goneril and Regan, who are neither honest nor loving, and who manipulate their father for their own ends. By refusing to take part in Lear's love test at the beginning of the play, Cordelia establishes herself as a repository of virtue, and the obvious authenticity of her love for Lear makes clear the extent of the king's error in banishing her. For most of the middle section of the play, she is offstage, but as we observe the depredations of Goneril and Regan and watch Lear's descent into madness, Cordelia is never far from the audience's thoughts, and her beauty is venerably described in religious terms. Indeed, rumors of her return to Britain begin to surface almost immediately, and once she lands at Dover, the action of the play begins to move toward her, as all the characters converge on the coast. Cordelia's reunion with Lear marks the apparent restoration of order in the kingdom and the triumph of love and forgiveness over hatred and spite. This fleeting moment of familial happiness makes the devastating finale of *King Lear* that much more cruel, as Cordelia, the personification of kindness and virtue, becomes a literal sacrifice to the heartlessness of an apparently unjust world.

Miranda

Just under fifteen years old, Miranda is a gentle and compassionate, but also relatively passive, heroine. From her very first lines she displays a meek and emotional nature. "O, I have suffered /

With those that I saw suffer!” she says of the shipwreck (I.ii.5–6), and hearing Prospero’s tale of their narrow escape from Milan, she says “I, not rememb’ring how I cried out then, / Will cry it o’er again” (I.ii.133–134). Miranda does not choose her own husband. Instead, while she sleeps, Prospero sends Ariel to fetch Ferdinand, and arranges things so that the two will come to love one another. After Prospero has given the lovers his blessing, he and Ferdinand talk with surprising frankness about her virginity and the pleasures of the marriage bed while she stands quietly by. Prospero tells Ferdinand to be sure not to “break her virgin-knot” before the wedding night (IV.i.15), and Ferdinand replies with no small anticipation that lust shall never take away “the edge of that day’s celebration” (IV.i.29). In the play’s final scene, Miranda is presented, with Ferdinand, almost as a prop or piece of the scenery as Prospero draws aside a curtain to reveal the pair playing chess.

But while Miranda is passive in many ways, she has at least two moments of surprising forthrightness and strength that complicate the reader’s impressions of her as a naïve young girl. The first such moment is in Act I, scene ii, in which she and Prospero converse with Caliban. Prospero alludes to the fact that Caliban once tried to rape Miranda. When Caliban rudely agrees that he intended to violate her, Miranda responds with impressive vehemence, clearly appalled at Caliban’s light attitude toward his attempted rape. She goes on to scold him for being ungrateful for her attempts to educate him: “When thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes / With words that made them known” (358–361). These lines are so surprising coming from the mouth of Miranda that many editors have amended the text and given it to Prospero. This reattribution seems to give Miranda too little credit. In Act III, scene i comes the second surprising moment—Miranda’s marriage proposal to Ferdinand: “I am your wife, if you will marry me; / If not, I’ll die your maid” (III.i.83–84). Her proposal comes shortly after Miranda has told herself to remember her “father’s precepts” (III.i.58) forbidding conversation with Ferdinand. As the reader can see in her speech to Caliban in Act I, scene ii, Miranda is willing to speak up for herself about her sexuality.

6.0 Critics:

Wilson Knight wrote several volumes of essays on Shakespeare. He de-emphasizes character, and thinks that earlier Shakespeare critics, like A.C. Bradley, sometimes over-emphasized character. He sees an analogy to his approach in modern physics: “the belief in rigid particles with predictable motions has been replaced by concepts of form, pattern and symmetry.... For ‘particles’ put ‘characters’ and we have a clear Shakespearean analogy.”

Knight thinks that his approach to Shakespeare is akin to Einstein’s theory: “Einstein’s relativity theory served to shift emphasis from individual entities to their observable ‘relationships’; just as, in my early essays on *Hamlet*, I tried... to see that hero not merely as an isolated ‘character’ rigidly conceived, but in direct and living relation to his own dramatic environment.”

Knight says that trends in modern physics run parallel with trends in other branches of knowledge, they are “part of a general movement of the twentieth-century mind... [there are] similar tendencies in both biology and psychology. It would be sad were literary investigation to be allowed to lag too far behind these more virile sciences.” Knight envisions literary criticism as part of “a newly comprehensive system of knowledge covering the organic as well as the inorganic world, and therefore relevant also to man himself.” Has there ever been a bolder, more ambitious preface to a work of literary criticism? The profundity of Knight’s essays matches the boldness of his preface.

But the introduction to Knight’s book, by T.S. Eliot, is neither bold nor profound. It has the dry, pedantic style that we’ve come to expect from Eliot. Eliot’s reputation as a critic is higher than Knight’s; Eliot is as over-rated as Knight is under-rated. Knight regards Shakespeare as a profound philosophical writer, with a proclivity for the mystical and the occult. Eliot, on the other hand, subscribes to the common view that Shakespeare has no philosophy — or at least, no philosophy worthy of the name. “Dante made great poetry,” Eliot writes, “out of a great philosophy of life... Shakespeare made equally great poetry out of an inferior and muddled philosophy of life.”

Shakespeare here depicts a dead man merging with the universe — changing into coral, pearls, etc. By merging with the universe, the dead achieve a kind of immortality. These famous lines exemplify the mystical character of Shakespeare’s final plays.

After writing *Myth and Miracle*, Knight read a book called *Shakespeare's Mystery Play: A Study of The Tempest*, by Colin Still. Knight says that "Mr. Still's interpretation of *The Tempest* is very similar to mine. His conclusions were reached by a detailed comparison of the play in its totality with other creations of literature, myth, and ritual throughout the ages." Knight regards Still's book as confirmation ("empirical proof") of his own view that *The Tempest* is a mystical work.

Knight calls his approach "interpretation", and distinguishes it from "criticism". "'Criticism' to me suggests a certain process of deliberately objectifying the work under consideration.... 'Interpretation', on the contrary, tends to merge into the work it analyzes.... Interpretation is passive." Knight says that the most famous Shakespeare commentators took the interpretative approach: "Coleridge, repelled by one of the horrors in *King Lear*, admitted that the author's judgment... was here probably superior to his own: and he was right. That is the interpretative approach. Hazlitt and A.C. Bradley both developed that approach: their work is primarily interpretative."

What Knight calls "interpretation" can help us to understand all sorts of literature, not just imaginative literature. Ruskin advocated an approach similar to Knight's, and thought that approach should be applied to literature in general; Ruskin said that reading means "putting ourselves always in the author's place, annihilating our own personality, and seeking to enter into his." (This approach came naturally to 19th-century man, who revered the Great Men of past eras, but it doesn't come naturally to the people of our time, hence "criticism" may be more popular now than "interpretation".)

Knight argues that most Shakespeare commentary is too concerned with temporal factors, sequential factors, and doesn't pay enough attention to spatial factors, to atmosphere. "A Shakespearean tragedy is set spatially as well as temporally in the mind. By this I mean that there are throughout the play a set of correspondences which relate to each other independently of the time-sequence which is the story: such [are] the death-theme in *Hamlet*, the nightmare evil of *Macbeth*. This I have sometimes called the play's 'atmosphere'." The spatial element, the atmosphere, may be created unconsciously by the poet, and may be perceived unconsciously by the reader: "With the poet, as with the reader, the time-sequence will be uppermost in consciousness, the pervading atmosphere or static background tending to be unconsciously

apprehended or created, a half-realized significance, a vague all-inclusive deity of the dramatic universe.”

But if the time-sequence is uppermost for most readers, Knight takes the opposite approach, Knight focuses on the atmosphere. Knight says that the atmosphere is ‘pure Shakespeare’, whereas the time-sequence, the plot, is often borrowed from earlier writers (Plutarch, Holinshed, etc.). Knight thinks that a study of Shakespeare’s sources is of little use since these sources don’t shape the atmosphere, the spatial element.

One of Knight’s chief innovations is to de-emphasize character. He argues that character is merely a role that we play, not our true nature. Shakespeare goes deeper than character, and depicts our true self, our fundamental nature. My yoga teacher often told his students, “drop your personality, the word ‘personality’ comes from the word ‘persona’, meaning mask.” According to Knight, Shakespeare removes the mask, Shakespeare goes deeper than character, deeper than personality, and describes the fundamental drives that all people share.

Knight avoids using the term “character”: “It is impossible to use the term without any tinge of a morality which blurs vision. The term, which in ordinary speech often denotes the degree of moral control exercised by the individual over his instinctive passions, is altogether unsuited to those persons of poetic drama whose life consists largely of passion unveiled. *Macbeth* and *King Lear* are created in a soul-dimension of primal feeling, of which in real life we may be only partly conscious or may be urged to control by a sense of right and wrong.”

If Shakespeare is concerned with the occult and the mystical, as I believe he is, then we should expect him to look beyond character, and look beyond moral considerations. Mystical world-views like Zen pay little heed to character and moral considerations. Likewise, the occult doesn’t deal with character and moral considerations. “Interpretation,” says Knight, “must be metaphysical rather than ethical.” To understand Shakespeare, we need to go deeper than ethics because Shakespeare goes deeper than ethics. Do all great writers go deeper than ethics? Do all great writers go “beyond good and evil”?

Knight focuses on the atmosphere, the theme, the “burning central core” of the play, rather than on the plot, the time-sequence. According to Knight, once we grasp this central core, this theme,

then all the incidents make sense. The incidents “relate primarily, not directly to each other, nor to the normal appearances of human life, but to this central reality alone.” One thinks of James Allen, who said that thought is the master of circumstances, the circumstances of your life flow out of your thoughts, your mind-set. Shakespeare’s view of human affairs can be described as The Occult View, since Shakespeare regards mind-set as the master of circumstances.

Synchronicity in Shakespeare

Shakespeare seems to subscribe to one of the central principles of occult thought, namely, that man and the world are connected, psyche and matter are connected. This is what Jung called synchronicity. Jung argues that the Chinese have always viewed the world in terms of synchronicity, rather than in terms of linear cause-and-effect. The Chinese notice what events occur together, rather than seeking causal connections. The Chinese notice, for example, that the death of an emperor occurs together with an earthquake; these events aren’t causally linked, but they’re often found together. The Chinese were interested in synchronicity rather than causality; they never developed what we call science because science is based on causality.

Shakespeare seems to view the world in the Chinese/Jungian way, he describes correspondences between man and the world, between psyche and matter. In *King Lear*, for example, “Act III begins with thunder, lightning, and storm — a special kind of storm such as there never was before, as one of the characters in the play says.” In Shakespeare’s plays tragedy is often accompanied by a storm. This can be seen as synchronicity, though some people may say that it’s merely symbolism. Another example of Shakespeare’s interest in synchronistic phenomena is the following passage from *Hamlet*:

In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets:
As stars with trains of fire and dews of blood,
Disasters in the sun; and the moist star
Upon whose influence Neptune’s empire stands

Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse:
And even the like precursor of fierce events,
As harbingers preceding still the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on,
Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
Unto our climates and countrymen.

A similar correspondence between nature and man is found in *Julius Caesar*, where Casca says,

O, Cicero,
I have seen tempests, when the scolding winds
Have rived the knotty oaks...
But never till tonight, never till now,
Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.

Disorder in the human world is mirrored by disorder in the natural world; animals behave strangely. A character in *Macbeth* says,

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down...
the obscure bird
Clamored the live-long night: some say the earth
Was feverous, and did shake.

Knight realizes that the law of causality doesn't apply to Shakespeare's world. He realizes that Shakespeare's world is governed by synchronicity, though he doesn't use Jung's term (he pays no attention to Freud or Jung). "The hero and his universe are interdependent.... The original spiritual disorder may equally be said either to cause, or to be caused by, the final disorder in the world.... Thus there is no rigid time-sequence of cause and effect between the hero and his environment: there is, however, a relation, and this relation is cemented and fused by the use of

prophecy and poetic symbolism, merging subject and object, present with future. We are shown not merely the story of a murder; not merely the mind of a murderer; nor merely the effect of murder; but rather a single reality built of these three interacting, reciprocal, co-existent.”

If the future exists in the present, and can be foretold in the present, what happens to cause-and-effect? Are historical events the result of fate, do they flow out of a mind-set or spirit? A century before the Holocaust, Heine predicted, based on his study of German philosophers, that the German mind would roar into the world and cause a genocide that would make the French Revolution look like a “pretty idyll”. Heine’s accurate prediction makes one think that the Holocaust (and other historical events, too) was caused by mind-set, not by a chain of circumstances. Perhaps we should view history as Knight views a Shakespeare play; though rational thinking says that events are caused by earlier events, perhaps events flow out of mind-set, out of destiny.

Since Knight regards Shakespeare as a deep thinker, one might suppose that he ignores considerations of style and sound. In fact, his essay “The *Othello* Music” is a penetrating, much-admired study of Shakespeare’s style.

Shakespeare’s Themes: Hate and Evil

According to Knight, *Othello* is a typical Shakespeare play, or at least a typical Shakespeare tragedy. Knight believes there is a pattern in Shakespeare’s work, a pattern found in many different plays; *Othello* follows this pattern. “The play turns on this theme: the cynical intellect pitted against a lovable humanity transfigured by qualities of heroism and grace.” Iago doesn’t believe in love, and thinks that the love between Othello and Desdemona can’t last; he plots to destroy this love. “Iago, himself a kind of devil, insidiously eats his way into this world of romance, chivalry, nobility.”

Freud said that love often turns into hate. This is part of The Shakespeare Pattern: Othello’s love for Desdemona turns into hate, Lear’s love for his daughters turns into hate, etc. *Timon of Athens* also follows this pattern: “The theme of *Timon of Athens* is closely connected with that of *Othello*.... In both plays we have a protagonist compact of generosity, trust, nobility.... At the crisis each swerves from passionate love to its opposite with a similar finality.”

If the character of Timon is akin to Othello, who is akin to Iago? The Iago character in *Timon of Athens* is, according to Knight, the cynical philosopher Apemantus. *King Lear* also follows The Shakespeare Pattern: “The plot of *King Lear* is, fundamentally, the plot of *Timon of Athens* and *Othello*. Here Lear, Cordelia, and Edmund... replace Othello, Desdemona, Iago.... In each of these plays we see the same three figures recurring. They are representative of (i) noble mankind, (ii) the supreme value of spiritual love, and (iii) the cynic.”

Such is the case, according to Knight, with Hamlet, who is both noble hero and cruel cynic. Hamlet is cruel to both Ophelia and his mother, and he eagerly kills Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; “Hamlet thus takes a devilish joy in cruelty towards the end of the play: he is like Iago.... Hamlet is both hero and villain in his own drama.” Since Hamlet is both hero and cynic, the play doesn’t have an Iago character, doesn’t have a “pure cynic”, Hamlet performs two parts himself. “His mind wavers,” Knight says, “between the principle of good, which is love, and that of evil, which is loathing and cruelty.” Hamlet is both light and shadow, both positive and negative, and thus he is closer to real people than other Shakespeare characters.

Like other Shakespeare characters, Hamlet speaks scornfully of love. Knight frequently mentions “the ‘hate-theme’, which is turbulent throughout most of these plays: an especial mode of cynicism toward love, disgust at the physical body, and dismay at the thought of death; a revulsion from human life caused by a clear sight of its limitations — more especially limitations imposed by time.” Knight argues that *Hamlet* is the first of Shakespeare’s plays to express the hate-theme, to express “love-cynicism and death-horror.” Many of Shakespeare’s later plays elaborate themes first expressed in *Hamlet*.

One of the essays in Knight’s *Wheel of Fire* is called “Shakespeare and Tolstoy.” It argues that Tolstoy’s mid-life depression, described in his book *My Confession*, closely matches Hamlet’s depression. “In Tolstoy’s case the sense that life had any meaning whatever was for a time wholly withdrawn.” Though he recovered from his depression, at least partly, Tolstoy remained scornful of the establishment. The same scorn of the establishment is found, says Knight, in Timon, who “curses the whole of civilization.”

Like Hamlet and other Shakespeare characters, Tolstoy spoke scornfully of love; Knight speaks of “the hatred of sexual impurity in *Resurrection* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*.” Knight concludes his comparison of Shakespeare and Tolstoy by saying that “these two great men” were “closely akin... on a matter deep in the soul of each [i.e., sex].”

Unlike Tolstoy, Shakespeare never wrote an autobiographical piece, never wrote *My Confession*. So how does Knight know that Shakespeare was akin to Tolstoy? Knight makes deductions about Shakespeare from Shakespeare’s works; in other words, he thinks that Shakespeare reveals himself in his writings. Knight suggests that Shakespeare may have experienced “tremendous” pain; “the nausea of Hamlet, the railing of Thersites, the volcanic curses of Timon, would surely tell their own story.”

“You mentioned *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, etc., but you didn’t mention *Macbeth*. Is *Macbeth* an exception to the rule, or does it fit this so-called Shakespeare Pattern?” According to Knight, *Macbeth* doesn’t fit this pattern, doesn’t exemplify the “hate-theme”. *Macbeth* exemplifies the theme of evil, what Knight calls “nightmare evil”. So the chief themes in Shakespeare’s work, or at least in Shakespeare’s tragedies, are (according to Knight) Hate and Evil. One is reminded of Freud’s late works, in which he emphasized the sadistic, violent, evil impulses in human nature.

“You said that Shakespeare’s final plays express a mystic vision, an affirmative world-view. Are Shakespeare’s tragedies completely dark and pessimistic, or do they contain a mystical element, an affirmative element?” Knight argues that Shakespeare’s tragedies, however permeated by Hate, Evil, etc., usually end on a positive note, and usually are somewhat affirmative. For example, “the beauties of the *Othello* world are not finally disintegrated: they make ‘a swan-like end fading in music’.”

The paradox of tragedy is that it affirms even though it depicts suffering and death. “The optimism of Shakespearean tragedy is, no doubt, irrational: but it is potent.... It is not nihilistic, but... philosophic and mystic. Especially in *Timon of Athens*, during the final scenes, we scale the silences of eternity. Terrible and somber, yet irresistibly grand, the death-mysticism of the play is compelling, and leaves a memory, not of pain, or hate, but profundity and infinite significance.”

Tolstoy’s Attack on Shakespeare

In addition to comparing Shakespeare and Tolstoy, Knight also wrote an essay that discusses Tolstoy's criticisms of Shakespeare. Tolstoy was perhaps the most harsh of all Shakespeare critics; Tolstoy describes Shakespeare's works as "beneath criticism, insignificant, empty, and immoral." Why was Tolstoy so critical of Shakespeare? Perhaps because Tolstoy was a rational thinker, and Shakespeare had a penchant for the irrational, for the occult and the mystical. As Knight put it, "Tolstoy... suffered from clear thinking." Tolstoy's rationalism made him contemptuous of the mystical, mysterious side of religion; the doctrine of the trinity, for example, made no sense to him ("how can one be three, and three be one?"). Perhaps rational thinkers can't relate to Shakespeare, perhaps only people who are receptive to the occult and the mystical can relate to Shakespeare.

Tolstoy complains that Shakespeare's characters don't have clear motives. Knight says that Tolstoy is right, but Knight regards this vagueness of motivation as a merit, not as a weakness. In actual life, motives aren't simple and clear — even to ourselves — they're complex and uncertain. "Motive is always vague," Knight writes, "a complex woven of conscious desire, semi-conscious promptings, opportunity, and, in addition, certain unknown quantities which any analysis will falsify." If Macbeth's motives are unclear, says Knight, we shouldn't criticize Shakespeare for this, we should praise him: "[*Macbeth*] presents a vision of essential evil in all its irrationality. Again, the critic has attacked the poet for his profundity, regarding as an ugly blot the very signature of his genius."

Tolstoy excoriates Hamlet for having "no character at all." Again, Knight says that Tolstoy is right, Knight has high regard for Tolstoy as a literary critic. But Knight says that it's precisely Hamlet's lack of character that makes Hamlet Shakespeare's greatest creation, Shakespeare's most life-like creation. Hamlet, says Knight, "expresses many impulses, good and evil, and thus is one of Shakespeare's most universal single creations. As men are not different in the instincts and desires they possess, but only in those they express, the deeper we go in human understanding, the less ultimate meaning we must attribute to differences of character between man and man." Hamlet is "like a real person with a real person's potentiality for all things.... Hamlet is universal. In him we recognize ourselves, not our acquaintances. Possessing all characters, he possesses none."

What started Knight on his career as a Shakespeare interpreter? “A question posed suddenly by my brother during a performance of *The Tempest* to which I had persuaded him to accompany me: ‘What does it mean?’ For many years I have been laboring at the answer.” Among Knight’s many books is a biography of his brother, W. Jackson Knight, who was a Classics professor and the author of several books on Vergil. Knight also wrote *The Saturnian quest; a chart of the prose works of John Cowper Powys*. If we can believe Powys’s fans (of whom Knight is one), Powys is the best modern English writer whom you haven’t heard of.

Wilson Knight has set a new standard for Shakespeare commentary, he has revealed aspects of Shakespeare’s genius that weren’t previously appreciated, and he has enriched our understanding, not only of Shakespeare, but of literature in general and of human nature.

7.0 Questions for practice:

Give a detailed description about the Age of Shakespeare.

Who can be considered as important Shakespearean men characters? Explain them.

Who are considered to be important women characters in the plays of Shakespeare? Elaborate them.

Give a summarized version of any of the plays which can be categorized as tragedies.

What are basic themes in most of Shakespearean plays?

Hamlet

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Act-wise Summary of the Play

3.0 Characters

4.0 Theme

5.0 Motifs

6.0 Symbols

7.0 Explanation of some Important Quotations

8.0 Critic views on Hamlet

9.0 Summing Up

10.0 Questions for practice

11. 0 Suggestions for Further Reading

1.0 Introduction:

As the Renaissance spread to other countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, a more skeptical strain of humanism developed, stressing the limitations of human understanding. For example, the sixteenth-century French humanist, Michel de Montaigne, was no less interested in studying human experiences than the earlier humanists were, but he maintained that the world of experience was a world of appearances, and that human beings could never hope to see past those appearances into the “realities” that lie behind them. This is the world in which Shakespeare places his characters. Hamlet is faced with the difficult task of correcting an injustice that he can never have sufficient knowledge of—a dilemma that is by no means unique, or even uncommon. And while Hamlet is fond of pointing out questions that cannot be answered because they concern supernatural and metaphysical matters, the play as a whole chiefly demonstrates the difficulty of knowing the truth about other people—their guilt or innocence, their motivations, their feelings, their relative states of sanity or insanity. The world

of other people is a world of appearances, and *Hamlet* is, fundamentally, a play about the difficulty of living in that world.

1.1 Summary:

On a dark winter night, a ghost walks the ramparts of Elsinore Castle in Denmark. Discovered first by a pair of watchmen, then by the scholar Horatio, the ghost resembles the recently deceased King Hamlet, whose brother Claudius has inherited the throne and married the king's widow, Queen Gertrude. When Horatio and the watchmen bring Prince Hamlet, the son of Gertrude and the dead king, to see the ghost, it speaks to him, declaring ominously that it is indeed his father's spirit, and that he was murdered by none other than Claudius. Ordering Hamlet to seek revenge on the man who usurped his throne and married his wife, the ghost disappears with the dawn.

Prince Hamlet devotes himself to avenging his father's death, but, because he is contemplative and thoughtful by nature, he delays, entering into a deep melancholy and even apparent madness. Claudius and Gertrude worry about the prince's erratic behavior and attempt to discover its cause. They employ a pair of Hamlet's friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to watch him. When Polonius, the pompous Lord Chamberlain, suggests that Hamlet may be mad with love for his daughter, Ophelia, Claudius agrees to spy on Hamlet in conversation with the girl. But though Hamlet certainly seems mad, he does not seem to love Ophelia: he orders her to enter a nunnery and declares that he wishes to ban marriages.

A group of traveling actors comes to Elsinore, and Hamlet seizes upon an idea to test his uncle's guilt. He will have the players perform a scene closely resembling the sequence by which Hamlet imagines his uncle to have murdered his father, so that if Claudius is guilty, he will surely react. When the moment of the murder arrives in the theater, Claudius leaps up and leaves the room. Hamlet and Horatio agree that this proves his guilt. Hamlet goes to kill Claudius but finds him praying. Since he believes that killing Claudius while in prayer would send Claudius's soul to heaven, Hamlet considers that it would be an inadequate revenge and decides to wait. Claudius, now frightened of Hamlet's madness and fearing for his own safety, orders that Hamlet be sent to England at once.

Hamlet goes to confront his mother, in whose bedchamber Polonius has hidden behind a tapestry. Hearing a noise from behind the tapestry, Hamlet believes the king is hiding there. He draws his sword and stabs through the fabric, killing Polonius. For this crime, he is immediately dispatched to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. However, Claudius's plan for Hamlet includes more than banishment, as he has given Rosencrantz and Guildenstern sealed orders for the King of England demanding that Hamlet be put to death.

In the aftermath of her father's death, Ophelia goes mad with grief and drowns in the river. Polonius's son, Laertes, who has been staying in France, returns to Denmark in a rage. Claudius convinces him that Hamlet is to blame for his father's and sister's deaths. When Horatio and the king receive letters from Hamlet indicating that the prince has returned to Denmark after pirates attacked his ship en route to England, Claudius concocts a plan to use Laertes' desire for revenge to secure Hamlet's death. Laertes will fence with Hamlet in innocent sport, but Claudius will poison Laertes' blade so that if he draws blood, Hamlet will die. As a backup plan, the king decides to poison a goblet, which he will give Hamlet to drink should Hamlet score the first or second hits of the match. Hamlet returns to the vicinity of Elsinore just as Ophelia's funeral is taking place. Stricken with grief, he attacks Laertes and declares that he had in fact always loved Ophelia. Back at the castle, he tells Horatio that he believes one must be prepared to die, since death can come at any moment. A foolish courtier named Osric arrives on Claudius's orders to arrange the fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes.

The sword-fighting begins. Hamlet scores the first hit, but declines to drink from the king's proffered goblet. Instead, Gertrude takes a drink from it and is swiftly killed by the poison. Laertes succeeds in wounding Hamlet, though Hamlet does not die of the poison immediately. First, Laertes is cut by his own sword's blade, and, after revealing to Hamlet that Claudius is responsible for the queen's death, he dies from the blade's poison. Hamlet then stabs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. Claudius dies, and Hamlet dies immediately after achieving his revenge.

At this moment, a Norwegian prince named Fortinbras, who has led an army to Denmark and attacked Poland earlier in the play, enters with ambassadors from England, who report that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Fortinbras is stunned by the gruesome sight of the entire

royal family lying sprawled on the floor dead. He moves to take power of the kingdom. Horatio, fulfilling Hamlet's last request, tells him Hamlet's tragic story. Fortinbras orders that Hamlet be carried away in a manner befitting a fallen soldier.

2.0 Act-wise Summary of the Play:

Act 1 Scene 1

2.1 Summary

On a dark winter night outside Elsinore Castle in Denmark, an officer named Bernardo comes to relieve the watchman Francisco. In the heavy darkness, the men cannot see each other. Bernardo hears a footstep near him and cries, "Who's there?" After both men ensure that the other is also a watchman, they relax. Cold, tired, and apprehensive from his many hours of guarding the castle, Francisco thanks Bernardo and prepares to go home and go to bed.

Shortly thereafter, Bernardo is joined by Marcellus, another watchman, and Horatio, a friend of Prince Hamlet. Bernardo and Marcellus have urged Horatio to stand watch with them, because they believe they have something shocking to show him. In hushed tones, they discuss the apparition they have seen for the past two nights, and which they now hope to show Horatio: the ghost of the recently deceased King Hamlet, which they claim has appeared before them on the castle ramparts in the late hours of the night.

Horatio is skeptical, but then the ghost suddenly appears before the men and just as suddenly vanishes. Terrified, Horatio acknowledges that the specter does indeed resemble the dead King of Denmark, that it even wears the armor King Hamlet wore when he battled against the armies of Norway, and the same frown he wore when he fought against the Poles. Horatio declares that the ghost must bring warning of impending misfortune for Denmark, perhaps in the form of a military attack. He recounts the story of King Hamlet's conquest of certain lands once belonging to Norway, saying that Fortinbras, the young Prince of Norway, now seeks to reconquer those forfeited lands.

The ghost materializes for a second time, and Horatio tries to speak to it. The ghost remains silent, however, and disappears again just as the cock crows at the first hint of dawn. Horatio suggests that they tell Prince Hamlet, the dead king's son, about the apparition. He believes that though the ghost did not speak to him, if it is really the ghost of King Hamlet, it will not refuse to speak to his beloved son.

2.2 Act I, scene ii

Summary

The morning after Horatio and the guardsmen see the ghost, King Claudius gives a speech to his courtiers, explaining his recent marriage to Gertrude, his brother's widow and the mother of Prince Hamlet. Claudius says that he mourns his brother but has chosen to balance Denmark's mourning with the delight of his marriage. He mentions that young Fortinbras has written to him, rashly demanding the surrender of the lands King Hamlet won from Fortinbras's father, and dispatches Cornelius and Voltimand with a message for the King of Norway, Fortinbras's elderly uncle.

His speech concluded, Claudius turns to Laertes, the son of the Lord Chamberlain, Polonius. Laertes expresses his desire to return to France, where he was staying before his return to Denmark for Claudius's coronation. Polonius gives his son permission, and Claudius jovially grants Laertes his consent as well.

Turning to Prince Hamlet, Claudius asks why "the clouds still hang" upon him, as Hamlet is still wearing black mourning clothes (I.ii.66). Gertrude urges him to cast off his "nightly colour," but he replies bitterly that his inner sorrow is so great that his dour appearance is merely a poor mirror of it (I.ii.68). Affecting a tone of fatherly advice, Claudius declares that all fathers die, and all sons must lose their fathers. When a son loses a father, he is duty-bound to mourn, but to mourn for too long is unmanly and inappropriate. Claudius urges Hamlet to think of him as a father, reminding the prince that he stands in line to succeed to the throne upon Claudius's death.

With this in mind, Claudius says that he does not wish for Hamlet to return to school at Wittenberg (where he had been studying before his father's death), as Hamlet has asked to do.

Gertrude echoes her husband, professing a desire for Hamlet to remain close to her. Hamlet stiffly agrees to obey her. Claudius claims to be so pleased by Hamlet's decision to stay that he will celebrate with festivities and cannon fire, an old custom called "the king's rouse." Ordering Gertrude to follow him, he escorts her from the room, and the court follows.

Alone, Hamlet exclaims that he wishes he could die, that he could evaporate and cease to exist. He wishes bitterly that God had not made suicide a sin. Anguished, he laments his father's death and his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle. He remembers how deeply in love his parents seemed, and he curses the thought that now, not yet two months after his father's death, his mother has married his father's far inferior brother.

O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourn'd longer,—married with mine uncle,
My father's brother; but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules: within a month;
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married:— O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!

Hamlet quiets suddenly as Horatio strides into the room, followed by Marcellus and Bernardo. Horatio was a close friend of Hamlet at the university in Wittenberg, and Hamlet, happy to see him, asks why he has left the school to travel to Denmark. Horatio says that he came to see King Hamlet's funeral, to which Hamlet curtly replies that Horatio came to see his mother's wedding. Horatio agrees that the one followed closely on the heels of the other. He then tells Hamlet that he, Marcellus, and Bernardo have seen what appears to be his father's ghost. Stunned, Hamlet agrees to keep watch with them that night, in the hope that he will be able to speak to the apparition.

2.3 Summary: Act I, scene iii

In Polonius's house, Laertes prepares to leave for France. Bidding his sister, Ophelia, farewell, he cautions her against falling in love with Hamlet, who is, according to Laertes, too far above her by birth to be able to love her honorably. Since Hamlet is responsible not only for his own feelings but for his position in the state, it may be impossible for him to marry her. Ophelia agrees to keep Laertes' advice as a "watchman" close to her heart but urges him not to give her advice that he does not practice himself. Laertes reassures her that he will take care of himself.

Polonius enters to bid his son farewell. He tells Laertes that he must hurry to his ship but then delays him by giving him a great deal of advice about how to behave with integrity and practicality. Polonius admonishes Laertes to keep his thoughts to himself, restrain himself from acting on rash desires, and treat people with familiarity but not with vulgarity. He advises him to hold on to his old friends but be slow to embrace new friends; to be slow to quarrel but to fight boldly if the need arises; to listen more than he talks; to dress richly but not gaudily; to refrain from borrowing or lending money; and, finally, to be true to himself above all things.

Laertes leaves, bidding farewell to Ophelia once more. Alone with his daughter, Polonius asks Ophelia what Laertes told her before he left. Ophelia says that it was "something touching the Lord Hamlet" (I.ii.89). Polonius asks her about her relationship with Hamlet. She tells him that Hamlet claims to love her. Polonius sternly echoes Laertes' advice, and forbids Ophelia to associate with Hamlet anymore. He tells her that Hamlet has deceived her in swearing his love, and that she should see through his false vows and rebuff his affections. Ophelia pledges to obey.

2.4 Summary: Act I, scene iv

It is now night. Hamlet keeps watch outside the castle with Horatio and Marcellus, waiting in the cold for the ghost to appear. Shortly after midnight, trumpets and gunfire sound from the castle, and Hamlet explains that the new king is spending the night carousing, as is the Danish custom. Disgusted, Hamlet declares that this sort of custom is better broken than kept, saying that the king's revelry makes Denmark a laughingstock among other nations and lessens the Danes' otherwise impressive achievements. Then the ghost appears, and Hamlet calls out to it. The ghost beckons Hamlet to follow it out into the night. His companions urge him not to follow, begging him to consider that the ghost might lead him toward harm.

Hamlet himself is unsure whether his father's apparition is truly the king's spirit or an evil demon, but he declares that he cares nothing for his life and that, if his soul is immortal, the ghost can do nothing to harm his soul. He follows after the apparition and disappears into the darkness. Horatio and Marcellus, stunned, declare that the event bodes ill for the nation. Horatio proclaims that heaven will oversee the outcome of Hamlet's encounter with the ghost, but Marcellus says that they should follow and try to protect him themselves. After a moment, Horatio and Marcellus follow after Hamlet and the ghost.

2.5 Act I, scenes iii–iv

Neither a borrower nor a lender be:
For loan oft loses both itself and friend;
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.

The active, headstrong, and affectionate Laertes contrasts powerfully with the contemplative Hamlet, becoming one of Hamlet's most important foils in the play. (A foil is a character who by contrast emphasizes the distinct characteristics of another character.) As the plot progresses, Hamlet's hesitancy to undertake his father's revenge will markedly contrast with Laertes' furious willingness to avenge his father's death (III.iv). Act I, scene iii serves to introduce this contrast. Since the last scene portrayed the bitterly fractured state of Hamlet's family, by comparison, the bustling normalcy of Polonius's household appears all the more striking. Polonius's long speech advising Laertes on how to behave in France is self-consciously paternal, almost excessively so, as if to hammer home the contrast between the fatherly love Laertes enjoys and Hamlet's state of loss and estrangement. Hamlet's conversation with the ghost of his father in Act I, scene v will be a grotesque recapitulation of the father-to-son speech, with vastly darker content.

As in the previous scene, when Claudius and Gertrude advised Hamlet to stay in Denmark and cast off his mourning, the third scene develops through a motif of family members giving one another advice, or orders masked as advice. While Polonius and Laertes seem to have a relatively normal father-son relationship, their relationships with Ophelia seem somewhat troubling. They each assume a position of unquestioned authority over her, Polonius treating his daughter as though her feelings are irrelevant ("Affection! pooh! you speak like a green girl") and Laertes

treating her as though her judgment is suspect (I.iii.101). Further, Laertes' speech to Ophelia is laced with forceful sexual imagery, referring to her "chaste treasure open" to Hamlet's "unmaster'd importunity" (I.iii.31–32). Combined with the extremely affectionate interplay between the brother and sister, this sexual imagery creates an incestuous undertone, echoing the incest of Claudius's marriage to his brother's wife and Hamlet's passionate, conflicting feelings for his mother.

The short transitional scene that follows serves a number of important purposes, as Shakespeare begins to construct a unified world out of the various environments of the play. Whereas the play up to this point has been divided into a number of separate settings, this scene begins to blend together elements of different settings. Hamlet, for instance, has been associated with the world inside Elsinore, but he now makes his appearance in the darkness outside it. Likewise, the terror outside the castle so far has been quite separate from the revelry inside, but now the sound of Claudius's carousing leaks through the walls and reaches Hamlet and his companions in the night.

Act I, scene iv also continues the development of the motif of the ill health of Denmark. Hamlet views the king's carousing as a further sign of the state's corruption, commenting that alcohol makes the bad aspects of a person's character overwhelm all of his or her good qualities. And the appearance of the ghost is again seen as a sign of Denmark's decay, this time by Marcellus, who famously declares, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.67).

Finally, the reappearance of the still-silent ghost brings with it a return of the theme of spirituality, truth, and uncertainty, or, more specifically, the uncertainty of truth in a world of spiritual ambiguity. Since Hamlet does not know what lies beyond death, he cannot tell whether the ghost is truly his father's spirit or whether it is an evil demon come from hell to tempt him toward destruction. This uncertainty about the spiritual world will lead Hamlet to wrenching considerations of moral truth. These considerations have already been raised by Hamlet's desire to kill himself in Act I, scene ii and will be explored more directly in the scenes to come.

2.6 Summary: Act I, scene v

In the darkness, the ghost speaks to Hamlet, claiming to be his father's spirit, come to rouse Hamlet to revenge his death, a "foul and most unnatural murder" (I.v.25). Hamlet is appalled at the revelation that his father has been murdered, and the ghost tells him that as he slept in his garden, a villain poured poison into his ear—the very villain who now wears his crown, Claudius. Hamlet's worst fears about his uncle are confirmed. "O my prophetic soul!" he cries (I.v.40). The ghost exhorts Hamlet to seek revenge, telling him that Claudius has corrupted Denmark and corrupted Gertrude, having taken her from the pure love of her first marriage and seduced her in the foul lust of their incestuous union. But the ghost urges Hamlet not to act against his mother in any way, telling him to "leave her to heaven" and to the pangs of her own conscience (I.v.86).

As dawn breaks, the ghost disappears. Intensely moved, Hamlet swears to remember and obey the ghost. Horatio and Marcellus arrive upon the scene and frantically ask Hamlet what has happened. Shaken and extremely agitated, he refuses to tell them, and insists that they swear upon his sword not to reveal what they have seen. He tells them further that he may pretend to be a madman, and he makes them swear not to give the slightest hint that they know anything about his motives. Three times the ghost's voice echoes from beneath the ground, proclaiming, "Swear." Horatio and Marcellus take the oath upon Hamlet's sword, and the three men exit toward the castle. As they leave, Hamlet bemoans the responsibility he now carries: "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite / That ever I was born to set it right!" (I.v.189–190).

2.7 Summary: Act II, scene i

Polonius dispatches his servant Reynaldo to France with money and written notes for Laertes, also ordering him to inquire about and spy on Laertes' personal life. He gives him explicit directions as to how to pursue his investigations, then sends him on his way. As Reynaldo leaves, Ophelia enters, visibly upset. She tells Polonius that Hamlet, unkempt and wild-eyed, has accosted her. Hamlet grabbed her, held her, and sighed heavily, but did not speak to her. Polonius says that Hamlet must be mad with his love for Ophelia, for she has distanced herself from him ever since Polonius ordered her to do so. Polonius speculates that this lovesickness might be the cause of Hamlet's moodiness, and he hurries out to tell Claudius of his idea.

2.8 Act II, scene ii

Within the castle, Claudius and Gertrude welcome Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of Hamlet's friends from Wittenberg. Increasingly concerned about Hamlet's erratic behavior and his apparent inability to recover from his father's death, the king and queen have summoned his friends to Elsinore in the hope that they might be able to cheer Hamlet out of his melancholy, or at least discover the cause of it. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern agree to investigate, and the queen orders attendants to take them to her "too much changed" son (II.ii.36).

Polonius enters, announcing the return of the ambassadors whom Claudius sent to Norway. Voltimand and Cornelius enter and describe what took place with the aged and ailing king of Norway: the king rebuked Fortinbras for attempting to make war on Denmark, and Fortinbras swore he would never again attack the Danes. The Norwegian king, overjoyed, bequeathed upon Fortinbras a large annuity, and urged him to use the army he had assembled to attack the Poles instead of the Danes. He has therefore sent a request back to Claudius that Prince Fortinbras's armies be allowed safe passage through Denmark on their way to attack the Poles. Relieved to have averted a war with Fortinbras's army, Claudius declares that he will see to this business later. Voltimand and Cornelius leave.

Turning to the subject of Hamlet, Polonius declares, after a wordy preamble, that the prince is mad with love for Ophelia. He shows the king and queen letters and love poems Hamlet has given to Ophelia, and proposes a plan to test his theory. Hamlet often walks alone through the lobby of the castle, and, at such a time, they could hide behind an arras (a curtain or wall hanging) while Ophelia confronts Hamlet, allowing them to see for themselves whether Hamlet's madness really emanates from his love for her. The king declares that they will try the plan. Gertrude notices that Hamlet is approaching, reading from a book as he walks, and Polonius says that he will speak to the prince. Gertrude and Claudius exit, leaving Polonius alone with Hamlet.

Polonius attempts to converse with Hamlet, who appears insane; he calls the old man a "fishmonger" and answers his questions irrationally. But many of Hamlet's seemingly lunatic statements hide barbed observations about Polonius's pomposity and his old age. Polonius

comments that while Hamlet is clearly mad, his replies are often “pregnant” with meaning (II.ii.206). He hurries away, determined to arrange the meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia.

As Polonius leaves, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, and Hamlet seems pleased to see them. They discuss Hamlet’s unhappiness about recent affairs in Denmark. Hamlet asks why they have come. Sheepishly, the two men claim they have come merely to visit Hamlet, but he sternly declares that he knows that the king and queen sent for them. They confess this to be true, and Hamlet says that he knows why: because he has lost all of his joy and descended into a state of melancholy in which everything (and everyone) appears sterile and worthless.

Rosencrantz smiles and says he wonders how Hamlet will receive a theatrical troupe that is currently traveling toward the castle. The trumpets blow, announcing the arrival of the actors (or “players”). Hamlet tells his friends they are welcome to stay at Elsinore, but that his “uncle-father and aunt-mother” are deceived in his madness. He is mad only some of the time and at other times is sane.

Polonius enters to announce the arrival of the players, who follow him into the room. Hamlet welcomes them and entreats one of them to give him a speech about the fall of Troy and the death of the Trojan king and queen, Priam and Hecuba. Impressed with the player’s speech, Hamlet orders Polonius to see them escorted to guestrooms. He announces that the next night they will hear *The Murder of Gonzago* performed, with an additional short speech that he will write himself. Hamlet leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and now stands alone in the room.

He immediately begins cursing himself, bitterly commenting that the player who gave the speech was able to summon a depth of feeling and expression for long-dead figures who mean nothing to him, while Hamlet is unable to take action even with his far more powerful motives. He resolves to devise a trap for Claudius, forcing the king to watch a play whose plot closely resembles the murder of Hamlet’s father; if the king is guilty, he thinks, he will surely show some visible sign of guilt when he sees his sin reenacted on stage. Then, Hamlet reasons, he will obtain definitive proof of Claudius’s guilt. “The play’s the thing,” he declares, “wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king” (II.ii.581–582).

If Hamlet is merely pretending to be mad, as he suggests, he does almost too good a job of it. His portrayal is so convincing that many critics contend that his already fragile sanity shatters at the sight of his dead father's ghost. However, the acute and cutting observations he makes while supposedly mad support the view that he is only pretending. Importantly, he declares, "I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw" (II.ii.361–362). That is, he is only "mad" at certain calculated times, and the rest of the time he knows what is what. But he is certainly confused and upset, and his confusion translates into an extraordinarily intense state of mind suggestive of madness.

This scene, by far the longest in the play, includes several important revelations and furthers the development of some of the play's main themes. The scene contains four main parts: Polonius's conversation with Claudius and Gertrude, which includes the discussion with the ambassadors; Hamlet's conversation with Polonius, in which we see Hamlet consciously feigning madness for the first time; Hamlet's reunion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and the scene with the players, followed by Hamlet's concluding soliloquy on the theme of action. These separate plot developments take place in the same location and occur in rapid succession, allowing the audience to compare and contrast their thematic elements.

We have already seen the developing contrast between Hamlet and Laertes. The section involving the Norwegian ambassadors develops another important contrast, this time between Hamlet and Fortinbras. Like Hamlet, Fortinbras is the grieving son of a dead king, a prince whose uncle inherited the throne in his place. But where Hamlet has sunk into despair, contemplation, and indecision, Fortinbras has devoted himself to the pursuit of revenge. This contrast will be explored much more thoroughly later in the play. Here, it is important mainly to note that Fortinbras's uncle has forbidden him to attack Denmark but has given him permission to ride through Denmark on his way to attack Poland. This at least suggests the possibility that the King of Norway is trying to trick Claudius into allowing a hostile army into his country. It is notable that Claudius appears indifferent to the fact that a powerful enemy will be riding through his country with a large army in tow. Claudius seems much more worried about Hamlet's madness, indicating that where King Hamlet was a powerful warrior who sought to expand Denmark's power abroad, Claudius is a politician who is more concerned about threats from within his state.

The arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of the most enigmatic figures in *Hamlet*, is another important development. These two characters are manipulated by all of the members of the royal family and seem to exist in a state of fear that they will offend the wrong person or give away the wrong secret at the wrong time. One of the strangest qualities of the two men is their extraordinary similarity. In fact, Shakespeare leaves Rosencrantz and Guildenstern almost entirely undifferentiated from one another. “Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern,” Claudius says, and Gertrude replies, “Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz,” almost as though it does not matter which is which (II.ii.33–34). The two men’s questioning of Hamlet is a parody of a Socratic dialogue. They propose possibilities, develop ideas according to rational argument, and find their attempts to understand Hamlet’s behavior entirely thwarted by his uncooperative replies.

What a piece of work is 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?

The other important event in this scene is the arrival of the players. The presence of players and play-acting within the play points to an important theme: that real life is in certain ways like play-acting. Hamlet professes to be amazed by the player king’s ability to engage emotionally with the story he is telling even though it is only an imaginative recreation. Hamlet is prevented from responding to his own situation because he doesn’t have certain knowledge about it, but the player king, and theater audiences in general, can respond feelingly even to things they know to be untrue. In fact, most of the time people respond to their real-life situations with feelings and actions that are not based on certain knowledge. This is what Hamlet refuses to do. His refusal to act like he knows what he’s doing when he really doesn’t may be construed as heroic and appropriate, or quixotic and impossible. In either case, Hamlet’s plan to trap the king by eliciting an emotional response is highly unsound: Claudius’s feelings about a play could never be construed as a reliable index of its truth.

2.9 Act III, scene i

Claudius and Gertrude discuss Hamlet's behavior with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who say they have been unable to learn the cause of his melancholy. They tell the king and queen about Hamlet's enthusiasm for the players. Encouraged, Gertrude and Claudius agree that they will see the play that evening. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave, and Claudius orders Gertrude to leave as well, saying that he and Polonius intend to spy on Hamlet's confrontation with Ophelia. Gertrude exits, and Polonius directs Ophelia to walk around the lobby. Polonius hears Hamlet coming, and he and the king hide.

Hamlet enters, speaking thoughtfully and agonizingly to himself about the question of whether to commit suicide to end the pain of experience: "To be, or not to be: that is the question" (III.i.58). He says that the miseries of life are such that no one would willingly bear them, except that they are afraid of "something after death" (III.i.80). Because we do not know what to expect in the afterlife, we would rather "bear those ills we have," Hamlet says, "than fly to others that we know not of" (III.i.83–84). In mid-thought, Hamlet sees Ophelia approaching. Having received her orders from Polonius, she tells him that she wishes to return the tokens of love he has given her. Angrily, Hamlet denies having given her anything; he laments the dishonesty of beauty, and claims both to have loved Ophelia once and never to have loved her at all. Bitterly commenting on the wretchedness of humankind, he urges Ophelia to enter a nunnery rather than become a "breeder of sinners" (III.i.122–123). He criticizes women for making men behave like monsters and for contributing to the world's dishonesty by painting their faces to appear more beautiful than they are. Working himself into a rage, Hamlet denounces Ophelia, women, and humankind in general, saying that he wishes to end all marriages. As he storms out, Ophelia mourns the "noble mind" that has now lapsed into apparent madness (III.i.149).

The king and Polonius emerge from behind the tapestry. Claudius says that Hamlet's strange behavior has clearly not been caused by love for Ophelia and that his speech does not seem like the speech of insanity. He says that he fears that melancholy sits on something dangerous in Hamlet's soul like a bird sits on her egg, and that he fears what will happen when it hatches. He declares that he will send Hamlet to England, in the hope that a change of scenery might help him get over his troubles. Polonius agrees that this is a good idea, but he still believes that Hamlet's agitation comes from loving Ophelia. He asks Claudius to send Hamlet to Gertrude's chamber after the play, where Polonius can hide again and watch unseen; he hopes to learn

whether Hamlet is really mad with love. Claudius agrees, saying that “[m]adness in great ones” must be carefully watched (III.i.187).

“To be, or not to be” is the most famous line in English literature. What does it mean? Why are these words and what follows special?

One reason is that they are a stunning example of Shakespeare’s ability to make his characters seem three-dimensional. The audience senses that there is more to Hamlet’s words than meets the ear—that there is something behind his words that is never spoken. Or, to put it another way, the audience witnesses signs of something within Hamlet’s mind that even he isn’t aware of. Hamlet is a fictional character who seems to possess a subconscious mind. How does Shakespeare manage to accomplish this?

In the first place, Hamlet doesn’t talk directly about what he’s really talking about. When he questions whether it is better “to be, or not to be,” the obvious implication is, “Should I kill myself?” The entire soliloquy strongly suggests that he is toying with suicide and perhaps trying to work up his courage to do it. But at no point does he say that he is in pain or discuss why he wants to kill himself. In fact, he never says “I” or “me” in the entire speech. He’s not trying to “express” himself at all; instead, he poses the question as a matter of philosophical debate. When he claims that everybody would commit suicide if they weren’t uncertain about the afterlife, it sounds as if he’s making an argument to convince an imaginary listener about an abstract point rather than directly addressing how the question applies to him. Now, it’s perfectly ordinary for characters in plays to say something other than what they mean to other characters (this suggests that they are consciously hiding their true motives), but Hamlet does it when he’s talking to himself. This creates the general impression that there are things going on in Hamlet’s mind that he can’t think about directly.

While we’re on the subject of what’s going on inside Hamlet’s mind, consider his encounter with Ophelia. This conversation, closely watched by Claudius and Polonius, is, in fact, a test. It’s supposed to establish whether Hamlet’s madness stems from his lovesickness over Ophelia. Before we, the audience, see this encounter, we already think we know more than Claudius does: we know that Hamlet is only acting crazy, and that he’s doing it to hide the fact that he’s plotting

against (or at least investigating) his uncle. Therefore, it can't be true that he's acting mad because of his love for Ophelia. But witnessing Hamlet's encounter with her throws everything we think we know into question.

Does Hamlet mean what he says to Ophelia? He says that he did love her once but that he doesn't love her now. There are several problems with concluding that Hamlet says the opposite of what he means in order to appear crazy. For one thing, if he really does love her, this is unnecessarily self-destructive behavior. It's unnecessary because it doesn't accomplish very much; that is, it doesn't make Claudius suspect him less. His professions of former love make him appear fickle, or emotionally withdrawn, rather than crazy.

Is Hamlet really crazy or just pretending? He announced ahead of time that he was going to act crazy, so it's hard to conclude that he (coincidentally) really went mad right after saying so. But his behavior toward Ophelia is both self-destructive and fraught with emotional intensity. It doesn't obviously further his plans. Moreover, his bitterness against Ophelia, and against women in general, resonates with his general discontentedness about the state of the world, the same discontentedness that he expresses when he thinks no one is watching. There is a passionate intensity to his unstable behavior that keeps us from viewing it as fake.

Perhaps it is worthwhile to ask this question: if a person in a rational state of mind decides to act as if he is crazy, to abuse the people around him regardless of whether he loves those people or hates them, and to give free expression to all of his most antisocial thoughts, when he starts to carry those actions out, will it even be possible to say at what point he stops pretending to be crazy and starts actually being crazy?

2.10 Act III, scene ii

Summary

That evening, in the castle hall now doubling as a theater, Hamlet anxiously lectures the players on how to act the parts he has written for them. Polonius shuffles by with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Hamlet dispatches them to hurry the players in their preparations. Horatio enters, and Hamlet, pleased to see him, praises him heartily, expressing his affection for and high

opinion of Horatio's mind and manner, especially Horatio's qualities of self-control and reserve. Having told Horatio what he learned from the ghost—that Claudius murdered his father—he now asks him to watch Claudius carefully during the play so that they might compare their impressions of his behavior afterward. Horatio agrees, saying that if Claudius shows any signs of guilt, he will detect them.

The trumpets play a Danish march as the audience of lords and ladies begins streaming into the room. Hamlet warns Horatio that he will begin to act strangely. Sure enough, when Claudius asks how he is, his response seems quite insane: "Excellent, i' faith; of the chameleon's dish: I eat the air, promise-crammed" (III.ii.84–86). Hamlet asks Polonius about his history as an actor and torments Ophelia with a string of erotic puns. The players enter and act out a brief, silent version of the play to come called a "dumbshow." In the dumbshow, a king and queen display their love. The queen leaves the king to sleep, and while he is sleeping, a man murders him by pouring poison into his ear. The murderer tries to seduce the queen, who gradually accepts his advances.

The players begin to enact the play in full, and we learn that the man who kills the king is the king's nephew. Throughout, Hamlet keeps up a running commentary on the characters and their actions, and continues to tease Ophelia with oblique sexual references. When the murderer pours the poison into the sleeping king's ear, Claudius rises and cries out for light. Chaos ensues as the play comes to a sudden halt, the torches are lit, and the king flees the room, followed by the audience. When the scene quiets, Hamlet is left alone with Horatio.

Hamlet and Horatio agree that the king's behavior was telling. Now extremely excited, Hamlet continues to act frantic and scatterbrained, speaking glibly and inventing little poems. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern arrive to tell Hamlet that he is wanted in his mother's chambers. Rosencrantz asks again about the cause of Hamlet's "distemper," and Hamlet angrily accuses the pair of trying to play him as if he were a musical pipe. Polonius enters to escort Hamlet to the queen. Hamlet says he will go to her in a moment and asks for a moment alone. He steels himself to speak to his mother, resolving to be brutally honest with her but not to lose control of himself: "I will speak daggers to her, but use none" (III.ii.366).

In the first two scenes of Act III, Hamlet and Claudius both devise traps to catch one another's secrets: Claudius spies on Hamlet to discover the true nature of his madness, and Hamlet attempts to "catch the conscience of the king" in the theater (III.i.582). The play-within-a-play tells the story of Gonzago, the Duke of Vienna, and his wife, Baptista, who marries his murdering nephew, Lucianus. Hamlet believes that the play is an opportunity to establish a more reliable basis for Claudius's guilt than the claims of the ghost. Since he has no way of knowing whether to believe a member of the spirit world, he tries to determine whether Claudius is guilty by reading his behavior for signs of a psychological state of guilt.

Although Hamlet exults at the success of his stratagem, interpreting Claudius's interruption isn't as simple as it seems. In the first place, Claudius does not react to the dumbshow, which exactly mimics the actions of which the ghost accuses Claudius. Claudius reacts to the play itself, which, unlike the dumbshow, makes it clear that the king is murdered by his nephew. Does Claudius react to being confronted with his own crimes, or to a play about uncle-killing sponsored by his crazy nephew? Or does he simply have indigestion?

Hamlet appears more in control of his own behavior in this scene than in the one before, as shown by his effortless manipulations of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and his frank conversation with Horatio. He even expresses admiration and affection for Horatio's calm level-headedness, the lack of which is his own weakest point: "Give me that man / That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him / In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart, / As I do thee" (III.ii.64-67). In this scene he seems to prove that he is not insane after all, given the effortlessness with which he alternates between wild, erratic behavior and focused, sane behavior. He is excited but coherent during his conversation with Horatio before the play, but as soon as the king and queen enter, he begins to act insane, a sign that he is only pretending. His only questionable behavior in this scene arises in his crude comments to Ophelia, which show him capable of real cruelty. His misogyny has crossed rational bounds, and his every comment is laced with sexual innuendo. For instance, she comments, "You are keen, my lord, you are keen," complimenting him on his sharp intellect, and he replies, "It would cost you a groaning to take off my edge" (III.ii.227-228). His interchange with Ophelia is a mere prelude to the passionate rage he will unleash on Gertrude in the next scene.

2.11 Act III, scene iii

Summary

Elsewhere in the castle, King Claudius speaks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Badly shaken by the play and now considering Hamlet's madness to be dangerous, Claudius asks the pair to escort Hamlet on a voyage to England and to depart immediately. They agree and leave to make preparations. Polonius enters and reminds the king of his plan to hide in Gertrude's room and observe Hamlet's confrontation with her. He promises to tell Claudius all that he learns. When Polonius leaves, the king is alone, and he immediately expresses his guilt and grief over his sin. A brother's murder, he says, is the oldest sin and "hath the primal eldest curse upon't" (III.iii.37). He longs to ask for forgiveness, but says that he is unprepared to give up that which he gained by committing the murder, namely, the crown and the queen. He falls to his knees and begins to pray.

Hamlet slips quietly into the room and steels himself to kill the unseeing Claudius. But suddenly it occurs to him that if he kills Claudius while he is praying, he will end the king's life at the moment when he was seeking forgiveness for his sins, sending Claudius's soul to heaven. This is hardly an adequate revenge, Hamlet thinks, especially since Claudius, by killing Hamlet's father before he had time to make his last confession, ensured that his brother would not go to heaven. Hamlet decides to wait, resolving to kill Claudius when the king is sinning—when he is either drunk, angry, or lustful. He leaves. Claudius rises and declares that he has been unable to pray sincerely: "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below" (III.iii.96).

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

In Act III, scene iii, Hamlet finally seems ready to put his desire for revenge into action. He is satisfied that the play has proven his uncle's guilt. When Claudius prays, the audience is given

real certainty that Claudius murdered his brother: a full, spontaneous confession, even though nobody else hears it. This only heightens our sense that the climax of the play is due to arrive. But Hamlet waits.

On the surface, it seems that he waits because he wants a more radical revenge. Critics such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge have been horrified by Hamlet's words here—he completely oversteps the bounds of Christian morality in trying to damn his opponent's soul as well as kill him. But apart from this ultraviolent posturing, Hamlet has once again avoided the imperative to act by involving himself in a problem of knowledge. Now that he's satisfied that he knows Claudius's guilt, he wants to know that his punishment will be sufficient. It may have been difficult to prove the former, but how can Hamlet ever hope to know the fate of Claudius's immortal soul?

Hamlet poses his desire to damn Claudius as a matter of fairness: his own father was killed without having cleansed his soul by praying or confessing, so why should his murderer be given that chance? But Hamlet is forced to admit that he doesn't really know what happened to his father, remarking "how his audit stands, who knows, save heaven?" (III.iv.82). The most he can say is that "in our circumstance and course of thought / 'Tis heavy with him" (III.iv.83–84). The Norton Shakespeare paraphrases "in our circumstance and course of thought" as "in our indirect and limited way of knowing on earth." Having proven his uncle's guilt to himself, against all odds, Hamlet suddenly finds something else to be uncertain about.

At this point, Hamlet has gone beyond his earlier need to know the facts about the crime, and he now craves metaphysical knowledge, knowledge of the afterlife and of God, before he is willing to act. The audience has had plenty of opportunity to see that Hamlet is fascinated with philosophical questions. In the case of the "to be, or not to be" soliloquy, we saw that his philosophizing can be a way for him to avoid thinking about or acknowledging something more immediately important (in that case, his urge to kill himself). Is Hamlet using his speculations about Claudius's soul to avoid thinking about something in this case? Perhaps the task he has set for himself—killing another human being in cold blood—is too much for him to face. Whatever it is, the audience may once again get the sense that there is something more to Hamlet's behavior than meets the eye. That Shakespeare is able to convey this sense is a remarkable

achievement in itself, quite apart from how we try to explain what Hamlet's unacknowledged motives might be

2.12 Act III, scene iv

Summary

In Gertrude's chamber, the queen and Polonius wait for Hamlet's arrival. Polonius plans to hide in order to eavesdrop on Gertrude's confrontation with her son, in the hope that doing so will enable him to determine the cause of Hamlet's bizarre and threatening behavior. Polonius urges the queen to be harsh with Hamlet when he arrives, saying that she should chastise him for his recent behavior. Gertrude agrees, and Polonius hides behind an arras, or tapestry.

Hamlet storms into the room and asks his mother why she has sent for him. She says that he has offended his father, meaning his stepfather, Claudius. He interrupts her and says that she has offended his father, meaning the dead King Hamlet, by marrying Claudius. Hamlet accosts her with an almost violent intensity and declares his intention to make her fully aware of the profundity of her sin. Fearing for her life, Gertrude cries out. From behind the arras, Polonius calls out for help. Hamlet, realizing that someone is behind the arras and suspecting that it might be Claudius, cries, "How now! a rat?" (III.iv.22). He draws his sword and stabs it through the tapestry, killing the unseen Polonius. Gertrude asks what Hamlet has done, and he replies, "Nay, I know not: / Is it the king?" (III.iv.24). The queen says his action was a "rash and bloody" deed, and Hamlet replies that it was almost as rash and bloody as murdering a king and marrying his brother (III.iv.26–28). Disbelieving, the queen exclaims, "As kill a king!" and Hamlet replies that she heard him correctly (III.iv.29).

Hamlet lifts the arras and discovers Polonius's body: he has not killed the king and achieved his revenge but has murdered the relatively innocent Polonius. He bids the old man farewell, calling him an "intruding fool" (III.iv.30). He turns to his mother, declaring that he will wring her heart. He shows her a picture of the dead king and a picture of the current king, bitterly comments on the superiority of his father to his uncle, and asks her furiously what has driven her to marry a rotten man such as Claudius. She pleads with him to stop, saying that he has turned her eyes onto

her soul and that she does not like what she sees there. Hamlet continues to denounce her and rail against Claudius, until, suddenly, the ghost of his father again appears before him.

Hamlet speaks to the apparition, but Gertrude is unable to see it and believes him to be mad. The ghost intones that it has come to remind Hamlet of his purpose, that Hamlet has not yet killed Claudius and must achieve his revenge. Noting that Gertrude is amazed and unable to see him, the ghost asks Hamlet to intercede with her. Hamlet describes the ghost, but Gertrude sees nothing, and in a moment the ghost disappears. Hamlet tries desperately to convince Gertrude that he is not mad but has merely feigned madness all along, and he urges her to forsake Claudius and regain her good conscience. He urges her as well not to reveal to Claudius that his madness has been an act. Gertrude, still shaken from Hamlet's furious condemnation of her, agrees to keep his secret. He bids her goodnight, but, before he leaves, he points to Polonius's corpse and declares that heaven has "punished me with this, and this with me" (III.iv.158). Hamlet reminds his mother that he must sail to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he says he will regard with suspicion, as though they were poisonous snakes, since he assumes that their loyalties are with Claudius, not with him. Dragging Polonius's body behind him, Hamlet leaves his mother's room.

2.13 Summary: Act IV, scene i

Frantic after her confrontation with Hamlet, Gertrude hurries to Claudius, who is conferring with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. She asks to speak to the king alone. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exit, she tells Claudius about her encounter with Hamlet. She says that he is as mad as the sea during a violent storm; she also tells Claudius that Hamlet has killed Polonius. Aghast, the king notes that had he been concealed behind the arras, Hamlet would have killed him. Claudius wonders aloud how he will be able to handle this public crisis without damaging his hold on Denmark. He tells Gertrude that they must ship Hamlet to England at once and find a way to explain Hamlet's misdeed to the court and to the people. He calls Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, tells them about the murder, and sends them to find Hamlet.

2.14 Summary: Act IV, scene ii

Elsewhere in Elsinore, Hamlet has just finished disposing of Polonius's body, commenting that the corpse has been "safely stowed" (IV.ii.1). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear and ask what he has done with the body. Hamlet refuses to give them a straight answer, instead saying, "The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body" (IV.ii.25–26). Feigning offense at being questioned, he accuses them of being spies in the service of Claudius. He calls Rosencrantz a "sponge . . . that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities," and warns him that "when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you, and, sponge, you shall be dry again" (IV.ii.11–19). At last he agrees to allow Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to escort him to Claudius.

2.15 Summary Act IV, scenes iii–iv

The king speaks to a group of attendants, telling them of Polonius's death and his intention to send Hamlet to England. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern appear with Hamlet, who is under guard. Pressed by Claudius to reveal the location of Polonius's body, Hamlet is by turns inane, coy, and clever, saying that Polonius is being eaten by worms, and that the king could send a messenger to find Polonius in heaven or seek him in hell himself. Finally, Hamlet reveals that Polonius's body is under the stairs near the castle lobby, and the king dispatches his attendants to look there. The king tells Hamlet that he must leave at once for England, and Hamlet enthusiastically agrees. He exits, and Claudius sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to ensure that he boards the ship at once. Alone with his thoughts, Claudius states his hope that England will obey the sealed orders he has sent with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The orders call for Prince Hamlet to be put to death.

2.16 Summary: Act IV, scene iv

On a nearby plain in Denmark, young Prince Fortinbras marches at the head of his army, traveling through Denmark on the way to attack Poland. Fortinbras orders his captain to go and ask the King of Denmark for permission to travel through his lands. On his way, the captain encounters Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern on their way to the ship bound for England. The captain informs them that the Norwegian army rides to fight the Poles. Hamlet asks about the basis of the conflict, and the man tells him that the armies will fight over "a little patch of land / That hath in it no profit but the name" (IV.iv.98–99). Astonished by the thought that a

bloody war could be fought over something so insignificant, Hamlet marvels that human beings are able to act so violently and purposefully for so little gain. By comparison, Hamlet has a great deal to gain from seeking his own bloody revenge on Claudius, and yet he still delays and fails to act toward his purpose. Disgusted with himself for having failed to gain his revenge on Claudius, Hamlet declares that from this moment on, his thoughts will be bloody.

2.17 Summary: Act IV, scene v

Gertrude and Horatio discuss Ophelia. Gertrude does not wish to see the bereaved girl, but Horatio says that Ophelia should be pitied, explaining that her grief has made her disordered and incoherent. Ophelia enters. Adorned with flowers and singing strange songs, she seems to have gone mad. Claudius enters and hears Ophelia's ravings, such as, "They say the owl was a baker's daughter" (IV.v.42). He says that Ophelia's grief stems from her father's death, and that the people have been suspicious and disturbed by the death as well: "muddied, / Thick and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers / For good Polonius' death" (IV.v.77-79). He also mentions that Laertes has secretly sailed back from France.

A loud noise echoes from somewhere in the castle. Claudius calls for his guards, and a gentleman enters to warn the king that Laertes has come with a mob of commoners. The mob calls Laertes "lord," according to the gentlemen, and the people whisper that "Laertes shall be king" (IV.v.102-106). A furious Laertes storms into the hall, fuming in his desire to avenge his father's death. Claudius attempts to soothe him by frankly acknowledging that Polonius is dead. Gertrude nervously adds that Claudius is innocent in it. When Ophelia reenters, obviously insane, Laertes plunges again into rage. Claudius claims that he is not responsible for Polonius's death and says that Laertes' desire for revenge is a credit to him, so long as he seeks revenge upon the proper person. Claudius convinces Laertes to hear his version of events, which he says will answer all his questions. Laertes agrees, and Claudius seconds his desire to achieve justice in the aftermath of Polonius's death: "Where th' offence is, let the great axe fall" (IV.v.213).

2.18 Summary: Act IV, scene vi

In another part of the castle, Horatio is introduced to a pair of sailors bearing a letter for him from Hamlet. In the letter, Hamlet says that his ship was captured by pirates, who have returned

him to Denmark. He asks Horatio to escort the sailors to the king and queen, for they have messages for them as well. He also says that he has much to tell of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Horatio takes the sailors to the king and then follows them to find Hamlet, who is in the countryside near the castle.

2.19 Act IV, scene vii

Summary

As Horatio speaks to the sailors, Claudius and a calmer Laertes discuss Polonius's death. Claudius explains that he acted as he did, burying Polonius secretly and not punishing Hamlet for the murder, because both the common people and the queen love Hamlet very much. As a king and as a husband, he did not wish to upset either of them. A messenger enters with the letter from Hamlet to Claudius, which informs the king that Hamlet will return tomorrow. Laertes is pleased that Hamlet has come back to Denmark, since it means that his revenge will not be delayed.

Claudius agrees that Laertes deserves to be revenged upon Hamlet, and he is disposed to encourage Laertes to kill Hamlet, since Hamlet's erratic behavior has made him a threat to Claudius's reign. The devious king begins to think of a way for Laertes to ensure his revenge without creating any appearance of foul play. He recalls that Hamlet has been jealous in the past of Laertes' prowess with a sword, which was recently praised before all the court by a Frenchman who had seen him in combat. The king speculates that if Hamlet could be tempted into a duel with Laertes, it might provide Laertes with the chance to kill him. Laertes agrees, and they settle on a plan. Laertes will use a sharpened sword rather than the customary dull fencing blade. Laertes also proposes to poison his sword, so that even a scratch from it will kill Hamlet. The king concocts a backup plan as well, proposing that if Hamlet succeeds in the duel, Claudius will offer him a poisoned cup of wine to drink from in celebration.

Gertrude enters with tragic news. Ophelia, mad with grief, has drowned in the river. Anguished to have lost his sister so soon after his father's death, Laertes flees the room. Claudius summons Gertrude to follow. He tells her it was nearly impossible to quiet Laertes' rage, and worries that the news of Ophelia's death will reawaken it.

2.20 Summary Act V, scene i

In the churchyard, two gravediggers shovel out a grave for Ophelia. They argue whether Ophelia should be buried in the churchyard, since her death looks like a suicide. According to religious doctrine, suicides may not receive Christian burial. The first gravedigger, who speaks cleverly and mischievously, asks the second gravedigger a riddle: “What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?” (V.i.46–47). The second gravedigger answers that it must be the gallows-maker, for his frame outlasts a thousand tenants. The first gravedigger corrects him, saying that it is the gravedigger, for his “houses” will last until Doomsday.

Hamlet and Horatio enter at a distance and watch the gravediggers work. Hamlet looks with wonder at the skulls they excavate to make room for the fresh grave and speculates darkly about what occupations the owners of these skulls served in life: “Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities now . . . ?” (V.i.90–91). Hamlet asks the gravedigger whose grave he digs, and the gravedigger spars with him verbally, first claiming that the grave is his own, since he is digging it, then that the grave belongs to no man and no woman, because men and women are living things and the occupant of the grave will be dead. At last he admits that it belongs to one “that was a woman sir; but, rest her soul, she’s dead” (V.i.146). The gravedigger, who does not recognize Hamlet as the prince, tells him that he has been a gravedigger since King Hamlet defeated the elder Fortinbras in battle, the very day on which young Prince Hamlet was born. Hamlet picks up a skull, and the gravedigger tells him that the skull belonged to Yorick, King Hamlet’s jester. Hamlet tells Horatio that as a child he knew Yorick and is appalled at the sight of the skull. He realizes forcefully that all men will eventually become dust, even great men like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. Hamlet imagines that Julius Caesar has disintegrated and is now part of the dust used to patch up a wall.

Suddenly, the funeral procession for Ophelia enters the churchyard, including Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, and many mourning courtiers. Hamlet, wondering who has died, notices that the funeral rites seem “maimed,” indicating that the dead man or woman took his or her own life (V.i.242). He and Horatio hide as the procession approaches the grave. As Ophelia is laid in the earth, Hamlet realizes it is she who has died. At the same moment, Laertes becomes infuriated

with the priest, who says that to give Ophelia a proper Christian burial would profane the dead. Laertes leaps into Ophelia's grave to hold her once again in his arms. Grief-stricken and outraged, Hamlet bursts upon the company, declaring in agonized fury his own love for Ophelia. He leaps into the grave and fights with Laertes, saying that "forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / make up my sum" (V.i.254–256). Hamlet cries that he would do things for Ophelia that Laertes could not dream of—he would eat a crocodile for her, he would be buried alive with her. The combatants are pulled apart by the funeral company. Gertrude and Claudius declare that Hamlet is mad. Hamlet storms off, and Horatio follows. The king urges Laertes to be patient, and to remember their plan for revenge.

2.21 Summary Act V, scene ii

The next day at Elsinore Castle, Hamlet tells Horatio how he plotted to overcome Claudius's scheme to have him murdered in England. He replaced the sealed letter carried by the unsuspecting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which called for Hamlet's execution, with one calling for the execution of the bearers of the letter—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern themselves. He tells Horatio that he has no sympathy for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who betrayed him and catered to Claudius, but that he feels sorry for having behaved with such hostility toward Laertes. In Laertes' desire to avenge his father's death, he says, he sees the mirror image of his own desire, and he promises to seek Laertes' good favor.

Their conversation is interrupted by Osric, a foolish courtier. Osric tries to flatter Hamlet by agreeing with everything Hamlet says, even when he contradicts himself; in the space of seconds, he agrees first that it is cold, then that it is hot. He has come to tell them that Claudius wants Hamlet to fence with Laertes and that the king has made a wager with Laertes that Hamlet will win. Then Osric begins to praise Laertes effusively, though Hamlet and Horatio are unable to determine what point he is trying to make with his overly elaborate proclamations. Finally, a lord enters and asks Hamlet if he is ready to come to the match, as the king and queen are expecting him. Against Horatio's advice, Hamlet agrees to fight, saying that "all's ill here about my heart," but that one must be ready for death, since it will come no matter what one does (V.ii.222). The court marches into the hall, and Hamlet asks Laertes for forgiveness, claiming that it was his madness, and not his own will, that murdered Polonius. Laertes says that he will

not forgive Hamlet until an elder, an expert in the fine points of honor, has advised him in the matter. But, in the meantime, he says, he will accept Hamlet's offer of love.

They select their foils (blunted swords used in fencing), and the king says that if Hamlet wins the first or second hit, he will drink to Hamlet's health, then throw into the cup a valuable gem (actually the poison) and give the wine to Hamlet. The duel begins. Hamlet strikes Laertes but declines to drink from the cup, saying that he will play another hit first. He hits Laertes again, and Gertrude rises to drink from the cup. The king tells her not to drink, but she does so anyway. In an aside, Claudius murmurs, "It is the poison'd cup: it is too late" (V.ii.235). Laertes remarks under his breath that to wound Hamlet with the poisoned sword is almost against his conscience. But they fight again, and Laertes scores a hit against Hamlet, drawing blood. Scuffling, they manage to exchange swords, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with Laertes' own blade.

The queen falls. Laertes, poisoned by his own sword, declares, "I am justly kill'd with my own treachery" (V.ii.318). The queen moans that the cup must have been poisoned, calls out to Hamlet, and dies. Laertes tells Hamlet that he, too, has been slain, by his own poisoned sword, and that the king is to blame both for the poison on the sword and for the poison in the cup. Hamlet, in a fury, runs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. Claudius dies crying out for help. Hamlet tells Horatio that he is dying and exchanges a last forgiveness with Laertes, who dies after absolving Hamlet.

The sound of marching echoes through the hall, and a shot rings out nearby. Osric declares that Fortinbras has come in conquest from Poland and now fires a volley to the English ambassadors. Hamlet tells Horatio again that he is dying, and urges his friend not to commit suicide in light of all the tragedies, but instead to stay alive and tell his story. He says that he wishes Fortinbras to be made King of Denmark; then he dies. Fortinbras marches into the room accompanied by the English ambassadors, who announce that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Horatio says that he will tell everyone assembled the story that led to the gruesome scene now on display. Fortinbras orders for Hamlet to be carried away like a soldier.

2.22 Summary Act V, scene ii

The next day at Elsinore Castle, Hamlet tells Horatio how he plotted to overcome Claudius's scheme to have him murdered in England. He replaced the sealed letter carried by the unsuspecting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which called for Hamlet's execution, with one calling for the execution of the bearers of the letter—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern themselves. He tells Horatio that he has no sympathy for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who betrayed him and catered to Claudius, but that he feels sorry for having behaved with such hostility toward Laertes. In Laertes' desire to avenge his father's death, he says, he sees the mirror image of his own desire, and he promises to seek Laertes' good favor.

Their conversation is interrupted by Osric, a foolish courtier. Osric tries to flatter Hamlet by agreeing with everything Hamlet says, even when he contradicts himself; in the space of seconds, he agrees first that it is cold, then that it is hot. He has come to tell them that Claudius wants Hamlet to fence with Laertes and that the king has made a wager with Laertes that Hamlet will win. Then Osric begins to praise Laertes effusively, though Hamlet and Horatio are unable to determine what point he is trying to make with his overly elaborate proclamations. Finally, a lord enters and asks Hamlet if he is ready to come to the match, as the king and queen are expecting him. Against Horatio's advice, Hamlet agrees to fight, saying that "all's ill here about my heart," but that one must be ready for death, since it will come no matter what one does (V.ii.222). The court marches into the hall, and Hamlet asks Laertes for forgiveness, claiming that it was his madness, and not his own will, that murdered Polonius. Laertes says that he will not forgive Hamlet until an elder, an expert in the fine points of honor, has advised him in the matter. But, in the meantime, he says, he will accept Hamlet's offer of love.

They select their foils (blunted swords used in fencing), and the king says that if Hamlet wins the first or second hit, he will drink to Hamlet's health, then throw into the cup a valuable gem (actually the poison) and give the wine to Hamlet. The duel begins. Hamlet strikes Laertes but declines to drink from the cup, saying that he will play another hit first. He hits Laertes again, and Gertrude rises to drink from the cup. The king tells her not to drink, but she does so anyway. In an aside, Claudius murmurs, "It is the poison'd cup: it is too late" (V.ii.235). Laertes remarks under his breath that to wound Hamlet with the poisoned sword is almost against his conscience. But they fight again, and Laertes scores a hit against Hamlet, drawing blood. Scuffling, they manage to exchange swords, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with Laertes' own blade.

The queen falls. Laertes, poisoned by his own sword, declares, “I am justly kill’d with my own treachery” (V.ii.318). The queen moans that the cup must have been poisoned, calls out to Hamlet, and dies. Laertes tells Hamlet that he, too, has been slain, by his own poisoned sword, and that the king is to blame both for the poison on the sword and for the poison in the cup. Hamlet, in a fury, runs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. Claudius dies crying out for help. Hamlet tells Horatio that he is dying and exchanges a last forgiveness with Laertes, who dies after absolving Hamlet.

The sound of marching echoes through the hall, and a shot rings out nearby. Osric declares that Fortinbras has come in conquest from Poland and now fires a volley to the English ambassadors. Hamlet tells Horatio again that he is dying, and urges his friend not to commit suicide in light of all the tragedies, but instead to stay alive and tell his story. He says that he wishes Fortinbras to be made King of Denmark; then he dies. Fortinbras marches into the room accompanied by the English ambassadors, who announce that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead. Horatio says that he will tell everyone assembled the story that led to the gruesome scene now on display. Fortinbras orders for Hamlet to be carried away like a soldier.

3.0 Characters:

Hamlet:

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

A university student whose studies are interrupted by his father’s death, Hamlet is extremely philosophical and contemplative. He is particularly drawn to difficult questions or questions that

cannot be answered with any certainty. Faced with evidence that his uncle murdered his father, evidence that any other character in a play would believe, Hamlet becomes obsessed with proving his uncle's guilt before trying to act. The standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt" is simply unacceptable to him. He is equally plagued with questions about the afterlife, about the wisdom of suicide, about what happens to bodies after they die—the list is extensive.

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

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

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

Claudius

Hamlet's major antagonist is a shrewd, lustful, conniving king who contrasts sharply with the other male characters in the play. Whereas most of the other important men in *Hamlet* are preoccupied with ideas of justice, revenge, and moral balance, Claudius is bent upon maintaining his own power. The old King Hamlet was apparently a stern warrior, but Claudius is a corrupt politician whose main weapon is his ability to manipulate others through his skillful use of language. Claudius's speech is compared to poison being poured in the ear—the method he used

to murder Hamlet's father. Claudius's love for Gertrude may be sincere, but it also seems likely that he married her as a strategic move, to help him win the throne away from Hamlet after the death of the king. As the play progresses, Claudius's mounting fear of Hamlet's insanity leads him to ever greater self-preoccupation; when Gertrude tells him that Hamlet has killed Polonius, Claudius does not remark that Gertrude might have been in danger, but only that he would have been in danger had he been in the room. He tells Laertes the same thing as he attempts to soothe the young man's anger after his father's death. Claudius is ultimately too crafty for his own good. In Act V, scene ii, rather than allowing Laertes only two methods of killing Hamlet, the sharpened sword and the poison on the blade, Claudius insists on a third, the poisoned goblet. When Gertrude inadvertently drinks the poison and dies, Hamlet is at last able to bring himself to kill Claudius, and the king is felled by his own cowardly machination.

Gertrude

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

These questions can be answered in numerous ways, depending upon one's reading of the play. The Gertrude who does emerge clearly in *Hamlet* is a woman defined by her desire for station and affection, as well as by her tendency to use men to fulfill her instinct for self-preservation—which, of course, makes her extremely dependent upon the men in her life. Hamlet's most famous comment about Gertrude is his furious condemnation of women in general: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (I.ii.146). This comment is as much indicative of Hamlet's agonized state of mind as of anything else, but to a great extent Gertrude does seem morally frail. She never exhibits the ability to think critically about her situation, but seems merely to move instinctively toward seemingly safe choices, as when she immediately runs to Claudius after her confrontation

with Hamlet. She is at her best in social situations (I.ii and V.ii), when her natural grace and charm seem to indicate a rich, rounded personality. At times it seems that her grace and charm are her *only* characteristics, and her reliance on men appears to be her sole way of capitalizing on her abilities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Francisco - A soldier and guardsman at Elsinore.

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

4.0 Theme:

The Impossibility of Certainty

What separates *Hamlet* from other revenge plays (and maybe from every play written before it) is that the action we expect to see, particularly from Hamlet himself, is continually postponed while Hamlet tries to obtain more certain knowledge about what he is doing. This play poses many questions that other plays would simply take for granted. Can we have certain knowledge about ghosts? Is the ghost what it appears to be, or is it really a misleading fiend? Does the ghost have reliable knowledge about its own death, or is the ghost itself deluded? Moving to more earthly matters: How can we know for certain the facts about a crime that has no witnesses? Can Hamlet know the state of Claudius's soul by watching his behavior? If so, can he know the facts of what Claudius did by observing the state of his soul? Can Claudius (or the audience) know the state of Hamlet's mind by observing his behavior and listening to his speech? Can we know

whether our actions will have the consequences we want them to have? Can we know anything about the afterlife?

Many people have seen *Hamlet* as a play about indecisiveness, and thus about Hamlet's failure to act appropriately. It might be more interesting to consider that the play shows us how many uncertainties our lives are built upon, how many unknown quantities are taken for granted when people act or when they evaluate one another's actions.

The Complexity of Action

Directly related to the theme of certainty is the theme of action. How is it possible to take reasonable, effective, purposeful action? In *Hamlet*, the question of how to act is affected not only by rational considerations, such as the need for certainty, but also by emotional, ethical, and psychological factors. Hamlet himself appears to distrust the idea that it's even possible to act in a controlled, purposeful way. When he does act, he prefers to do it blindly, recklessly, and violently. The other characters obviously think much less about "action" in the abstract than Hamlet does, and are therefore less troubled about the possibility of acting effectively. They simply act as they feel is appropriate. But in some sense they prove that Hamlet is right, because all of their actions miscarry. Claudius possesses himself of queen and crown through bold action, but his conscience torments him, and he is beset by threats to his authority (and, of course, he dies). Laertes resolves that nothing will distract him from acting out his revenge, but he is easily influenced and manipulated into serving Claudius's ends, and his poisoned rapier is turned back upon himself.

The Mystery of Death

In the aftermath of his father's murder, Hamlet is obsessed with the idea of death, and over the course of the play he considers death from a great many perspectives. He ponders both the spiritual aftermath of death, embodied in the ghost, and the physical remainders of the dead, such as by Yorick's skull and the decaying corpses in the cemetery. Throughout, the idea of death is closely tied to the themes of spirituality, truth, and uncertainty in that death may bring the answers to Hamlet's deepest questions, ending once and for all the problem of trying to determine truth in an ambiguous world. And, since death is both the cause and the consequence

of revenge, it is intimately tied to the theme of revenge and justice—Claudius’s murder of King Hamlet initiates Hamlet’s quest for revenge, and Claudius’s death is the end of that quest.

The question of his own death plagues Hamlet as well, as he repeatedly contemplates whether or not suicide is a morally legitimate action in an unbearably painful world. Hamlet’s grief and misery is such that he frequently longs for death to end his suffering, but he fears that if he commits suicide, he will be consigned to eternal suffering in hell because of the Christian religion’s prohibition of suicide. In his famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy (III.i), Hamlet philosophically concludes that no one would choose to endure the pain of life if he or she were not afraid of what will come after death, and that it is this fear which causes complex moral considerations to interfere with the capacity for action.

The Nation as a Diseased Body

Everything is connected in *Hamlet*, including the welfare of the royal family and the health of the state as a whole. The play’s early scenes explore the sense of anxiety and dread that surrounds the transfer of power from one ruler to the next. Throughout the play, characters draw explicit connections between the moral legitimacy of a ruler and the health of the nation.

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

5.0 Motifs

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

Incest and Incestuous Desire

The motif of incest runs throughout the play and is frequently alluded to by Hamlet and the ghost, most obviously in conversations about Gertrude and Claudius, the former brother-in-law and sister-in-law who are now married. A subtle motif of incestuous desire can be found in the relationship of Laertes and Ophelia, as Laertes sometimes speaks to his sister in suggestively sexual terms and, at her funeral, leaps into her grave to hold her in his arms. However, the strongest overtones of incestuous desire arise in the relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude, in Hamlet's fixation on Gertrude's sex life with Claudius and his preoccupation with her in general.

Misogyny

Shattered by his mother's decision to marry Claudius so soon after her husband's death, Hamlet becomes cynical about women in general, showing a particular obsession with what he perceives to be a connection between female sexuality and moral corruption. This motif of misogyny, or hatred of women, occurs sporadically throughout the play, but it is an important inhibiting factor in Hamlet's relationships with Ophelia and Gertrude. He urges Ophelia to go to a nunnery rather than experience the corruptions of sexuality and exclaims of Gertrude, "Frailty, thy name is woman" (I.ii.146).

Ears and Hearing

One facet of *Hamlet's* exploration of the difficulty of attaining true knowledge is slipperiness of language. Words are used to communicate ideas, but they can also be used to distort the truth, manipulate other people, and serve as tools in corrupt quests for power. Claudius, the shrewd politician, is the most obvious example of a man who manipulates words to enhance his own power. The sinister uses of words are represented by images of ears and hearing, from Claudius's murder of the king by pouring poison into his ear to Hamlet's claim to Horatio that "I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb" (IV.vi.21). The poison poured in the king's ear by Claudius is used by the ghost to symbolize the corrosive effect of Claudius's dishonesty on the health of Denmark. Declaring that the story that he was killed by a snake is a lie, he says that "the whole ear of Denmark" is "Rankly abused. . . ." (I.v.36–38).

6.0 Symbols

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

Yorick's Skull

In *Hamlet*, physical objects are rarely used to represent thematic ideas. One important exception is Yorick's skull, which Hamlet discovers in the graveyard in the first scene of Act V. As Hamlet speaks to the skull and about the skull of the king's former jester, he fixates on death's inevitability and the disintegration of the body. He urges the skull to "get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favor she must come"—no one can avoid death (V.i.178–179). He traces the skull's mouth and says, "Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft," indicating his fascination with the physical consequences of death (V.i.174–175). This latter idea is an important motif throughout the play, as Hamlet frequently makes comments referring to every human body's eventual decay, noting that Polonius will be eaten by worms, that even kings are eaten by worms, and that dust from the decayed body of Alexander the Great might be used to stop a hole in a beer barrel.

7.0 Explanation of some Important Quotations:

1 O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead!—nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother,
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him

As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month,—
Let me not think on't,—Frailty, thy name is woman!—
A little month; or ere those shoes were old
With which she followed my poor father's body
Like Niobe, all tears;—why she, even she,—
O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason,
Would have mourn'd longer,—married with mine uncle,
My father's brother; but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules: within a month;
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married:— O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not, nor it cannot come to good;
But break my heart,—for I must hold my tongue.

This quotation, Hamlet's first important soliloquy, occurs in Act I, scene ii (129–158). Hamlet speaks these lines after enduring the unpleasant scene at Claudius and Gertrude's court, then being asked by his mother and stepfather not to return to his studies at Wittenberg but to remain in Denmark, presumably against his wishes. Here, Hamlet thinks for the first time about suicide (desiring his flesh to “melt,” and wishing that God had not made “self-slaughter” a sin), saying that the world is “weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable.” In other words, suicide seems like a desirable alternative to life in a painful world, but Hamlet feels that the option of suicide is closed to him because it is forbidden by religion. Hamlet then goes on to describe the causes of his pain, specifically his intense disgust at his mother's marriage to Claudius. He describes the haste of their marriage, noting that the shoes his mother wore to his father's funeral were not worn out before her marriage to Claudius. He compares Claudius to his father (his father was “so excellent a king” while Claudius is a bestial “satyr”). As he runs through his description of their marriage, he touches upon the important motifs of misogyny, crying, “Frailty, thy name is woman”; incest, commenting that his mother moved “[w]ith such dexterity to incestuous sheets”;

and the ominous omen the marriage represents for Denmark, that “[i]t is not nor it cannot come to good.” Each of these motifs recurs throughout the play.

2.

Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportion'd thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel;
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in,
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice:
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy:
For the apparel oft proclaims the man;
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be:
For loan oft loses both itself and friend;
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all,—to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

This famous bit of fatherly advice is spoken by Polonius to Laertes shortly before Laertes leaves for France, in Act I, scene iii (59–80). Polonius, who is bidding Laertes farewell, gives him this list of instructions about how to behave before he sends him on his way. His advice amounts to a list of clichés. Keep your thoughts to yourself; do not act rashly; treat people with familiarity but not excessively so; hold on to old friends and be slow to trust new friends; avoid fighting but

fight boldly if it is unavoidable; be a good listener; accept criticism but do not be judgmental; maintain a proper appearance; do not borrow or lend money; and be true to yourself. This long list of quite normal fatherly advice emphasizes the regularity of Laertes' family life compared to Hamlet's, as well as contributing a somewhat stereotypical father-son encounter in the play's exploration of family relationships. It seems to indicate that Polonius loves his son, though that idea is complicated later in the play when he sends Reynaldo to spy on him.

3.

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

This line is spoken by Marcellus in Act I, scene iv (67), as he and Horatio debate whether or not to follow Hamlet and the ghost into the dark night. The line refers both to the idea that the ghost is an ominous omen for Denmark and to the larger theme of the connection between the moral legitimacy of a ruler and the health of the state as a whole. The ghost is a visible symptom of the rottenness of Denmark created by Claudius's crime.

4. I have of late,—but wherefore I know not,—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire,—why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is 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?

In these lines, Hamlet speaks to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Act II, scene ii (287–298), explaining the melancholy that has afflicted him since his father's death. Perhaps moved by the presence of his former university companions, Hamlet essentially engages in a rhetorical exercise, building up an elaborate and glorified picture of the earth and humanity before declaring it all merely a "quintessence of dust." He examines the earth, the air, and the sun, and rejects them as "a sterile promontory" and "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors." He then describes human beings from several perspectives, each one adding to his glorification of them.

Human beings' reason is noble, their faculties infinite, their forms and movements fast and admirable, their actions angelic, and their understanding godlike. But, to Hamlet, humankind is merely dust. This motif, an expression of his obsession with the physicality of death, recurs throughout the play, reaching its height in his speech over Yorick's skull. Finally, it is also telling that Hamlet makes humankind more impressive in "apprehension" (meaning understanding) than in "action." Hamlet himself is more prone to apprehension than to action, which is why he delays so long before seeking his revenge on Claudius.

5. To be, or not to be: that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?—To die,—to sleep,—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to,—'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die,—to sleep;—
To sleep: perchance to dream:—ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despis'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would these fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,—

The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns,—puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought;
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

This soliloquy, probably the most famous speech in the English language, is spoken by Hamlet in Act III, scene i (58–90). His most logical and powerful examination of the theme of the moral legitimacy of suicide in an unbearably painful world, it touches on several of the other important themes of the play. Hamlet poses the problem of whether to commit suicide as a logical question: “To be, or not to be,” that is, to live or not to live. He then weighs the moral ramifications of living and dying. Is it nobler to suffer life, “[t]he slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” passively or to actively seek to end one’s suffering? He compares death to sleep and thinks of the end to suffering, pain, and uncertainty it might bring, “[t]he heartache, and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to.” Based on this metaphor, he decides that suicide is a desirable course of action, “a consummation / Devoutly to be wished.” But, as the religious word “devoutly” signifies, there is more to the question, namely, what will happen in the afterlife. Hamlet immediately realizes as much, and he reconfigures his metaphor of sleep to include the possibility of dreaming; he says that the dreams that may come in the sleep of death are daunting, that they “must give us pause.”

He then decides that the uncertainty of the afterlife, which is intimately related to the theme of the difficulty of attaining truth in a spiritually ambiguous world, is essentially what prevents all of humanity from committing suicide to end the pain of life. He outlines a long list of the miseries of experience, ranging from lovesickness to hard work to political oppression, and asks who would choose to bear those miseries if he could bring himself peace with a knife, “[w]hen he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin?” He answers himself again, saying no

one would choose to live, except that “the dread of something after death” makes people submit to the suffering of their lives rather than go to another state of existence which might be even more miserable. The dread of the afterlife, Hamlet concludes, leads to excessive moral sensitivity that makes action impossible: “conscience does make cowards of us all . . . thus the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.”

In this way, this speech connects many of the play’s main themes, including the idea of suicide and death, the difficulty of knowing the truth in a spiritually ambiguous universe, and the connection between thought and action. In addition to its crucial thematic content, this speech is important for what it reveals about the quality of Hamlet’s mind. His deeply passionate nature is complemented by a relentlessly logical intellect, which works furiously to find a solution to his misery. He has turned to religion and found it inadequate to help him either kill himself or resolve to kill Claudius. Here, he turns to a logical philosophical inquiry and finds it equally frustrating.

8.0 Critic views on Hamlet:

‘Shakespearean Tragedy’ is the most significant and discussed during 19th and 20th century especially in the field of literary criticism. The reason was one the most significant and influential works on criticism on Shakespeare’s tragedies by one the most popular Shakespearean critic A.C. Bradley, whose work produced in 1904, containing his minute observation and thorough study.

Critique on the essay:-

Bradley’s work can be seen in the context of the 19th century’s interest in characterization but it has cast its shadow over 20th century approaches to the genera. So through Bradley’s analysis we can understand Shakespeare more clearly because he studied him through various perspectives. Bradley in his introduction put stress on the right way to read Shakespeare. In the words of Bradley

“Our understanding and enjoyment of these works as dramas is as if an actor studying the parts, coupled with a process of comparison and analysis”

So according to Bradley the right way to read Shakespeare is 'process of comparison and analysis so for this purpose he identifies 'Shakespearean Tragedy' as represented by Hamlet.

Bradley also mentioned other tragic agents that is 'Fate' for Bradley it is

“ a mythological expression for the whole system or order, of which the individual character form an inconsiderable and feeble part; which seem to determine, far more than they, their native dispositions and their circumstances, and, through these, their action”

But here he argues that in tragedy we feel emotions like repulsion, pity, wonder, fear, horror etc. but we don't judge them so his tragedies are dealing with what is good and evil but not with justice and merit and he adds that

“Tragedy would not be tragedy if it were not a painful mystery”

Bradley in his essay mentioned one folly of Shakespeare in his play Hamlet he says

“The mysteriousness of life is one thing, the psychological unintelligibility of a dramatic character is quite another”

So his point is we feel strange that in Hamlet strength and weakness mingled in one soul and this soul doomed to such misery and apparent failure. For Bradley Hamlet is „a state of profound melancholy“

and reason is his mother's nature and behavior which poisoned his mind and because of that his tendency towards women is generalized so he can never see Ophelia in the same light again.

Here Bradley identifies 'the feeling of a supreme power of destiny.'

Thus, Bradley brought variety of dimensions in the way of reading Shakespeare in 19th century which affects the later time periods and he also justified himself by putting concrete arguments.

In the conclusion I would like to quote two scholars' opinion on Bradley's work.

In the words of **Terence Hawkes**,: “Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy is one the most influential texts of our country...which remains a key and vastly formative work”. Gary Taylor observes that, “In Bradley's hands, Shakespearean criticism become a philosophical novel”

Henry Mackenzie notes the tradition of seeing Hamlet as the most varied of Shakespeare's creations: "With the strongest purposes of revenge he is irresolute and inactive; amidst the gloom

of the deepest melancholy he is gay and jocular; and while he is described as a passionate lover he seems indifferent about the object of his affections." Like Richardson, Mackenzie concludes that the tragedy in the play arises from Hamlet's nature: even the best qualities of his character merely reinforce his inability to cope with the world in which he is placed. To this analysis Thomas Robertson adds in particular the devastating impact of the death of Hamlet's father.

By the end of the 18th century, psychological and textual criticism had outrun strictly rhetorical criticism; one still sees occasional critiques of metaphors viewed as inappropriate or barbarous, but by and large the neoclassical critique of Shakespeare's language had become moribund. The most extended critique of the play's language from the end of the century is perhaps that of Hugh Blair.

Hamlet is often perceived as a philosophical character. Some of the most prominent philosophical theories in *Hamlet* are relativism, existentialism, and scepticism. Hamlet expresses a relativist idea when he says to Rosencrantz: "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so" (2.2.268-270). The idea that nothing is real except in the mind of the individual finds its roots in the Greek Sophists, who argued that since nothing can be perceived except through the senses, and all men felt and sensed things differently, truth was entirely relative. There was no absolute truth. This same line of Hamlet's also introduces theories of existentialism. A double-meaning can be read into the word "is", which introduces the question of whether anything "is" or can be if thinking doesn't make it so. This is tied into his To be, or not to be speech, where "to be" can be read as a question of existence. Hamlet's contemplation on suicide in this scene, however, is more religious than philosophical.

The Approach of Wilson Knight

Until the 1930s, the evaluation of Hamlet was mostly a continuation of the nineteenth century approach to the character of its tragic hero. After Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* was published in 1904, an entire generation of critics remained obsessed with Hamlet's delay in killing Claudius. They blamed the whole tragedy on the fact that it took the Prince too long to act on his revenge. They never acknowledged the basic premise that Hamlet was a sweet and noble

prince, that Claudius was a treacherous villain, and that the tragedy of Hamlet lay in the fact that a "good" character was destroyed because of an "evil" usurper.

In 1930, Wilson Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* questioned the delay premise. Instead, Knight described the story of Hamlet as an "Embassy of Death" with the Ghost being a true devil, setting all the evil doings within the plot in motion. He even questioned if Claudius was truly a treacherous villain. He referred to the image of Claudius at prayer, repenting of his crimes, while Hamlet refuses to kill him, not wanting his soul to go to heaven. Further, Knight stated that Hamlet was a very unpleasant person -- rude, callous, and sometimes ruthless -- to his mother, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. Knight thinks that most critics have over-sentimentalized Hamlet's being. Many critics do agree that Hamlet embodies both good and evil. Although he is basically innocent and pure, he has been tainted by the evil around him. As a result, his procrastination leads to further ruin.

Hamlet Seen Solely as the Victim of External Difficulties

To see Hamlet solely as the victim of external problems is the simplest approach to the play. Many critics argue, however, that Hamlet's tragedy is not a result of the supposed weaknesses/flaws in his character or even mistakes in his judgement/action, but from the evil and intolerable situation into which he is cruelly thrust. With his father dead and his mother remarried to his enemy, Hamlet has no one to turn to for help; therefore, he is totally a victim of circumstance. The critics further argue that the external situation prevents him from taking swift action. After all, Claudius is an extremely powerful man now that he is King; any person would have faced enormous difficulties in scheming against him. They excuse Hamlet's lack of action, and in so doing, make him a much less interesting character.

The Romantic Interpretation of Hamlet

The Romantic critics of the nineteenth century, led by Coleridge, were more interested in the character of Hamlet than in the plot construction of the play. For them, Hamlet was one of the greatest artistic creations ever drawn by an author or playwright. They saw Hamlet as an individual torn apart by doubt and fearful of taking action. As an idealist, Hamlet was unable to

deal with the harsh realities of life; as a result, he paid a tragic penalty. These critics often quoted Hamlet's own words in support of their interpretation.

Many Romantic writers came to identify themselves with Hamlet. Coleridge went so far as to admit that he had much of Hamlet in himself, for, like the Prince, he was more prone to thought than to action. In fact, many Romantics felt that Hamlet's overdeveloped intellect made it impossible for him to act. Instead, he became a sentimental dreamer, just like many of the Romantics.

The Psychoanalytical Approach

The psychoanalytical approach focuses on the neurotic tendencies of Hamlet and judges him to suffer from an Oedipus Complex. In ancient Greek mythology, Oedipus is the unconscious instrument of an old curse, a destiny to murder his father and marry his mother. Today, many psychologists feel that there are many sons who have developed erotic feelings for their mothers and, as a result, they resent and hate their fathers. Normally, these feelings about their parents are repressed, pushed into the unconscious; but from time to time, these feelings may overcome repression and re-emerge due to crisis situations. The psychoanalysts believe that Hamlet's possessiveness towards his mother proves his Oedipal Complex; they defend their arguments in specifics from the play. Hamlet explicitly urges Gertrude not to have intercourse with Claudius; moreover, he advises her to curb her desire to have sex as well. The psychoanalysts then argue that Hamlet's repressed Oedipal Complex prevents him from killing Claudius. They feel that Hamlet procrastinates because, in his subconscious, he does not really want to murder the man who killed the father that he so envied. They also argue that it is Oedipal Complex prevents him from committing himself to Ophelia.

The Historical Approach

The historical approach holds that only those theories prevalent in Shakespeare's time should be utilized to interpret his texts. Supporters of this school of thought argue that the clue to Hamlet's madness and his hesitancy in killing Claudius lies in his melancholic disposition. Indeed, Shakespeare calls Hamlet the "melancholy Dane." The malady of melancholy was well known in the Elizabethan age, and several treatises were written on the subject. Shakespeare had probably

read or heard about these treatises, which state that the primary characteristics of melancholy are sadness, fear, distrust, doubt, despair, and diffidence. Sometimes the negative feelings are interrupted by a false laughter or sardonic humor.

Hamlet displays all these traits of melancholy. He is extremely sad over the death of his father and hasty remarriage of his mother; he is fearful and distrusting of the Ghost; he behaves with diffidence as he procrastinates about taking revenge on Claudius; he falls into despair over his inaction, even contemplating suicide. But from time to time, Hamlet jests sardonically with people he dislikes, making it seem that his mood fluctuates between depression and elation. While Hamlet's behavior can be reasonably explained in terms of melancholy, it is an extremely simplistic approach to the problems of the tragic hero.

9.0 Summing Up:

It can be concluded that Hamlet's psyche is cleansed of the burden of failed love, familial outrage and grief. Shakespeare represents revenge as an inward tragic event which is externalized, dramatized, and then reinforced by destructive family relationships whose psychic energies violate and eventually destroy the psychic wholeness of the tragic person. The conflict between ego and superego constitutes the dynamic action of *Hamlet* on many levels, creating revenge and its delay through acute inner anxieties and mental anguish, as well as ambiguities in action, language and thought. But, in the end, although the superego wins, because Hamlet must die, it is with Hamlet's / Shakespeare's total acceptance, as long as revenge is revealed for what it is: a dynamically hostile, hateful, destructive force, and, in *Hamlet*, an unbeatable enemy, as well as an Oedipal foe.

10.0 Questions for practice:

Long Questions and Answers:

1. Shakespeare includes characters in *Hamlet* who are obvious foils for Hamlet, including, most obviously, Horatio, Fortinbras, Claudius, and Laertes. Compare and contrast Hamlet with each of these characters. How are they alike? How are they different? How does each respond to the crises with which he is faced?

Horatio's steadfastness and loyalty contrasts with Hamlet's variability and excitability, though both share a love of learning, reason, and thought. Claudius's willingness to disregard all moral law and act decisively to fulfill his appetites and lust for power contrasts powerfully with Hamlet's concern for morality and indecisive inability to act. Fortinbras's willingness to go to great lengths to avenge his father's death, even to the point of waging war, contrasts sharply with Hamlet's inactivity, even though both of them are concerned with avenging their fathers. Laertes' single-minded, furious desire to avenge Polonius stands in stark opposition to Hamlet's inactivity with regard to his own father's death. Finally, Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras are all in a position to seek revenge for the murders of their fathers, and their situations are deeply intertwined. Hamlet's father killed Fortinbras's father, and Hamlet killed Laertes' father, meaning that Hamlet occupies the same role for Laertes as Claudius does for Hamlet.

2. Many critics take a deterministic view of *Hamlet's* plot, arguing that the prince's inability to act and tendency toward melancholy reflection is a "tragic flaw" that leads inevitably to his demise. Is this an accurate way of understanding the play? Why or why not? Given Hamlet's character and situation, would another outcome of the play have been possible?

The idea of the "tragic flaw" is a problematic one in *Hamlet*. It is true that Hamlet possesses definable characteristics that, by shaping his behavior, contribute to his tragic fate. But to argue that his tragedy is inevitable because he possesses these characteristics is difficult to prove. Given a scenario and a description of the characters involved, it is highly unlikely that anyone who had not read or seen *Hamlet* would be able to predict its ending based solely on the character of its hero. In fact, the play's chaotic train of events suggests that human beings are forced to make choices whose consequences are unforeseeable as well as unavoidable. To argue that the play's outcome is intended to appear inevitable seems incompatible with the thematic claims made by the play itself.

3. Throughout the play, Hamlet claims to be feigning madness, but his portrayal of a madman is so intense and so convincing that many readers believe that Hamlet actually slips into insanity at certain moments in the play. Do you think this is true, or is Hamlet merely play-acting insanity? What evidence can you cite for either claim?

At any given moment during the play, the most accurate assessment of Hamlet's state of mind probably lies somewhere between sanity and insanity. Hamlet certainly displays a high degree of mania and instability throughout much of the play, but his "madness" is perhaps too purposeful and pointed for us to conclude that he actually loses his mind. His language is erratic and wild, but beneath his mad-sounding words often lie acute observations that show the sane mind working bitterly beneath the surface. Most likely, Hamlet's decision to feign madness is a sane one, taken to confuse his enemies and hide his intentions.

On the other hand, Hamlet finds himself in a unique and traumatic situation, one which calls into question the basic truths and ideals of his life. He can no longer believe in religion, which has failed his father and doomed him to life amid miserable experience. He can no longer trust society, which is full of hypocrisy and violence, nor love, which has been poisoned by his mother's betrayal of his father's memory. And, finally, he cannot turn to philosophy, which cannot explain ghosts or answer his moral questions and lead him to action.

With this much discord in his mind, and already under the extraordinary pressure of grief from his father's death, his mother's marriage, and the responsibility bequeathed to him by the ghost, Hamlet is understandably distraught. He may not be mad, but he likely is close to the edge of sanity during many of the most intense moments in the play, such as during the performance of the play-within-a-play (III.ii), his confrontation with Ophelia (III.i), and his long confrontation with his mother (III.iv).

Suggested Questions for practice

1. Think about Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia. Does he love her? Does he stop loving her? Did he ever love her? What evidence can you find in the play to support your opinion?
2. Consider Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's role in the play. Why might Shakespeare have created characters like this? Are they there for comic relief, or do they serve a more serious purpose? Why does the news of their deaths come only after the deaths of the royal family in Act V, as if this news were not anticlimactic? Is it acceptable for Hamlet to treat them as he does? Why or why not?

3. Analyze the use of descriptions and images in *Hamlet*. How does Shakespeare use descriptive language to enhance the visual possibilities of a stage production? How does he use imagery to create a mood of tension, suspense, fear, and despair?
4. Analyze the use of comedy in *Hamlet*, paying particular attention to the gravediggers, Osric, and Polonius. Does comedy serve merely to relieve the tension of the tragedy, or do the comic scenes serve a more serious thematic purpose as well?
5. Suicide is an important theme in *Hamlet*. Discuss how the play treats the idea of suicide morally, religiously, and aesthetically, with particular attention to Hamlet's two important statements about suicide: the "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt" soliloquy (I.ii.129–158) and the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy (III.i.56–88). Why does Hamlet believe that, although capable of suicide, most human beings choose to live, despite the cruelty, pain, and injustice of the world?

11. 0 Suggestions for Further Reading:

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1999.

Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, reprint edition 2007.

Eliot, T. S. "Hamlet and His Problems." In *The Sacred Wood*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, reprint edition 1997.

Frye, Northrop. *Fools of Time: Studies in Shakespearean Tragedy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, reprint edition 1996.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Hamlet in Purgatory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Husain, Adrian A. *Politics and Genre in Hamlet*. New York: Oxford University Press, reprint edition 2007.

Kerrigan, Wililam. *Hamlet's Perfection*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Kinney, Arthur F. *Hamlet: Critical Essays*. Oxford, UK: Routledge, Inc., 2001.

Wilson, John Dover. *What Happens in Hamlet*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1951.

Tempest

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Act-wise Analysis of the Play

3.0 Characters

4.0 Themes

5.0 Motifs

6.0 Explanation of some important quotations

7.0 Summing Up

8.0 Long questions and Answers

9.0 Further reading

1.0 Introduction:

Age:

The most influential writer in all of English literature, William Shakespeare was born in 1564 to a successful middle-class glove-maker in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Shakespeare attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582 he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her. Around 1590 he left his family behind and traveled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Public and critical acclaim quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603) and James I (ruled 1603–1625), and he was a favorite of both monarchs. Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by bestowing upon its members the title of King's Men. Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to Stratford and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two. At the time of Shakespeare's death, literary luminaries such as Ben Jonson hailed his works as timeless.

Shakespeare's works were collected and printed in various editions in the century following his death, and by the early eighteenth century his reputation as the greatest poet ever to write in English was well established. The unprecedented admiration garnered by his works led to a

fierce curiosity about Shakespeare's life, but the dearth of biographical information has left many details of Shakespeare's personal history shrouded in mystery. Some people have concluded from this fact and from Shakespeare's modest education that Shakespeare's plays were actually written by someone else—Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford are the two most popular candidates—but the support for this claim is overwhelmingly circumstantial, and the theory is not taken seriously by many scholars.

In the absence of credible evidence to the contrary, Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the thirty-seven plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to affect profoundly the course of Western literature and culture ever after.

The Tempest probably was written in 1610–1611, and was first performed at Court by the King's Men in the fall of 1611. It was performed again in the winter of 1612–1613 during the festivities in celebration of the marriage of King James's daughter Elizabeth. *The Tempest* is most likely the last play written entirely by Shakespeare, and it is remarkable for being one of only two plays by Shakespeare (the other being *Love's Labor's Lost*) whose plot is entirely original. The play does, however, draw on travel literature of its time—most notably the accounts of a tempest off the Bermudas that separated and nearly wrecked a fleet of colonial ships sailing from Plymouth to Virginia. The English colonial project seems to be on Shakespeare's mind throughout *The Tempest*, as almost every character, from the lord Gonzalo to the drunk Stephano, ponders how he would rule the island on which the play is set if he were its king. Shakespeare seems also to have drawn on Montaigne's essay "Of the Cannibals," which was translated into English in 1603. The name of Prospero's servant-monster, Caliban, seems to be an anagram or derivative of "Cannibal."

The extraordinary flexibility of Shakespeare's stage is given particular prominence in *The Tempest*. Stages of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period were for the most part bare and simple. There was little on-stage scenery, and the possibilities for artificial lighting were limited. The King's Men in 1612 were performing both at the outdoor Globe Theatre and the indoor Blackfriars Theatre and their plays would have had to work in either venue. Therefore, much

dramatic effect was left up to the minds of the audience. We see a particularly good example of this in *The Tempest*, Act II, scene i when Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Antonio argue whether the island is beautiful or barren. The bareness of the stage would have allowed either option to be possible in the audience's mind at any given moment.

At the same time, *The Tempest* includes stage directions for a number of elaborate special effects. The many pageants and songs accompanied by ornately costumed figures or stage-magic—for example, the banquet in Act III, scene iii, or the wedding celebration for Ferdinand and Miranda in Act IV, scene i—give the play the feeling of a masque, a highly stylized form of dramatic, musical entertainment popular among the aristocracy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is perhaps the tension between simple stage effects and very elaborate and surprising ones that gives the play its eerie and dreamlike quality, making it seem rich and complex even though it is one of Shakespeare's shortest, most simply constructed plays.

It is tempting to think of *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's farewell to the stage because of its theme of a great magician giving up his art. Indeed, we can interpret Prospero's reference to the dissolution of "the great globe itself" (IV.i.153) as an allusion to Shakespeare's theatre. However, Shakespeare is known to have collaborated on at least two other plays after *The Tempest*: *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII* in 1613, both probably written with John Fletcher. A performance of the latter was, in fact, the occasion for the actual dissolution of the Globe. A cannon fired during the performance accidentally ignited the thatch, and the theater burned to the ground.

1.1 Summary:

A storm strikes a ship carrying Alonso, Ferdinand, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, Stephano, and Trinculo, who are on their way to Italy after coming from the wedding of Alonso's daughter, Claribel, to the prince of Tunis in Africa. The royal party and the other mariners, with the exception of the unflappable Boatswain, begin to fear for their lives. Lightning cracks, and the mariners cry that the ship has been hit. Everyone prepares to sink.

The next scene begins much more quietly. Miranda and Prospero stand on the shore of their island, looking out to sea at the recent shipwreck. Miranda asks her father to do anything he can

to help the poor souls in the ship. Prospero assures her that everything is all right and then informs her that it is time she learned more about herself and her past. He reveals to her that he orchestrated the shipwreck and tells her the lengthy story of her past, a story he has often started to tell her before but never finished. The story goes that Prospero was the Duke of Milan until his brother Antonio, conspiring with Alonso, the King of Naples, usurped his position. Kidnapped and left to die on a raft at sea, Prospero and his daughter survive because Gonzalo leaves them supplies and Prospero's books, which are the source of his magic and power. Prospero and his daughter arrived on the island where they remain now and have been for twelve years. Only now, Prospero says, has Fortune at last sent his enemies his way, and he has raised the tempest in order to make things right with them once and for all.

After telling this story, Prospero charms Miranda to sleep and then calls forth his familiar spirit Ariel, his chief magical agent. Prospero and Ariel's discussion reveals that Ariel brought the tempest upon the ship and set fire to the mast. He then made sure that everyone got safely to the island, though they are now separated from each other into small groups. Ariel, who is a captive servant to Prospero, reminds his master that he has promised Ariel freedom a year early if he performs tasks such as these without complaint. Prospero chastises Ariel for protesting and reminds him of the horrible fate from which he was rescued. Before Prospero came to the island, a witch named Sycorax imprisoned Ariel in a tree. Sycorax died, leaving Ariel trapped until Prospero arrived and freed him. After Ariel assures Prospero that he knows his place, Prospero orders Ariel to take the shape of a sea nymph and make himself invisible to all but Prospero.

Miranda awakens from her sleep, and she and Prospero go to visit Caliban, Prospero's servant and the son of the dead Sycorax. Caliban curses Prospero, and Prospero and Miranda berate him for being ungrateful for what they have given and taught him. Prospero sends Caliban to fetch firewood. Ariel, invisible, enters playing music and leading in the awed Ferdinand. Miranda and Ferdinand are immediately smitten with each other. He is the only man Miranda has ever seen, besides Caliban and her father. Prospero is happy to see that his plan for his daughter's future marriage is working, but decides that he must upset things temporarily in order to prevent their relationship from developing too quickly. He accuses Ferdinand of merely pretending to be the Prince of Naples and threatens him with imprisonment. When Ferdinand draws his sword,

Prospero charms him and leads him off to prison, ignoring Miranda's cries for mercy. He then sends Ariel on another mysterious mission.

On another part of the island, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and other miscellaneous lords give thanks for their safety but worry about the fate of Ferdinand. Alonso says that he wishes he never had married his daughter to the prince of Tunis because if he had not made this journey, his son would still be alive. Gonzalo tries to maintain high spirits by discussing the beauty of the island, but his remarks are undercut by the sarcastic sourness of Antonio and Sebastian. Ariel appears, invisible, and plays music that puts all but Sebastian and Antonio to sleep. These two then begin to discuss the possible advantages of killing their sleeping companions. Antonio persuades Sebastian that the latter will become ruler of Naples if they kill Alonso. Claribel, who would be the next heir if Ferdinand were indeed dead, is too far away to be able to claim her right. Sebastian is convinced, and the two are about to stab the sleeping men when Ariel causes Gonzalo to wake with a shout. Everyone wakes up, and Antonio and Sebastian concoct a ridiculous story about having drawn their swords to protect the king from lions. Ariel goes back to Prospero while Alonso and his party continue to search for Ferdinand.

Caliban, meanwhile, is hauling wood for Prospero when he sees Trinculo and thinks he is a spirit sent by Prospero to torment him. He lies down and hides under his cloak. A storm is brewing, and Trinculo, curious about but undeterred by Caliban's strange appearance and smell, crawls under the cloak with him. Stephano, drunk and singing, comes along and stumbles upon the bizarre spectacle of Caliban and Trinculo huddled under the cloak. Caliban, hearing the singing, cries out that he will work faster so long as the "spirits" leave him alone. Stephano decides that this monster requires liquor and attempts to get Caliban to drink. Trinculo recognizes his friend Stephano and calls out to him. Soon the three are sitting up together and drinking. Caliban quickly becomes an enthusiastic drinker, and begins to sing.

Prospero puts Ferdinand to work hauling wood. Ferdinand finds his labor pleasant because it is for Miranda's sake. Miranda, thinking that her father is asleep, tells Ferdinand to take a break. The two flirt with one another. Miranda proposes marriage, and Ferdinand accepts. Prospero has been on stage most of the time, unseen, and he is pleased with this development.

Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban are now drunk and raucous and are made all the more so by Ariel, who comes to them invisibly and provokes them to fight with one another by impersonating their voices and taunting them. Caliban grows more and more fervent in his boasts that he knows how to kill Prospero. He even tells Stephano that he can bring him to where Prospero is sleeping. He proposes that they kill Prospero, take his daughter, and set Stephano up as king of the island. Stephano thinks this a good plan, and the three prepare to set off to find Prospero. They are distracted, however, by the sound of music that Ariel plays on his flute and tabor-drum, and they decide to follow this music before executing their plot.

Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Antonio grow weary from traveling and pause to rest. Antonio and Sebastian secretly plot to take advantage of Alonso and Gonzalo's exhaustion, deciding to kill them in the evening. Prospero, probably on the balcony of the stage and invisible to the men, causes a banquet to be set out by strangely shaped spirits. As the men prepare to eat, Ariel appears like a harpy and causes the banquet to vanish. He then accuses the men of supplanting Prospero and says that it was for this sin that Alonso's son, Ferdinand, has been taken. He vanishes, leaving Alonso feeling vexed and guilty.

Prospero now softens toward Ferdinand and welcomes him into his family as the soon-to-be-husband of Miranda. He sternly reminds Ferdinand, however, that Miranda's "virgin-knot" (IV.i.15) is not to be broken until the wedding has been officially solemnized. Prospero then asks Ariel to call forth some spirits to perform a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda. The spirits assume the shapes of Ceres, Juno, and Iris and perform a short masque celebrating the rites of marriage and the bounty of the earth. A dance of reapers and nymphs follows but is interrupted when Prospero suddenly remembers that he still must stop the plot against his life.

He sends the spirits away and asks Ariel about Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban. Ariel tells his master of the three men's drunken plans. He also tells how he led the men with his music through prickly grass and briars and finally into a filthy pond near Prospero's cell. Ariel and Prospero then set a trap by hanging beautiful clothing in Prospero's cell. Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban enter looking for Prospero and, finding the beautiful clothing, decide to steal it. They are immediately set upon by a pack of spirits in the shape of dogs and hounds, driven on by Prospero and Ariel.

Prospero uses Ariel to bring Alonso and the others before him. He then sends Ariel to bring the Boatswain and the mariners from where they sleep on the wrecked ship. Prospero confronts Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian with their treachery, but tells them that he forgives them. Alonso tells him of having lost Ferdinand in the tempest and Prospero says that he recently lost his own daughter. Clarifying his meaning, he draws aside a curtain to reveal Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess. Alonso and his companions are amazed by the miracle of Ferdinand's survival, and Miranda is stunned by the sight of people unlike any she has seen before. Ferdinand tells his father about his marriage.

Ariel returns with the Boatswain and mariners. The Boatswain tells a story of having been awakened from a sleep that had apparently lasted since the tempest. At Prospero's bidding, Ariel releases Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano, who then enter wearing their stolen clothing. Prospero and Alonso command them to return it and to clean up Prospero's cell. Prospero invites Alonso and the others to stay for the night so that he can tell them the tale of his life in the past twelve years. After this, the group plans to return to Italy. Prospero, restored to his dukedom, will retire to Milan. Prospero gives Ariel one final task—to make sure the seas are calm for the return voyage—before setting him free. Finally, Prospero delivers an epilogue to the audience, asking them to forgive him for his wrongdoing and set him free by applauding.

2.0 Act-wise Analysis of the Play:

Summary

A violent storm rages around a small ship at sea. The master of the ship calls for his boatswain to rouse the mariners to action and prevent the ship from being run aground by the tempest. Chaos ensues. Some mariners enter, followed by a group of nobles comprised of Alonso, King of Naples, Sebastian, his brother, Antonio, Gonzalo, and others. We do not learn these men's names in this scene, nor do we learn (as we finally do in Act II, scene i) that they have just come from Tunis, in Africa, where Alonso's daughter, Claribel, has been married to the prince. As the Boatswain and his crew take in the topsail and the topmast, Alonso and his party are merely underfoot, and the Boatswain tells them to get below-decks. Gonzalo reminds the Boatswain that

one of the passengers is of some importance, but the Boatswain is unmoved. He will do what he has to in order to save the ship, regardless of who is aboard.

The lords go belowdecks, and then, adding to the chaos of the scene, three of them—Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo—enter again only four lines later. Sebastian and Antonio curse the Boatswain in his labors, masking their fear with profanity. Some mariners enter wet and crying, and only at this point does the audience learn the identity of the passengers on-board. Gonzalo orders the mariners to pray for the king and the prince. There is a strange noise—perhaps the sound of thunder, splitting wood, or roaring water—and the cry of mariners. Antonio, Sebastian, and Gonzalo, preparing to sink to a watery grave, go in search of the king.

Analysis

Even for a Shakespeare play, *The Tempest* is remarkable for its extraordinary breadth of imaginative vision. The play is steeped in magic and illusion. As a result, the play contains a tremendous amount of spectacle, yet things are often not as they seem. This opening scene certainly contains spectacle, in the form of the howling storm (the “tempest” of the play’s title) tossing the little ship about and threatening to kill the characters before the play has even begun. In terms of stagecraft, it was a significant gamble for Shakespeare to open his play with this spectacular natural event, given that, in the early seventeenth century when the play was written, special effects were largely left to the audience’s imagination.

Shakespeare’s stage would have been almost entirely bare, without many physical signs that the actors were supposed to be on a ship, much less a ship in the midst of a lashing storm. As a result, the audience sees Shakespeare calling on all the resources of his theater to establish a certain level of realism. For example, the play begins with a “noise of thunder and lightning” (stage direction). The first word, “Boatswain!” immediately indicates that the scene is the deck of a ship. In addition, characters rush frantically in and out, often with no purpose—as when Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo exit at line 29 and re-enter at 33, indicating the general level of chaos and confusion. Cries from off-stage create the illusion of a space below-decks.

But in addition to this spectacle, the play also uses its first scene to hint at some of the illusions and deceptions it will contain. Most plays of this era, by Shakespeare and others, use the

introductory scene to present the main characters and hint at the general narrative to come—so *Othello* begins with Iago's jealousy, and *King Lear* begins with Lear's decision to abdicate his throne. But *The Tempest* begins toward the end of the actual story, late in Prospero's exile. Its opening scene is devoted to what appears to be an unexplained natural phenomenon, in which characters who are never named rush about frantically in service of no apparent plot. In fact, the confusion of the opening is itself misleading, for as we will learn later, the storm is not a natural phenomenon at all, but a deliberate magical conjuring by Prospero, designed to bring the ship to the island. The tempest is, in fact, central to the plot.

But there is more going on in this scene than initially meets the eye. The apparently chaotic exchanges of the characters introduce the important motif of master-servant relationships. The characters on the boat are divided into nobles, such as Antonio and Gonzalo, and servants or professionals, such as the Boatswain. The mortal danger of the storm upsets the usual balance between these two groups, and the Boatswain, attempting to save the ship, comes into direct conflict with the hapless nobles, who, despite their helplessness, are extremely irritated at being rudely spoken to by a commoner. The characters in the scene are never named outright; they are only referred to in terms that indicate their social stations: "Boatswain," "Master," "King," and "Prince." As the scene progresses, the characters speak less about the storm than about the class conflict underlying their attempts to survive it—a conflict between masters and servants that, as the story progresses, becomes perhaps the major motif of the play.

Gonzalo, for instance, jokes that the ship is safe because the uppity Boatswain was surely born to be hanged, not drowned in a storm: "I have great comfort from this fellow: methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows" (I.i.25–27). For his part, the Boatswain observes that social hierarchies are flimsy and unimportant in the face of nature's wrath. "What cares these roarers," he asks, referring to the booming thunder, "for the name of king?" (I.i.15–16). The irony here, of course, is that, unbeknownst to the occupants of the ship, and to the audience, the storm is not natural at all, but is in fact a product of another kind power: Prospero's magic.

Act I, scene ii

Summary

Prospero and Miranda stand on the shore of the island, having just witnessed the shipwreck. Miranda entreats her father to see that no one on-board comes to any harm. Prospero assures her that no one was harmed and tells her that it's time she learned who she is and where she comes from. Miranda seems curious, noting that Prospero has often started to tell her about herself but always stopped. However, once Prospero begins telling his tale, he asks her three times if she is listening to him. He tells her that he was once Duke of Milan and famous for his great intelligence.

Prospero explains that he gradually grew uninterested in politics, however, and turned his attention more and more to his studies, neglecting his duties as duke. This gave his brother Antonio an opportunity to act on his ambition. Working in concert with the King of Naples, Antonio usurped Prospero of his dukedom. Antonio arranged for the King of Naples to pay him an annual tribute and do him homage as duke. Later, the King of Naples helped Antonio raise an army to march on Milan, driving Prospero out. Prospero tells how he and Miranda escaped from death at the hands of the army in a barely-seaworthy boat prepared for them by his loyal subjects. Gonzalo, an honest Neapolitan, provided them with food and clothing, as well as books from Prospero's library.

Having brought Miranda up to date on how she arrived at their current home, Prospero explains that sheer good luck has brought his former enemies to the island. Miranda suddenly grows very sleepy, perhaps because Prospero charms her with his magic. When she is asleep, Prospero calls forth his spirit, Ariel. In his conversation with Ariel, we learn that Prospero and the spirit were responsible for the storm of Act I, scene i. Flying about the ship, Ariel acted as the wind, the thunder, and the lightning. When everyone except the crew had abandoned the ship, Ariel made sure, as Prospero had requested, that all were brought safely to shore but dispersed around the island. Ariel reports that the king's son is alone. He also tells Prospero that the mariners and Boatswain have been charmed to sleep in the ship, which has been brought safely to harbor. The rest of the fleet that was with the ship, believing it to have been destroyed by the storm, has headed safely back to Naples.

Prospero thanks Ariel for his service, and Ariel takes this moment to remind Prospero of his promise to take one year off of his agreed time of servitude if Ariel performs his services without complaint. Prospero does not take well to being reminded of his promises, and he chastises Ariel for his impudence. He reminds Ariel of where he came from and how Prospero rescued him. Ariel had been a servant of Sycorax, a witch banished from Algiers (Algeria) and sent to the island long ago. Ariel was too delicate a spirit to perform her horrible commands, so she imprisoned him in a “cloven pine” (I.ii.279). She did not free him before she died, and he might have remained imprisoned forever had not Prospero arrived and rescued him. Reminding Ariel of this, Prospero threatens to imprison him for twelve years if he does not stop complaining. Ariel promises to be more polite. Prospero then gives him a new command: he must go make himself like a nymph of the sea and be invisible to all but Prospero. Ariel goes to do so, and Prospero, turning to Miranda’s sleeping form, calls upon his daughter to awaken. She opens her eyes and, not realizing that she has been enchanted, says that the “strangeness” of Prospero’s story caused her to fall asleep.

Analysis

Act I, scene ii opens with the revelation that it was Prospero’s magic, and not simply a hostile nature, that raised the storm that caused the shipwreck. From there, the scene moves into a long sequence devoted largely to telling the play’s background story while introducing the major characters on the island. The first part of the scene is devoted to two long histories, both told by Prospero, one to Miranda and one to Ariel. If *The Tempest* is a play about power in various forms (as we observed in the previous scene, when the power of the storm disrupted the power relations between nobles and servants), then Prospero is the center of power, controlling events throughout the play through magic and manipulation. Prospero’s retellings of past events to Miranda and Ariel do more than simply fill the audience in on the story so far. They also illustrate how Prospero maintains his power, exploring the old man’s meticulous methods of controlling those around him through magic, charisma, and rhetoric.

Prospero’s rhetoric is particularly important to observe in this section, especially in his confrontation with Ariel. Of all the characters in the play, Prospero alone seems to understand that controlling history enables one to control the present—that is, that one can control others by

controlling how they understand the past. Prospero thus tells his story with a highly rhetorical emphasis on his own good deeds, the bad deeds of others toward him, and the ingratitude of those he has protected from the evils of others. For example, when he speaks to Miranda, he calls his brother “perfidious,” then immediately says that he loved his brother better than anyone in the world except Miranda (I.ii.68). He repeatedly asks Miranda, “Dost thou attend me?” Through his questioning, he commands her attention almost hypnotically as he tells her his one-sided version of the story. Prospero himself does not seem blameless. While his brother did betray him, he also failed in his responsibilities as a ruler by giving up control of the government so that he could study. He contrasts his popularity as a leader—“the love my people bore me” (I.ii.141)—with his brother’s “evil nature” (I.ii.).

When he speaks to Ariel, a magical creature over whom his mastery is less certain than over his doting daughter, Prospero goes to even greater lengths to justify himself. He treats Ariel as a combination of a pet, whom he can praise and blame as he chooses, and a pupil, demanding that the spirit recite answers to questions about the past that Prospero has taught him. Though Ariel must know the story well, Prospero says that he must “once in a month” recount Ariel’s history with Sycorax, simply to ensure that his servant’s fickle nature does not cause him to become disloyal. Every time he retells Ariel’s history, we feel, he must increase both the persuasiveness of his own story and his control over Ariel. This is why he now chooses to claim that Ariel is behaving badly—so that he can justify a retelling of the history, even though Ariel is perfectly respectful. He forces Ariel to recall the misery he suffered while trapped in the pine tree (“thy groans / Did make wolves howl,” I.ii.289–290). He then positions himself as the good savior who overthrew Sycorax’s evil. However, he immediately follows this with a forceful display of his own magical power, threatening to trap Ariel in an oak just as the “evil” Sycorax had trapped him in a pine. In this way, Prospero exercises control both intellectually and physically. By controlling the way Ariel and Miranda think about their lives, he makes it difficult for them to imagine that challenging his authority would be a good thing to do, and by threatening Ariel (and, shortly thereafter, Caliban) with magical torture, he sets very high stakes for any such rebellion. For his part, Ariel promises to “do my spiriting gently” from now on.

After Miranda is fully awake, Prospero suggests that they converse with their servant Caliban, the son of Sycorax. Caliban appears at Prospero's call and begins cursing. Prospero promises to punish him by giving him cramps at night, and Caliban responds by chiding Prospero for imprisoning him on the island that once belonged to him alone. He reminds Prospero that he showed him around when he first arrived. Prospero accuses Caliban of being ungrateful for all that he has taught and given him. He calls him a "lying slave" and reminds him of the effort he made to educate him (I.ii.347). Caliban's hereditary nature, he continues, makes him unfit to live among civilized people and earns him his isolation on the island. Caliban, though, cleverly notes that he knows how to curse only because Prospero and Miranda taught him to speak. Prospero then sends him away, telling him to fetch more firewood and threatening him with more cramps and aches if he refuses. Caliban obeys him.

Ariel, playing music and singing, enters and leads in Ferdinand. Prospero tells Miranda to look upon Ferdinand, and Miranda, who has seen no humans in her life other than Prospero and Caliban, immediately falls in love. Ferdinand is similarly smitten and reveals his identity as the prince of Naples. Prospero is pleased that they are so taken with each other but decides that the two must not fall in love too quickly, and so he accuses Ferdinand of merely pretending to be the prince of Naples. When he tells Ferdinand he is going to imprison him, Ferdinand draws his sword, but Prospero charms him so that he cannot move. Miranda attempts to persuade her father to have mercy, but he silences her harshly. This man, he tells her, is a mere Caliban compared to other men. He explains that she simply doesn't know any better because she has never seen any others. Prospero leads the charmed and helpless Ferdinand to his imprisonment. Secretly, he thanks the invisible Ariel for his help, sends him on another mysterious errand, and promises to free him soon.

Analysis

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language! (I.ii.366–368)

The introduction of Caliban at the start of this section gives Prospero yet another chance to retell the history of one of the island's denizens, simultaneously filling the audience in on the background of Sycorax's unfortunate son and reasserting his power over the dour Caliban. Unlike Ariel and Miranda, however, Caliban attempts to use language as a weapon against Prospero just as Prospero uses it against Caliban. Caliban admits that he once tried to rape Miranda, but rather than showing contrition, he says that he wishes he would have been able to finish the deed, so that he could have "peopled . . . / This isle with Calibans" (I.ii.353–354). He insists that the island is his but that Prospero took it from him by flattering Caliban into teaching him about the island and then betraying and enslaving him. Prospero lists Caliban's shortcomings and describes his own good treatment of him, but Caliban answers with curses. We sense that there is more at stake here than a mere shouting-match. If words and histories are a source of power, then Prospero's control over Caliban rests on his ability to master him through words, and the closer Caliban comes to outdoing Prospero in their cursing-match, the closer Caliban comes to achieving his freedom. In the end, Caliban only relents because he fears Prospero's magic, which, he says, is so powerful that it would make a slave of his witch-mother's god, Setebos.

The re-entrance of Ariel creates an immediate and powerful contrast between Prospero's two servants. Where Caliban is coarse, resentful, and brutish, described as a "[h]ag-seed" (I.ii.368), a "poisonous" (I.ii.322) and "most lying slave" (I.ii.347) and as "earth" (I.ii.317), Ariel is delicate, refined, and gracious, described in the *Dramatis personae* as an "airy spirit." Ariel is indeed a spirit of air and fire, while Caliban is a creature of earth. Though the two are both Prospero's servants, Ariel serves the magician somewhat willingly, in return for his freeing him from the pine, while Caliban resists serving him at all costs. In a sense, upon arriving on the island, Prospero enslaved Caliban and freed Ariel, imprisoning the dark, earthy "monster" and releasing the bright, airy spirit. Readers who interpret *The Tempest* as an allegory about European colonial practices generally deem Prospero's treatment of Ariel, and especially of Caliban, to represent the disruptive effect of European colonization on native societies. Prospero's colonization has left Caliban, the original owner of the island, subject to enslavement and hatred on account of his dark countenance and—in the eyes of Prospero, a European—rough appearance.

Prospero's treatment of Ferdinand at the end of this scene re-emphasizes his power and his willingness to manipulate others to achieve his own ends. Though he is pleased by his daughter's obvious attraction to the powerful young man, Prospero does not want their love to get ahead of his plans. As a result, he has no qualms about enchanting Ferdinand and lying to Miranda about Ferdinand's unworthiness. This willingness to deceive even his beloved daughter draws attention to the moral and psychological ambiguities surrounding Shakespeare's depiction of Prospero's character.

Though many readers view *The Tempest* as an allegory about creativity, in which Prospero and his magic work as metaphors for Shakespeare and his art, others find Prospero's apparently narcissistic moral sense disturbing. Prospero seems to think that his own sense of justice and goodness is so well-honed and accurate that, if any other character disagrees with him, that character is wrong simply by virtue of the disagreement. He also seems to think that his objective in restoring his political power is so important that it justifies any means he chooses to use—hence his lying, his manipulations, his cursing, and the violence of his magic. Perhaps the most troubling part of all this is that Shakespeare gives us little reason to believe he disagrees with Prospero: for better or worse, Prospero is the hero of the play.

Act II, scene i:

Summary

While Ferdinand is falling in love with Miranda, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and other shipwrecked lords search for him on another part of the island. Alonso is quite despondent and unreceptive to the good-natured Gonzalo's attempts to cheer him up. Gonzalo meets resistance from Antonio and Sebastian as well. These two childishly mock Gonzalo's suggestion that the island is a good place to be and that they are all lucky to have survived. Alonso finally brings the repartee to a halt when he bursts out at Gonzalo and openly expresses regret at having married away his daughter in Tunis. Francisco, a minor lord, pipes up at this point that he saw Ferdinand swimming valiantly after the wreck, but this does not comfort Alonso. Sebastian and Antonio continue to provide little help. Sebastian tells his brother that he is indeed to blame for

Ferdinand's death—if he had not married his daughter to an African (rather than a European), none of this would have happened.

Gonzalo tells the lords that they are only making the situation worse and attempts to change the subject, discussing what he might do if he were the lord of the island. Antonio and Sebastian mock his utopian vision. Ariel then enters, playing “solemn music” (II.i.182, stage direction), and gradually all but Sebastian and Antonio fall asleep. Seeing the vulnerability of his sleeping companions, Antonio tries to persuade Sebastian to kill his brother. He rationalizes this scheme by explaining that Claribel, who is now Queen of Tunis, is too far from Naples to inherit the kingdom should her father die, and as a result, Sebastian would be the heir to the throne.

Sebastian begins to warm to the idea, especially after Antonio tells him that usurping Prospero's dukedom was the best move he ever made. Sebastian wonders aloud whether he will be afflicted by conscience, but Antonio dismisses this out of hand. Sebastian is at last convinced, and the two men draw their swords. Sebastian, however, seems to have second thoughts at the last moment and stops. While he and Antonio confer, Ariel enters with music, singing in Gonzalo's ear that a conspiracy is under way and that he should “Awake, awake!” (II.i.301). Gonzalo wakes and shouts “Preserve the King!” His exclamation wakes everyone else (II.i.303). Sebastian quickly concocts a story about hearing a loud noise that caused him and Antonio to draw their swords. Gonzalo is obviously suspicious but does not challenge the lords. The group continues its search for Ferdinand.

Analysis

As in the storm scene in Act I, scene i, Shakespeare emphasizes and undercuts the capacity of the bare stage to create a convincing illusion throughout Act II, scene i. As the shipwrecked mariners look around the island, they describe it in poetry of great imagistic richness, giving the audience an imaginary picture of the setting of the play. Even so, they disagree about what they see, and even argue over what the island actually looks like. Adrian finds it to be of “subtle, tender, and delicate temperance,” where “the air breathes upon us . . . most sweetly” (II.i.42–47). Gonzalo says that the grass is “lush and lusty” and “green” (II.i.53–54). Antonio and Sebastian, however, cynical to the last, refuse to let these descriptions rest in the audience's mind. They say that the air smells “as 'twere perfumed by a fen” (II.i.49), meaning a swamp, and that the ground “indeed

is tawny” (II.i.55), or brown. The remarks of Antonio and Sebastian could be easily discounted as mere grumpiness, were it not for the fact that Gonzalo and Adrian do seem at times to be stretching the truth. (Adrian, for example, begins his remarks about the island’s beauty by saying, “Though this island seem to be desert . . . Uninhabitable, and almost inaccessible” [II.i.35–38].) Thus the bareness of the stage allows the beauty and other qualities of the island to be largely a matter of perspective. The island may be a paradise, but only if one chooses to see it that way.

Shakespeare uses this ambiguous setting for several different purposes. First, the setting heightens the sense of wonder and mystery that surrounds the magical island. It also gives each audience member a great deal of freedom to imagine the island as he or she so chooses. Most importantly, however, it enables the island to work as a reflection of character—we know a great deal about different characters simply from how they choose to see the island. Hence the dark, sensitive Caliban can find it both a place of terror—as when he enters, frightened and overworked in Act II, scene ii—and of great beauty—as in his “the isle is full of noises” speech (III.ii.130–138). Therefore, both Gonzalo (at II.i.147–164) and Trinculo (throughout Act III, scene ii), colonially minded, are so easily able to imagine it as the site of their own utopian societies.

Gonzalo’s fantasy about the plantation he would like to build on the island is a remarkable poetic evocation of a utopian society, in which no one would work, all people would be equal and live off the land, and all women would be “innocent and pure.” This vision indicates something of Gonzalo’s own innocence and purity. Shakespeare treats the old man’s idea of the island as a kind of lovely dream, in which the frustrations and obstructions of life (magistrates, wealth, power) would be removed and all could live naturally and authentically. Though Gonzalo’s idea is not presented as a practical possibility (hence the mockery he receives from Sebastian and Antonio), Gonzalo’s dream contrasts to his credit with the power-obsessed ideas of most of the other characters, including Prospero. Gonzalo would do away with the very master-servant motif that lies at the heart of *The Tempest*.

The mockery dished out by Antonio and Sebastian reveals, by contrast, something of the noblemen’s cynicism and lack of feeling. Where Gonzalo is simply grateful and optimistic about

having survived the shipwreck, Antonio and Sebastian seem mainly to be annoyed by it, though not so annoyed that they stop their incessant jesting with each other. Gonzalo says that they are simply loudmouthed jokers, who “would lift the moon out of her sphere, if she would continue in it five weeks without changing” (II.i.179–181). By conspiring against the king, however, they reveal themselves as more sinister and greedier than Gonzalo recognizes, using their verbal wit to cover up their darker and more wicked impulses. However, their greediness for power is both foolish and clumsy. As they attempt to cover their treachery with the story of the “bellowing / Like bulls, or rather lions” (II.i.307–308), it seems hard to believe that Antonio ever could have risen successfully against his brother. The absurdly aggressive behavior of Antonio and Sebastian makes Prospero’s exercise of power in the previous and following scenes seem necessary. It also puts Alonso in a sympathetic position. He is a potential victim of the duo’s treachery, a fact that helps the audience believe his conversion when he reconciles with Prospero at the end.

Act II, scene ii

Summary

Caliban enters with a load of wood, and thunder sounds in the background. Caliban curses and describes the torments that Prospero’s spirits subject him to: they pinch, bite, and prick him, especially when he curses. As he is thinking of these spirits, Caliban sees Trinculo and imagines him to be one of the spirits. Hoping to avoid pinching, he lies down and covers himself with his cloak. Trinculo hears the thunder and looks about for some cover from the storm. The only thing he sees is the cloak-covered Caliban on the ground. He is not so much repulsed by Caliban as curious. He cannot decide whether Caliban is a “man or a fish” (II.ii.24). He thinks of a time when he traveled to England and witnessed freak-shows there. Caliban, he thinks, would bring him a lot of money in England. Thunder sounds again and Trinculo decides that the best shelter in sight is beneath Caliban’s cloak, and so he joins the man-monster there.

Stephano enters singing and drinking. He hears Caliban cry out to Trinculo, “Do not torment me! O!” (II.ii.54). Hearing this and seeing the four legs sticking out from the cloak, Stephano thinks the two men are a four-legged monster with a fever. He decides to relieve this fever with a drink.

Caliban continues to resist Trinculo, whom he still thinks is a spirit tormenting him. Trinculo recognizes Stephano's voice and says so. Stephano, of course, assumes for a moment that the monster has two heads, and he promises to pour liquor in both mouths. Trinculo now calls out to Stephano, and Stephano pulls his friend out from under the cloak. While the two men discuss how they arrived safely on shore, Caliban enjoys the liquor and begs to worship Stephano. The men take full advantage of Caliban's drunkenness, mocking him as a "most ridiculous monster" (II.ii.157) as he promises to lead them around and show them the isle.

Analysis

Trinculo and Stephano are the last new characters to be introduced in the play. They act as comic foils to the main action, and will in later acts become specific parodies of Antonio and Sebastian. At this point, their role is to present comically some of the more serious issues in the play concerning Prospero and Caliban. In Act I, scene ii, Prospero calls Caliban a "slave" (II.ii.311, 322, 347), "thou earth" (II.ii.317), "Filth" (II.ii.349), and "Hag-seed" (II.ii.368). Stephano and Trinculo's epithet of choice in Act II, scene ii and thereafter is "monster." But while these two make quite clear that Caliban is seen as less than human by the Europeans on the island, they also treat him more humanely than Prospero does. Stephano and Trinculo, a butler and a jester respectively, remain at the low end of the social scale in the play, and have little difficulty finding friendship with the strange islander they meet. "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows," says Trinculo (II.ii.36–37), and then hastens to crawl beneath Caliban's garment in order to get out of the rain. The similarity, socially and perhaps physically as well, between Trinculo and Caliban is further emphasized when Stephano, drunk, initially mistakes the two for a single monster: "This is some monster of the isle with four legs" (II.ii.62).

More important than the emphasis on the way in which Caliban seems to others more monster than man, is the way in which this scene dramatizes the initial encounter between an almost completely isolated, "primitive" culture and a foreign, "civilized" one. The reader discovers during Caliban and Prospero's confrontation in Act I, scene ii that Prospero initially "made much of" Caliban (II.ii.336); that he gave Caliban "Water with berries in't" (II.ii.337); that Caliban showed him around the island; and that Prospero later imprisoned Caliban, after he had taken all he could take from him. The reader can see these events in Act II, scene ii, with Trinculo and

Stephano in the place of Prospero. Stephano calls Caliban a “brave monster,” as they set off singing around the island. In addition, Stephano and Trinculo give Caliban wine, which Caliban finds to be a “celestial liquor” (II.ii.109). Moreover, Caliban initially mistakes Stephano and Trinculo for Prospero’s spirits, but alcohol convinces him that Stephano is a “brave god” and decides unconditionally to “kneel to him” (II.ii.109–110). This scene shows the foreign, civilized culture as decadent and manipulative: Stephano immediately plans to “inherit” the island (II.ii.167), using Caliban to show him all its virtues. Stephano and Trinculo are a grotesque, parodic version of Prospero upon his arrival twelve years ago. Godlike in the eyes of the native, they slash and burn their way to power.

By this point, Caliban has begun to resemble a parody of himself. Whereas he would “gabble like / A thing most brutish” (I.ii.359–360) upon Prospero’s arrival, because he did not know language, he now is willfully inarticulate in his drunkenness. Immediately putting aside his fear that these men are spirits sent to do him harm, Caliban puts his trust in them for all the wrong reasons. What makes Caliban’s behavior in this scene so tragic is that we might expect him, especially after his eloquent curses of Prospero in Act I, scene ii, to know better

Act III, scene i

Summary

I am your wife, if you will marry me.
If not, I’ll die your maid. To be your fellow
You may deny me, but I’ll be your servant
Whether you will or no.

Back at Prospero’s cell, Ferdinand takes over Caliban’s duties and carries wood for Prospero. Unlike Caliban, however, Ferdinand has no desire to curse. Instead, he enjoys his labors because they serve the woman he loves, Miranda. As Ferdinand works and thinks of Miranda, she enters, and after her, unseen by either lover, Prospero enters. Miranda tells Ferdinand to take a break from his work, or to let her work for him, thinking that her father is away. Ferdinand refuses to let her work for him but does rest from his work and asks Miranda her name. She tells him, and he is pleased: “Miranda” comes from the same Latin word that gives English the word

“admiration.” Ferdinand’s speech plays on the etymology: “Admired Miranda! / Indeed the top of admiration, worth / What’s dearest to the world!” (III.i.37–39).

Ferdinand goes on to flatter his beloved. Miranda is, of course, modest, pointing out that she has no idea of any woman’s face but her own. She goes on to praise Ferdinand’s face, but then stops herself, remembering her father’s instructions that she should not speak to Ferdinand. Ferdinand assures Miranda that he is a prince and probably a king now, though he prays his father is not dead. Miranda seems unconcerned with Ferdinand’s title, and asks only if he loves her.

Ferdinand replies enthusiastically that he does, and his response emboldens Miranda to propose marriage. Ferdinand accepts and the two part. Prospero comes forth, subdued in his happiness, for he has known that this would happen. He then hastens to his book of magic in order to prepare for remaining business.

Analysis

There be some sports are painful, and their labour
Delight in them sets off. Some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters
Point to rich ends. This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what’s dead
And makes my labours pleasures.

This scene revolves around different images of servitude. Ferdinand is literally in service to Prospero, but in order to make his labor more pleasant he sees Miranda as his taskmaster. When he talks to Miranda, Ferdinand brings up a different kind of servitude—the love he has felt for a number of other beautiful women. Ferdinand sees this love, in comparison to his love for Miranda, as an enforced servitude: “Full many a lady / I have eyed with the best regard, and many a time / Th’ harmony of their tongues hath into bondage / Brought my too diligent ear” (III.i.39–42). When Miranda stops the conversation momentarily, remembering her father’s command against talking to Ferdinand, the prince hastens to assure her that he is worthy of her love. He is royalty, he says, and in normal life “would no more endure / This wooden slavery

[carrying logs] than to suffer / The flesh-fly blow my mouth” (III.i.61–63). But this slavery is made tolerable by a different kind of slavery: “The very instant that I saw you did / My heart fly to your service; there resides, / To make me slave to it” (III.i.64–66). The words “slavery” and “slave” underscore the parallel as well as the difference between Ferdinand and Caliban.

Prospero repeatedly calls Caliban a slave, and we see Caliban as a slave both to Prospero and to his own anger. Ferdinand, on the other hand, is a willing slave to his love, happy in a servitude that makes him rejoice rather than curse.

At the end of the scene, Miranda takes up the theme of servitude. Proposing marriage to Ferdinand, she says that “I am your wife, if you will marry me; / If not, I’ll die your maid. . . . / You may deny me; but I’ll be your servant / Whether you will or no” (III.i.83–86). This is the only scene of actual interaction we see between Ferdinand and Miranda. Miranda is, as we know, and as she says, very innocent: “I do not know / One of my sex, no woman’s face remember / Save from my glass mine own; nor have I seen / More that I may call men than you, good friend, / And my dear father” (III.i.48–52). The play has to make an effort to overcome the implausibility of this courtship—to make Miranda look like something more than Prospero’s puppet and a fool for the first man she sees. Shakespeare accomplishes this by showing Ferdinand in one kind of servitude—in which he must literally and physically humble himself—as he talks earnestly about another kind of servitude, in which he gives himself wholly to Miranda. The fact that Miranda speaks of a similar servitude of her own accord, that she remembers her father’s “precepts” and then disregards them, and that Prospero remains in the background without interfering helps the audience to trust this meeting between the lovers more than their first meeting in Act I, scene ii.

Of course, Prospero’s presence in the first place may suggest that he is somehow in control of what Miranda does or says. At the end he steps forward to assure the audience that he knew what would happen: “So glad of this as they I cannot be, / Who are surprised with all” (III.i.93–94). But Prospero’s five other lines (III.i.31–32 and III.i.74–76) do not suggest that he controls what Miranda says. Rather, he watches in the manner of a father—both proud of his daughter’s choice and slightly sad to see her grow up.

Act III, scene ii

Summary

Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano continue to drink and wander about the island. Stephano now refers to Caliban as “servant monster” and repeatedly orders him to drink. Caliban seems happy to obey. The men begin to quarrel, mostly in jest, in their drunkenness. Stephano has now assumed the title of Lord of the Island and he promises to hang Trinculo if Trinculo should mock his servant monster. Ariel, invisible, enters just as Caliban is telling the men that he is “subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island” (III.ii.40–41). Ariel begins to stir up trouble, calling out, “Thou liest” (III.ii.42). Caliban cannot see Ariel and thinks that Trinculo said this. He threatens Trinculo, and Stephano tells Trinculo not to interrupt Caliban anymore. Trinculo protests that he said nothing. Drunkenly, they continue talking, and Caliban tells them of his desire to get revenge against Prospero. Ariel continues to interrupt now and then with the words, “Thou liest.” Ariel’s ventriloquizing ultimately results in Stephano hitting Trinculo.

While Ariel looks on, Caliban plots against Prospero. The key, Caliban tells his friends, is to take Prospero’s magic books. Once they have done this, they can kill Prospero and take his daughter. Stephano will become king of the island and Miranda will be his queen. Trinculo tells Stephano that he thinks this plan is a good idea, and Stephano apologizes for the previous quarreling. Caliban assures them that Prospero will be asleep within the half hour.

Ariel plays a tune on his flute and tabor-drum. Stephano and Trinculo wonder at this noise, but Caliban tells them it is nothing to fear. Stephano relishes the thought of possessing this island kingdom “where I shall have my music for nothing” (III.ii.139–140). Then the men decide to follow the music and afterward to kill Prospero.

Analysis

As we have seen, one of the ways in which *The Tempest* builds its rich aura of magical and mysterious implication is through the use of doubles: scenes, characters, and speeches that mirror each other by either resemblance or contrast. This scene is an example of doubling: almost everything in it echoes Act II, scene i. In this scene, Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano wander aimlessly about the island, and Stephano muses about the kind of island it would be if he ruled

it—"I will kill this man [Prospero]. His daughter and I will be King and Queen . . . and Trinculo and myself [Caliban] shall be viceroys" (III.ii.101–103)—just as Gonzalo had done while wandering with Antonio and Sebastian in Act II, scene i. At the end of Act III, scene ii, Ariel enters, invisible, and causes strife among the group, first with his voice and then with music, leading the men astray in order to thwart Antonio and Sebastian's plot against Alonso. The power-hungry servants Stephano and Trinculo thus become rough parodies of the power-hungry courtiers Antonio and Sebastian. All four men are now essentially equated with Caliban, who is, as Alonso and Antonio once were, simply another usurper.

But Caliban also has a moment in this scene to become more than a mere usurper: his striking and apparently heartfelt speech about the sounds of the island. Reassuring the others not to worry about Ariel's piping, Caliban says:

The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices,
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked,
I cried to dream again. (III.ii.130–138)

In this speech, we are reminded of Caliban's very close connection to the island—a connection we have seen previously only in his speeches about showing Prospero or Stephano which streams to drink from and which berries to pick (I.ii.333–347 and II.ii.152–164). After all, Caliban is not only a symbolic "native" in the colonial allegory of the play. He is also an actual native of the island, having been born there after his mother Sycorax fled there. This ennobling monologue—ennobling because there is no servility in it, only a profound understanding of the magic of the island—provides Caliban with a moment of freedom from Prospero and even from his drunkenness. In his anger and sadness, Caliban seems for a moment to have risen above his wretched role as Stephano's fool. Throughout much of the play, Shakespeare seems to side with

powerful figures such as Prospero against weaker figures such as Caliban, allowing us to think, with Prospero and Miranda, that Caliban is merely a monster. But in this scene, he takes the extraordinary step of briefly giving the monster a voice. Because of this short speech, Caliban becomes a more understandable character, and even, for the moment at least, a sympathetic one.

Act III, scene iii:

Summary

Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and their companion lords become exhausted, and Alonso gives up all hope of finding his son. Antonio, still hoping to kill Alonso, whispers to Sebastian that Alonso's exhaustion and desperation will provide them with the perfect opportunity to kill the king later that evening.

At this point "solemn and strange music" fills the stage (III.iii.17, stage direction), and a procession of spirits in "several strange shapes" enters, bringing a banquet of food (III.iii.19, stage direction). The spirits dance about the table, invite the king and his party to eat, and then dance away. Prospero enters at this time as well, having rendered himself magically invisible to everyone but the audience. The men disagree at first about whether to eat, but Gonzalo persuades them it will be all right, noting that travelers are returning every day with stories of unbelievable but true events. This, he says, might be just such an event.

Just as the men are about to eat, however, a noise of thunder erupts, and Ariel enters in the shape of a harpy. He claps his wings upon the table and the banquet vanishes. Ariel mocks the men for attempting to draw their swords, which magically have been made to feel heavy. Calling himself an instrument of Fate and Destiny, he goes on to accuse Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio of driving Prospero from Milan and leaving him and his child at the mercy of the sea. For this sin, he tells them, the powers of nature and the sea have exacted revenge on Alonso by taking Ferdinand. He vanishes, and the procession of spirits enters again and removes the banquet table. Prospero, still invisible, applauds the work of his spirit and announces with satisfaction that his enemies are now in his control. He leaves them in their distracted state and goes to visit with Ferdinand and his daughter.

Alonso, meanwhile, is quite desperate. He has heard the name of Prospero once more, and it has signaled the death of his own son. He runs to drown himself. Sebastian and Antonio, meanwhile, decide to pursue and fight with the spirits. Gonzalo, ever the voice of reason, tells the other, younger lords to run after Antonio, Sebastian, and Alonso and to make sure that none of the three does anything rash.

Analysis

Ariel's appearance as an avenging harpy represents the climax of Prospero's revenge, as Antonio, Alonso, and the other lords are confronted with their crimes and threatened with punishment. From Prospero's perspective, the disguised Ariel represents justice and the powers of nature. He has arrived to right the wrongs that have been done to Prospero, and to punish the wicked for their sins. However, the audience knows that Ariel is not an angel or representative of a higher moral power, but merely mouths the script that Prospero has taught him. Ariel's only true concern, of course, is to win his freedom from Prospero. Thus, the vision of justice presented in this scene is artificial and staged.

Ariel's display has less to do with fate or justice than with Prospero's ability to manipulate the thoughts and feelings of others. Just as his frequent recitations of history to Ariel, Miranda, and Caliban are designed to govern their thinking by imposing his own rhetoric upon it, Prospero's decision to use Ariel as an illusory instrument of "fate" is designed to govern the thinking of the nobles at the table by imposing his own ideas of justice and right action upon their minds. Whether or not Prospero's case is really just—as it may well be—his use of Ariel in this scene is done purely to further his persuasion and control. He knows that a supernatural creature claiming to represent nature will make a greater impression in advancing his argument than he himself could hope to. If Prospero simply appeared before the table and stated his case, it would seem tainted with selfish desire. However, for Ariel to present Prospero's case in this fashion makes it seem like the inevitable natural order of the universe—even though Prospero himself is behind everything Ariel says.

This state of affairs gets at the heart of the central problem of reading *The Tempest*. The play seems to present Prospero's notion of justice as the only viable one, but it simultaneously

undercuts Prospero's notion of justice by presenting the artificiality of his method of obtaining justice. We are left to wonder if justice really exists when it appears that only a sorcerer can bring about justice. Alternatively, Prospero's manipulations may put us in mind of what playwrights do when they arrange events into meaningful patterns, rewarding the good and punishing the bad.

Act IV, scene i:

Summary

Prospero gives his blessing to Ferdinand and Miranda, warning Ferdinand only that he take care not to break Miranda's "virgin-knot" before the wedding has been solemnized (IV.i.15–17). Ferdinand promises to comply. Prospero then calls in Ariel and asks him to summon spirits to perform a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda. Soon, three spirits appear in the shapes of the mythological figures of Iris (Juno's messenger and the goddess of the rainbow), Juno (queen of the gods), and Ceres (goddess of agriculture). This trio performs a masque celebrating the lovers' engagement. First, Iris enters and asks Ceres to appear at Juno's wish, to celebrate "a contract of true love." Ceres appears, and then Juno enters. Juno and Ceres together bless the couple, with Juno wishing them honor and riches, and Ceres wishing them natural prosperity and plenty. The spectacle awes Ferdinand and he says that he would like to live on the island forever, with Prospero as his father and Miranda as his wife. Juno and Ceres send Iris to fetch some nymphs and reapers to perform a country dance. Just as this dance begins, however, Prospero startles suddenly and then sends the spirits away. Prospero, who had forgotten about Caliban's plot against him, suddenly remembers that the hour nearly has come for Caliban and the conspirators to make their attempt on his life.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,

Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.148–158)

Prospero's apparent anger alarms Ferdinand and Miranda, but Prospero assures the young couple that his consternation is largely a result of his age; he says that a walk will soothe him. Prospero makes a short speech about the masque, saying that the world itself is as insubstantial as a play, and that human beings are "such stuff / As dreams are made on." Ferdinand and Miranda leave Prospero to himself, and the old enchanter immediately summons Ariel, who seems to have made a mistake by not reminding Prospero of Caliban's plot before the beginning of the masque. Prospero now asks Ariel to tell him again what the three conspirators are up to, and Ariel tells him of the men's drunken scheme to steal Prospero's book and kill him. Ariel reports that he used his music to lead these men through rough and prickly briars and then into a filthy pond. Prospero thanks his trusty spirit, and the two set a trap for the three would-be assassins.

On a clothesline in Prospero's cell, Prospero and Ariel hang an array of fine apparel for the men to attempt to steal, after which they render themselves invisible. Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano enter, wet from the filthy pond. The fine clothing immediately distracts Stephano and Trinculo. They want to steal it, despite the protests of Caliban, who wants to stick to the plan and kill Prospero. Stephano and Trinculo ignore him. Soon after they touch the clothing, there is "A noise of hunters" (IV.i.251, stage direction). A pack of spirits in the shape of hounds, set on by Ariel and Prospero, drives the thieves out.

Analysis

The wedding of Ferdinand and Miranda draws near. Thus, Act IV, scene i explores marriage from several different angles. Prospero and Ferdinand's surprisingly coarse discussion of Miranda's virginity at the beginning of the scene serves to emphasize the disparity in knowledge and experience between Miranda and her future husband. Prospero has kept his daughter extremely innocent. As a result, Ferdinand's vulgar description of the pleasures of the wedding-

bed reminds the audience (and probably Prospero as well) that the end of Miranda's innocence is now imminent. Her wedding-night will come, she will lose her virginity, and she will be in some way changed. This discussion is a blunt reminder that change is inevitable and that Miranda will soon give herself, in an entirely new way, to a man besides her father. Though Prospero somewhat perfunctorily initiates and participates in the sexual discussion, he also seems to be affected by it. In the later parts of the scene, he makes unprecedented comments on the transitory nature of life and on his own old age. Very likely, the prospect of Miranda's marriage and growing up calls these ideas to his mind.

After the discussion of sexuality, Prospero introduces the masque, which moves the exploration of marriage to the somewhat more comfortable realms of society and family. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, masques were popular forms of entertainment in England. Masques featured masked actors performing allegorical, often highly ritualized stories drawn from mythology and folklore. Prospero's masque features Juno, the symbol of marriage and family life in Roman mythology, and Ceres, the symbol of agriculture, and thus of nature, growth, prosperity, and rebirth, all notions intimately connected to marriage. The united blessing of the union by Juno and Ceres is a blessing on the couple that wishes them prosperity and wealth while explicitly tying their marriage to notions of social propriety (Juno wishes them "honor") and harmony with the Earth. In this way, marriage is subtly glorified as both the foundation of society and as part of the natural order of things, given the accord between marriage and nature in Ceres' speech.

Interestingly, Juno and Ceres de-emphasize the role of love, personal feeling, and sexuality in marriage, choosing instead to focus on marriage's place in the social and natural orders. When Ceres wonders to Iris where Venus and Cupid, the deities of love and sex, are, she says that she hopes not to see them because their lustful powers caused Pluto, god of the underworld, to kidnap Persephone, Ceres's daughter (IV.i.86–91). Iris assures Ceres that Venus and Cupid are nowhere in sight. Venus and Cupid had hoped to foil the purity of the impending union, "but in vain" (IV.i.97). Ceres, Juno, and Iris have kept the gods of lust at bay; it seems that, through his masque, Prospero is trying to suppress entirely the lasciviousness of Ferdinand's tone when he discusses Miranda's virginity.

In almost all of Shakespeare's comedies, marriage is used as a symbol of a harmonious and healthy social order. In these plays, misunderstandings erupt, conflicts break out, and at the end, love triumphs and marriage sets everything right. *The Tempest*, a romance, is not exactly a comedy. However, it is deeply concerned with the social order, both in terms of the explicit conflict of the play (Prospero's struggle to regain his place as duke) and in terms of the play's constant exploration of the master-servant dynamic, especially when the dynamic appears unsettled or discordant. One reason Shakespeare might shift the focus of the play to marriage at this point is to prepare the audience for the mending of the disrupted social order that takes place at the end of the story. Calling upon all the social and dramatic associations of marriage, and underscoring them heavily with the solemnity of the masque, Shakespeare creates a sense that, even though the play's major conflict is still unresolved, the world of the play is beginning to heal itself. What is interesting about this technique is that the sense of healing has little to do with anything intrinsic to the characters themselves. Throughout this scene, Ferdinand seems unduly coarse, Miranda merely a threatened innocent, and Prospero somewhat weary and sad. But the fact of marriage itself, as it is presented in the masque, is enough to settle the turbulent waters of the story.

After this detailed exploration of marriage, the culmination of Caliban's plot against Prospero occurs merely as a moment of comic relief, exposing the weaknesses of Stephano and Trinculo and giving the conspirators their just desserts. Any hint of sympathy we may have had for Caliban earlier in the play has vanished, partly because Caliban's behavior has been vicious and degraded, but also because Prospero has become more appealing. Prospero has come to seem more fully human because of his poignant feelings for his daughter and his discussion of his old age. As a result, he is far easier to identify with than he was in the first Act. Simply by accenting aspects of character we have already seen, namely Prospero's love for Miranda and the conspirators' absurd incompetence, Shakespeare substantially rehabilitates Prospero in the eyes of the audience

. We can cheer wholeheartedly for Prospero in his humorous defeat of Caliban now; this is one of the first really uncomplicated moments in the play. After this moment, Prospero becomes easier to sympathize with as the rest of the story unfolds.

Act V, scene i & Epilogue:

Summary

Ariel tells Prospero that the day has reached its “sixth hour” (6 p.m.), when Ariel is allowed to stop working. Prospero acknowledges Ariel’s request and asks how the king and his followers are faring. Ariel tells him that they are currently imprisoned, as Prospero ordered, in a grove. Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian are mad with fear; and Gonzalo, Ariel says, cries constantly. Prospero tells Ariel to go release the men, and now alone on stage, delivers his famous soliloquy in which he gives up magic. He says he will perform his last task and then break his staff and drown his magic book.

Ariel now enters with Alonso and his companions, who have been charmed and obediently stand in a circle. Prospero speaks to them in their charmed state, praising Gonzalo for his loyalty and chiding the others for their treachery. He then sends Ariel to his cell to fetch the clothes he once wore as Duke of Milan. Ariel goes and returns immediately to help his master to put on the garments. Prospero promises to grant freedom to his loyal helper-spirit and sends him to fetch the Boatswain and mariners from the wrecked ship. Ariel goes.

Prospero releases Alonso and his companions from their spell and speaks with them. He forgives Antonio but demands that Antonio return his dukedom. Antonio does not respond and does not, in fact, say a word for the remainder of the play except to note that Caliban is “no doubt marketable” (V.i.269). Alonso now tells Prospero of the missing Ferdinand. Prospero tells Alonso that he, too, has lost a child in this last tempest—his daughter. Alonso continues to be wracked with grief. Prospero then draws aside a curtain, revealing behind it Ferdinand and Miranda, who are playing a game of chess. Alonso is ecstatic at the discovery. Meanwhile, the sight of more humans impresses Miranda. Alonso embraces his son and daughter-in-law to be and begs Miranda’s forgiveness for the treacheries of twelve years ago. Prospero silences Alonso’s apologies, insisting that the reconciliation is complete.

After arriving with the Boatswain and mariners, Ariel is sent to fetch Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano, which he speedily does. The three drunken thieves are sent to Prospero’s cell to return the clothing they stole and to clean it in preparation for the evening’s reveling. Prospero then

invites Alonso and his company to stay the night. He will tell them the tale of his last twelve years, and in the morning, they can all set out for Naples, where Miranda and Ferdinand will be married. After the wedding, Prospero will return to Milan, where he plans to contemplate the end of his life. The last charge Prospero gives to Ariel before setting him free is to make sure the trip home is made on “calm seas” with “auspicious gales” (V.i.318).

The other characters exit, and Prospero delivers the epilogue. He describes the loss of his magical powers (“Now my charms are all o’erthrown”) and says that, as he imprisoned Ariel and Caliban, the audience has now imprisoned him on the stage. He says that the audience can only release him by applauding, and asks them to remember that his only desire was to please them. He says that, as his listeners would like to have their own crimes forgiven, they should forgive him, and set him free by clapping.

Analysis

In this scene, all of the play’s characters are brought on stage together for the first time. Prospero repeatedly says that he is relinquishing his magic, but its presence pervades the scene. He enters in his magic robes. He brings Alonso and the others into a charmed circle (V.i.57, stage direction) and holds them there for about fifty lines. Once he releases them from the spell, he makes the magician-like spectacle of unveiling Miranda and Ferdinand behind a curtain, playing chess (V.i.173, stage direction). His last words of the play proper are a command to Ariel to ensure for him a safe voyage home. Only in the epilogue, when he is alone on-stage, does Prospero pass judgment on his enemies in the final scene, we are no longer put off by his power, both because his love for Miranda has humanized him to a great extent, and also because we now can see that, over the course of the play, his judgments generally have been justified. Gonzalo is an “honourable man” (V.i.62); Alonso did, and knows he did, treat Prospero “[m]ost cruelly” (V.i.71); and Antonio is an “[u]nnatural” brother (V.i.79). Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, led in sheepishly in their stolen apparel at line 258, are so foolish as to deserve punishment, and Prospero’s command that they “trim” his cell “handsomely” (V.i.297) in preparation for the evening’s revels seems mild. Accusing his enemies neither more nor less than they deserve, and forgiving them instantly once he has been restored to his dukedom, Prospero has at last come to seem judicious rather than arbitrary in his use of power. Of course, it helps

that Prospero's most egregious sins have been mitigated by the outcome of events. He will no longer hold Ariel and Caliban as slaves because he is giving up his magic and returning to Naples. Moreover, he will no longer dominate Miranda because she is marrying Ferdinand.

Prospero has made the audience see the other characters clearly and accurately. What is remarkable is the fact that the most sympathetic character in the play, Miranda, still cannot. Miranda's last lines are her most famous: "O wonder!" she exclaims upon seeing the company Prospero has assembled. "How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world / That has such people in't!" (V.i.184–187). From Miranda's innocent perspective, such a remark seems genuine and even true. But from the audience's perspective, it must seem somewhat ridiculous. After all, Antonio and Sebastian are still surly and impudent; Alonso has repented only after believing his son to be dead; and Trinculo and Stephano are drunken, petty thieves. However, Miranda speaks from the perspective of someone who has not seen any human being except her father since she was three years old. She is merely delighted by the spectacle of all these people.

In a sense, her innocence may be shared to some extent by the playwright, who takes delight in creating and presenting a vast array of humanity, from kings to traitors, from innocent virgins to inebriated would-be murderers. As a result, though Miranda's words are to some extent undercut by irony, it is not too much of a stretch to think that Shakespeare really does mean this benediction on a world "[t]hat has such people in't!" After all, Prospero is another stand-in for the playwright, and he forgives all the wrongdoers at the end of the play. There is an element in the conclusion of *The Tempest* that celebrates the multiplicity and variety of human life, which, while it may result in complication and ambiguity, also creates humor, surprise, and love.

If *The Tempest* is read, as it often is, as a celebration of creativity and art, the aging Shakespeare's swan song to the theater, then this closing benediction may have a much broader application than just to this play, referring to the breadth of humanity that inspired the breadth of Shakespeare's characters. Similarly, Prospero's final request for applause in the monologue functions as a request for forgiveness, not merely for the wrongs he has committed in this play. It also requests forgiveness for the beneficent tyranny of creativity itself, in which an author, like a Prospero, moves people at his will, controls the minds of others, creates situations to suit his

aims, and arranges outcomes entirely in the service of his own idea of goodness or justice or beauty. In this way, the ambiguity surrounding Prospero's power in *The Tempest* may be inherent to art itself. Like Prospero, authors work according to their own conceptions of a desirable or justifiable outcome. But as in *The Tempest*, a happy ending can restore harmony, and a well-developed play can create an authentic justice, even if it originates entirely in the mind of the author.

The plot of *The Tempest* is organized around the idea of persuasion, as Prospero gradually moves his sense of justice from his own mind into the outside world, gradually applying it to everyone around him until the audience believes it, too. This aggressive persuasiveness makes Prospero difficult to admire at times. Still, in another sense, persuasion characterizes the entire play, which seeks to enthrall audiences with its words and magic as surely as Prospero sought to enthrall Ariel. And because the audience decides whether it believes in the play—whether to applaud, as Prospero asks them to do—the real power lies not with the playwright, but with the viewer, not with the imagination that creates the story, but with the imagination that receives it. In this way, Shakespeare transforms the troubling ambiguity of the play into a surprising cause for celebration. The power wielded by Prospero, which seemed unsettling at first, is actually the source of all of our pleasure in the drama. In fact, it is the reason we came to the theater in the first place.

3.0 Characters:

Prospero

Prospero is one of Shakespeare's more enigmatic protagonists. He is a sympathetic character in that he was wronged by his usurping brother, but his absolute power over the other characters and his overwrought speeches make him difficult to like. In our first glimpse of him, he appears puffed up and self-important, and his repeated insistence that Miranda pay attention suggest that his story is boring her. Once Prospero moves on to a subject other than his absorption in the pursuit of knowledge, Miranda's attention is riveted.

The pursuit of knowledge gets Prospero into trouble in the first place. By neglecting everyday matters when he was duke, he gave his brother a chance to rise up against him. His possession

and use of magical knowledge renders him extremely powerful and not entirely sympathetic. His punishments of Caliban are petty and vindictive, as he calls upon his spirits to pinch Caliban when he curses. He is defensively autocratic with Ariel. For example, when Ariel reminds his master of his promise to relieve him of his duties early if he performs them willingly, Prospero bursts into fury and threatens to return him to his former imprisonment and torment. He is similarly unpleasant in his treatment of Ferdinand, leading him to his daughter and then imprisoning and enslaving him.

Despite his shortcomings as a man, however, Prospero is central to *The Tempest's* narrative. Prospero generates the plot of the play almost single-handedly, as his various schemes, spells, and manipulations all work as part of his grand design to achieve the play's happy ending. Watching Prospero work through *The Tempest* is like watching a dramatist create a play, building a story from material at hand and developing his plot so that the resolution brings the world into line with his idea of goodness and justice. Many critics and readers of the play have interpreted Prospero as a surrogate for Shakespeare, enabling the audience to explore firsthand the ambiguities and ultimate wonder of the creative endeavor.

Prospero's final speech, in which he likens himself to a playwright by asking the audience for applause, strengthens this reading of the play, and makes the play's final scene function as a moving celebration of creativity, humanity, and art. Prospero emerges as a more likable and sympathetic figure in the final two acts of the play. In these acts, his love for Miranda, his forgiveness of his enemies, and the legitimately happy ending his scheme creates all work to mitigate some of the undesirable means he has used to achieve his happy ending. If Prospero sometimes seems autocratic, he ultimately manages to persuade the audience to share his understanding of the world—an achievement that is, after all, the final goal of every author and every play.

Miranda

Just under fifteen years old, Miranda is a gentle and compassionate, but also relatively passive, heroine. From her very first lines she displays a meek and emotional nature. "O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer!" she says of the shipwreck (I.ii.5–6), and hearing Prospero's tale of

their narrow escape from Milan, she says “I, not rememb’ring how I cried out then, / Will cry it o’er again” (I.ii.133–134). Miranda does not choose her own husband. Instead, while she sleeps, Prospero sends Ariel to fetch Ferdinand, and arranges things so that the two will come to love one another. After Prospero has given the lovers his blessing, he and Ferdinand talk with surprising frankness about her virginity and the pleasures of the marriage bed while she stands quietly by. Prospero tells Ferdinand to be sure not to “break her virgin-knot” before the wedding night (IV.i.15), and Ferdinand replies with no small anticipation that lust shall never take away “the edge of that day’s celebration” (IV.i.29). In the play’s final scene, Miranda is presented, with Ferdinand, almost as a prop or piece of the scenery as Prospero draws aside a curtain to reveal the pair playing chess.

But while Miranda is passive in many ways, she has at least two moments of surprising forthrightness and strength that complicate the reader’s impressions of her as a naïve young girl. The first such moment is in Act I, scene ii, in which she and Prospero converse with Caliban. Prospero alludes to the fact that Caliban once tried to rape Miranda. When Caliban rudely agrees that he intended to violate her, Miranda responds with impressive vehemence, clearly appalled at Caliban’s light attitude toward his attempted rape. She goes on to scold him for being ungrateful for her attempts to educate him: “When thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes / With words that made them known” (358–361). These lines are so surprising coming from the mouth of Miranda that many editors have amended the text and given it to Prospero. This reattribution seems to give Miranda too little credit. In Act III, scene i comes the second surprising moment—Miranda’s marriage proposal to Ferdinand: “I am your wife, if you will marry me; / If not, I’ll die your maid” (III.i.83–84). Her proposal comes shortly after Miranda has told herself to remember her “father’s precepts” (III.i.58) forbidding conversation with Ferdinand. As the reader can see in her speech to Caliban in Act I, scene ii, Miranda is willing to speak up for herself about her sexuality.

Caliban

Prospero’s dark, earthy slave, frequently referred to as a monster by the other characters, Caliban is the son of a witch-hag and the only real native of the island to appear in the play. He is an

extremely complex figure, and he mirrors or parodies several other characters in the play. In his first speech to Prospero, Caliban insists that Prospero stole the island from him. Through this speech, Caliban suggests that his situation is much the same as Prospero's, whose brother usurped his dukedom. On the other hand, Caliban's desire for sovereignty of the island mirrors the lust for power that led Antonio to overthrow Prospero. Caliban's conspiracy with Stephano and Trinculo to murder Prospero mirrors Antonio and Sebastian's plot against Alonso, as well as Antonio and Alonso's original conspiracy against Prospero.

Caliban both mirrors and contrasts with Prospero's other servant, Ariel. While Ariel is "an airy spirit," Caliban is of the earth, his speeches turning to "springs, brine pits" (I.ii.341), "bogs, fens, flats" (II.ii.2), or crabapples and pignuts (II.ii.159–160). While Ariel maintains his dignity and his freedom by serving Prospero willingly, Caliban achieves a different kind of dignity by refusing, if only sporadically, to bow before Prospero's intimidation.

Surprisingly, Caliban also mirrors and contrasts with Ferdinand in certain ways. In Act II, scene ii Caliban enters "with a burden of wood," and Ferdinand enters in Act III, scene i "bearing a log." Both Caliban and Ferdinand profess an interest in untying Miranda's "virgin knot." Ferdinand plans to marry her, while Caliban has attempted to rape her. The glorified, romantic, almost ethereal love of Ferdinand for Miranda starkly contrasts with Caliban's desire to impregnate Miranda and people the island with Calibans.

Finally, and most tragically, Caliban becomes a parody of himself. In his first speech to Prospero, he regretfully reminds the magician of how he showed him all the ins and outs of the island when Prospero first arrived. Only a few scenes later, however, we see Caliban drunk and fawning before a new magical being in his life: Stephano and his bottle of liquor. Soon, Caliban begs to show Stephano the island and even asks to lick his shoe. Caliban repeats the mistakes he claims to curse. In his final act of rebellion, he is once more entirely subdued by Prospero in the most petty way—he is dunked in a stinking bog and ordered to clean up Prospero's cell in preparation for dinner.

Despite his savage demeanor and grotesque appearance, however, Caliban has a nobler, more sensitive side that the audience is only allowed to glimpse briefly, and which Prospero and

Miranda do not acknowledge at all. His beautiful speeches about his island home provide some of the most affecting imagery in the play, reminding the audience that Caliban really did occupy the island before Prospero came, and that he may be right in thinking his enslavement to be monstrously unjust. Caliban's swarthy appearance, his forced servitude, and his native status on the island have led many readers to interpret him as a symbol of the native cultures occupied and suppressed by European colonial societies, which are represented by the power of Prospero. Whether or not one accepts this allegory, Caliban remains one of the most intriguing and ambiguous minor characters in all of Shakespeare, a sensitive monster who allows himself to be transformed into a fool.

Ariel - Prospero's spirit helper. Ariel is referred to throughout this SparkNote and in most criticism as "he," but his gender and physical form are ambiguous. Rescued by Prospero from a long imprisonment at the hands of the witch Sycorax, Ariel is Prospero's servant until Prospero decides to release him. He is mischievous and ubiquitous, able to traverse the length of the island in an instant and to change shapes at will. He carries out virtually every task that Prospero needs accomplished in the play.

Caliban - Another of Prospero's servants. Caliban, the son of the now-deceased witch Sycorax, acquainted Prospero with the island when Prospero arrived. Caliban believes that the island rightfully belongs to him and has been stolen by Prospero. His speech and behavior is sometimes coarse and brutal, as in his drunken scenes with Stephano and Trinculo (II.ii, IV.i), and sometimes eloquent and sensitive, as in his rebukes of Prospero in Act I, scene ii, and in his description of the eerie beauty of the island in Act III, scene ii (III.ii.130-138).

Ferdinand - Son and heir of Alonso. Ferdinand seems in some ways to be as pure and naïve as Miranda. He falls in love with her upon first sight and happily submits to servitude in order to win her father's approval.

Alonso - King of Naples and father of Ferdinand. Alonso aided Antonio in unseating Prospero as Duke of Milan twelve years before. As he appears in the play, however, he is acutely aware of the consequences of all his actions. He blames his decision to marry his daughter to the Prince of Tunis on the apparent death of his son. In addition, after the magical banquet, he regrets his role in the usurping of Prospero.

Antonio - Prospero's brother. Antonio quickly demonstrates that he is power-hungry and foolish. In Act II, scene i, he persuades Sebastian to kill the sleeping Alonso. He then goes along with Sebastian's absurd story about fending off lions when Gonzalo wakes up and catches Antonio and Sebastian with their swords drawn.

Sebastian - Alonso's brother. Like Antonio, he is both aggressive and cowardly. He is easily persuaded to kill his brother in Act II, scene i, and he initiates the ridiculous story about lions when Gonzalo catches him with his sword drawn.

Gonzalo - An old, honest lord, Gonzalo helped Prospero and Miranda to escape after Antonio usurped Prospero's title. Gonzalo's speeches provide an important commentary on the events of the play, as he remarks on the beauty of the island when the stranded party first lands, then on the desperation of Alonso after the magic banquet, and on the miracle of the reconciliation in Act V, scene i.

Trinculo & Stephano - Trinculo, a jester, and Stephano, a drunken butler, are two minor members of the shipwrecked party. They provide a comic foil to the other, more powerful pairs of Prospero and Alonso and Antonio and Sebastian. Their drunken boasting and petty greed reflect and deflate the quarrels and power struggles of Prospero and the other noblemen.

Boatswain - Appearing only in the first and last scenes, the Boatswain is vigorously good-natured. He seems competent and almost cheerful in the shipwreck scene, demanding practical help rather than weeping and praying. And he seems surprised but not stunned when he awakens from a long sleep at the end of the play.

3.1 Analysis of the Major Characters:

Prospero

Prospero is one of Shakespeare's more enigmatic protagonists. He is a sympathetic character in that he was wronged by his usurping brother, but his absolute power over the other characters and his overwrought speeches make him difficult to like. In our first glimpse of him, he appears puffed up and self-important, and his repeated insistence that Miranda pay attention suggest that his story is boring her. Once Prospero moves on to a subject other than his absorption in the pursuit of knowledge, Miranda's attention is riveted.

The pursuit of knowledge gets Prospero into trouble in the first place. By neglecting everyday matters when he was duke, he gave his brother a chance to rise up against him. His possession and use of magical knowledge renders him extremely powerful and not entirely sympathetic. His punishments of Caliban are petty and vindictive, as he calls upon his spirits to pinch Caliban when he curses. He is defensively autocratic with Ariel. For example, when Ariel reminds his master of his promise to relieve him of his duties early if he performs them willingly, Prospero bursts into fury and threatens to return him to his former imprisonment and torment. He is similarly unpleasant in his treatment of Ferdinand, leading him to his daughter and then imprisoning and enslaving him.

Despite his shortcomings as a man, however, Prospero is central to *The Tempest's* narrative. Prospero generates the plot of the play almost single-handedly, as his various schemes, spells, and manipulations all work as part of his grand design to achieve the play's happy ending. Watching Prospero work through *The Tempest* is like watching a dramatist create a play, building a story from material at hand and developing his plot so that the resolution brings the world into line with his idea of goodness and justice. Many critics and readers of the play have interpreted Prospero as a surrogate for Shakespeare, enabling the audience to explore firsthand the ambiguities and ultimate wonder of the creative endeavor.

Prospero's final speech, in which he likens himself to a playwright by asking the audience for applause, strengthens this reading of the play, and makes the play's final scene function as a moving celebration of creativity, humanity, and art. Prospero emerges as a more likable and sympathetic figure in the final two acts of the play. In these acts, his love for Miranda, his forgiveness of his enemies, and the legitimately happy ending his scheme creates all work to mitigate some of the undesirable means he has used to achieve his happy ending. If Prospero sometimes seems autocratic, he ultimately manages to persuade the audience to share his understanding of the world—an achievement that is, after all, the final goal of every author and every play.

Miranda

Just under fifteen years old, Miranda is a gentle and compassionate, but also relatively passive, heroine. From her very first lines she displays a meek and emotional nature. “O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer!” she says of the shipwreck (I.ii.5–6), and hearing Prospero’s tale of their narrow escape from Milan, she says “I, not rememb’ring how I cried out then, / Will cry it o’er again” (I.ii.133–134). Miranda does not choose her own husband. Instead, while she sleeps, Prospero sends Ariel to fetch Ferdinand, and arranges things so that the two will come to love one another. After Prospero has given the lovers his blessing, he and Ferdinand talk with surprising frankness about her virginity and the pleasures of the marriage bed while she stands quietly by. Prospero tells Ferdinand to be sure not to “break her virgin-knot” before the wedding night (IV.i.15), and Ferdinand replies with no small anticipation that lust shall never take away “the edge of that day’s celebration” (IV.i.29). In the play’s final scene, Miranda is presented, with Ferdinand, almost as a prop or piece of the scenery as Prospero draws aside a curtain to reveal the pair playing chess.

But while Miranda is passive in many ways, she has at least two moments of surprising forthrightness and strength that complicate the reader’s impressions of her as a naïve young girl. The first such moment is in Act I, scene ii, in which she and Prospero converse with Caliban. Prospero alludes to the fact that Caliban once tried to rape Miranda. When Caliban rudely agrees that he intended to violate her, Miranda responds with impressive vehemence, clearly appalled at Caliban’s light attitude toward his attempted rape. She goes on to scold him for being ungrateful for her attempts to educate him: “When thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes / With words that made them known” (358–361). These lines are so surprising coming from the mouth of Miranda that many editors have amended the text and given it to Prospero. This reattribution seems to give Miranda too little credit. In Act III, scene i comes the second surprising moment—Miranda’s marriage proposal to Ferdinand: “I am your wife, if you will marry me; / If not, I’ll die your maid” (III.i.83–84). Her proposal comes shortly after Miranda has told herself to remember her “father’s precepts” (III.i.58) forbidding conversation with Ferdinand. As the reader can see in her speech to Caliban in Act I, scene ii, Miranda is willing to speak up for herself about her sexuality.

Caliban

Prospero's dark, earthy slave, frequently referred to as a monster by the other characters, Caliban is the son of a witch-hag and the only real native of the island to appear in the play. He is an extremely complex figure, and he mirrors or parodies several other characters in the play. In his first speech to Prospero, Caliban insists that Prospero stole the island from him. Through this speech, Caliban suggests that his situation is much the same as Prospero's, whose brother usurped his dukedom. On the other hand, Caliban's desire for sovereignty of the island mirrors the lust for power that led Antonio to overthrow Prospero. Caliban's conspiracy with Stephano and Trinculo to murder Prospero mirrors Antonio and Sebastian's plot against Alonso, as well as Antonio and Alonso's original conspiracy against Prospero.

Caliban both mirrors and contrasts with Prospero's other servant, Ariel. While Ariel is "an airy spirit," Caliban is of the earth, his speeches turning to "springs, brine pits" (I.ii.341), "bogs, fens, flats" (II.ii.2), or crabapples and pignuts (II.ii.159–160). While Ariel maintains his dignity and his freedom by serving Prospero willingly, Caliban achieves a different kind of dignity by refusing, if only sporadically, to bow before Prospero's intimidation.

Surprisingly, Caliban also mirrors and contrasts with Ferdinand in certain ways. In Act II, scene ii Caliban enters "with a burden of wood," and Ferdinand enters in Act III, scene i "bearing a log." Both Caliban and Ferdinand profess an interest in untying Miranda's "virgin knot." Ferdinand plans to marry her, while Caliban has attempted to rape her. The glorified, romantic, almost ethereal love of Ferdinand for Miranda starkly contrasts with Caliban's desire to impregnate Miranda and people the island with Calibans.

Finally, and most tragically, Caliban becomes a parody of himself. In his first speech to Prospero, he regrettably reminds the magician of how he showed him all the ins and outs of the island when Prospero first arrived. Only a few scenes later, however, we see Caliban drunk and fawning before a new magical being in his life: Stephano and his bottle of liquor. Soon, Caliban begs to show Stephano the island and even asks to lick his shoe. Caliban repeats the mistakes he claims to curse. In his final act of rebellion, he is once more entirely subdued by Prospero in the most petty way—he is dunked in a stinking bog and ordered to clean up Prospero's cell in preparation for dinner.

Despite his savage demeanor and grotesque appearance, however, Caliban has a nobler, more sensitive side that the audience is only allowed to glimpse briefly, and which Prospero and Miranda do not acknowledge at all. His beautiful speeches about his island home provide some of the most affecting imagery in the play, reminding the audience that Caliban really did occupy the island before Prospero came, and that he may be right in thinking his enslavement to be monstrously unjust. Caliban's swarthy appearance, his forced servitude, and his native status on the island have led many readers to interpret him as a symbol of the native cultures occupied and suppressed by European colonial societies, which are represented by the power of Prospero. Whether or not one accepts this allegory, Caliban remains one of the most intriguing and ambiguous minor characters in all of Shakespeare, a sensitive monster who allows himself to be transformed into a fool.

4.0 Theme:

The Illusion of Justice

The Tempest tells a fairly straightforward story involving an unjust act, the usurpation of Prospero's throne by his brother, and Prospero's quest to re-establish justice by restoring himself to power. However, the idea of justice that the play works toward seems highly subjective, since this idea represents the view of one character who controls the fate of all the other characters. Though Prospero presents himself as a victim of injustice working to right the wrongs that have been done to him, Prospero's idea of justice and injustice is somewhat hypocritical—though he is furious with his brother for taking his power, he has no qualms about enslaving Ariel and Caliban in order to achieve his ends. At many moments throughout the play, Prospero's sense of justice seems extremely one-sided and mainly involves what is good for Prospero. Moreover, because the play offers no notion of higher order or justice to supersede Prospero's interpretation of events, the play is morally ambiguous.

As the play progresses, however, it becomes more and more involved with the idea of creativity and art, and Prospero's role begins to mirror more explicitly the role of an author creating a story around him. With this metaphor in mind, and especially if we accept Prospero as a surrogate for Shakespeare himself, Prospero's sense of justice begins to seem, if not perfect, at least

sympathetic. Moreover, the means he uses to achieve his idea of justice mirror the machinations of the artist, who also seeks to enable others to see his view of the world. Playwrights arrange their stories in such a way that their own idea of justice is imposed upon events. In *The Tempest*, the author is *in* the play, and the fact that he establishes his idea of justice and creates a happy ending for all the characters becomes a cause for celebration, not criticism.

By using magic and tricks that echo the special effects and spectacles of the theater, Prospero gradually persuades the other characters and the audience of the rightness of his case. As he does so, the ambiguities surrounding his methods slowly resolve themselves. Prospero forgives his enemies, releases his slaves, and relinquishes his magic power, so that, at the end of the play, he is only an old man whose work has been responsible for all the audience's pleasure. The establishment of Prospero's idea of justice becomes less a commentary on justice in life than on the nature of morality in art. Happy endings are possible, Shakespeare seems to say, because the creativity of artists can create them, even if the moral values that establish the happy ending originate from nowhere but the imagination of the artist.

The Difficulty of Distinguishing “Men” from “Monsters”

Upon seeing Ferdinand for the first time, Miranda says that he is “the third man that e'er I saw” (I.ii.449). The other two are, presumably, Prospero and Caliban. In their first conversation with Caliban, however, Miranda and Prospero say very little that shows they consider him to be human. Miranda reminds Caliban that before she taught him language, he gabbled “like / A thing most brutish” (I.ii.359–360) and Prospero says that he gave Caliban “human care” (I.ii.349), implying that this was something Caliban ultimately did not deserve. Caliban's exact nature continues to be slightly ambiguous later. In Act IV, scene i, reminded of Caliban's plot, Prospero refers to him as a “devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick” (IV.i.188–189). Miranda and Prospero both have contradictory views of Caliban's humanity. On the one hand, they think that their education of him has lifted him from his formerly brutish status. On the other hand, they seem to see him as inherently brutish. His devilish nature can never be overcome by nurture, according to Prospero. Miranda expresses a similar sentiment in Act I, scene ii: “thy vile race, / Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures / Could not

abide to be with” (I.ii.361–363). The inhuman part of Caliban drives out the human part, the “good nature,” that is imposed on him.

Caliban claims that he was kind to Prospero, and that Prospero repaid that kindness by imprisoning him (see I.ii.347). In contrast, Prospero claims that he stopped being kind to Caliban once Caliban had tried to rape Miranda (I.ii.347–351). Which character the audience decides to believe depends on whether it views Caliban as inherently brutish, or as made brutish by oppression. The play leaves the matter ambiguous. Caliban balances all of his eloquent speeches, such as his curses in Act I, scene ii and his speech about the isle’s “noises” in Act III, scene ii, with the most degrading kind of drunken, servile behavior. But Trinculo’s speech upon first seeing Caliban (II.ii.18–38), the longest speech in the play, reproaches too harsh a view of Caliban and blurs the distinction between men and monsters. In England, which he visited once, Trinculo says, Caliban could be shown off for money: “There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian” (II.ii.28–31). What seems most monstrous in these sentences is not the “dead Indian,” or “any strange beast,” but the cruel voyeurism of those who capture and gape at them.

The Allure of Ruling a Colony

The nearly uninhabited island presents the sense of infinite possibility to almost everyone who lands there. Prospero has found it, in its isolation, an ideal place to school his daughter. Sycorax, Caliban’s mother, worked her magic there after she was exiled from Algeria. Caliban, once alone on the island, now Prospero’s slave, laments that he had been his own king (I.ii.344–345). As he attempts to comfort Alonso, Gonzalo imagines a utopian society on the island, over which he would rule (II.i.148–156). In Act III, scene ii, Caliban suggests that Stephano kill Prospero, and Stephano immediately envisions his own reign: “Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter and I will be King and Queen—save our graces!—and Trinculo and thyself shall be my viceroys” (III.ii.101–103). Stephano particularly looks forward to taking advantage of the spirits that make “noises” on the isle; they will provide music for his kingdom for free. All these characters envision the island as a space of freedom and unrealized potential.

The tone of the play, however, toward the hopes of the would-be colonizers is vexed at best. Gonzalo's utopian vision in Act II, scene i is undercut by a sharp retort from the usually foolish Sebastian and Antonio. When Gonzalo says that there would be no commerce or work or "sovereignty" in his society, Sebastian replies, "yet he would be king on't," and Antonio adds, "The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning" (II.i.156–157). Gonzalo's fantasy thus involves him ruling the island while seeming not to rule it, and in this he becomes a kind of parody of Prospero.

While there are many representatives of the colonial impulse in the play, the colonized have only one representative: Caliban. We might develop sympathy for him at first, when Prospero seeks him out merely to abuse him, and when we see him tormented by spirits. However, this sympathy is made more difficult by his willingness to abase himself before Stephano in Act II, scene ii. Even as Caliban plots to kill one colonial master (Prospero) in Act III, scene ii, he sets up another (Stephano). The urge to rule and the urge to be ruled seem inextricably intertwined.

5.0 Motifs

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

Masters and Servants

Nearly every scene in the play either explicitly or implicitly portrays a relationship between a figure that possesses power and a figure that is subject to that power. The play explores the master-servant dynamic most harshly in cases in which the harmony of the relationship is threatened or disrupted, as by the rebellion of a servant or the ineptitude of a master. For instance, in the opening scene, the "servant" (the Boatswain) is dismissive and angry toward his "masters" (the noblemen), whose ineptitude threatens to lead to a shipwreck in the storm. From then on, master-servant relationships like these dominate the play: Prospero and Caliban; Prospero and Ariel; Alonso and his nobles; the nobles and Gonzalo; Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban; and so forth. The play explores the psychological and social dynamics of power relationships from a number of contrasting angles, such as the generally positive relationship

between Prospero and Ariel, the generally negative relationship between Prospero and Caliban, and the treachery in Alonso's relationship to his nobles.

Water and Drowning

The play is awash with references to water. The Mariners enter "wet" in Act I, scene i, and Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo enter "all wet," after being led by Ariel into a swampy lake (IV.i.193). Miranda's fear for the lives of the sailors in the "wild waters" (I.ii.2) causes her to weep. Alonso, believing his son dead because of his own actions against Prospero, decides in Act III, scene iii to drown himself. His language is echoed by Prospero in Act V, scene i when the magician promises that, once he has reconciled with his enemies, "deeper than did ever plummet sound / I'll drown my book" (V.i.56–57).

These are only a few of the references to water in the play. Occasionally, the references to water are used to compare characters. For example, the echo of Alonso's desire to drown himself in Prospero's promise to drown his book calls attention to the similarity of the sacrifices each man must make. Alonso must be willing to give up his life in order to become truly penitent and to be forgiven for his treachery against Prospero. Similarly, in order to rejoin the world he has been driven from, Prospero must be willing to give up his magic and his power.

Perhaps the most important overall effect of this water motif is to heighten the symbolic importance of the tempest itself. It is as though the water from that storm runs through the language and action of the entire play—just as the tempest itself literally and crucially affects the lives and actions of all the characters.

Mysterious Noises

The isle is indeed, as Caliban says, "full of noises" (III.ii.130). The play begins with a "tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning" (I.i.1, stage direction), and the splitting of the ship is signaled in part by "a confused noise within" (I.i.54, stage direction). Much of the noise of the play is musical, and much of the music is Ariel's. Ferdinand is led to Miranda by Ariel's music. Ariel's music also wakes Gonzalo just as Antonio and Sebastian are about to kill Alonso in Act II, scene i. Moreover, the magical banquet of Act III, scene iii is laid out to the tune of "Solemn

and strange music” (III.iii.18, stage direction), and Juno and Ceres sing in the wedding masque (IV.i.106–117).

The noises, sounds, and music of the play are made most significant by Caliban’s speech about the noises of the island at III.ii.130–138. Shakespeare shows Caliban in the thrall of magic, which the theater audience also experiences as the illusion of thunder, rain, invisibility. The action of *The Tempest* is very simple. What gives the play most of its hypnotic, magical atmosphere is the series of dreamlike events it stages, such as the tempest, the magical banquet, and the wedding masque. Accompanied by music, these present a feast for the eye and the ear and convince us of the magical glory of Prospero’s enchanted isle.

Symbols

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

The Tempest

The tempest that begins the play, and which puts all of Prospero’s enemies at his disposal, symbolizes the suffering Prospero endured, and which he wants to inflict on others. All of those shipwrecked are put at the mercy of the sea, just as Prospero and his infant daughter were twelve years ago, when some loyal friends helped them out to sea in a ragged little boat (see I.ii.144–151). Prospero must make his enemies suffer as he has suffered so that they will learn from their suffering, as he has from his. The tempest is also a symbol of Prospero’s magic, and of the frightening, potentially malevolent side of his power.

The Game of Chess

The object of chess is to capture the king. That, at the simplest level, is the symbolic significance of Prospero revealing Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess in the final scene. Prospero has caught the king—Alonso—and reprimanded him for his treachery. In doing so, Prospero has married Alonso’s son to his own daughter without the king’s knowledge, a deft political maneuver that assures Alonso’s support because Alonso will have no interest in upsetting a dukedom to which his own son is heir. This is the final move in Prospero’s plot, which began

with the tempest. He has maneuvered the different passengers of Alonso's ship around the island with the skill of a great chess player.

Caught up in their game, Miranda and Ferdinand also symbolize something ominous about Prospero's power. They do not even notice the others staring at them for a few lines. "Sweet lord, you play me false," Miranda says, and Ferdinand assures her that he "would not for the world" do so (V.i.174–176). The theatrical tableau is almost too perfect: Ferdinand and Miranda, suddenly and unexpectedly revealed behind a curtain, playing chess and talking gently of love and faith, seem entirely removed from the world around them. Though he has promised to relinquish his magic, Prospero still seems to see his daughter as a mere pawn in his game.

Prospero's Books

Like the tempest, Prospero's books are a symbol of his power. "Remember / First to possess his books," Caliban says to Stephano and Trinculo, "for without them / He's but a sot" (III.ii.86–88). The books are also, however, a symbol of Prospero's dangerous desire to withdraw entirely from the world. It was his devotion to study that put him at the mercy of his ambitious brother, and it is this same devotion to study that has made him content to raise Miranda in isolation. Yet, Miranda's isolation has made her ignorant of where she came from (see I.ii.33–36), and Prospero's own isolation provides him with little company. In order to return to the world where his knowledge means something more than power, Prospero must let go of his magic.

6.0 Explanation of some important quotations:

1.

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language! (I.ii.366–368)

This speech, delivered by Caliban to Prospero and Miranda, makes clear in a very concise form the vexed relationship between the colonized and the colonizer that lies at the heart of this play. The son of a witch, perhaps half-man and half-monster, his name a near-anagram of "cannibal," Caliban is an archetypal "savage" figure in a play that is much concerned with colonization and

the controlling of wild environments. Caliban and Prospero have different narratives to explain their current relationship. Caliban sees Prospero as purely oppressive while Prospero claims that he has cared for and educated Caliban, or did until Caliban tried to rape Miranda. Prospero's narrative is one in which Caliban remains ungrateful for the help and civilization he has received from the Milanese Duke. Language, for Prospero and Miranda, is a means to knowing oneself, and Caliban has in their view shown nothing but scorn for this precious gift. Self-knowledge for Caliban, however, is not empowering. It is only a constant reminder of how he is different from Miranda and Prospero and how they have changed him from what he was. Caliban's only hope for an identity separate from those who have invaded his home is to use what they have given him against them.

2.

There be some sports are painful, and their labour
Delight in them sets off. Some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters
Point to rich ends. This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
And makes my labours pleasures. (III.i.1-7)

Ferdinand speaks these words to Miranda, as he expresses his willingness to perform the task Prospero has set him to, for her sake. *The Tempest* is very much about compromise and balance. Prospero must spend twelve years on an island in order to regain his dukedom; Alonso must seem to lose his son in order to be forgiven for his treachery; Ariel must serve Prospero in order to be set free; and Ferdinand must suffer Prospero's feigned wrath in order to reap true joy from his love for Miranda. This latter compromise is the subject of this passage from Act III, scene i, and we see the desire for balance expressed in the structure of Ferdinand's speech. This desire is built upon a series of antitheses—related but opposing ideas: “sports . . . painful” is followed by “labour . . . delights”; “baseness” can be undergone “nobly”; “poor matters” lead to “rich ends”; Miranda “quickens” (makes alive) what is “dead” in Ferdinand. Perhaps more than any other character in the play, Ferdinand is resigned to allow fate to take its course, always believing that the good will balance the bad in the end. His waiting for Miranda mirrors Prospero's waiting for

reconciliation with his enemies, and it is probably Ferdinand's balanced outlook that makes him such a sympathetic character, even though we actually see or hear very little of him on-stage.

3.

[I weep] at mine unworthiness, that dare not offer
What I desire to give, and much less take
What I shall die to want. But this is trifling,
And all the more it seeks to hide itself
The bigger bulk it shows. Hence, bashful cunning,
And prompt me, plain and holy innocence.
I am your wife, if you will marry me.
If not, I'll die your maid. To be your fellow
You may deny me, but I'll be your servant
Whether you will or no (III.i.77–86)

Miranda delivers this speech to Ferdinand in Act III, scene i, declaring her undying love for him. Remarkably, she does not merely *propose* marriage, she practically insists upon it. This is one of two times in the play that Miranda seems to break out of the predictable character she has developed under the influence of her father's magic. The first time is in Act I, scene ii, when she scolds Caliban for his ingratitude to her after all the time she has spent teaching him to speak. In the speech quoted above, as in Act I, scene ii, Miranda seems to come to a point at which she can no longer hold inside what she thinks. It is not that her desires get the better of her; rather, she realizes the necessity of expressing her desires. The naïve girl who can barely hold still long enough to hear her father's long story in Act I, scene ii, and who is charmed asleep and awake as though she were a puppet, is replaced by a stronger, more mature individual at this moment. This speech, in which Miranda declares her sexual independence, using a metaphor that suggests both an erection and pregnancy (the "bigger bulk" trying to hide itself), seems to transform Miranda all at once from a girl into a woman.

At the same time, the last three lines somewhat undercut the power of this speech: Miranda seems, to a certain extent, a slave to her desires. Her pledge to follow Ferdinand, no matter what the cost to herself or what he desires, is echoed in the most degrading way possible by Caliban as

he abases himself before the liquor-bearing Stephano. Ultimately, we know that Ferdinand and Miranda are right for one another from the fact that Ferdinand does not abuse the enormous trust Miranda puts in him.

4.

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That, if I then had waked after long sleep
Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again (III.ii.130–138).

This speech is Caliban's explanation to Stephano and Trinculo of mysterious music that they hear by magic. Though he claims that the chief virtue of his newly learned language is that it allows him to curse, Caliban here shows himself capable of using speech in a most sensitive and beautiful fashion. This speech is generally considered to be one of the most poetic in the play, and it is remarkable that Shakespeare chose to put it in the mouth of the drunken man-monster. Just when Caliban seems to have debased himself completely and to have become a purely ridiculous figure, Shakespeare gives him this speech and reminds the audience that Caliban has something within himself that Prospero, Stephano, Trinculo, and the audience itself generally cannot, or refuse to, see. It is unclear whether the "noises" Caliban discusses are the noises of the island itself or noises, like the music of the invisible Ariel, that are a result of Prospero's magic. Caliban himself does not seem to know where these noises come from. Thus his speech conveys the wondrous beauty of the island and the depth of his attachment to it, as well as a certain amount of respect and love for Prospero's magic, and for the possibility that he creates the "[s]ounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not."

5.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.148–158)

Prospero speaks these lines just after he remembers the plot against his life and sends the wedding masque away in order to deal with that plot. The sadness in the tone of the speech seems to be related to Prospero's surprising forgetfulness at this crucial moment in the play: he is so swept up in his own visions, in the power of his own magic, that for a moment he forgets the business of real life. From this point on, Prospero talks repeatedly of the "end" of his "labours" (IV.i.260), and of breaking his staff and drowning his magic book (V.i.54–57). One of Prospero's goals in bringing his former enemies to the island seems to be to extricate himself from a position of near absolute power, where the concerns of real life have not affected him. He looks forward to returning to Milan, where "every third thought shall be my grave" (V.i.315). In addition, it is with a sense of relief that he announces in the epilogue that he has given up his magic powers. Prospero's speech in Act IV, scene i emphasizes both the beauty of the world he has created for himself and the sadness of the fact that this world is in many ways meaningless because it is a kind of dream completely removed from anything substantial.

His mention of the "great globe," which to an audience in 1611 would certainly suggest the Globe Theatre, calls attention to Prospero's theatricality—to the way in which he controls events like a director or a playwright. The word "rack," which literally means "a wisp of smoke" is probably a pun on the "wrack," or shipwreck, with which the play began. These puns conflate the theatre and Prospero's island. When Prospero gives up his magic, the play will end, and the

audience, like Prospero, will return to real life. No trace of the magical island will be left behind, not even of the shipwreck, for even the shipwreck was only an illusion.

7.0 Summing Up:

The Tempest has little of action or progressive movement; the union of Ferdinand and Miranda is settled at their first interview, and Prospero merely throws apparent obstacles in their way; the shipwrecked band go leisurely about the island; the attempts of Sebastian and Antonio on the life of the king of Naples, and the plot of Caliban and the drunken sailors against Prospero are nothing but a feint, for we foresee that they will be completely frustrated by the magical skill of the latter; nothing remains, therefore, but the punishment of the guilty by dreadful sights which harrow up their consciences, and then the discovery and final reconciliation.

The Tempest concludes in an atmosphere of idealism and justness. Nonetheless, the journey to this eventual utopia is fraught with chaos. Due to the nature of some characters, it is questionable if the concluding peace will last. On a more fundamental note, whether the island is utopian or dystopian cannot be easily accounted for – all due to the theme of illusion and the multiple characters' divergent perspectives. This island, while appearing utopian and perfect, may actually be a dystopia in disguise.

8.0 Long Questions and Answers

1. Analyze Caliban's "the isle is full of noises" speech (III.ii.130–138). What makes it such a compelling and beautiful passage? What is its relation to Caliban's other speeches, and to his character in general? What effect does this speech have on our perception of Caliban's character? Why does Shakespeare give these lines to Caliban rather than, say, Ariel or Miranda?

Caliban's speech is most remarkable and compelling largely because of how different it is from anything he has said before. Caliban frequently describes the qualities of the island, but usually these descriptions relate to the torments Prospero subjects him to. Indeed, the speech in Act III, scene ii echoes one from the beginning of Act II, scene ii, in which Caliban complains of the spirits that Prospero has sent to bother him. Like the earlier speech, the speech in Act III, scene ii

repeats the word “sometime” twice, and like the earlier speech it seems to discuss the workings of spirits on the island. Unlike the earlier speech, however, the speech in Act III, scene ii takes us into a hypnotic dream world, where there seems to be a magic greater than Prospero’s. The voices Caliban hears do not command him to work, but rather, if they wake him from sleep, put him back to sleep again. In Caliban’s speech, even the rain is transformed. The words “The clouds methought would open” suggests an image of rain, but what Caliban imagines is “riches / Ready to drop upon me” (II.ii.136–137). The harsh, tangible things of this island—Prospero’s voice, the pinches of spirits, the weather—become in this speech beautiful noises, possibly only dreams, that “give delight and hurt not” (II.ii.131).

Caliban is drunk when he gives this speech, and while it certainly brings the audience to rapt attention, the speech does not do much to change Caliban’s character. He continues to range drunkenly about the island with Trinculo and Stephano. What the speech does is change our perception of Caliban. It reveals a deeply tragic side of him. His life on the island is so terrible that he longs for the ethereal world of the noises that give him delight. In the mouth of Miranda, or Ariel, this speech might be just as beautiful, and would convey effectively the magic of the island. But it has more power in Caliban because it allows his curses and his drunkenness to make tragic sense: since the arrival of Prospero, the island’s beauty is no longer Caliban’s.

2.

What is the nature of Prospero and Miranda’s relationship? Discuss moments where Miranda seems to be entirely dependent on her father and moments where she seems independent. How does Miranda’s character change over the course of the play?

At first, Miranda seems very young. When Prospero tells her of his exile from Italy, it is her passionate but also restless youth that the reader sees in her exclamations of concern (“O the heavens!” I.ii.116; “Alack, for pity!” I.ii.132). In this scene the reader sees a relationship that is tender but also astonishingly one-sided. Prospero has lived alone with his daughter for twelve years and not told her why they live alone on the island. After he has told her, he charms her to sleep so that he can set about the new plan of getting her a husband, which he has not discussed with her. When that future husband, Ferdinand, arrives, Prospero continues to dominate her by

directing her gaze toward Ferdinand, but then quickly steps between the two. When Miranda begs him to have mercy upon Ferdinand, Prospero is strikingly harsh.

Prospero's love for Miranda is most evident in his willingness to remain quiet while Miranda talks to Ferdinand in Act III, scene i. Though Prospero enters, unseen, at the same time as Miranda in this scene, he does not say a word until she and Ferdinand have left the stage. During that time, Miranda remembers that her father has given her "precepts" (III.i.58) against talking with Ferdinand—and then breaks them by trusting her desires and proposing marriage to him (III.i.77–86). By the end of the scene, Miranda seems almost to have forgotten her father entirely, and she seems much older, in control of her destiny. By leaving her alone for perhaps the first time, Prospero has allowed Miranda to leave behind her childhood. The transition is not complete, however, and may not become complete, even by the end of the play. In Act IV, scene i, Miranda speaks only two and a half lines, standing completely silent while her father and Ferdinand discuss the details of her marriage. And while Miranda speaks first, and forthrightly, when she appears in Act V, scene i, she appears only after being revealed behind a curtain by her father. Her final lines, "O brave new world / That has such people in't" (V.i.186–187) while gloriously hopeful, are also painfully ironic. The isolation her life has forced upon her has made her mistake for "brave" a cast of characters that the audience knows only too well to be deeply flawed.

3. Discuss Ferdinand's character. What is the nature of his love for Miranda? Is he a likable character? What is the nature of his relationship to other characters?

Ferdinand is very formal. Upon first seeing Miranda, he assumes that she is a goddess, and he addresses her as such. His language is that of courtly love, of knights who fight for fair ladies. Ferdinand idealizes both Miranda and love itself. From the moment he sees her, he is intent upon finding himself in a heaven of love.

While Ferdinand's formality is in some ways endearing, it is also in some ways disturbingly reminiscent of Prospero. Some of Ferdinand's long speeches, especially the speech about Miranda's virginity in Act IV, scene i, sound quite similar to the way Prospero speaks. Ferdinand is a sympathetic character, and his love for Miranda seems most genuine when he suddenly is

able to break out of his verbose formality and show a strikingly simple interest in Miranda. The reader can see this when he asks Miranda, “What is your name?” (III.i.36). The reader notices it again in Act V, scene i when he jests with her over a game of chess, and when he tells his father, who asks whether Miranda is “the goddess that hath severed us, / And brought us together,” that “she is mortal” (V.i.190–191). Ferdinand agrees to marry Miranda in a scene in which he has been, like Caliban, hauling logs for Prospero. Unlike Caliban, however, Ferdinand has been carrying wood gladly, believing that he serves Miranda. The sweet humbleness implicit in this belief seems to shine through best at the times when Ferdinand lets go of his romantic language.

8.0 Questions For Practice:

1. Discuss one or more of the play’s comic scenes involving Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban. How do these scenes parallel and parody the main action of the play? Pay particular attention to Trinculo’s speech about Caliban in Act II, scene ii, lines 18–38. This is one of the longest speeches in the play. How does it relate to larger thematic issues in the play, such as the difference between “men” and “monsters,” or the relationship between colonizers and the colonized?
2. Look at a few of the many passages in the play in which there is mention of noises, sound, or music. Focusing on one or two characters, discuss the role of noise in *The Tempest*.
3. Virtually every character in the play expresses some desire to be lord of the island. Discuss two or three of these characters. How does each envision the island’s potential? How does each envision his own rule?
4. Analyze the tempest scene in Act I, scene i. Topics to discuss include the following. How does Shakespeare use the very limited resources of his bare stage to create a sense of realism? How are we introduced to the characters? How does this introduction affect our perception of them later? How does the dialogue in this scene relate to the content or themes of the rest of the play? How is this scene echoed in later parts of the play?

9.0 Further reading:

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Caliban*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992.

Graff, Gerald, and James Phelan, eds. *The Tempest: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.

Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Murphy, Patrick M., ed. *The Tempest: Critical Essays*. New York: Garland, 2000.

Palmer, D., ed. *Shakespeare: The Tempest: A Casebook*. Nashville: Aurora Publishers, 1970.

Richards, Jennifer, and James Knowles, eds. *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

Smith, Hallett Darius, ed. *The Tempest: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969.

Vaughan, Virginia Mason, and Alden T. Vaughan, eds. *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's The Tempest*. New York: G. K. Hall, 1998.