POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME (CBCS)

M.A. in ENGLISH

SEMESTER - I

COR - 101

RENAISSANCE TO RESTORATION: PLAYS (1485 - 1659)

Self-Learning Material

DIRECTORATE OF OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING

UNIVERSITY OF KALYANI

KALYANI-741235, WEST BENGAL

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Director's Message

Satisfying the varied needs of distance learners, overcoming the obstacle of distance and reaching the unreached students are the threefold functions catered by Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. The onus lies on writers, editors, production professionals and other personnel involved in the process to overcome the challenges inherent to curriculum design and production of relevant Self Learning Materials (SLMs). At the University of Kalyani, a dedicated team under the able guidance of the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor has invested its best efforts, professionally and in keeping with the demands of Post Graduate CBCS Programmes in Distance Mode to devise a self-sufficient curriculum for each course offered by the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODL), University of Kalyani.Development of printed SLMs for students admitted to the DODL within a limited time to cater to the academic requirements of the Course as per standards set by the Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India under Open and Distance Mode UGC Regulations, 2021 had been our endeavour. We are happy to have achieved our goal. Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome. During the production process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from Professor (Dr.) Manas Kumar Sanyal, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We, gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance.Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PG-BOS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt gratitude is also due to the faculty members of the DODL, subject-experts serving at the University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level at the DODL, University of Kalyani. Their persistent and coordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through the Distance Mode.

Director

Directorate of Open and Distance Learning

University of Kalyani

COR - 101

Renaissance to Restoration: Plays (1485 - 1659)

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Study Hours - 16

BLOCK - I

UNIT - I

SUB UNIT - I

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE, WORKS, TIMES

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

UNIT I :

SUB UNIT I : **William Shakespeare: Life and Works**

(a) : Life

(b) : Works

(c) : Times

(d) : Date

a) An Introduction to William Shakespeare: Life

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a market town north-west of London. He was the third child and eldest son of John and Mary Shakespeare. His father was a successful businessman and landowner who held several important posts in the local council till 1576 when the decline in the fortune of the Shakespeare family started. During his better days John Shakespeare had applied for a coat-of-arms which was finally granted in the last year of his life, 1601, elevating the Shakespeare family to the status of the gentry[1]. Not much is known about the early life of Shakespeare except that he must have attended local grammar school and married Anne Hathaway in 1582 and had three children -Susanna, Judith and Hamnet. It is said that Shakespeare fled to London sometime around 1585/86 to escape the wrath of Sir Thomas Lucy of Cherlecot near Stratford, after hunting deer illegally in his private park, but it is more likely that he joined a London-based visiting theatre company that had come to perform at Stratford. Shakespeare started in the lowest rung of theatre hierarchy, probably as a stable boy who looked after the horses of the more prosperous audience as they watched the show. From a handyman doing odd jobs for the company to an actor in bit parts to the lead writer and finally, in 1594, a shareholder in the newly formed Lord Chamberlain's Men who performed at the playhouse called Theatre in Shoreditch, London, Shakespeare's rise was arduous but fairly quick. He stayed on with the Company when it shifted to the Globe theatre-house across the River Thames

Shakespeare's Life : born in Startford-upon-Avon — parents : John and Mary Shakespeare — attended the local grammar school — married Anne Hathway in 1582 — fled to London around 1585-86 — joined a London based theatre company — started as a stable boy — later became a leading writer, and finally a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men which shifted to the Globe theatre-house — bought New Place in 1596 — died of fever on 23 April, 1616 and was buried in the Stratford church.

[1] coat-of-arms : the family insignia granted by the office of the Herald against payment. The permission to wear this sign on one's coat signified that the concerned person and his successors would henceforth be considered as gentlemen.

and changed its name to King's Men in 1603. His financial prosperity in an age when most playwrights either died poor or in debt, earned him the jealousy of the author, Robert Greene, who labeled him an "upstart Crow" in his *Groatsworth of Wit, Bought with a Million of Repentance (1592).*[2] In 1596, Shakespeare bought New Place, the finest house in Stratford-upon-Avon, and thereafter continued to invest in business and property in his hometown although he continued to live and work in London as the resident playwright and a major shareholder of his Company. By 1613, he was living mostly in Stratford, actively involved in his business and landed affairs and had stopped writing plays altogether. But he still had financial interests in the King's Men Company that is testified by his investment in rebuilding the Globe playhouse after it was burnt down during a performance of Henry VIII in 1613. He died of fever on 23 April 1616, presumably contracted from lying in the open the whole night after a drunken bout with fellow authors, Michael Drayton (1563-1631) and Ben Jonson (1572-1637). He was buried in the Stratford church. The epitaph[3] on his gravestone says,

"Good friend for Jesus sake
forebeare,To dig the dust enclosed
here!
Blest be the man that spares these stones
And curst be he that moves my bones."

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Write a note on the life of William Shakespeare.

b) William Shakespeare: Works

Shakespeare wrote two long poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *Rape of Lucrece* (1594), which established his reputation in the fashionable circles of London. His 154 sonnets, written in the late 1590s, were published in 1609. Of these, 126 are addressed to a young man while the rest are directed at a "dark lady" whose real identities are still hotly debated. The sonnets explore, with great verbal compression and ingenuity, the complex relationship between the poet and the two persons addressed. Although Shakespeare records feelings of pain, betrayal and abandonment, the power of poetic creativity to defy the ravages of time is celebrated at such length that the figure of the poet emerges as the central character of the sonnets. The 1609 edition of sonnets also included a poem "A Lover's Complaint" (begun 1602/05, completed 1608-09) which tells of the sexual ruin of a young woman seduced and deceived by a young man. Apart from these, Shakespeare is also said to have written 20 poems published in the collection of poems entitled *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599) and "The Phoenix and the Turtle" (1601).

However, Shakespeare's fame rests on the 37 plays written by him, which have been translated, adapted, performed and filmed in almost all languages of the world. Apart from these plays, he is said to have collaborated with John Fletcher to write *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613-14) and two

[2] groat : an old English coin worth four pennies.

[3] epitaph : words written or said about a dead person, usually on the gravestone.

lost plays, *Love's Labour's Won* (1596-97) and *Cardenio* (1613?) have been attributed to him. There is also some doubt as to whether Pericles is authored entirely by Shakespeare or in collaboration with George Wilkins. As the list below indicates, his plays cover all genres-from tragedies and comedies to histories, problem play and romances-indicating his mastery of the stage. His early works belong to the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) but his most famous tragedies, problem plays, and romances belong the Jacobean period, i.e., the reign of King James (1603-1625)[4]

Composition Date	**Histories**	**Comedies**	**Tragedies**	**Problem plays**	**Romances/tragicomedies**	**Important events**
1588-91		*The Comedy of Errors* (1623)				British navy defeats the Spanish Armada; William Lee invents the steel Knitting loom; Lyly: *Endymion*; Greene: *Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay*; Kyd: *Hamlet*; Marlowe: *Jew of Malta*
1590-91	*Henry VI* (1594) *Henry VI* (1595)	*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1623)				Law students & apprentices clash in London; *Edward III* & *King Leir (Anon.)* published; tea comes to England; Earl of Essex leads expedition to aid Henry IV of France
1591-92	*Henry VI* (1623)					London theatres closed on account of plague; Marlowe:

[4] The dates in parenthesis indicate the date of printing of the first authoritative version of the play, many of which were published for the first time in the *First Folio* of 1623.

Composition Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Romances/tragicomedies	Important events
						Dr. Faustus; Greene: *Groatsworth of Wit*
1592-94	*Richard III* (1597)	*The Taming of the Shrew* (1623)	*Titus Andronicus* (1594)			Plague continues; church attendance made mandatory; Henry IV of France embraces Catholicism
1594-96	*Love's Labour's Lost* (1598) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600)	*Romeo And Juliet* (1597)				Portuguese Roderigo Lopez convicted of plotting against Elizabeth I; Henry IV ascends French throne
1595	*Richard II* (1597)					Food scarcity; grain riots in London; Irish rebellion led by Earl of Tyrone; Walter Raleigh's Guiana expedition; Jesuit poet Robert Southwell executed
1596-97	*King John* (1623)	*The Merchant of Venice* (1600)				Rain destroys crop; steep rise in food prices; men conscripted for French wars; peace pact between England & France

Composition Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Romances/tragicomedies	Important events
1597	*Henry IV* (1598)					King of Polonia arrives to woo Elizabeth I; Burbage builds 2nd Blackfriars Theatre
1597-98	*Henry IV* (1600)	*The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1602)				Philip II, King of Dies
1598		*Much Ado About Nothing* (1600)				French civil wars end; Jonson : Every Man in His Humour; Globe theatre built outside London from dismantled pieces of Theatre at Shoreditch
1598-99	*Henry V* (1600)	*As You Like It* (1623)				Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, leads Irish expedition, defeated, returns secretly to London; great frost freezes River Thames
1599			*Julius Caesar* (1623)			London tense; offensive satires banned; Nashe & Harvey forbidden to publish their work
1599-1600		*Twelfth Night* (1623)				Globe theatre opens; famous comedian Will Kempe leaves

Composition Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Romances/tragicomedies	Important events
						Shakespeare's Company & dances from London to Norwich; East India Company founded for trade with India & Far East
1600-02			*Hamlet* (1603)			Jonson : Cynthia's Revels; Alleyn & Henslowe build to compete Fortune theatre with Globe
1601-02				*Troilus and Cressida*(1609)		Essex rebellion against Essex Elizabeth put down; beheaded; Richard II performed by Shakespeare's Company irks Elizabeth with its implicit comparison between her & deposed Richard; new Poor Law transfers responsibility of poor relief to parishes
1602-04				*All's Well That Ends Well* (1623)		Irish rebellion crushed; Bodleian Library opens at Oxford; Salmon Pavy, a famous boy

Composition Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Romances/tragicomedies	Important events
						actor, dies; *Timon* (Anon.)
1603-04			*Othello* (1622)			Elizabeth dies; James VI, King of Scotland, ascends the English throne as James I; Irish rebel O'Neill surrenders; theatres closed due to plague
1604				*Measure for Measure* (1623)		Peace with Spain; tax on tobacco; The Book of Common Prayer; Marston : The Malcontent;
1605			*King Lear* (1607-08) *Macbeth* (1623)			Gunpowder plot by Guy Fox to blow up James & the Parliament uncovered; Red Bull Theatre built; Jonson's 1st court masque
1605-07			*Timon of Athens* (1623)			Jesuit Henry Garnet executed for involvement in Gunpowder Plot
1606-07			*Antony And Cleopatra* (1623)			London & Plymouth Companies given charter to colonise Virginia in America;

Composition Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Romances/tragicomedies	Important events
						Act passed to restrain abuses of players : Jonson : *Volpone; The Revenger's Tragedy* (Anon.)
1607-08			*Coriolanus* (1623)		*Pericles* (1609)	Anti-enclosure riots in Warwickshire, Northampton-shire, Leicestershire; Irish rebels Tyrone, Tryconnel, Hugh Baron escape overseas; colony established in Jamestown, Virginia; Shakespeare enacted on an East India Company ship; Shakespeare's Company leases 2nd Blackfriars theatre for indoor performance; Rowley: *Birth of Merlin*
1609-10					*Cymbeline* (1623)	Mulberry trees planted across England by royal order, to encourage silk trade; Moors expelled from Spain

Composition Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Romances/tragicomedies	Important events
1610-11					*The Winter's Tale* (1623)	James dissolves Parliament; decrees that all citizens takean oath of allegiance to him; James's eldest son, Henry, proclaimed Prince of Wales; Jonson: *The Alchemist*
1611-12					*The Tempest* (1623)	Marriage alliance between France and Spain; plantation of Ulster in Ireland; Authorised Version of *The Bible* published; Beaumont & Fletcher : *A King and No King*
1612-13	*Henry VIII* (1623)					*Heretics Bartholomew Legat & Edward Wightman burnt on the stakes; Henry, Prince of Wales, dies; Lancashire witches executed; Princess Elizabeth, daughter of JamesI married to Frederick, Elector Palatine; Webster : The White Devil*

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Write a note on Shakespeare's life and works.

(c) William Shakespeare: Times

Throughout this period, the playhouses The chart above shows that Shakespeare began writing comedies and histories at a time of intense literary activity in England, against a spirit of buoyant nationalism, initiated by the British victory over the formidable Spanish fleet. Only three tragedies were penned by him in the 1590s, a decade so marked by epidemics, crop failures, famine, inflation, civil disturbance and wars across the continent that it has been labelled by historians as a period of ***European Crisis***. As the London playhouses were often closed due to the scare of the plague, most theatre companies including the Lord Chamberlain's Men, survived by touring the provinces. London was extremely restless and at least twice it was besieged by riotous crowds who threatened to disrupt the status quo. Vagrancy problem accentuated as villagers evicted by force or sheer necessity, roamed the countryside and eventually progressed to London in search of food and work. The government transferred the responsibility of caring for this hapless populace to the local bodies by enacting a new Poor Law in 1601.

While conditions of the common people improved slightly at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the aging queen Elizabeth faced dissension in court from her own previous favourites like the Earl of Essex. People looked forward to a male ruler and welcomed James's ascension to the throne in 1603. Britain had mixed political fortunes in the European arena with occasional tensions with countries like France and Spain but managed to avoid a full-fledged war with either of them. Ireland proved to a troublesome engagement with constant rebellions against brutal British exploitation. Although late in the fray, Britain joined the colonial race by establishing the East India Company. The Company started as a trading venture in India and Far East, gaining increasing concessions from the local rulers, but by the end of the century they were deeply involved in local politics to gain more power and well on their way to becoming the colonial masters. Colonial settlements came up in the east coast of America as well with many travelling to the ***New World*** hopeful of a prosperous future, which was rudely belied by the severe hardships. Profits from business ventures and colonial enterprises emboldened the successful citizens to demand a greater sway in the running of the country resulting in a growing rift between the Parliament and King James who insisted on the "Divine Right of Kingship" and unconditional obedience from the subjects.

It emerged as a major source of popular entertainment. Divested from religious ceremonies and thoroughly secularised, they provided amusement for the rich and the poor, and reflected the current concerns of the society. Crossing of conventionally established boundaries was a perennial subject - from Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, from Jonson's urban satires to Beaumont and Fletcher's delicate tragicomedies. Shakespeare always kept abreast of the public pulse switching

from comedy to history to tragedy, revenge plays and tragicomedies as tastes changed. Most contemporary playwrights cannot boast such fluid movement across the various genres. Despite its popularity, theatre and actors had a tenuous relationship with the authorities. Playhouses were ordered to shift outside London across the Thames as the civic authorities considered them potential vice dens capable of disrupting law and order. But every day large sections of the very Londoners, for whose safety the theatres were banished outside London, thronged the theatre houses to enjoy themselves.

Actors too held a precarious position in the Elizabethan and Jacobean society. As the names of the theatre companies suggest, they were patronised by the mighty aristocrats including the king and the queen, and often requisitioned to put up special performances for them. So they enjoyed close contact with the rulers and lawmakers of the kingdom but on the other hand, as a social group they were situated just above the vagrants and itinerant beggars and subject to rigorous punishment for any misdemeanour. Also, as time progressed the universal appeal of the stage was displaced by a more class and culture specific orientation. In the Elizabethan times public playhouses like the Theatre, Globe etc. staged plays that were watched simultaneously by the lowly apprentice and the high-born courtiers paying different entry fees for the pit and the gallery respectively. In Jacobean times, the number of private theatre houses increased - they provided greater comfort against much higher entry fees that were beyond the reach of the common man. Gradually the plays performed there started catering exclusively to the tastes of the highborn while the public playhouses focused on a more lowly audience.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Write a note on the key incidents that took place during Shakespeare's times.

DATE, STORYLINE, HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

(d) Date

Written in late 1610 or early 1611, *The Tempest* was first performed at the court in 1611 and again in the winter of 1612-13 as part of the elaborate celebrations to mark the union of King James's daughter, Princess Elizabeth to Prince Frederick, the Elector Palatine. Other contemporary presentations were confined to the Blackfriars theatre, a private playhouse catering to the relatively wealthy.

SUB UNIT II :

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

(a) : Storyline

(b) : Historical Background

(c) : Colonisation of the Americas / New World

(d) : African Connection

(e) : Slavery and Plantation

(f) : Mediterranean Africa

(g) : European Context

(a) Storyline :

Despite biographical evidence to the contrary, *The Tempest*, has for centuries been considered the swan song of a world-weary Shakespeare, finding peace and happiness, like Prospero, in quiet retirement where "every third thought shall be…[his] grave" (5.1.312). This alignment of Prospero with Shakespeare overlooks the fact that Shakespeare wrote one more play *(Henry VIII)* after *The Tempest* and that he was actively involved in business matters in both Stratford and London and had no thought of retiring from such engagements although he had stopped writing for the stage. The play is also said to end happily with a blissful heaven being ushered on earth through the future rulers, Ferdinand and Miranda. This too ignores the fact that their reign is yet to come; it is Prospero who returns in full regalia as the Duke of Milan and that there will always be a lurking threat to the peace of Milan and Naples from the unrepentant pair of Antonio and Sebastian The story begins twelve years before the play's action commences when Prospero's bother Antonio took advantage of Prospero's lack of attention to his duties as the Duke of Milan and deposed him with the help Alonso, the Duke of Naples. Prospero and his infant daughter, Miranda, were put on boat and it was hoped that they would capsize and be killed on the high seas. But they survived miraculously and landed on an enchanted island where Prospero promptly enslaved the inhabitants, Caliban, Ariel and other spirits, and forced them to carry out his orders so that he could lead a comfortable life in the wilderness. Just as Antonio is guilty of usurping Prospero's dukedom, so is Prospero guilty of usurping Caliban's right over the island although he justifies his action saying that he is a benevolent ruler who has brought civilisation to the island. One must remember that this is the typical justification forwarded by all colonisers to justify their exploitation of the colonies.

1590's was a decade marked by epidemics, crop failures, famine, inflation, civil disturbance and wars across the continent. London playhouses were often closed. Shakespeare penned only three tragedies during this period — at the beginning of 17th century conditions improved slightly — Britain joined the colonial race playhouses emerged as a major source of popular entertainment.

The play begins twelve years later when Alonso is returning from Tunis after having married his daughter, Claribel, to the Tunisian king, quite against her wishes. He is accompanied by his brother Sebastian and his son Ferdinand, Antonio, and courtiers like Gonsalo, Adrian, Francisco. As they pass by the island, Prospero raises a magical storm with the help of Ariel and has them shipwrecked on the island. Although nobody is harmed, the shipwrecked people are separated into four different groups in such a manner that each group thinks it is the only survivor. One group comprises Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian and the courtiers, the second group is the comic duo of Trinculo and Sebastian, the third are the mariners who do not come on stage till the last act, and Ferdinand is separated from everybody else to form the last group. Prospero plans to remind his brother and Alonso of their

crimes against him, hoping to make them repent and give him back his kingdom. As an added measure he makes Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love so that Milan and Naples are forever united through marriage and Alonso cannot refuse to return Milan to his son's father-in-law.

Despite its popularity, theatre and actors had a tenuous relationship with the authorities. Play houses were ordered to shift outside London as the civic authorities considered them potential vice dens capable of disrupting law and order — as a social group, the actors were situated just above the vagrants and itinerant beggars

..... Gradually the plays performed in the private theatres started catering exclusively to the tastes of the high born while the public playhouses focused on a more lowly audience.

However, Prospero has to cross many hurdles to realise his plan. The theme of usurpation seems to be re-enacted on the enchanted island as Antonio, believing Ferdinand to be dead, lures Sebastian into a conspiracy to kill Alonso and become the King of Naples. At the level of the sub-plot, Caliban, vexed with Prospero's ill treatment, induces Stephano and Trinculo to murder Prospero, usurp the island and possess Miranda. Through his magical powers, providential help and the services of Ariel and the spirits, Prospero is able to thwart both these attempts. Repentant Alonso, beside himself with joy on seeing his son alive readily returns Milan to Prospero and agrees to the match between Ferdinand and Miranda. As Prospero has achieved his goal and does not need to stay on the island any longer, he grants freedom to Caliban and Ariel, but orders Ariel to generate favourable winds that will direct the ship safely to Milan. Gonzalo's words seem to sum up neatly the play's course of action :

In one voyage

Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis, And Ferdinand her brother found a wife

Where he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedom In a poor isle, and all of us ourselves

When no man was his own. (5.1.208-13)

Yet this happy ending hides many problematic elements which remain unresolved - Miranda is unable to distinguish between good and evil persons which might prove costly when she becomes the queen; Antonio and Sebastian are unrepentant and likely to conspire against the new rulers in future; Caliban's charges of usurpation and brutal treatment against Prospero cannot be countered; Prospero's behaviour on the island is strikingly similar to Antonio's in Milan. It is as though the play offers a double narrative - the narrative of Prospero which can and does smoothen all troubles to finally achieve its projected end; and the discontinuous, frequently disruptive narratives of other characters - the silent but sullen royal brothers; Caliban, the non-committal seeker of "grace" (5.1.296); the obedient yet restless Ariel; the absent presence of Sycorax, Claribel and Miranda's mother.

(b) : Historical Background

Although *The Tempest* is set in Italy, its historical context is related to Europe's encounter with alien civilisation, races, religion and culture. The aim of these encounters was ultimate political and economic domination but the process whereby this was achieved was different in each case. With

primitive tribes as in America and southern Africa, the colonising efforts were rapid, direct and ruthless, but when the Europeans encountered a more sophisticated and ancient race of people with a culture and civilisation of their own as in India or Egypt, the European entry was more surreptitious and devious, usually cloaked as a mercantile enterprise. It has become customary to view *The Tempest* as a paradigmatic text for the colonisation of the Americas, but as this section will show, it incorporates various kinds of European colonial projects and also examines the nature of power struggles within the European ruling class.

Prospero, deposed illegally by his brother Antonio lands on an enchanted island, where he promptly enslaves the inhabitants, Caliban, Ariel and others ..... as Alonso passes the island, Prospero raises a magical storm. The ship-wrecked people are separated.....
Prospero plans to remind his brother and Alonso of their crimes, hoping to make them repent — he makes Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love so that Milan and Naples are forever united through marriage — after crossing many hurdles prospero becomes able to realise his plan.

Colonisation of the Americas/New World

Critics pointing to parallels between New World travel accounts and the play identify quite a few similarities but this relates more to the general ambience of *The Tempest* rather than specific details, which frequently differ. For instance, Caliban's island is located in the Mediterranean although its description is derived from the travel accounts focusing on the Bermudas, situated in the Atlantic. Like most European accounts of New World encounters, *The Tempest* endorses the colonisation of foreign lands and races in the name of spreading civilisation by contrasting the courage, determination and perseverance of the early settlers to the treachery, idleness and cruelty of the native population. Prospero's experiences on the island reiterate the notion of white supremacy and generosity by pitting the churlish, lustful and inherent savagery of Caliban (the native) against the sincere efforts of Prospero (the civilised visitor) to uplift him. This takes our attention away from Prospero's brutal treatment of Caliban or his threats of pegging Ariel in the "knotty entrails" of an oak for twelve years if he does not follow his orders (1.2.294-96).

Early English definitions of the native Americans (Red Indians) depended not only on facts like the occupational, religious, cultural, social and political practices of a particular tribe but also However, *The Tempest* was written during the early phases of the colonial encounter when the Englishmen were still engaged in studying and familiarising the alien land (including its inhabitants) and could not survive without local help. Prospero acknowledges a similar dependence on Caliban, "We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,/ Fetch in our wood, and serve in offices/ That profit us" (1.2.310-13). Such a cryptic, utilitarian comment drastically minimises the nature of indebtedness and frees the white coloniser from admitting his debt to the local inhabitants without whose generosity he would have definitely perished. In reality, the first batch of English settlers in Virginia, reduced to eating dogs, cats, mice and even corpses after using up the food they had transported from England, would not have survived if the Powhatan Indians had not come to their aid with food and provisions (Nash 58; Adler 22). But both Prospero and the English colonisers of America (and of India) repaid the goodness of the natives by usurping their land and enslaving and exploiting them. On the English settlers' nature of engagement with them. In the early stages, when the Virginian settlers depended

largely on the charity of the farming Indian tribes, their brutishness and primitivism was regarded as culturally constituted, i.e., their savagery could be removed by making them imbibe enlightened, civilised (European) values. But as the colonizers increased in number it became necessary to seize lands and brutally transform the Indians into forced labourers on the very land which had previously been owned by them. Though Thomas Gates's survival mentioned in **SOURCES** was hailed as providential in England, it proved a nightmare for the peaceful Powhatan Indians Gates arrived with plans of usurping their farms, forcing them to labour for the colonists and pay annual taxes: an agenda justified by the inherent racial inferiority of the tribe on whose "nature", as Prospero says of Caliban, "Nurture can never stick" (4.1.188-89). The Caliban- Prospero encounter assimilates both these constructs of the alien races: that they can be improved through contact with the superior European civilisation and that they are inherent savages so it is justified to ill-treat and enslave them.

Prospero, deposed illegally by his brother Antonio lands on an enchanted island, where he promptly enslaves the inhabitants-Caliban, Ariel and the others. As Alonso passes the island, Propsero raisesa magical storm. The ship wrecked people are separated. Prospero plans to remind the brother and Alonso of their crimes, hoping to make them repent-he makes Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love so that Miland and Naples are forever united through marriage-after surmounting several odds Prospero is able to realize his plan.

Prospero begins with befriending and improving Caliban by teaching him language but once he is shown "all the qualities o'th'isle" (1.2.337) by the trusting Caliban and is ensured that Caliban can understand enough of his language to follow his instructions, he abandons this civilising attempt and enslaves him for his own "profit" accusing him of sexual aggression against Miranda :

"Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,
Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate"

African Connection: Slavery and Plantation

The issue of enslavement extends the play's colonial discourse beyond and through the New World to slave trade and the plantations in the Indies — much earlier and well-established enterprises of many European nations, including England. During the time that Shakespeare was writing *The Tempest* or even later, the American Indians, or Native Americans as they are called today, were not enslaved in the manner that the Africans and West Indians were. Considered barely more than chattel, they had been sold both in the colonies and at home in Europe since the mid-sixteenth century to be used as plantation workers or menial servants carrying logs, fetching wood and executing numerous household chores very much in the manner of Caliban. Against this backdrop, it is understandable why marketability is a prime concern for the shipwrecked Italians who encount Caliban for the first time: "A strange fish! Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver…. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian" (2.2.27-32). Stephano alludes to the profitability of exhibiting Caliban in England, a frontrunner in slave trade right up to its abolition in 1807.

In addition to other services, the slaves (especially women) also gratified the sexual needs of their white masters. Shakespeare, by making Caliban lust after Miranda inverts and erases this long-standing history of exploitation in a manner that serves to justify Prospero's enslavement of Caliban. Most postcolonial audiences like us can only view this blatant distortion of historic reality into a convenient justificatory myth with bitter irony. Sexual conquest, particularly rape, has long served asa common trope of imperial domination; the play re-inscribes it in the field of gender to justify colonial imposition. Gonzalo's plantation is similarly ironic in universalising a phenomenon exclusive to the colonial masters. It talks of utopian freedom from "service" and "occupation" and stresses the enjoyment of "all abundance" which in colonial reality was the exclusive prerogative of the plantation owner and extracted from the "sweat or endeavour" of the enslaved labourers who were forced to comply on the very points of the "Sword, pike, knife, gun" that Gonzalo promises to abolish (2.1.145-65).

Mediterranean Africa

The Tempest's geographical link with Africa is in fact stronger than that with the New World. The royal persons of Naples are returning home from Tunis in Africa to Italy. Caliban's mother Sycorax is banished from Argier (modern day Algier)-both located in Africa near the coast of the Mediterranean sea. The 'Argier' connection suggests an African lineage for Caliban contrary to current criticism's tendency of associating him with the Red Indians. Caliban's title under Prospero on the island exemplifies the colonized native's experience of sustained treachery and brutal violence during colonial encounters of multiple kinds, but a different kind of African connection is traced in Caliban's marriage to the king of Tunis. Jerry Brotton tries to "redress the marginalization of the Mediterranean contexts of *The Tempest* by focusing on the 'Carthage/Tunis' debate between Gonzalo and his retinue in Act II Scene 1:

Adrian: Tunis was never graced before with such a paragon to their queen.

Gonzalo: Not since widow Dido's time.

Antonio: Widow? A pox on that! How came that widow in? Widow Dido!

Sebastian: What is he had said Widower Aeneas too? Good Lord, how you take it!

Adrian: 'Widow Dido', said you? Yu make me study of that. She was of Carthage, not of Tunis.

GONZALO This Tunis, sir, was Carthage. 2.1.77-85

Gonzalo and the others are arguing about two different myths related to the African queen Dido. Gonzalo is referring to the pre-Virgilian myth of Dido, the chaste queen of Sychaeus. Widowed by her own brother Pygmalion who killed her husband to get his wealth, she escaped and after many hardships set up a new and glorious kingdom in Carthage. A capable ruler devoted to the memory of her deceased husband, Dido killed herself rather than succumb to the pressure of marrying again. Virgil invents a connection between Dido and Aneas in his *Aneid*, transforming this chaste an

heroic queen into an obsessed, hapless lover. Sebastian's "widower Aeneas" is ironically referringto this story.[6] In ancient times, the various states of Southern Europe, mainly Spain and Rome, had vied with Carthage for supremacy in Mediterranean trade and were successful only after the sack of Carthage during the Battle of Zama in 202 BC.

By the sixteenth century, Tunis replaced Carthage in political and economic significance because of its strategic location. The narrow strip of sea separating Italy and Tunis marks the boundary between eastern and western Mediterranean, so whoever controlled Tunis controlled the entire Mediterranean trade. The contest for Tunis also acquired religious overtones with the Muslim Ottomans and Christian Habsburgs constantly fighting for its possession between 1534 and 1574. Interestingly, the Habsburg occupation of Tunis was frequently equated to the ancient victory over Carthage thus authenticating Gonzalo's claim, "This Tunis, sir, was Carthage" (2.1.85). In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the Habsburgs shifted their attention to the Americas leaving the Levant trade to the Ottomans.

It is around this time that the English forays into eastern Mediterranean began. But unlike the American enterprise, their engagement with the Ottoman Empire was as a subordinate, with little political or territorial control. Moreover, they had to constantly compete with other European traders to gain special favours from the Ottomans. In fact, the English Mediterranean trade in the Jacobean and later period was vital to its economy but it never resulted in an "empire in the sense of conventional sense of territorial possessions overseas" (Andrews 99). The anxieties of having to woo a powerful heathen alien at the expense of one's own religion and race, of struggling to maintain a foothold in the North African trade through incessant realignment with other self-seeking adventurers are reflected in the hectic alliances attempted throughout the play : between Antonio and Sebastian; Caliban and Prospero; Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo; Ferdinand and Miranda; or between Milan and Naples Alonso's insistence on a Tunisian match for Claribel is tantamount to alienating his own blood, but Prospero's prompting of a marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda is also a kind of turning against the self because it repeats the subordination of Milan to Naples in more absolute terms than Antonio's conditional tribute to Alonso. More pervasively, the tempest, shipwreck and sea-sorrows can be read as symptomatic of the ambivalence, tensions and uncertainties plaguing the Ottoman- English negotiations although it would be far-fetched to view the vanquishing of Sycorax by Prospero as emblematic of the Christian Habsburgs' victory over the heathen Ottoman sultans.

The narrow strip of sea separating Italy from Tunisia marks the boundary between eastern and western Mediterranean, so whoever controlled Tunis controlled the Mediterranean trade.

European Context

For an idyllic site the island experiences an excess of violence and conspiracy. Sycorax initiates the forcible subjugation of the native spirits of the island which is continued by Prospero on his arrival. Trinculo and Stephano aided by Caliban try to de seat him in turn. Antonio and Sebastian plot the death of Alonso and Gonzalo. The sylvan island, from his point

of view, is less a contrast than an extension of the real worlds of Milan and Naples-Machievellian deceit and manipulations are the staple tools of political empowerment in both worlds. A prime mode of political maneuver was marriage diplomacy. We must remember that *The Tempest* was staged to celebrate the marriage between James' daughter and Elector palatine, which aligned James with the formidable Union of Protestant princes against the Catholic League and the Austrian Habsburgs. James had long nurtured the desire to play the grand arbitrator in Europe's religio-political conflicts by marrying his son to the Catholic princess of Spain and his daughter to a Protestant prince. These hopes were dashed by Prince Henry's death in 1612and he proceeded with understandable urgency to gain what political allies he could through his daughter's marriage the next year.

This event also involved England in the Habsburg crisi of authority and established a Catholic connection for James although it was not the kind he was seeking. Since 1606, the Austrian Habsburg archdukes had been consistently divesting their emperor Rudolf II (whose jurisdiction included Milan and Naples) of his authority and transferring it to his brother Matthias, finally making him the Habsburg emperor in 1611. Despite being a Catholic, Rudolf turned to the Union of Protestant Princes and James for help. James was asked to seal the marriage between Elizabeth and Elector Palatine as a sign of commitment to aid Rudolf's re-instatement. James's firm belief in the Divine Right of Kingship (and other political interests) made him uphold Rudolf's claim but he was aware that the ex-emperor was himself responsible for the state of affairs by turning away from his administrative responsibilities and becoming obsessed with occult art and magical studies in a manner similar to Prospero, who "cast" his "government…upon…[his] brother" and "to…[his] state grew stranger, being transported/ And rapt in secret studies" 1.2.75-77). This does not necessarily equate Prospero with Rudolf or Antonio with Matthias but it does situate the European dynastic conflicts and debates over the king's rights and responsibilities at the core of the play. James's continuous friction with the Parliament revolved around the issue of inherent, absolute royal authority and his contribution and commitment to the subjects issues crucial to the usurpation of both Milan and the island by Antonio and Prospero respectively. Although Prospero's interaction with Ariel and Caliban does have strong colonial overtones, Prospero never intends to reside permanently on the island, his primary project is to re-claim the title of Milan, destroy (at least politically) his brother Antonio, and acquire a suitable match for Miranda that will simultaneously secure lasting peace for his kingdom, in brief, concerns of dynastic succession, political rivalry and marriage diplomacy that formed the core of European politics in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Write a note on the historical background of *The Tempest*.

UNIT - 2

SUB UNIT- I

SOURCES

CONTENT STRUCTURE

SUB-UNIT I : Sources

(a) : Original Plot

(b) : Literary Parallels

(c) : Contemporary Travel Literature

(d)* : Montaigne's *Essays

(e)* : Raleigh's *Discovery

(f) : James I and Magic

(g)* : Ovid's *Metamorphoses

SUB-UNIT II : Themes

(a) Nature / Nurture

(b) Order / Disorder

(c) Complementary Binaries

(d) Magic

(e) Colonialism and Operations of Power

— Colonising the Internal Periphery (Social Inferiors)

— Colonising the Core (Aristocracy)

— Colonising the Other (Non-European)

(f) : gender

(a) : Original Plot

Most plays of Shakespeare have borrowed plots. *Hamlet*, for instance, is the re-working of an earlier play. The English chronicle plays derive their inspiration from the historical works of Hall and Holinshed. Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* is the staple source for many of the Greek and Roman plays. By contrast *The Tempest* is an original piece of fiction with its plot being invented by Shakespeare himself. But precisely because *The Tempest* does not have one single definitive source, it draws on several kinds of contemporary material, literary and otherwise, to forge a compact drama of three hours replete with magic, music, adventure and political intrigues.

(b) : Literary Parallels

Early critics, like Dowden drew parallels between *The Tempest* and a German play *Die Schone Sidea* [*The Fair Sidea*] by Jacob Ayrer written some time before 1605. Both plays have a magician

as the protagonist, his only daughter falls in love with his enemy's son who is imprisoned and madeto carry logs by the magician; there are attendant spirits and both plays end in lovers' union and reconciliation with the enemy. It is conjectured that the German play could have reached Shakespeare via an English touring company that had visited Nuremberg in 1604 or that both Ayrer and Shakespeare drew from a more ancient common source now lost. Close similarities in the storyline do strengthen the theory of borrowing but Shakespeare's play is much more complex and problematic than Ayrer's simple romance. Similar claims have been made on behalf of two Spanish works — Antonio de Eslava's *Las Noches de Invierno* [*The Winter Nights*] (1609) and Diego Ortunez de Calahorra's *Espejo de Principes y Caballeros* [*The Mirror of the Princes and Noblemen*] (1562, translated 1578). While both claim certain similarities with *The Tempest*, the narratives are vastly different in emphasis and plot construction leading one to believe in common folkloric ingredients rather than specific indebtedness.

(c) : Contemporary Travel Literature

In recent times, the tendency to view *The Tempest* as a paradigmatic text of colonisation, particularly the European encounter with the New World, has encouraged scholars to explore the links between the play and contemporary travel accounts and pamphlets related to the Americas. The connection was made as early as 1808 by Malone in his *Account of The Incidents from which The Title and Part of The Story of Shakespeare's Tempest were derived* but it is mainly since the 1970s that consistent attempts have been made to align *The Tempest* with other colonial discourses. Although England joined the race for colonial acquisition rather late, by 1607 the colony of Virginia had already been founded in North America by John Smith. In response to his plea for reinforcement, a fleet of nine ships set sail from England in May 1609. But on 25 July, the main ship *Sea Adventure* carrying the leaders of the expedition, Sir Thomas Gates and Sir George Summers, wrecked on the coast of the Bermudas during a storm. Most of the other ships reached Virginia safely. Gates, Summers and their company, thought to be dead, finally arrived in Virginia in May 1610. Their resurrection made a great impact both at home and in the colonies; it was seen as God's special favour for the Virginia project. The strange story of their survival spawned several accounts with vying perspectives : some highlighted the perilous, storm-ridden route, others highlighted the lurking dangers of the Bermudas commonly known as the Devil's Island and still others, particularly survivors, described the bizarre, fantastical yet sustaining quality of the island.

Three of these, The True Declaration of the state of the Colonie in Virginia, with a confutation of such scandalous reports as have tended to the disgrace of so worthy an enterprise (1610) published by the Council of Virginia to dispel the fears of the shareholders and would-be settlers regarding the profit-worthiness of the colonial enterprise, Sylvester Jourdain's *Discovery of the Bermudas, otherwise called the Isle of Devils* (1610) and William Strachey's *True Repertory of the Wrack*

(written 1610) are said to be closely related to the genesis of *The Tempest*. That Shakespeare had access to these tracts, even Strachey's letter which was published only in 1625, is fairly certain as he was close to a number of the shareholders of the Virginia Company, namely the Earls of Pembroke and Southampton. Shakespeare's storm scene (1.1) echoes Starchey's description of the same, including the mysterious fires thatAriel lights on the doomed ship at Prospero's orders. The supernatural aura of the Bermudas and its rich natural resources are stressed both by Jourdain and Strachey; Strachey also mentions several attempts at mutiny on the island that could have provided the inspiration for the Alonso-Sebastian conspiracy.

(d) : Montaigne's *Essays*

Shakespeare's habit of drawing from multiple sources is seen in various passages in the play. Florio's 1603 translation of Montaigne's *Essays* (of which Shakespeare owned a copy) especially the essay "Of the Cannibals" contributes to Gonzalo's "commonwealth speech" (2.1.150-67) and more generally to Caliban's empathy with the natural beauty of the island. Caliban's name is considered an anagram of "cannibal". Gonzalo echoes Montaigne in stressing the fruitful abundance of a world uncorrupted by civilisation :

> "It is a nation…that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superioritie, no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kindred, but common' (Kermode 146)."

His speech criticises indirectly the fiercely competitive European society more directly condemned by Montaigne as being infested with "lying, falshood, treason, dissimulations, covetousnes, envie, detraction" — a society that has "altogether overchoaked" nature by its superfluous "inventions" and "frivolous enterprises" (Kermode 146-47).

(e) : Raleigh's *Discovery*

Montaigne's idealisation of the noble savage is challenged by Sir Walter Raleigh's evocation of the terrifying other in his *Discovery of the large, rich, and beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1596). It describes a monstrously disfigured race of people whose heads are level with their shoulders and whose eyes and mouths are located in their shoulders and breasts respectively. Gonzalo tells of "such men/ Whose heads stood in their breasts" (3.3.47-48) in the same breath as he notes the "monstrous shape" of the islanders whose manners are nonetheless "more gentle, kind, than of/ Our human generation" (3.3.32-34) thus juxtaposing the two extreme Western constructs of aliens outside their known world.

(f) : James I and Magic

The magic component of the play was included primarily because of James I's interest in the subject: his *Daemonologie* (1597) and *Basilikon Doron* (1599) discuss the extent of magical studies permissible for Christian people. As Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) and *Discours of Divels and Spirits* (1584) testify, religion, race, gender and social status were crucial to the debate on what constituted white and black magic. Shakespeare follows the common practice of aligning legitimate magical activity with the God-fearing European male figure of authority while condemning the devil-worshipping witchcraft of the marginalised female. As we shall see later, the tussle between the male magus (magician) and the female witch in the play is also related to the transfer of political power from a female monarch, Elizabeth, to the patriarchal figure of King James.

(g) : Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Caliban's mother, the absent Sycorax, is loosely modelled on the Colchian princess, Medea, whose story is included in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a book that Shakespeare admired throughout his life. Both are outsiders, have magical powers, use them diabolically but the similarity ends there as Medea, spurned by her husband Jason, turns against her own family and kills her children for vengeance while Sycorax's violence is directed at subordinate spirits, not her kin — Caliban nurtures loving memories of his dead mother. A much stronger link with the Ovidian narrative is noted in Prospero's famous farewell to his Art (5.1.33-57), which is almost a verbatim echo of Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of *Metamorphoses* :

"Ye airs and winds; ye eves of hills, of brooks, of woods alone.
Of standing lakes, and of the, approach ye every one.
Through help of whom….

I have compelled streams to run clean backward to their spring.

By charms I make the calm seas rough and make the rough seas plain.
And cover all the sky with clouds and chase them thence again." (Ovid Bk VII)

The passage continues in the same vein to speak of shaking mountains, groaning earth, dead men being called up "from their graves", dimming the noontime sun, chastening of "fiery bulls" and more, all of which is metamorphosed into a memorable parting eulogy by Shakespeare's superior poetry :

"Ye elves of hills brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
And ye that on the sands with printless foot

Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back; you demi-puppets that
By moonshine do the green, sour ringlets make,

Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose pastime

Is to make midnight mushrooms, that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew, by whose aid -
Weak masters though ye be - I have bedimmed
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar; graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth

THEMES

The play focuses on several themes some of which like colonialism, dynastic politics, etc have been touched upon in the section titled **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**. The thematic concerns are presented as binarieswhich are then elaborated through either analogous or contrasting characters or actions. The major binaries in the play are **NATURE/NURTURE, ORDER/DISORDER, FREEDOM/BONDAGE, JOY/SORROW, GOOD/EVIL, LEGITIMATE RULE/**
USURPATION, BLACK MAGIC/WHITE MAGIC, etc. they incorporate larger issues of justice, equality, patriarchy, colonialism, gender, etc. this binarism extends to relationships as well, father/daughter (or son), ruler/subject, master/slave, colonizer/colonized, teacher/student, civilized/ savage, etc. The THEMES therefore cannot be dealt with separately as they are interrelated and overlap, complement and illuminate each other. However, viewing such issues all togetheras binary

opposites helps us to highlight the contrast but simolifies or obscures the complexities that lie outsidethe binary framework.

(a) : Nature / Nurture

Nature, as a binary of Nurture, has a more specific meaning than is generally associated with the word. It refers to the inherent characteristics of a living being, i.e., the intrinsic qualities or defects he/she is born with. By this definition, Miranda and Ferdinand are born with a superior nature - they are physically, mentally and morally pure and chaste. Caliban, by contrast, is monstrous and ugly in looks and in behaviour. By associating these characteristics with their birth, Shakespeare is endorsing a notion very common in his times - that aristocrats or the highborn are *naturally superior* to the ordinary commoners who are naturally rude and vulgar. The kings and aristocrats who ruled the country encouraged such a view as it justified their political and social authority. In *The Tempest* it legitimises Prospero's power over Caliban and Ariel and identifies Ferdinand as a more suitable match for Miranda than the monstrous Caliban.

Nurture is the learning or education that a person imbibes from parents, teachers, elders, the state, society, environment etc., to improve oneself. It was assumed that people with a superior nature would be more conducive to nurture while the lowborn will either be dull or rebellious students. *The Tempest* upholds this belief by presenting Miranda as her father's most obedient student (1.2.21-22) who has consequently benefited most from his instructions. As Prospero himself admits,

> Here in this island we arrived, and here
> Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit
> Than other princess can, that have more time
>
> For vainer hours, and tutors not so careful. (1.2.171-74)

Even Ferdinand, who initially resists Prospero, learns to obey him through his love for Miranda and as a result is finally betrothed to her. By contrast, Ariel though subservient, is often restless and has to be threatened with imprisonment to enforce subservience (1.2.294-96).

Caliban proves to be the worst learner as he refuses to assimilate any of Prospero's instructions. The cause, Prospero suggests, is his monstrous origin - he is the "poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/ Upon…[the] wicked dam" Sycorax (2.1.319-20). It is solely because he is a *born* devil" that "Nurture can never stick" on his "nature" (4.1.188-89; italics added). This approach not only justifies Prospero's treatment of Caliban, but all kinds of domination of the lower orders by their superiors - of the slave by the master, the subject by the ruler, the child by the parent, the colonised by the coloniser, and so forth. It also perpetuates the status quo by suggesting that a hierarchic,

unequal society based on discrimination is justified because the highborn, even if they err, are naturally adaptable to improvement while the lowly can never improve either their nature or their lot. In reality, Caliban's supposedly irredeemable nature, which is said to refuse nurture, has been further distorted by the kind of nurturing undertaken by Prospero and Miranda. Prospero's coercive tactics repeatedly erode the traditional image of caring sustenance associated with nurturing: he inflicts "cramps,/ Side-stitches", pinches "thick as honey-comb" (1.2.325-30) on Caliban, enjoys unleashing hounds on the Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban (4.1.255-62) and threatens to imprison Ariel in an oak at the least sign of weariness (1.2.294-96).

(b) : Order / Disorder

The Tempest opens with anarchy (disorder) in nature. The whole of Act 1, scene 1, depicts a raging tempest where,

> The sky it seems would pour down stinking pitch,
> But that the sea, mounting to th'welkin's cheek,
> Dashes the fire out. (1.2. 3-5)

The ship carrying Alonso and his retinue is about to capsize despite the best efforts of the captain and his crew. In most plays of Shakespeare natural calamity either prefigures or reflects social and political upheaval. On the eve of the assassination of Julius Caesar, for instance, there is thunder and lightening with a "tempest dropping fire" and Casca reports how the earth "Shakes like a thing unfirm" (*Julius Caesar* 1.3.10, 3-4). Similarly, Duncan's death in *Macbeth* is followed by the day being plunged in total darkness:

By the clock 'tis day,
> And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp.
> Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
> That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
> When living light should kiss it ? (2.4.6-10)

In *The Tempest*, the topsyturvydom in nature is extended to the social order as well. If the ship has to survive during this crisis the natural superiors, the king and his courtiers, must "keep below" in their cabins and not "assist the storm" by blundering about on the deck (1.1.11, 14). The opening scene also charts the limits of royal authority which can only be exercised during times of peace upon people, it has no effect on the chaotic forces of nature. The boatswain's challenge to Gonzalo exemplifies this,

> You are a councillor.
> If you can command these elements to silence,

and work the peace of the present,
we will not hand a rope more.
Use your authority. If you cannot, give
thanks you have lived so long,
and make yourself ready
in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it hap
(L.20-26)

This scene raises very important questions regarding the jurisdiction and efficacy of established uthority and this issue is crucial to the whole play-Who is responsible for Prospero's deposition ? Is Prospero's authority over the island legitimate ? Is Caliban justified in his attempt to remove Prospero ? Does Prospero use fair methods to regain his dukedom etc. The binary of **ORDER/ DISORDER** is further complicated by the fact that this is not a natural tempest but one ordered by Prospero through his magical powers to further his own interests. This brings us to another key issue of the play-order produces disorder, in other words, the figures of authority who are supposed to maintain peace and stability are the very people who initiate disorder and anarchy. Alonso, the king of Naples, assists Antonio's usurpation of Milan, Prospero's "trust,/ Like a good parent" "*beget*[*s*]" Antonio's "falsehood" (1.2.93-95, italics added), Prospero in turn takes away Caliban's island which was by right his own through Sycorax, his mother (1.2.331-32) and his inhuman treatment drives Caliban to conspire with Stephano and Trinculo to overthrow him. The role of the usurper and the usurped become interchangeable and all the highborn in the play are guilty of usurping what is not rightfully theirs. Although the play encourages us to endorse Prospero's notion of order as the most ideal, there are also hints suggesting that Prospero's system of organising things benefits primarily him and not necessarily the others. For example, although innocent of any crime Ferdinand is imprisoned so that he falls in love with Prospero's daughter and gives him back his dukedom, Ariel is restless and longs for freedom but he is coerced into executing Prospero's orders and Prospero himself readily acknowledges that he has enslaved Caliban to ensure his and his daughter's material comfort, "We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,/ Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices/ That profit us" (1.2.311-13).

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. "ORDER produces DISORDER in *The Tempest*."- Discuss.

(c): Complementary Binaries

The binaries in *The Tempest* including those noted above are also complementary and occasionally overlap lending an ambiguity and an aura of incompleteness to the play. The overlap

between the usurper and the usurped and the ruler and the subject and their interchangeability is discussed in the previous section. The true ruler of the island, Caliban, is subjected to the outsider Prospero who usurps him. Antonio, Prospero's brother and subject, dethrones and banishes him. But more significant is the complementary relation of the binaries where each learns something from the other and is made more complete. In Milan Prospero was an indifferent ruler who neglected his duties. Antonio's treachery taught him how to wield his power as a ruler more effectively. Caliban learns from the stupidity of his co-conspirators Stephano and Trinculo, to be "wise hereafter" (5.1. 295). Miranda, whose relation to Prospero is designated as his "foot" who can never be his "tutor" (1.2.470) nevertheless teaches him "to bear up/ Against what should ensue" (1.2.156-57) when the two are cast on a stormy night in a derelict boat.

Prospero, the master, relieves Ariel, from physical torment and teaches him to control his desire and learn the values of "future gain, pardon ":

I will be correspondent to command
And doing my spirit gently.
Prospero do so, and after a few days
I will discharge thee.

But Prospero himself has to learn to curb his passion for revenge and this important lesson is imparted to him by none other than Ariel. When Ariel reports to a triumphant and gleeful Prospero the utter wretchedness of Alonso and his followers, he concludes by saying that their condition would have evoked pity in him if he were human (5.1.18-20). Only then does Prospero reflect on the value of forgiveness and decides to be merciful,

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art ? (5.1.21-24)

No state of being - pleasure or pain, delight or sadness, slavery or mastery-is absolute or complete in the play. For instance, the joy of reunion and rediscovery of the self (5.1.212-13) is mediated by sea-sorrow. The pre-condition for Ariel's liberty is his bondage to Prospero while Caliban's desire for freedom makes him voluntarily enslave himself to foolish Stephano. Caliban further problematises the master-servant relationship by responding in poetry to Stephano and Trinculo's prose contrary to the tradition of the inferior characters speaking in prose on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Even the restoration of order is far from satisfactory at the close of the play. Happiness is marred by the suggestion of future travails and dangers. Only Alonso is truly repentant and wholeheartedly welcomes Ferdinand's betrothal to Miranda and Prospero's return as the Duke

of Milan. Antonio and Sebastian are blackmailed to silence by Prospero's threat of revealing their conspiracy against Alonso and Gonzalo if they cause trouble,

> But you, my brace of lords, were I so minded,
> I here could pluck his highness' frown upon you, And justify you traitors. At this time
> I will tell no tales. (5.1.125-28)

There is no guarantee that they will not intrigue in future to de-throne Prospero and Alonso. Miranda's inability to distinguish between the good courtiers like Gonzalo and evil doers like her uncle Antonio - all of whom she lumps together as "goodly creatures" of a "brave new world" (5.1.182-83) - warns of future dangers that might befall the two kingdoms because of her ignorance. Also, as noted in the section **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**, Prospero's recovery of Milan through marriage diplomacy entails a permanent subjugation of Milan to Naples as Miranda's right over Milan will pass on to her husband, Ferdinand, after their marriage. The play closes with the sense of binaries being more complementary than oppositional.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. What dramatic purpose do the complementary binaries serve in *The Tempest*?

(d) : Magic

Both the distance and the connections between the real and the illusory world in *The Tempest* generate an ambivalence that is strengthened by the ambiguous subjectivity of the island itself. The island is not wholly fantastical occupying an imaginary space; it is situated in the Mediterranean, somewhere along the Naples-Tunis sea route. Yet it re-enacts a recent disaster that took place elsewhere in the Atlantic - the shipwreck off the Bermuda islands - confusing the reader about its geographical location. Its topography too does not confirm to that of any real geographical region: it is an enchanted isle peopled with unearthly and sub-human beings who belong to the realm of fairy tales and folklore. More significant is the fact that it does not seem to have a stable natural surrounding. The "sweet air" of the island which is "subtle, tender, and delicate" invigorates Ferdinand and Adrian (1.2.394; 2.1.49, 44). Gonzalo is so enamoured by the "lush and lusty" vegetation that he longs to set up a "commonwealth" on it (2.1.55, 150). For Caliban it is a treasure trove of fresh-water springs, berries, pignuts, crabs, marmoset, filberts and scamels (2.2.157-69). But for Antonio and Sebastian the same ground is "tawny", "perfumed by a fen" (2.1.51, 57); Stephano and Trinculo follow Ariel blindly through "toothed briars, sharp furzes, pricking goss" into a "filthy mantled pool" reeking of "horse-piss" (4.1.180-82, 199).

The musical magic of the island too appeals differently to different sensibilities. It restores Ferdinand's spirits, brings remorse to Alonso, and puts some to sleep while others remain wide-awake not having heard anything. Ariel's song that sounds like "humming" to Gonzalo, is transformed

into "a hollow burst of bellowing", "a din to fright a monster's ear" for Sebastian and Antonio (2.1.322, 316, 319). The objective reality of the island is constructed subjectively by various perceptions leading to numerous, conflicting manifestations, all of which intensify the aura of radical ambivalence. The constant shape shifting of the native inhabitants adds to the fantastic quality of the island. Ariel transforms into fire, water, wind (1.1; 1.2), harpy (3.3.53 SD), a nameless voice (3.2) with equal felicity: he is indeed "the picture of Nobody" and everybody (3.2.127-28). This leads us to question the efficacy of their actions — will the gods' blessings prove substantial for Ferdinand and Miranda or are they merely false promises made by an "insubstantial pageant" (4.1.155) ?

Prospero's magic adds the final touch of the miraculous to this elusive, unreal fantasia. He *orders* natural disorder in more ways than one: he initiates the storm and then allays it to bring all his enemies safely to the shore, *resurrects* himself and Ferdinand for Alonso and his retinue, all of whom have presumed them dead, and *engineers* a match between the future rulers to effect the miraculous reunion of Milan and Naples. In a play obsessed with issues of order and disorder, nature and nurture, Prospero is the prime mover embracing all binaries to facilitate the realisation of dreams — collective and personal. But his very omnipotence draws our attention to the limits of the romance genre as a vehicle of wish-fulfilment. The simple faith in men's (or the aristocrats') ability to re-generate themselves seen in early pastoral plays like *As You Like It* is no longer there, it now requires the magical aid of the super-natural and

even then reformation is far from complete. In *As You Like It* the society's re-structuring is total, everybody returns to the court re-fashioned and cleansed of previous ills. Jaques, who chooses to stay back in Arden, is no threat to the new social order they wish to build. But in *The Tempest*, Prospero's magic fails to mould all - unrepentant Antonio and Sebastian accompany reformed Alonso and Prospero back to Milan and Naples and Miranda's inability to detect their potential disruptiveness signals dangerous times ahead. And finally, if man cannot be re-modelled even with the aid of magic, what will happen to the brave new world when all "charms are…o'erthrown" (Epilogue 1), that is, when Prospero no longer has access to magic ?

However, within the play's action-time Prospero is the enlightened magus whose power is derived as much from his magic as from the rightness of his cause. Barbara A. Mowat's article "Prospero's Books" in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52.1 (2001), pages 1-33, provides useful information on the kind of studies and magical practices engaged in by a magician of the period. But Prospero's supremacy as a magician on the island is closely related to the legitimacy of his project - the re-writing/righting of the wrongful usurpation of Milan by his evil brother Antonio. This project is endorsed to such a degree by the text that it seems to justify Prospero's manipulative handling of characters not directly linked with the event, namely Ariel, Ferdinand and Miranda. His personal stake in the recovery of Milanese dukedom is obscured by the more pervading rhetoric of justice, peace and order. Prospero's magic is powerful not merely because of his superior knowledge, but because of

its socio-political agenda, its willingness to submit to the dictates of the stars. His magic apparently works on behalf of a grand design and it is extremely convenient that his individual gains coincide with it. Shakespeare further highlights the potency of Prospero's white magic by contrasting it with Sycorax's black magic - it is good as opposed to evil, inclusive instead of selfish, educative and benevolent rather than cruel and coercive. Sycorax's magic is weaker than Prospero's because of its negative extra-magical associations. Shakespeare insidiously extends this contrast to implicate magic in the racial and gendered discourse of the play by suggesting a natural superiority of the male European magus over the female non-European witch.

The above strategy prioritises masculine rule over female authority in the British context as well. Both *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*, the two Shakespearean plays dealing largely with supernatural power, designate female occult activities as diabolic. *Macbeth,* written within two years of James's accession in 1603, explores in great detail the potency of witchcraft and the defencelessness of the men who are subjected to it. Female authority is viewed as essentially disruptive and malevolent and empowered by non-sanctioned sources. But it undoubtedly has the power to direct the destiny of men. Patriarchal anxieties of being subject to a female sovereign, Elizabeth, seem to reverberate through the play. By the time *The Tempest* is staged (1611) James has cast off the shadow of inheritance through the female line and re-established male dominance in the political arena. Prospero has similarly taken over from Sycorax; her threatening authority is a distant memory, vanquished conclusively by Prospero's God-ordained magic. As Caliban admits, "His art is of such power,/ It would control my dam's god Setebos,/ And make a vassal of him" (1.2.72-74). Magic, in *The Tempest* is therefore multifaceted: it provides the spectacular effect of the storm (1.1) and the masques (3.3, 4.1), accentuates the fascination with the exotic (if evil) Other, but it is integral to the operations of various kinds of power in the play - personal, political, domestic, patriarchal and colonial.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS:

1. Analyse the treatment of magic in *The Tempest*.

(e) : Colonialism and Operations of Power

The Tempest, says Paul Brown, "is not simply a reflection of colonialist practices but an intervention in an ambivalent and even contradictory discourse" (Brown 48). The play's projection of the colonial issue is not straightforward. It serves as a paradigm for the European colonisation of the Americas and at the same time touches upon foreign encounters less profitable to the European nations. There is a consistent alienating and subordinating of all forms of existence that are potentially dangerous to white male supremacy of the aristocrats. Social inferiors, the female sex, non-European races are either commodified or identified as masterless or savage to justify their subjugation.

Colonialism is only one facet of a much more comprehensive and interrelated programme of domination, which entails the unequal relationship of the exploiter and the exploited. *The Tempest* dramatises, mystifies and unravels such operations of power at a particular historical juncture - in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century - when European capitalism and colonialism were in their initial stage.

(f) : Colonising the Internal Periphery (Social Inferiors)

Masterlessness, which increased rapidly in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, denotes the "unfixed and unsupervised elements [people] located in the internal margins of civil society" that were viewed as a growing threat to the government and the social order (Brown 50). Commoners from all across the country were being evicted or forced to leave their homes due to lack of work and roamed the countryside or flocked to towns as beggars, thieves, highwaymen, or unemployed labourers seeking any kind of occupation. Thirteen laws were passed between 1495 and 1610 to control this phenomenon that was a constant source of anxiety to Tudor and Stuart administration (Beier 9). For our purposes it is immaterial whether the masterless men did or did not pose a danger to the established order, what concerns us is the authority's attitude towards them and its reflection in *The Tempest*. Richard Morison, writing *A Remedy for Sedition* in 1536, defined the masterless as "idle without any occupation, without lands, fees, wages" who are prone to "riot, robbery, murder, and rebellion" and "either sow sedition among people or else be the fields themselves apt to bring forth such fruits" (Berkowitz 125). Similar views persist a century later as in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathon* (1651) where the "dissolute condition of masterless men" is considered one of the gravest threats to the English society because they are not subject to laws and evade the "coercive power" of the state that could control them" (Hobbes 238). De-linked from land and occupation, they acquire a fluidity that is beyond the control of the *master* who is both landed and occupied and lords over the *mastered* (subjects) who are located on his land. The inability to monitor them results in their official construction as a menace to private and public property which needs to be removed with brute force. Stephano and Trinculo have robbed the royal cellar (it is immaterial that they have accidentally stumbled upon the wine stored in the ship) and this automatically identifies them (in the eyes of the establishment) as potential killers, rioters and rebels. The play proceeds to establish this connection by making them join hands with Caliban to plot the murder of Prospero and the possession of Miranda. The threat to the individual ruler and his daughter is read as a disruption of the ordered, civil society, which justifies Prospero's harsh treatment of them. It is beside the point that their destabilising efforts are ridiculously negligible, what is important is that the periphery (of society) has collectively planned an attack upon the nucleus thereby challenging the status quo which privileges the ruling class, i.e., the aristocrats.

(g) : Colonising the Core (Aristocracy)

A greater cause for concern for the powers that be is the seditious impulse embedded within the ruling class. It is more dangerous than the open rebellion of the lower orders as it often takes the form of treacherous intrigue and its perpetrators have greater resources at their command. *An Invective Ayenste*…Treason (1539) defines arch-traitors as those who betray "their prince of whom they had received so innumerable benefits, and which [i.e., the prince], so many ways had declared his singular favour and love toward them" (Morison Bii, spelling modernised). This description fits Antonio whom, Prospero tells Miranda, "next thyself/ Of all the world I loved, and to him put/ The manage of my estate" (1.2.68-70). Prospero's trust in him "had indeed no limit,/ A confidence sans bound" (1.2.96-97). Antonio's (and Sebastian's) usurping capabilities are much greater than that of the comical trio mentioned above because of their elevated status and their close proximity to the central figure of authority. Consequently their sedition is treated in the serious mode and their crime magnified - they have violated the bonds of love, kinship and allegiance to the sovereign. The royal brothers exemplify an internalised condition of masterlessness that is all the more dangerous because it is not visible externally. Yet the strategies of containment directed at them are different from those employed for the social inferiors. They are not subjected to physical torture and public exposure like Stephano or Trinculo precisely because they belong to the ruling elite. There is no open denouncement of their conspiracy would as that disclose the fractures within the privileged class and severely jeopardise its political and social hegemony.

(h) : Colonising the Other (Non-European)

The subjugation of Antonio and Sebastian on one hand and of Stephano and Trinculo on the other can be seen as the colonisation of the core and internal periphery respectively. The complex and multiple strategies deployed to neutralise them testify the authority's chameleon-like ability to adopt different, even contradictory notions of justice and order to maintain its supremacy. Pragmatic considerations similarly override ideological consistency in racial and cultural encounters beyond the European state. As the section on **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND** illustrates, the initial stages of the European engagement with North Africa were very different from its colonization of the New World. England and other nations seeking a foothold in the powerful Ottoman empire were vulnerable aliens who needed a policy of appeasement rather than confrontation. So Alonso resorts to marriage diplomacy, trading his own daughter Claribel for strategic alliance with Tunis. It is significant that the notion of the savage, which "probes and categorises alien cultures on the external margins of expanding civil power" (Brown 50), is not applied to the Tunisian king as that would imply a contamination of the core (Claribel and her future offspring) and undermine the colonialist discourse.

This subservient position is vicariously reversed in the European conquest of the Americas. Caliban epitomises the American encounter with the West as he embodies all the constructs of the

Native American projected by the Europeans. His subject-position in relation to Prospero and his conspiracy with Stephano and Trinculo denotes his masterlessness that must be curbed if the civil society, namely Prospero and Miranda, are to "profit" by his services (1.2.313). His violent nature is meticulously recorded as he urges Stephano to "brain" Prospero, "or with a log/ Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,/Or cut his weasand with thy knife" (3.2.89-92). Caliban's identity as a murderer is further combined with his capacity to organise sedition to present him as a dual threat - at the personal level to the ruler and at the collective level to the civic society - to justify his brutal treatment. His transgression is similar to Antonio's, against his master and the father figure who claims to have "*used*" him with "*human care*" (1.2.45-46, emphases added). But the play avoids an impartial investigation of the conditions responsible for Caliban's transformation from the doting native to the enchained and embittered slave.

Caliban is also the archetypal savage assimilating two contradictory constructs of the American Indian presented by the colonisers. If the savage is seen as one who is capable of nurture, then colonisation can be presented as an educative and civilising mission that aims at incorporating the reformed savage within the orbit of civil society.... Whichever mould Caliban is cast in, it facilitates his subordination. Prospero commands not only Caliban's actions and movements, but his sexuality as well.

Caliban is also the archetypal savage assimilating two contradictory constructs of the American Indian presented by the colonisers. The savage is the wild, non-social, libidinal sub-human who legitimises colonial control. If the savage is seen as one who is capable of nurture then colonisation can be presented as an educative and civilising mission that aims at incorporating the re-formed savage within the orbit of civil society. This was the attitude of the early settlers who could not afford to antagonise the alien if they were to survive. Caliban says of his early encounter with Prospero,

When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night. (1.2.332-36)

It is only after becoming acquainted with "all the qualities o'th'isle,/ The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile" (1.2.337-38) that Caliban's libidinality or sexuality begins troubling Prospero. It is castigated as sinful lust and Caliban is reconstituted as inherently savage, beyond improvement or redemption. This relieves Prospero of the responsibility of cultivating/civilising Caliban; he can now ill-treat him with impunity paradoxically under the pretext of protecting all that is humane. Incidentally, the previous programme of urbanising the savage would have would have ripped Caliban from his roots, which is why Caliban resists it.

Whichever mould Caliban is cast in, it facilitates his subordination Prospero's complete masteryover the colonised subject is testified by the fact that he not only commands Caliban's actions and movements, but his sexuality as well. Caliban is charged with attempted rape just at the moment when he accuses Prospero of usurping his island. The juxtaposition of the innocent, beautiful Miranda with the ugly, bestial Caliban accentuates audience's aversion that turns to loathing, as the rapist proves totally unrepentant. The veracity of Caliban's allegations becomes redundant as Prospero's control over his sexuality is fully vindicated. To counter Shakespeare's privileging Prospero's perspective one needs to look at the situation from Caliban's viewpoint. His primitive consciousness precludes any awareness of proprietary rights over anything, including one's sexuality. Miranda's body is as available as his own for procreation - an extension of the fertile earth for the planting of seeds. The idea of private possession and consequent denial of access is alien to him so he is unable to comprehend the immorality of his act. His desire to "people…/ This isle with Calibans" (1.2.350-51) is also a good political strategy from a colonised person's perspective. European conquest of the Americas can be largely ascribed to advanced scientific knowledge - of natural phenomena, statecraft and weaponry. Like all other colonised people, the American Indians' only strength lay in numerical superiority. Caliban's dream of vanquishing Prospero can only succeed if he has many more Calibans to aid him.

Caliban's of allegiance from the wise and enlightened Prospero to the drunken butler Stephano is generally taken to exemplify the colonised subject's stupidity and his dependent mentality. The comic treatment of this change of masters obscures the harsh tragic reality that years of servitude rob a man's capacity to enjoy true freedom. He becomes habituated to the state of bondage; ironically, the colonial mission of humanising the savage brings about this de- humanization. But on another plane the shift of allegiance is tactically advantageous to Caliban. Prospero is a much more exacting and competent exploiter than Stephano and Trinculo, and Caliban is powerless against him. But Caliban's superior intelligence in comparison to the comic duo allows him considerable manipulative hold over his masters: he enjoys their "celestial liquor", sows dissension between them and sets them up to kill Prospero. It is an empowerment that would never be possible under the rule of Prospero.

Caliban, the composite savage, denotes the high point of success and failure of colonial encounters involving different races. His physical and mental enslavement demonstrates the absolute sway of the coloniser over the colonised. Yet, unlike Ariel, he is never fully mastered and is a persistent source of anxiety. His obduracy and accusations provide a critique of colonial rule that is applicable to other hegemonic spheres as well. The island is an imaginary site serving simultaneously as several colonial playgrounds where the core, the periphery and the realm beyond the periphery are subjugated. But the ultimate irony is the voluntary Othering of the Self and its subsequent colonisation. After the initial setback in Milan, Prospero emerges as the absolute figure of authority who has learnt to channel his scholarship to political ends. Landing as a hapless exile on the island he quickly colonises

the racial Other (Ariel, Caliban) and then proceeds to discipline subversive Others within the ruling class (Antonio, Sebastian) and among the plebeians (Stephano, Trinculo). These are stepping stones in his game plan of recuperating his dukedom through the union of Miranda and Ferdinand. But paradoxically, he becomes more and more disempowered as he moves towards his goal. He abjures magic and Miranda, the two most potent weapons for wielding power on the island, foregoes the plan of punishing his usurpers, releases the colonial subjects from bondage and returns to Milan, not to rule but to "retire" (5.1.311). The marriage alliance that helps his return also puts Milan's independence in permanent jeopardy, as henceforth the descendants of Ferdinand, the future king of Naples, shall be its rulers. Prospero is guilty of subjecting Milan (and himself as its duke) to "most ignoble stooping" (1.2.116) - the very charge he brings against Antonio to label him as a traitor to his country. The self-consuming nature of the colonial project becomes evident at the moment of its triumph which also "signals the banishment of its supreme exponent" (Brown 1985).

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Write a note on the theme of colonialism and the operations of power in this play.

(i) : Gender

Gendered metaphor, surcharged with the implicit fear of castration and pleasure of sexual gratification, has been traditionally used to express the apprehensions and anticipations surrounding territorial expansion. The desired geographical region is frequently eroticised as one of many variants of the female figure - the deviant, the insubordinate, the castrator, the virgin, the devotee - all of which justify male occupation. The interchangeability of sexual and political tropes affecting the male/ruler vis-à-vis woman/nation is also witnessed in *The Tempest*. Male empowerment occurs through exorcising (Sycorax), trading (Claribel) or possessing (Miranda) the woman's body. The play meticulously avoids an actual assessment of the comparative powers of Sycorax and Prospero by excluding her from the text : she dies long before Prospero's acquisition of the island. Yet she operates as an absent reference point to justify white male supremacy.[9] She is produced as a point-by-point counter to Prospero: she is sexually deviant, consorts with the devil, practices "sorceries terrible", imposes oppressive rule through "abhorred commands" (1.2.319, 264, 273). Prospero, by contrast, is almost asexual, has "Providence divine" on his side (1.2.159), practices white magic, and is an enlightened sovereign with the charitable mission of uplifting Caliban and freeing Ariel. Their respective progenies further underscore their contrasting productivity — Caliban is bestial, deformed and lustful, Miranda is innocent, beautiful and virtuous. The wholesale Othering of Sycorax even after her death proves that her symbolic function as an alternative power structure - non-European and matriarchal - is a source of anxiety for white supremacist discourse. She must be physically, ideologically and politically destroyed for the absolute triumph of European patriarchy over other cultures and races.

The apprehension generated by female presence is so great that even Prospero's wife, the mother of Miranda, is banished from the narrative. The importance of physical procreation is minimised as Prospero, the father, is given total control over his child. He nurtures and educates Miranda, shapes her moral and aesthetic perception and, not the least, regulates her sexuality. Like the Christian God who created mankind, Prospero is simultaneously the father and the mother, moulding Miranda's persona. Women have no agency in political manoeuvres but they are crucial components in such negotiations engaged in by male authority. Alonso possesses a daughter, Claribel, who can be exchanged for political and economic privileges in Mediterranean Africa. Prospero owns a daughter and is understandably anxious about her sexuality, as it is the commodity that lures Caliban into rape and justifies the island's takeover, just as it entraps Ferdinand in marriage and aids his re-entry into Milan. The issue at stake is the male ruler's possession and control over the productive machinery - the woman's body - either by her father or her husband. Miranda's commodification is made explicit by the language of the marketplace used by Prospero while betrothing her to Ferdinand: "Then, as my *gift*, and thine own *acquisition*/ Worthily purchased, take my daughter" (4.1.13-14, italics added).

The interchangeability of sexual and political tropes affecting the male/ruler vis-à-vis woman/ nation is witnessed in "The Tempest". Male empowerment occurs through exorcising, trading, or possessing the woman's body..... The woman's position in the negotiations in this play is at the lowest rung of gender hierarchy.

Various kinds of power relations in *The Tempest* are mediated by the language of sexual desire and procreation. Prospero's trust "beget[s]" Antonio's usurping impulse (1.2.94), Sebastian heralds Antonio's proposal of displacing Alonso as "a birth…/ Which throes thee much to yield" (2.1.234-35), Caliban tempts Stephano and Trinculo to join his conspiracy with "the beauty of his [Prospero's] daughter" (3.2.100), Prospero hands over Miranda to Ferdinand as "his rich gift" (4.1.8). The woman's position in all these negotiations is at the lowest rung of gender hierarchy: she is the foot which can never presume to "tutor" the (male) head (1.2.470). Yet, despite all the control and subordination of woman's sexuality, the power to procreate is vested in her body. Miranda can breed Calibans as well as Ferdinands or a female child; she can even be infertile. In the early sixteenth the inability of Catherine, Henry VIII's queen, to produce a male heir had wrought lasting changes in the politico-religious fabric of England: from Catholicism to Protestantism and from feudal to absolutist monarchy. The future of monarchical dominance depends on what the woman ultimately produces. This vests her with an autonomy that is beyond male supervision. She is moreover, simultaneously vital and marginal to colonial and dynastic enterprise: Prospero's designs on the island and Milan would never have materialised in the absence of Miranda. Prospero can barter her as he pleases but even as a commodity she holds the key to his empowerment. The ambivalence of gender relations problematises the patriarchal discourse of power in and outside the civil state, particularly when female entities seize power over the state and over their own sexuality, like Sycorax or Queen Elizabeth.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

The Tempest endorses patriarchy by minimising or exercising the role of woman. Comment.

UNIT - 3
SUB UNIT I: PLOT AND STRUCTURE

CONTENT STRUCTURE

(a) Plot & Structure

(b) Genre

(a) : Analogous Structure

The Tempest adheres to the unity of time and place as all action takes place on the island within the span of three hours. Prospero states very clearly that the "time 'twist six and now" (1.2.240), i.e., three hours, must be utilised by him to complete his project of retrieving Milan or else his "fortunes/ Will ever after droop" (1.2.183). This cohesion is reflected in its structural balance. Thematic concerns are portrayed through analogous and interrelated action that highlights similarities and differences between multiple characters, attitudes and perceptions. There are four usurpations - two successful, which occurred in the past and two unsuccessful belonging to the present. The second successful usurpation, that is Prospero's taking over of the island however, is presented as justified and natural removing the stigma of violence and duplicity normally associated with such acts. Instead the focus is diverted to Prospero's project of reclaiming his dukedom which is a re-enactment of the first usurpation in the reverse process : Alonso who had aided Antonio to dethrone Prospero will now remove Antonio to relocate Prospero. Stephano and Trinculo's plot to kill Prospero acts as a comic parallel to the Antonio-Sebastian conspiracy in 2.1, and parodies their efforts at seizing political power. all analogues however, work to create a balance. Some raise questions that cannot be answered within the play's structural framework. The desires and fortunes of Caliban and Ferdinand made to duplicate each other to juxtapose lust and love, illegitimate and legitimate sexual liaisons, imperfect and ideal service, and their consequent punishments and rewards. This contrast privileges parental and mutual consent over coercive union stigmatising Caliban as a rapist and extolling Ferdinand as the exemplary suitor but it obscures the racial prejudice that would never allow Caliban an access to Miranda even if he were to outdo Ferdinand in appropriate conduct. Analogous action is thus deployed to confine the issues of good and bad, right and wrong within a racist, Euro-centric framework even while proclaiming their apparent neutrality. This is particularly evident in the the Prospero/Sycorax parallel that justifies the Eurocentric patriarchal values and condemns non-European, matriarchal perspectives by aligning the latter with evil, malignant devil worship. The cast list also plays upon the sense of balance

The Tempest adheres to unity of time and place as all action takes place on the island within the span of three hours. A cohesion is reflected in its structural balance. Thematic concerns are portrayed through analogous and interrelated action that highlights similarities and differences between multiple characters, attitudes, perceptions… However some questions remain unanswered within the play's structural framework.

through similarities and contrasts: both Prospero and Alonso have wicked brothers; Caliban serves as a foil to Ariel, Miranda and Ferdinand; as Sycorax and her child to Prospero and his daughter.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. *The Tempest* features an analogous structure — Comment.

Plot

(c) : Act Division

The structure of Acts 1 to 5 is patterned on the model forwarded by Guarini [see **GENRE**]. Act 1 narrates the events that have occurred before the play's action starts. Act 2 intensifies the plot's complexity and sustains audience interest by giving something new to chew on (*nuovo cibo*) — the fresh intrigues of Antonio-Sebastian and Caliban. Act 3 resorts to *ordine comico* or comic plotting to forward the main action and add new twists — Ferdinand is subjected to labour, Ariel sows dissension among the clowns, presents a banquet masque and confronts the "three men of sin" (3.3.54) with their past crimes which initiates remorse in Alonso. Act 4 brings partial fulfilment of the main project together with the climax of the intrigue (*tutto nodo*) — the betrothal masque solemnises the Ferdinand-Miranda union while Caliban and the king's company are brought to such height of suffering that a tragic catastrophe seems imminent. Act 5 executes a credible miracle, which is basic to comic denouement to affect a final resolution — Prospero learns the virtue of forgiveness from Ariel and resolves to pardon his enemies, his aim of reclaiming Milan is realised through a combination of mercy and blackmail amidst a general sense of wonder. Shakespeare's special input is the sense of incomplete reconciliation (see **GENRE**) and the internalisation of the themes of resurrection and providential grace: Prospero's project is directed equally at self-conquest and at victory over his enemies, Alonso escapes from sorrow only after he has repented and turned into a better human being (re-constituted himself) and Caliban comprehends the folly of his own actions before becoming "wise hereafter" (5.1.295).

(d) : Prologue

Another innovation is to circumscribe the action of the play proper that takes place in Acts 2 to 5 by a double prologue and a clearly demarcated epilogue. Act 1, scene 1 serves as a dramatic prologue while Act 1, scene 2 provides a narrative prologue. The opening scene of the play throws us in the middle of hectic action : the inmates of a ship trying desperately to save themselves in the face of a raging tempest. Although the audience is totally in the dark regarding the story, major thematic concerns of the play are focused upon in this violent, action-packed scene. The limits of political authority are delineated by pitting them against a topsy-turvy nature. Tudor and Stuart absolutist monarchy proclaimed itself as an all-powerful, God-ordained institution that extended and reflected natural hierarchy in the human sphere. Yet when Gonzalo entreats the boatswain to "be

patient" he unambiguously declares natural calamity to be beyond royal jurisdiction, "What cares these roarers for the name of King ?" (1.1.16-17). The analogy between political and natural order crumbles as he challenges Gonzalo, "If you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more" (1.1.21-23). The notion of an all-pervading, linear hierarchic social structure is displaced by an awareness of situation-specific contending authorities : to fight the storm, political prerogative must give way to the professional supremacy of the boatswain. His peremptory orders to "keep below", "To cabin", "Silence" (1.1.11, 17) must be obeyed by the king, the prince and the courtiers alike just as Prospero must learn the importance of forgiveness from his servant, Ariel. Master and servant exchange places for the very survival of the political status quo that is being momentarily inverted.

As the next scene unfolds, the deeper implications of the natural and political upheaval come to the fore. The king's company has indeed "assist[ed] the storm" (1.1.14) — had Alonso and Antonio not usurped Milan the tempest would never have occurred. The antagonistic relationship between nature and human institutions is re-set as a corollary one : chaos in nature reflects a subversion of the political order by the very men responsible for upholding it. On hindsight, Antonio's vituperative language in 1.1.43-44 seems to anticipate his vile nature enumerated by Prospero's tale. It also affords a clue to Sebastian's linguistic violence (1.1.40-41), which forewarns the audience of a similar villainy although it is illustrated only in 2.1. More important, the umbilical link subversion and authority, good and evil is underscored, problematising these categories. Just as royal misdemeanour, i.e., Alonso's aid to Antonio too dethrone Prospero causes a breach in nature's harmony in 1.1, so to Prospero's withdrawal from public life "Awakened" Antonio's "evil nature"; his boundless trust "Like a good parent, did beget of him [Antonio]/ A falsehood in its contrary" (1.2.91-95). No matter how he puts it. Prospero is accountable for his own fate as he creates conditions that foster Antonio's evil genius; just as later he has to admit the responsibility for Caliban, "This thing of darkness /I/ Acknowledge mine" (5.1.275-76). To draw our attention from these disturbing surmises Miranda mediates the unravelling of the past — Prospero's admonitions and her reactions guide the audience to a sympathetic response towards the hapless monarch, Prospero who, ironically, emerges as a strongman at the helm of affairs on the island. Antonio, Miranda and Caliban expose various facets of the nature/nurture binary, as does Prospero who has educated himself on the ways of governance during his stay on the island. Although Prospero's narrative of the past is central to the scene, it actually includes two other narratives of the past, that of Ariel and Caliban. Between them these multiple narratives offer alternative perspectives on the various thematic concerns of the play: order/disorder, authority/ subversion, civility/ savagery, parent-child relationship, good and bad governance, black and white magic etc. Act 1, scene 2 also re-defines the natural tempest of the previous scene as magical : this blurring of distinction between reality and illusion constitutes the core of the island's makeup. Finally, Ferdinand's arrival hints at the future course of action.

Act I Scene 1 serves as a dramatic prologue while Act I Scene 2 provides a narrative prologue. The opening scene throws us in the middle of a hectic action. Major thematic concerns are focused upon in this scene. In the next scene the deeper implications of the natural and political upheaval come to the fore…chaos in nature reflects a subversion of the political order by the very men responsible for upholding it.

(e) : Epilogue

The Epilogue replicates more starkly the idea of theatrical illusion voiced by Prospero in his "insubstantial pageant" speech (4.1.48-58) and foregrounds the relationship between the stage and the world. The fictional protagonist's fictional project of righting an imaginary wrong coincides with the real actor's genuine desire to please a real audience. This is not possible unless, Prospero like, he can weave his own magic upon the audience with an "art to enchant" (Epilogue 14) generating a willing suspension of disbelief. Viewed from this angle, the entire action of the play becomes an elaborate metaphor for theatrical activity. Prospero has retrieved his "dukedom", "pardoned the deceiver" and wishes to leave the "bare island" to return to Milan (Epilogue 6-8); the actor hopes to have entertained his audience and wishes to step down from the stage. But his "project. . .to please" (Epilogue 12-13) can neither materialise nor succeed without audience complicity just as Prospero's scheme is doomed to failure without the collaboration of Alonso, Ferdinand, Miranda and Ariel. The Epilogue recognises the audience as the final sanctioning authority for all theatre activity. Their applause endorses the illusion and releases the actor from the "bands" (Epilogue 9), their displeasure subjects him to their "Mercy" for deliverance (Epilogue 18). By invoking the religious terminology of "prayer" "Mercy" and "indulgence" (Epilogue 16-20) Shakespeare acknowledges the audience's absolute power as the god who authors and authorises the theatre.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Write a critical note on the plot of the play *The Tempest*.

(f) : Masque

Magic, music and masque combine in *The Tempest* to accentuate the exotic and spectacular effect of the play. The masque - an elaborate and stylised courtly entertainment with strong allegorical overtones that endorse the status quo - was a particular favourite of the Jacobean nobility, and James I in particular.[10] It combines "poetic drama, music, song, dance, splendid costuming, and stage spectacle" and has a mythological or allegorical plot (Abrams 109). The actors were often royal and courtly persons whose status in real life corresponded to the status of the roles they played in the masque. For instance, if a masque portrayed the Roman gods and included the king and queen in the cast they would invariably play the roles of Jupiter and Juno respectively, i.e., the king and queen of the gods. In other words, the masque reiterates real-life hierarchy and order in a manner defined and endorsed by the existing authority. The anti-masque, a form developed by Ben Jonson, portrays grotesque characters whose ludicrous, disruptive actions elicit humour. It serves as a foil to the harmony and elegance of the masque proper and as a reminder of the unruly elements of society that need to be subjugated.

(g) : Banquet Masque

For some critics like Enid Welsford, the entire action of *The Tempest* is an elaborate masque with Prospero conducting the masque proper and subduing the masque presented by Caliban and

his group.[11] But such a view excludes the other dramatic possibilities of the play that have yielded rich dividends in more recent times - issues of colonialism, legitimacy of Prospero's claims etc. Elements of the masque and the anti-masque, while strewn across the play, are concentrated in two scenes - the banquet (3.3.18 *SD*-83 *SD*) and the betrothal masque (4.1.60-138 *SD*). No satisfactory allegorical explanation of the banquet scene has been provided although attempts have been madeto compare it with Biblical banquets like the one with which the Devil tempts Christ during his thirty days' fast and even with Christ's last supper. But the allegorical implication of both these banquets are at odds with the allegorical function of the banquet in *The Tempest*.

The Devil's banquet tries to lure Christ into breaking his fast and his allegiance to God, replacing spiritual sustenance with material sustenance. The shipwrecked aristocrats, particularly Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian are starved materially and spiritually, although they are aware only of their physical discomforts and seek succour accordingly. When various magical shapes appear to the accompaniment of music and invite them to partake of the victuals on a well-laid table, it is a heaven-sent opportunity for the king and his courtiers to satisfy their hunger. But the display vanishes with Ariel's words reminding the sinners of their grave spiritual lapses. As in masques, the spectacle of the banquet delineates the difference between right and wrong : it establishes a contrast between spiritual and material sustenance to initiate repentance in the guilty. But unlike a full-scale independent masque it does not culminate in the final victory of good over evil precisely because it is a device within a play serving a specific and temporary function. Directed by Prospero and executed by Ariel it is intended to make Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian admit their sins and seek forgiveness. That only one of the three (Alonso) responds positively is a comment on the limitations of Prospero's directorial powers. Conversely, if his design were to succeed fully the play would have ended at that point!

'The Tempest' is an elaborate masque with Prospero conducting the masque proper and subduing the anti-masque presented by Caliban and his group. The Banquet masque is allegorical. The spectacle of the banquet delineates the difference between right and wrong. But it does not culminate in the final victory of good over evil.

(h) : Betrothal Masque

This conflict of interest between the play's intention and that of the masques included in it is witnessed in the betrothal masque as well. Prospero organises it both as a spectacle to be enjoyed by Ferdinand and Miranda and as a means of securing heavenly blessings for the newly betrothed couple. It celebrates the joys and responsibilities of marriage insisting upon their interrelation. Marriage is the socially sanctioned mode of controlling sexuality hence the exclusion of Venus, the goddess of love, who is perceived as partial to any union irrespective of its legitimacy. Her effect is considered disruptive as it defies hierarchy and existing authority. One of the express aims of hierarchy and existing authority. One of the express aims of the young couple (4.1.95). The "contract of true love" (4.1.84) celebrated here demands the vows of celibacy before marriage, "no bed-right shall be paid/ Till Hymen's torch be lighted" 4.1.96). Only then shall Juno and Ceres's gifts of honours riches, winterless year, foison and plenty be showered upon them (4.1.106-17). Miranda and Ferdinand are in love but their union is also a crucial component in Prospero's grand design of punishing his enemies and re-inheriting Milan, hence he can never allow their passion to overstep the

limits he sets for it The masque therefore extols permissible love in a manner that prevents any interrogation of the authority that permits it (Prospero). But the masque is abruptly disrupted at the very moment when Prospero seems to be at the pinnacle of his magical powers with the gods at his behest. Caliban's "foul conspiracy" (4.1.139) initiates a double attack on the illusion of total supremacy created by Prospero. It reminds us that Prospero's recovery of Milan is far from assured and that his hold over the island is far from absolute. Secondly, it underscores the disruptive potential of love/ lust by reviving memories of Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda. The young lovers have so far abided by Prospero's strictures but their mutual attraction remains susceptible to the weakness of the flesh. The interrupted masque draws our attention to the true nature of the goddesses as well : they are "insubstantial pageant" that "Leave not a rack behind" (4.1.155-56). If so, then the future they promise Miranda and Ferdinand - a future that Prospero wishes to guarantee for them - is equally insubstantial, they are vulnerable and subject to the vagaries of fate as the rest of mankind. The betrothal masque, despite all its spectacle, does not usher in the end envisaged by Prospero but its very failure moves the play's action towards its conclusion.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

What purpose does the masque serve in the play *The Tempest*.

SUB-UNIT II : GENRE

(a) : Tragicomedy

The genre affiliation of *The Tempest* is less problematic than many other Shakespearean plays. This swan song of Shakespeare, is placed alongside *Pericles*, *Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* to form the group identified as his Last Plays all of which are categorised as Romance, a genre that often doubles as pastoral tragicomedy. However, even this simple definition hints at a mixed genre that includes four different overlapping elements : romance, pastoral, tragedy and comedy. Such a fusion was derided by many classical purists of the Elizabethan age including Sir Philip Sidney who denounced the tragicomedy as a "mongrel" mix of "kings and clowns," "hornpipes and funerals" with "neither decency nor discretion" (Sidney 46). Yet tastes change, and by Jacobean times this mixed genre became the rage especially for elite entertainment. Encouraged by the popularity of Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608), other playwrights began trying their hand at this form, and Shakespeare was never one to be left behind. To pre-empt the kind of reservations stated above, Fletcher's "Preface" to the play forwards an inclusive definition of the form based paradoxically on negatives :

> "A tragic-comedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect that it wants deaths, which is enough to make in no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned; so that a god is as lawful in this as in a tragedy, and mean people as in a comedy (Fletcher 14)."

Fletcher's formulation, as also his play's title, draws from the Italian writer of tragicomedy, Giambattista Guarini whose *Il Pastor Fido* [*The Faithful Shepherd*] (1589) was not a great success. This failure led Guarini to write *Compendio della Poesia Tragicomica* (1601), a defence of the genre that frames the laws for such drama. He counters Renaissance attacks of hybridity and lack of unity of action by comparing the new genre to an alloy, bronze (stronger than its separate components, tin and copper), which fuses tragedy and comedy through a process of careful selection rather than grafting one upon the other. The writer of tragicomedy, Guarini elaborates, must take from tragedy noble characters not noble action, a credible but not necessarily a historical story, "heightened yet tempered effects, delight not sorrow, the danger not the death" (Hirst 4). The comic components should be "laughter which is not dissolute, modest pleasures, a feigned crisis, an unexpected happy ending and — above all — the comic plotting" (Hirst 4). Temperance and comic plotting are the keynotes here: extreme sorrow or bawdy are to be avoided, as are large, sweeping actions conducive to tragedy.

Shakespeare follows this model fairly closely including, rather uncharacteristically, Guarini's insistence on the unities of time, place and action. *The Tempest* is about the ruling families of Milan and Naples, and while some like Antonio and Sebastian are capable of inflicting tragedy upon others; no character is inflexible as in the tragic mould. In fact, a main project of the play is to educate and re-fashion oneself which enables one to avert the tragic impact of hamartia. To mis-appropriate, from *Macbeth, The Tempest* is a tale about "what is done can be undone". Ferdinand's log-bearing slavery is like some "painful" sports, whose "labour/ Delight in them sets off" : his backbreaking work is offset by the pleasure derived from Miranda's company. Danger too, is not coupled with death : murder lurks around the corner for Prospero, Alonso and Gonzalo, but never materialises. Although the Caliban-Stephano-Trinculo passages generate slapstick laughter that occasionally borders on the vulgar, they are never allowed to override the general sense of well being pervading the play especially as the audience are aware that Ferdinand and Alonso's grief is caused by lack on information (each presumes that the other is dead) and is soon to be dispelled. The unexpected happy ending surprises Alonso's company and the audience differently : parents, children, enemies, friends and lovers are united on stage amidst tears, rejoicing (and some sullenness on behalf of Antonio and Sebastian) much as the audience expect but they too are pleasantly taken by the scene of the lovers playing chess, which as William Poole illustrates in his "False Play : Shakespeare and Chess", has complex overtones. Comic plotting and resolution are integral to the tragicomedy.

Tragic action inexorably rises to a momentous climax followed by an overwhelming catastrophe but comic plotting comprises several minor crises that are resolved along the way towards a final reconciliation. *The Tempest* begins with a calamitous storm where everybody seems to perish but the very next scene resolves this anxiety, the tension regarding Ferdinand's imprisonment is resolved almost simultaneously as the audience is informed by the invisible Prospero of his real intentions of uniting him with Miranda; both the scenes of Act 2 initiate new intrigues, against Alonso and Prospero respectively, only to be thwarted by the next two Acts, and the last act reunites everybody, literally as well as in a more deeper sense.

(b) : Incomplete Reconciliation

Shakespeare's unique contribution to this format is the concept of incomplete reconciliation: except for the relieved boatswain, the delighted Gonzalo and the core quartet of Alonso, Prospero, Ferdinand and Miranda, nobody joins the hallowed circle of true deliverance. Caliban's final declaration (5.1.295-96) continues to vex the critics, Sebastian and Antonio are forced to bide their time under Prospero's threat of "justify[ing]" them "traitors" (5.1.128), Ariel is yet to be free, Stephano and Trinculo are still feeling the effects of their punishment (5.1.282-87) and the absolute muteness of the courtiers remind one of Antonio's contemptuous comment, "They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk./ They'll tell the clock to any business that/ We say befits the hour" (2.1.293-95). Miranda's inability to distinguish between good and bad (5.1.281-84), the unreliability of the courtiers (already witnessed once during Prospero's dislodging) and the ominous silence of the two royal brothers signal a fractured ending more akin to the problem plays than the *happily ever after* conclusion of typical comedies. The respite is purely temporary with the threat of treachery repeating itself on even more credulous and unsuspecting rulers.

(c) : Pastoral Play

Guarini and Fletcher make tragicomedy synonymous with pastoral drama but the pastoral is a more comprehensive genre with an ancient lineage. Its classical antecedents can be traced back to Theocritus of 3rd century BC, Bion and Moschus perfected the form, which passed on to English poets like Spenser through Virgil, Dante, Petrarch and many others. The classical through Virgil, Dante, Petrarch and many others. The classical of the shepherd's life in poems (*pastor* in Latin means shepherd), but Italians like Sannazzaro and Tasso extended it to the field of prose and drama respectively. However, England also had a long-standing native tradition of pastoral drama as in the medieval Nativity plays where the shepherd's rustic life is both eulogized and made fun of: the two most popular plays in the Wakefield Cycle are *Prima Pastorum* and *Secunda Pastorum [The First Shepherd* and *The Second Shepherd*]. The pastoral in Renaissance England permeated all forms: Spenser's poem *Shepherd's Calender* (1579); Sidney's prose romance *Arcadia* (1581-84) are but a few examples. As Polonius's semi-farcical comment testifies, "The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical historical-comical-pastoral…" (Hamlet 2.2.380-83), English drama was particularly susceptible to the pastoral precisely because it could be moulded to suit all genres. In *The Tempest* for instance, the island's idyllic backdrop serves equally well for the romantic scenes between Ferdinand and Miranda, for foregrounding the latent violence of Antonio, Sebastian and Caliban, or the grief and remorse of Alonso, as also for the magical activities of Prospero and his spirits

This cult of nature however, is very different from the one promoted by the nineteenth century Romantics. For them, the natural world represented in the pastoral is the real world, an actual state of nature prior to civil society, to which all humanity should return as its final destination. The Elizabethan and the Jacobean pastoral is an artificial reconstruction of nature in what is perceived as its ideal state. Nature is not extolled for its own sake as by the Romantics but serves as an instructive contrast to the civilized world; it contrasts a natural and beneficial hierarchy with an ossified and

congealed social order that needs to be rectified immediately. The pastoral thus becomes a mode of critiquing the existing social structure not in order to displace it but to re-form it in a manner that would extend and perpetuate its existence. Its censure is conservative, not radical because it is aimed at the ruling class for their ultimate benefit. Kings, courtiers and people of aristocratic descent play at being shepherds while real herdsmen are either marginal or absent. In *The Tempest* Prospero roughs it out in his "poor cell" (1.2.20; 5.1.302) acting as the allegorical Christian shepherd tending his flock, which includes his daughter, the native islanders and the shipwrecked royalty. The island gives him a second chance to redeem himself as a ruler, to learn the rules of the game and becomea successful monarch (not necessarily a good one). He attempts, with various degrees of success, to correct Alonso, Caliban, Antonio, Sebastian, Stephano, Trinculo and, most important, himself, all of which result in a correction of his political position: his reinstatement as the Duke of Milan. Since the re-inscription of status quo is the ultimate concern, the pastoral world is never the final terminus; it is more of a stopover, a reformatory from where people return to the real world.[13] As in other plays, the pastoral in *The Tempest* symbolizes a norm against which the most powerful socio-political institution of the time — the court — is measured, found wanting, and re-fashioned to maintain its hegemony. The play participates in the conscious artistic project of mutating a rich and ancient tradition to fulfill the organic need for a particular from, the pastoral, arising from a particular context: a context aptly described by Lawrence Stone as *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*

(d) : Romance

Not all pastoral tragic-comedies are romances but in Shakespeare's last plays the two often coalesce as in *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. Fletcher's definition cited above affords a clue : a play inhabited by gods and commoners alike is conducive to the co-habitation of the natural and the super-natural which accounts for much of the fantasy-world aura of *The Tempest*. Caliban's island is replete with pagan gods, elves, demons, spirits, monsters, buffoons, sailors, kings and courtiers. Here Ceres, Juno and Iris descend from the heavens to bless a human betrothal, evildoers like Antonio and Sebastian are stopped by magical spirits, Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo are hounded by eerie dogs and goblins. But mere co-existence of the human and the non-human does not add up to a romance ambience. *The Tempest* achieves this effect through the dual strategy of separating the real world from the illusory and by vesting the illusory world with ambiguity and subjectivity.

A play inhabited by gods and commoners alike is conducive to the co-habitation of the natural and the supernatural which accounts for much of the fantasy - world aura of "The Tempest". The play achieves the romantic through the dual strategy of separating the real world from the illusory and by vesting the illusory world with ambiguity and subjectivity.

The geographically specific locations of Milan and Naples circumscribe the action on the island. They are also situated in different time zones : the island belongs to the present while the story of Milan and Naples belongs to the past and the future. Yet there is a causal link between the two worlds : what has happened in Milan and Naples determines the course of action on the island; in turn, the events occurring on the island will shape the future of the two kingdoms.

The operating systems of the two worlds are equally distinct. In the real world power succeeds through political intrigues, covert alliances and Machiavellian manipulation while magic is ineffectual. On the island magic is all-powerful : it subdues conspiracies and recalcitrant subjects, makes marriages, transforms enemies into friends. The distance between the two worlds is charted through Prospero's gesture of dressing and disrobing : the magic robe and the magic staff are essential for controlling the affairs of the island but the moment he starts speaking of Milan and Naples, he must "pluck" his "magic garments" from himself and lay his magic staff to rest (1.2.24-25). The pre-condition for his triumphal return to Milan is the formal abjuration of magic accompanied by the breaking of his staff and the drowning of his books (5.1.50-57). Yet this is the very source of anxiety: Prospero the magician has retrieved Milan, how long will he be able to hold on to it as a plain human being ?

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Comment on the genre of *The Tempest.*

UNIT- 4
SUB-UNIT I: LANGUAGE

CONTENT STRUCTURE

Sub-Unit I : Language
Sub-Unit II : Characterization
Conclusion
Bibliography
Assignments

(a) : Linguistic Colonisation

The Tempest is as much about linguistic colonisation as about territorial aggression. The first altercation between Caliban and Prospero and Miranda revolves round the teaching of language. Miranda claims to have given Caliban the gift of articulation: she has taken "pains to make…[him] speak" (1.2.354), has "endowed…[his] purposes/ With words that made them known" (1.2.357-58). Caliban acknowledges this claim when he says Prospero has taught him "how/ To name the bigger light, and how the less" (1.2.334-35). Together, Prospero and Miranda can maintain that they have civilised Caliban because language is the basic distinction between human beings and beasts. Language is also the primary means of comprehending the world, without it one can neither name nor distinguish what one perceives. Yet, Caliban's "gabble" as Miranda labels it, was fully invested with "meaning" (1.2.356) much before the arrival of the father-daughter team: he could make perfect sense of the world around him, knew all the secrets of the island, could distinguish accurately between "fresh springs" and "brine-pits", "barren place and fertile" (1.2.338). Caliban then, must have had a language of his own, incomprehensible to the new inhabitants. Yet, like the early European settlers of America, Miranda reduces this alien tongue to the category of non-language and confidently proceeds to impose her *superior* language over Caliban.

In teaching him their language, Prosper and Miranda are effectively erasing his native tongue and it is this simultaneous erasure and imposition that Caliban vehemently opposes. Language is much more than articulation; it is the mode of comprehending, contextualising and communicating reality. It is also the vital medium of shaping our thoughts, we cannot think without language. Thoughts are as much shaped and expressed by language as that language is shaped by its specific context. The lives of the people who speak it, the terrain which they inhabit, their cultural, social and religious practices, their economic activities - all contribute to the development of a language. Caliban's native language, since it pre-dates the arrival of those who enslave him, fosters images and memories of freedom, of his inalienable right to the island. Erasure of this language will entail the removal of these indigenous associations and reduce his consciousness to a blank slate - virtual *tabula rasa* - on which new inscriptions can be wrought at the coloniser's will. Moreover, both Miranda and Prospero encode this linguistic colonisation as the charitable mission undertaken out of pity for the brutish, inarticulate native by a superior people speaking a superior language (1.2.353-34). Caliban's

learning of this language will involve an interiorisation and acknowledgement of this supremacy. Caliban's refusal to bear to this ideological baggage is manifested in his conscious deployment of the received language solely to curse :

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse.
The red plague rid you
For learning me your language! (1.2.363-65)

Much before he joins hands with Stephano and Trinculo to defy political enslavement, Caliban opposes linguistic subjugation by turning the so-called civilised (and civilising) language into a weapon of resistance against the very masters who have taught him the language. Language thus becomes an essential site for the confrontation between the coloniser and the colonised.

(b) : Linguistic Affinities

Language also works as a crucial vehicle for charting affinities and enmities, for constructing moral and social hierarchies. Caliban is incapable of imbibing "any print of goodness" that Miranda's superior tongue is supposed to transmit and is consequently an inappropriate match for Miranda. Ferdinand, by contrast, not only speaks the same language, he is "the best of them that speak this speech" (1.2.429-30), making him the most "suitable boy" for the chaste and virtuous Miranda. Aristocratic articulation, as distinct from the plebeian prose of the mariners, Stephano and Trinuclo, is in poetry. Prospero' calm assurance, "I have done nothing but in care of thee" (1.2.16), Gonzalo's flamboyant claims on behalf of his utopian commonwealth (2.1.150-67), Ferdinand's ecstasy, "Admired Miranda ! / Indeed the top of admiration" (3.1.37-38), Alonso's anguish, "the sea mocks / Our frustrate search on land" are invariably in iambic pentameter with emotive excesses or restraint marking the difference between the various personages. Ariel shares this elite sensibility as denoted by his use of blank verse. Antonio and Sebastian, the two villains of the play are, by virtue of their lineage, adept at similar articulation. But their threatening malevolence is indicated by their disruptive use of language, particularly in 2.1. They transform the means of communication into a persistent tool for interruption, rudely thwarting Adrian and Gonzalo's attempt to soothe the distraught Alonso. The text visually transmits the linguistic violence of their speech by positing the intrusive brevity of their lines against the relatively lengthier utterances of the courtiers :

SEBASTIAN The old cock.

ANTONIO The cockerel.

SEBASTIAN Done. The wager ?

ANTONIO A laughter.

SEBASTIAN A match.

ADRIAN Though this island seem to be desert —

ANTONIO Ha, ha, ha !

SEBASTIAN So, you're paid

ADRIAN Uninhabitable, and almost inaccessible —

SEBASTIAN Yet —

ADRIAN Yet —

ANTONIO He could not mis't. (2.1.32-43)

Segregation on the basis of one's articulation is problematised by Caliban. He matches the inane speech of Trinculo and Stephano, which, in turn, parodies the linguistic violence of Antonio and Sebastian. His first exchange with the drunken jester and the butler begins with mutual misrecognition, i.e., with a failure of communication. If Trinculo mistakes Caliban for "a fish", "a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-John", Caliban returns the compliment by identifying the foolish pair first as spirits and later as "brave god[s]" that "bear…celestial liquor" (2.2.25-26, 63, 115). Their coarse cacophony (2.2.41-54) finds an apt counterpart in Caliban's, "Ban, Ban, Caliban / Has a new master- get a new man" (2.2.180-81). These dregs of the civilised world are as impervious to improvement as Caliban, the "born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick" (4.1.188-89). Together they constitute a dissident periphery that needs constant monitoring and surveillance. But Caliban is equally capable of using philosophic language at par with Prospero. His wistful longing for dreams as a substitute reality is no less poetic than Prospero's reflection on the transience of human life, "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.156-58):

The clouds methought would open, and show riches Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked I cried to dream again. (3.2.141-44)

Caliban's facile movement through the contours of sophisticated and base articulation adds another dimension to his subversive potential. Apart from a recalcitrant native who needs to be coercively colonised, he is a corrupter of the linguistic demarcation between the high and the low. He also poses the threat of contamination: faced with his obduracy Prospero frequently resorts to foul language reminiscent of Caliban's cursing, "thou tortoise", "poisonous slave", "hag-seed" (1.2.316, 319, 365). His levelling impulse not only erodes the graded distinctions of a social order profitable to hierarchic authority; his proximity engenders a topsyturvydom wherein figures of authority discard their distinctive linguistic identity to adopt that of the marginals.

(c) : Linguistic Euphemisation

In a way, Caliban's downgrading of superior language is complementary to the power-wielders' camouflaging of political designs and situations by means of tropes associated with love.[15] Prospero's serious lapse of duty that cost him his dukedom is re-designated in his narrative as the scholar's love for knowledge: he was "*transported* / And *rapt* in secret studies" (1.2.76-77, emphases added). The ensuing political and geographical dislocation - the exile from Milan - is presented as a fortunate fall, a relocation on both levels as the more power-wary overlord of a new territory. This is made possible, Prospero claims, through another kind of love, the filial bond between him and Miranda. She is the "cherubim" that "preserve[s]" him and enables him "to bear up / Against what should ensue" (1.2.152-58). This elaborate "euphemisation" (Brown 64) of political contests simultaneously validates the colonial project is by situating it within the all-encompassing design of "Providence

divine" (1.2.159). As Paul Brown observes, "the colonialist regime on the island" is construed as the end product of "charitable acts" by nature (sea, winds) and humans (Gonzalo) done "out of pity for the powerless exiles" at the behest of heavenly authority (Brown 60). And this grand blueprint of rescue and reinstallation can justify the enslaving of native inhabitants like Caliban as an exorcising of the wrong kind of love, namely lust and rape.

The euphemising project is necessarily extended to incorporate the recovery of power in the real world as well. The rhetoric of courtly love operates to make "bountiful Fortune" Prospero's "dear lady" and he must "court" the "auspicious star" failing which, his "fortunes / Will ever after droop" (1.2.178-84). And the apotheosis of courtly love is the union of Ferdinand and Miranda: it will transform the long-standing political enmity between Milan and Naples into an even more permanent political alliance that will re-assign Prospero his lost political status. The only instance of demystification, apart from Caliban's resistance to imposed language, is Trinculo and Stephano's endeavour to assess the monetary benefits of colonial acquisition. Trinculo thinks of capitalising on the English habit of paying "ten to see a dead Indian" while Stephano perceives Caliban as a prize catch worthy of being gifted to an emperor and of receiving due compensation in return (2.1.27-32, 67-69). But the comic encoding of this critique severely undermines its potency.

Claustrophobia as a Prominent Theme of *The Tempest*

The invigorating air of the pristine island is in marked contrast to the stifling, intrigue-ridden world of Milan and Naples. The old and new arrivals are meant to be rejuvenated by its "Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not" (3.2.137) but the topological openness of the terrain does nothing to dispel the strong sense of claustrophobia assailing most characters. The spatial and temporal confinement of the play's action - on a solitary water-bound landmass for precisely three hours - accentuates the feeling of stagnation. Ariel pines for release even as he faithfully carries out the orders of Prospero (1.2.243-44). Caliban, who was previously his "own king" is physically chained to a hard rock and kept from accessing the "rest o'th'island" (1.2.342-44). Ferdinand and Miranda are chafed by Prospero's restraining strictures. Antonio and Stephano, who feel choked by Alonso's dominance, are in fact encouraged by the opportunities provided by the isle to forcibly break this hegemony. In attempting this they re-enact the past where Antonio had similarly challenged the oppressive ascendancy of his brother. The island's serenity conceals a general sense of suffocation for which Prospero is primarily responsible.

SUB UNIT II: CHARACTERIZATION

(a) : Prospero

The conventional image of Prospero, elaborated upon by several critics, is that of an enlightened governor who relates justice with politics and is responsible for the moral regeneration of people and societies alike. Yet he is the most consistent and effective perpetrator of violence in the play. He begins by creating a storm that causes a shipwreck. He forces Ariel to recount and thereby re-live "Once in a month" the painful experience of being confined in an oak tree for twelve years to ensure his co-operation (1.2.261-96). He manacles and enslaves Caliban to light the "fire,/ Fetch in…wood,

and serve ... in offices" that "profit" him (1.2.311-13). One unsuccessful attempt at rape in the distant past provides all the justification he needs to disown his obligation to Caliban for his survival on the island and subject him to continuous ill treatment. He positively revels in egging the dogs to pursue Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban and orders his goblins to

grind their joints
With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews
With aged cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them
Than pard of cat o'mountain. (4.1.259-62)

The violence of his language is unmatched by any other character in *The Tempest*. He blackmails Antonio and Sebastian into submission by threatening to reveal their conspiracy against Alonso. Faced with the exposure, Antonio must "perforce…restore" Prospero's dukedom to him (5.1.132-34). The other acts of violence, by Antonio, Sebastian, Alonso, Caliban, Stephano or Trinculo, either belong to the past or are abortive. Yet their actions are designated as crimes that require punishment while Prospero's endeavours are legitimised in the name of justice. The play seems to assess the moral component of actions from an objective, neutral perspective but in effect it imposes the viewpoint of Prospero over that of others and encourages the audience/reader to do the same.

(b) and (c) : Miranda and Ferdinand

Miranda's iconic function in the play is similarly privileged. Her commodification to facilitate colonial and patriarchal enterprise has been already commented on in the sections on **COLONIALISM** and **GENDER** but the construct of an ideal daughter/lover epitomising mercy, compassion and obedience also requires scrutiny. Prominent instances of Miranda's naturally sympathetic nature are her concern over the storm-tossed aristocrats and Ferdinand's enforced slavery. But it is interesting that Miranda's sympathies are directed wholly at the shipwrecked nobility whom she has never seen, the play provides no instance of her sensitivity to the predicament of the islanders, including Caliban. She is also subject to a convenient amnesia that enables her to fall in love with the son of her father's enemy moments after she has wept over Alonso's ill treatment of Prospero. The Miranda-Ferdinand courtship and betrothal can be read as an idyllic partnership based on equality. Miranda's presence lightens the hardship of bonded labour for Ferdinand:

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. (3.1.4-7)

Miranda is equally eager to undertake the brutal physical activity of log-bearing to provide respite to the weary prince : "If you'll sit down, / I'll bear your logs the while" (3.1.23-24). She has never offered to do the same for Caliban. The contrast between authorized and illicit relationships is underscored by placing the two wooers of Miranda - Ferdinand and Caliban - in the same predicament. Both are enslaved by Prospero and subjected to rigorous toil but Ferdinand's innate

civility is borne out by his elaborate courting that emphasises unconditional surrender and mutual love : "My heart fly to your service, there resides / To make me slave to it" (3.1.65-66). Caliban's predatory lust that seeks no prior permission highlights the absence of both nature and nurture. Interestingly, Ferdinand's claim over Miranda is charted in terms of linguistic affinity. Miranda struggles to teach Caliban her language but Ferdinand's surprised exclamation on hearing her speak - "My language ? Heavens !" (1.2.429) - denotes a compatibility of thought and expression occasioned by similarity of race, status and civilisation. They belong to a world which will forever remain alien to Caliban.

The contrast between authorized and illicit relationships is underscored by placing the two wooers of Miranda-Ferdinand and Caliban-in the same predicament. Both are enslaved by Prospero and subjected to rigorous toil but Ferdinand's innate civility is borne out by his elaborate courting that emphasizes unconditional surrender and mutual love.

Focus on the young, handsome, well-matched pair however, obscures the basic inequality constituting their relationship. Ferdinand's choice of his mate is based on worldly experience: he has encountered and courted numerous accomplished women and can see that Miranda supersedes them all:

> For several virtues
> Have I liked several women; never any
> With so full soul but some defect in her
> Did quarrel with the noblest grace she ow'd,
> And put it to the foil.
> But you, O you,
> So perfect and so peerless, are created
> Of every creature's best. (3.1.42-48)

Miranda's love, on the other hand, is allowed no choice and springs from ignorance. Her negotiations with the opposite sex is limited to a lecherous half-beast and an imperious father; Ferdinand is her first encounter with an eligible male. Her lack of experience conforms to the stereotype of the innocent virgin, highly rated in the marriage market, but it also makes her susceptible to mistakes in her selection of a life-partner. Her faulty judgement comes to the fore in the last act when she clubs all the newcomers as "beauteous mankind" belonging to a "brave new world" (5.1.183-84) with breathless wonder, unable to distinguish between the moral fibre of a Gonzalo and an Antonio. Deficient discerning abilities does not auger well for a queen or a wife, roles that Miranda will have to fulfil in the immediate future. The problem is compounded by Miranda's readiness to play the devoted spouse to the hilt : Ferdinand can cheat her as much as he likes and she will gladly deny the deception. Prospero has indeed fashioned an ideal daughter/wife/queen whose desires never overstep her father's design (she dutifully falls in love

Miranda's love is allowed no choice and springs from ignorance. Her negotiations with the opposite sex is limited to a lecherous half-beast and an imperious father; Ferdinand is the first encounter he has with an eligible suitor.

with the man Prospero designates for her); who promises unconditional surrender to her future husband and becomes the docile medium of the transference of power, both in the colonial and national context. The outcome of the lovers' union very clearly demarcates the difference between the sexes - while Ferdinand is promised future sovereignty of two leading Italian cities, Miranda will merely be required to produce young Ferdinands instead on Calibans.

(d) : Caliban

See relevant sections of **THEMES (NATURE/ NURTURE, ORDER/ DISORDER, COLONISING THE OTHER)** and **LANGUAGE (LINGUISTIC COLONISATION).**

CONCLUSION

The Tempest is a play that emphasises the significance of nurture, benevolent and enlightened rule, the folly of rebellion and treachery as seen from the viewpoint of the white European male. But it also allows critical scrutiny of this perspective by accommodating the viewpoint of the vanquished or enslaved characters like Caliban and Ariel. Attention to such faultlines that abound will enable us to view the play in ways that make sense in our own context. We need to investigate the exorcising of matriarchal authority and the objectification of Miranda that legitimises the operations of patriarchy, the mystification of the colonial regime as an educative and civilizing project, the construct of a master language and class that relegates all alternatives to a subordinate position. The issue is not what the play says, but why. Unravelling the politics of the text, the ideology that informs it, will help us wrest meanings from the play written by the leading playwright of a nation that had colonised us for over three hundred years. That these interpretations might not coincide with mainstream readings will only prove that the empire can and does write/read back.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Write a note on Shakespeare's characterization in the play *The Tempest.*

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ASSIGNMENTS

Essay-type Questions:

1. Who is responsible for Prospero's fall from power in Milan ? What lessons does he learn in order to become a good ruler ?

2. Discuss how the notion of political and social hierarchy is problematised in *The Tempest*.

3. Explain how the theme of education is related to the theme of nature and nurture in *The Tempest*, with special reference to Miranda and Caliban.

4. Show how the binaries of order / disorder function in *The Tempest*. Substantiate your answer with textual references.

5. Trace the interrelation of illusion and reality in *The Tempest*.

6. Analyse the treatment of magic in *The Tempest*.

7. *The Tempest* endorses patriarchy by minimising or exorcising the role of women. Comment.

8. Comment on the generic hybridity of *The Tempest*.

9. Examine the comic subplot of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo critically and its parallels with the main plot.

10. Characters in *The Tempest* speak in different styles. Choosing any three characters from the play state what you learn about each of them from the kind of language they speak ?

11. Compare and contrast the banquet masque (3.3) and the betrothal masque (4.1.) and their thematic significance in *The Tempest*.

12. Consider the two scenes of Act 1 as dramatic and narrative prologues to the play.

Short Questions:

1. Examine critically Gonzalo's view of an ideal commonwealth in 2.1.150-67.

2. Why does Prospero refer to Miranda as "my foot" (2.2.12) ?

3. Why does Caliban refuse to learn his master's language ?

4. Why do Antonio and Sebastian plan to kill Gonzalo (and no other courtier) along with Alonso (2.1.290-93) ?

5. In Act 1, scene 1, why does Gonzalo think he will survive the shipwreck ?

6. Describe the initial misunderstanding between Caliban and Stephano and Trinculo during their first meeting (2.2). Why does it occur ?

7. Briefly summarise Ariel's second song, "Full fathom five" in *The Tempest* (1.2.397-402). To whom is it addressed ? What is its implication ?

8. When and why does Prospero decide to forgive his enemies ? (5.1.11-30)

9. Discuss the significance of the Epilogue in *The Tempest*.

10. Why does Miranda feel that "mankind" is "beauteous" (5.1.183) ? Is her observation correct ? Give reasons for your answer.

11. Why does Prospero enslave Ferdinand ?

12. What distracts Stephano and Trinculo from murdering Caliban in Act 4, scene 1 ? What light does this shed on their character

BLOCK - II

UNIT - 5

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

CONTENT STRUCTURE

UNIT 5 (a): Introduction

UNIT 5(b): Date of Composition and Type of the Play

UNIT 5(c): Sources

OBJECTIVES:

This module seeks to continue exploring the range and diversity of Shakespearean plays, taking a closer look at themes like 'Justice', 'Mercy', 'Grace', 'Nature', 'Creation' and 'Death' as operative in the arena of Jacobean English society. Together with *The Tempest*, *Measure for Measure* would help students engage with Shakespearean drama thoroughly.

UNIT 5 (a): INTRODUCTION

This module will help you understand one of the most difficult and variously interpreted plays of Shakespeare. Although most of the problems posed in the play, which itself is called a problem play, have been discussed here in a style intelligible to students who are approaching the play for the first time. Emphasis must be given on reading the sent so that the students offering distant mode of education can have a grasp of the textual analysis pertaining to the important issues arising out of the play. Indeed the best way of using the study material is to read it after at least one reading of the text from a standard edition, such as the Arden Shakespeare edition of the play mentioned at the end.

UNIT 5(b): DATE OF COMPOSITION AND TYPE OF THE PLAY

Measure for Measure was first performed on the 26th December 1604. It was first printed in the Folio of 1623. Textually, *Measure for Measure* along with *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen Of Verona* and *The Merry Wives Of Windsor* make up a group. *The Tempest* and *Measure For Measure* are also provided with the same place with a stated locale- 'An un-inhabited Island' and 'Vienna' respectively. *Measure For Measure* belongs to that period of Shakespeare's dramatic career when he wrote his bitter comedies namely *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure For Measure,* and *Troilus And Cressida* and the tragedies like *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Anthony And Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon Of Athens*. This was the period of Shakespeare's maturity.

(c) : SOURCES

The themes of most Shakespeare's plays were borrowed from different sources. Shakespeare had re-shaped the borrowed materials to his own dramatic needs. The primary story of Claudio's offence, Angelo's infamous bargain and breach of pledge, and lsabella's appeal to the Duke was taken from the ltalian author Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565). George Whetstone first used Cinthio's story as the plot of his play *Promos and Cassandra* (1578). *Measure For Measure* was much closer to Whetstone's play in respect of its structure. Shakespeare greatly simplified Whetstone's elaborate settings and removed many of his minor characters. The part of Phallax in Whetstone's play was eliminated, and the inner conflicts were presented entirely through the medium of soliloquy. Whetstone's Shrieve was developed into Escalus, and Whetstone's jailor into the Provost in Shakespeare's play. Shakespeare also took over Whetstone's sub-plot, but re-handled it freely. He substituted Mistress Overdone for Lamia and Pompey for Rosko, individualizing these characters with his natural comic genius, and adding Elbow, Froth Abhorson, and Barnardine. The most important change, however, was Shakespeare's presentation of Isabella as a novice of the strict order of St. Clare.Again, Angelo's abuse of authority has its countless precedents in the long history of human corruption, and similar tales of judicial infamy have doubtless been told since society began. The story of the Disguised Ruler also has affinities with world folk-lore, and tales concerning monarchs who went about in secret amongst their people, discovering abuses and righting wrongs, are widely diffused in place and time. The theme of the substitution of one partner for another is also quite common. Marian's part in *Measure For Measure*, however, is closely analogous to Diana's in *All's Well That Ends Well.*

The primary source of Measure for Measure was Giraldo Cinthio's Hecatommithi. But Shakespeare reshapedthe borrowed material for his own dramatic needs-e.g. he handled the subplot freely, individualized the characters like Mistress Overdone and Pompey with his own natural genius, presented Isabella as

UNIT- 6

Main Characters

CONTENT STRUCTURE

UNIT 6(a): Cast of Characters

UNIT 6(b): The Story in Brief

(a) : CAST OF CHARACTERS

Main Characters:

Vicentio, the Duke of Vienna, was modelled upon King James himself. Like King James, the Duke in this play shuns publicity and tries to avoid the loud applause and greetings of the crowds. Besides, King James's general principles, a number of his personal traits also went into the portrayal of the Duke in the play. For instance, James was as sensitive to personal slander as the Duke in the play is. However, the Duke was not an exact copy of James l.

Angelo, the Deputy, was chosen by the Duke to govern the country during the Duke's absence. Initially he appeared to be an extremely strict man in enforcing laws. Apparently thought to be a sexless man free from all carnal desires, he nourished a deep longing for lsabella and admitted that his sexual appetite had keenly been aroused by lsabella. Finally he confessed his guilt and was punished.

Claudio arrest led to the actual complications of the play. Claudio wanted his sister to meet Angelo and plead for a pardon for Claudio. Even after knowing Angelo's bargain that he will pardon Claudio's life only if his sister yielded her virginity to him. Claudio urged his sister to comply with Angelo's wish and thus save her brother's life.

lsabella, Claudio's sister, decided to renounce the world. She had the power of speech which moved Angelo. She was determined not to surrender her virginity to Angelo even after her brother's appeal. She accused Angelo but finally showed mercy on Angelo hearing Mariana's plea.

Escalus, an ancient Lord, was well-versed in the theory and practice of government and was fully acquainted with the nature of the people in the country and with the political and social customs as well as with the manner in which the country should be administered.

Juliet, the lady-love of Claudio, was a passive and submissive girl. She had been carried away by her own youthful passion and got entangled in an unsavoury situation. Her pregnancy led to the complications in the drama. However, she had enough courage in heart to face the disgrace which she had brought upon herself.

Mariana was a gentle and pliable girl. She did not resist when she was asked by lsabella and the Duke to go and sleep with Angelo in order to satisfy that man's lust. She was finally betrothed to Angelo. She entreated the Duke to pardon Angelo.

Lucio, the fantastic, was regarded as a strangely eccentric man with a rather unbalanced mind and one who was inclined to indulge in extravagant behaviour and irresponsible talk.

Supporting Characters:

(a) Friar Thomas or Friar Peter — the Justice.

(b) Francisca — a nun whom lsabella asked what privileges the inmates enjoy in a convent.

(c) Provost, a kind hearted man, sympathetic to Claudio and Juliet also.

(d) Pompey, servant to Mistress Overdone. He was one of the comic characters in the play.

(e) Mistress Overdone, a Bawd. She owed this name to the fact that she had married as many as nine (one after the other, of course). She was intended as a comic character but hardly provided any mirth and amusement.

(f) Elbow, a simple constable. His malapropism was a source of comedy.

(g) Barnardine, a dissolute prisoner.

(b) : THE STORY IN BRIEF

The story takes place in Vienna, and it opens with the Duke planning to leave the city. He is entrusting its government to his deputies, to an old lord Escalus and Angelo. The Duke, meanwhile, does not intend to leave Vienna at all, but to stay within the city in the disguise of a friar to see things work out under Angelo's rule.

Angelo, as chief deputy, is determined to reform the city. He is sure that the only way to purify the city is to enforce every law to the utmost severity. He is a man of complete rigidity, which is a dangerous quality in a magistrate. His first victim is Claudio who was hoping to marry Juliet. But before the marriage could take place, Juliet got pregnant. Under the laws of Vienna Claudio's crime is punishable by death, although severe crimes are happening everyday. Still Angelo is rigid and Claudio must die within three days. In Claudio's eyes, his relation with the girl was a 'true contract' and his crime is not a serious one. Claudio decides to ask his sister lsabella who is about to enter a convent for help.

Isabella is a woman of rigid purity and she feels that her brother has committed a grave sin. On the other hand, she loves her brother dearly, and she is willing to go to Angelo and plead for her life. She presents herself before him to plead her brother's case. She is not accustomed to pleading and moreover she herself thinks that her brother has sinned. However, she pleads eloquently for her brother's cause.

Angelo is moved not by lsabella's eloquence or by her prayers. He falls violently in love with her and tells her to come back the following day. lsablla returns and Angelo offers his bargain. If she will give herself to him for one night, he will spare Claudio.

The horrified Isabella refuses and is sure that Claudio would value his sister's honour more than his own life. She goes to the prison to tell her brother what Angelo has suggested and expects that Claudio will refuse such proposals. But Claudio is only human. He urges lsabella ''Sweet sister, let me live."

lsabella is a woman of no imagination and she cannot understand her brother's cowardice. She would willingly have died in his place. She herself is not afraid of death and she will not commit a sin for anyone.

The Duke, still disguised as a friar, has come to Claudio's cell and overhears the whole conversation. He admires lsabella deeply and solves the riddle. He tells her about Mariana, who was betrothed to Angelo. But since she lost her dowry, Angelo refused to marry her. She still loves Angelo, and the Duke suggests that she can be substituted for lsabella and sent to Angelo in her place. Isabella gladly agrees and tells Angelo that she will meet him that night.

Isabella, though feeling that her brother has committed a grave sin by making Juliet pregnant, goes to Angelo and pleads for his brother's life. But Angelo falling in love with Isabella offers her a bargain — She has to come to him for one night and he will spare her brother, but Isabella denies.

By the time the Duke goes to Mariana. lsabella comes to them with the news that everything has been arranged. Angelo has given her the keys to his garden. The meeting will take place at midnight. Mariana agrees gladly to the substitution, since as the Duke says, the pre-contract she had with him gives her all the rights of a wife. But Angelo, afraid of a possible vengeance from lsabella's brother, sends word to the warden that Claudio is to be beheaded and his head should be brought to him. There is another convict under the sentence of death in the prison. The Duke suggests that his head be sent to Angelo instead of Claudio's. But when the prisoner is called before them he refuses to cooperate. Fortunately, a notorious pirate dies in the prison, and his head can be sent to Angelo instead. The Duke then sends word to Angelo that he is near Vienna and planning a public return to the city. He wants Angelo's downfall to be complete. He hides himself from upright lsabella that her brother is still alive. The Duke comes back. As directed by the friar, lsabella accuses Angelo in front of the public. She tells the whole story, hiding only the substitution part. The Duke pretends not to believe the charge against Angelo. Mariana comes forward and tells the rest of the story. Angelo says the whole thing is a plot against him by some enemy. The Duke orders the women to be punished and he leaves the stage only to come back as the friar. As a friar he is able to speak to the two women, he, in turn, is about to be sent to prison when his disguise is pulled off. Angelo realises he has lost. The Duke orders him to marry Mariana and then he will be beheaded. Mariana pleads for has life, and so does lsabella for Mariana's happiness. Since Claudio has not been executed, Angelo is forgiven. The Duke then turns to lsabella and asks her to marry him.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Briefly narrate the story of *Measure for Measure.*

UNIT-7

Form of the Play

CONTENT STRUCTURE

UNIT 7: Form of the Play

(a): FORM OF THE PLAY

Measure For Measure has been variously described as a dark comedy, a problem play, a thesis play. Many also consider it a mingled drama. The form of *Measure For Measure* is a close blend of tragic and comic elements so carefully patterned as to suggest a conscious experiment in the medium of tragi-comedy. In *Compendio della Poesia Tragicomica* (1601), the ltalian critic Guarini defined tragi-comedy as a close blend or fusion of seeming disparities, taking from tragedy its great characters, but not its great action, a likely story, but not a true one; delight, not sadness, danger, not death, and taking from comedy laughter that was not dissolute, modest attractions, a well-tied knot, a happy reversal and above all the comic order of things. The design of *Measure For Measure* has the blend of the serious and the comic, extreme peril and happy solution, mixed characters and 'well-tied knot'. Structurally the play can be divided into halves. Through the first part there was a progressive mounting of tension between contrary characters and conflicting principles, with no more than the enigmatic hope of a solution offered by the continuing presence of the Duke on the scene of events. At the point of total deadlock in Act III scene I, the motion is reversed by the Duke's direct intervention. From this point onwards the Duke, in his part of moderator, is engaged tirelessly in 'passing from side to side', 'working amongst contraries.' and shaping a new course for the drama. Accordingly the play ends with pardon instead of punishment, marriage instead of death, reconciliation of enemies, harmony, and 'above all, the comic order of things.

In *Measure For Measure* mingled drama generally appears as a dark comedy but its affinity with tragedy makes it darker than a tragi-comedy as it is commonly understood. A dark comedy is pervaded by a general gloom. It is still a play with a happy ending, and it contains also several amusing scenes and episodes, with some display of wit and humour ; but the comic elements in such a play are pushed into the background by the tone and atmosphere of seriousness and gravity. Besides, the comic elements in such a play seems to have been written in a pessimistic and even cynical mood. *Measure For Measure* is such a play along with *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Triolus and Cressida*. *Measure For Measure* is the darkest of the three plays.

One of the prominent themes in *Measure For Measure* is the evil in human nature. The author's vision of evil in human beings lends to the play a dark and somber colouring, which is the play's principal feature. The author seems to have depicted human nature in this play in a bitter and cynical mood. There are two possible reasons for this gloom. According to one view the gloom in these plays resulted from the author's own state of mind at the time he wrote these plays. These plays seem to reveal Shakespeare's own self-laceration, weariness, discord, cynicism and disgust.

Thus, according to this view, the three dark comedies were the consequence of a psychological crisis which Shakespeare underwent during this period of his dramatic career when he also wrote his great tragedies. According to another view, the theory of the personal crisis of Shakespeare and his personal sorrows is to be dismissed as mythical. This second view traces the darkness of these plays to the spiritual exhaustion of the Jacobean age to the dread of death and horror of life, to the all comprehending doubt, and to the utter disgust which resulted in a touching of the lowest depths of Jacobean negation. The third view rejects both the views stated above. It finds the play to be sound to the core, and to be profoundly Christian in spirit. The other element much talked about is the excess of sex displayed in these dramas and an atmosphere of voluptuousness with its repulsive characters and bawdy language. These comedies, as Charlton put it, are full of greasy matter and they are apt to evoke a complex response and a plethora of critical interpretations.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1.Comment on the form of the play.

UNIT - 8

THEMES

CONTENT STRUCTURE

UNIT 8 (a): Justice and Mercy

UNIT 8 (b): Grace and Nature

UNIT 8 (c): Creation and Death

Suggested Reading

Assignment

The following section describes the treatment of the themes of Justice and Mercy, Grace and Nature, Creation and Death.

(a) : Justice and Mercy

The polarity of justice and mercy was not only a matter for theological speculation, but also a crucial issue to society. The title *Measure For Measure* reminds us of a verse in the Sermon that had become proverbial : ''with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.'' Again, justice can be done by human beings to human beings. A true ruler or a judge was not the most holy or zealous of men, but he whose reason and moderation exalted him above mere pity and passion. As human being he was obliged, like all men, to show all mercy and forgive trespasses. But in his office he was expected to function as deputies of god on earth, exercising under God, the divine right to judge and condemn. The 'demi-god authority' thus balanced between the opposites of justice and mercy. Justice is the clear theme in the play, although it is not always certain what conclusions about justice the play draws. There is a wide diversity of critical opinion with regard to the kind of justice that prevails in *Measure For Measure.* Critics like Coleridge, Swinburne felt deeply annoyed with the kind of justice that is done in the play, while others like Hazlitt defend the play as exhibiting not legal justice but justice tempered with mercy. Wilson Knight builds up a laborious thesis to show that the play is rooted in the Gospels, that an atmosphere of Christianity pervades the play, that the Duke's ethical attitude is identical with that of Jesus Christ, and that the play must be studied in the light of Gospel teaching.

The law is also inextricably intertwined with the issues of justice, to the extent that the two can hardly be separated. Claudio has committed a sin in the eyes of law, but in terms of common sense it is wholly excusable, and hence not a sin. Both lsabella and Angelo judge Claudio too harshly. Isabella comes to her senses, and Angelo has to become a sinner himself before he can understand the predicament of someone like Claudio.

It is possible to see in the play a suggestion that all men are guilty, and that, therefore, mercy is a right for all people. This certainly helps to explain the leniency with which Angelo is treated, and the attitude of forgiveness towards Claudio is evident almost from the start of the play. The need for mercy in a world in which all are guilty must also explain the condemnation of Isabella and Angelo's

over-simple view of morality and judgement and give an ironical point to the conflict that later develops between them. In the hands of Angelo the law is something which all human beings must serve; but the play shows that it is the law which should serve all humanity, not the other way round.

The debate between Angelo and lsabella has been described as 'The Contention of Justice and Mercy', presenting the conflict between the 'old law' and 'new'. The outcome of the debate is not the overthrow of one absolute by another but a breakdown of personal integrity and of social order which this sustains.

The reasons for the breakdown were implicit in the Renaissance view of authority. In a Christian commonwealth, justice and mercy were not contenders, but joint supporters of the throne. On the secular plane, there was neither 'Old Law' nor 'New', but the law of the land, administered in the last resort by the sovereign himself, a human-being elected to rule with reason and temperance by the grace of God. Isabella's demand for judges to practise God's mercy was, in the created world, the counterpart of Angelo's claim to practise divine-justice; of both it might be said, 'Tis set down so in heaven, but not in earth.' If Angelo's zeal for the eradication of sin was potentially a threat to human survival, Isabella's scorn for authority struck at the bases of order on which human society rested. The analogy has often been drawn between lsabella's apeal to Angelo and Portia's to Shylock. But it breaks down in view of the fact that Shylock, unlike Angelo, was a private individual, and, as such, bound to show mercy. However, between the extremes of justice and mercy the Duke, 'a gentleman of all temperance', stands as a mediator.

(b) : Grace and Nature

Measure for Measure steers clear of theological disputes as to the relative merits of grace and good works – 'grace is grace', Lucio declares, 'despite of all controversy' — but it is plainly concerned with the broader humanist problem of coordinating the spiritual and natural forces of personality for man upon earth.The special measure of grace bestowed upon rulers should not be directed inwards to the cultivation of their own sanctity, virtues 'must' go 'forth', otherwise, 'were all alike, as if we had them not'. Nature also enjoins the exercise of function: she is a 'thrifty goddess' who lends to man by way of investment, requiring him to use as well as enjoy his physical gifts, that the stock of natural wealth might be enhanced.

(c) : Creation and Death

Whether accident or design, Shakespeare chose a parallel situation in *Measure For Measure*. The parents of Isabella and Claudio are dead; upon the marriages of the brother and sister the continuity of their house depends; yet the beginning of the play one is about to enter a convent and the other to die for begetting a child. Fundamental to all issues of political justice and private morality was the categorical necessity for human survival. Reformation thinkers regarded the precept 'increase and multiply'as the first of the divine commandments enjoined upon Adam after the fall and repeated to Noah after the flood.

Sinful procreation was seen by Angelo as tantamount to murder. While the latter was the theft of a life from nature, the former stole the divine image, the soul of man from heaven. Murder was not

only a theft from nature but also a violation of man's divinely appointed right to life. Procreation, however, stole from neither nature nor God. 'Heaven's image' could not be spuriously put into the world since human souls, whether in nature or in heaven, remained always in the divine keeping. On the polarity of creation and death, all the issues of *Measure For Measure* ultimately turn. Throughout the play the theme is tirelessly reiterated. Juliet, in the play, is about to bear a child. Lucio's drab, too, was 'with child by him'. Against this, Claudio 'must die'. Barnardine 'must die'. Angelo is sentenced to death, and Lucio, to whipping and hanging, before they are reprieved; Abhorson, the hangman, is a visible presence of death.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Write a note on the themes of Justice and mercy, of grace and nature, and of creation and death in this play.

SUGGESTED READING

1. Text of *Measure For Measure* : The Arden Edition, Ed J.W. Lever.
2. Case book : Ed by C. K. Stead.
3. Shakespeare's Problem Plays : Peter Ure
4. Shakespeare's *Measure For Measure* : by Mary Lascelles
5. Shakespeare : *The Dark Comedies to the Last Plays* : R.A. Foakes.

ASSIGNMENT

1. *Measure For Measure* as a tragic-comedy.

2. "In *Measure For Measure* justice is buffeted, outraged, struck in the face." — Comment.

3. Critically compare Angelo and the Duke.

4. Critically analyse the role of lsabella.

BLOCK III

UNIT - 9

VOPLONE BY BEN JONSON

CONTENT STRUCTURE :

SUB UNIT I (a): Introduction
SUB UNIT I (b): Let's Sum Up
SUB UNIT II (a): Jonson's Classicism
SUB UNIT II (b): Jonson's Life and Works
SUB UNIT II (c): Text and Performance

OBJECTIVES

Having had a brief glimpse into two Shakespearean plays in the two previous chapters, we now turn our attention to another dramatic luminary of the period - Ben Jonson - acknowledged by Dryden as "the more correct poet". While the Renaissance opened newer avenues for soul-searching, it simultaneously rekindled the flames of Classical study. Jonson for whom "the classical formula came first" requires thorough study alongside Shakespeare in order to grasp how the Renaissance worldview accommodated Classical convention together with humanism.

I (a): INTRODUCTION

Ben Jonson saw himself, and was seen by many of his contemporaries, as a dramatist occupying a unique position among sixteenth and early seventeenth century English dramatists, a fact simply and memorably acknowledged in the words engraved on the marble square over his grave in Westminster Abbey : 'O rare Ben Jonson'. Yet Jonson's uniqueness does not lie in his adoption of the role of a professional playwrigtht, for he followed the example of many other men of the time, even well-educated people like the 'university wits', in turning to play-writing for the popular theatres that were coming up in London and its suburbs. Like Marlowe, Greene and Lyly, Jonson gravitated towards the theatre because more traditional career opportunities were not available. Like Shakespeare, Jonson became an actor-playwright, though he wrote plays for several companies of actors, working perhaps as a free-lancer instead of being permanently attached to any one company.

Jonson's uniqueness lies in the kind of comedy which he wrote and which, he convinced himself and never tired of persuading others, was completely different from the plays written by his contemporaries. Jonson did not immediately find his own distinctive voice, however, for he started his writing career with plays which could not have been very different from the common run of dramatic entertainments of the time; he also collaborated with other playwrights to churn out both comedies and tragedies. These early plays are lost, but it has been suggested that since they were not very different from the common dramatic works of the time, Jonson suppressed them to give greater substance to the image of himself as a writer who deliberately went against prevailing tastes. Jonson did prove his originality, however, with his first stage success *Every Man in His Humour*.

As the Prologue added to the revised version of the play (published in the 1616 Folio of Jonson's works) asserts, the playwright was determined to turn his back on contemporary dramatic practice and avoid the '11 customs of the age'. The Folio title page carried a Horatian motto which aptly expresses Jonson's independence of spirit: 'content with a few readers, I do not labour that the crowd may admire me'. The prologue to *Every Man in His Humour* also indicates clearly that Jonson's theory of comedy was essentially classical, though we should do well to remember that his comedy was also indebted to native English dramatic traditions like those of the morality play, trickster comedy and citizen drama. Jonson did not actually create the distinctive kind of comedy known as the comedy of humours, for Chapman's *An Humourous Day's Mirth* was the first English comedy in which many of the characters are identified with a dominant 'humour' or mood, very much like 'mania' in modern psychological idiom, though the theory of humours was medieval in origin and a physiological explanation of character traits. According to this theory, an imbalance of the four humours or bodily fluds – blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile – gave rise to a dominant temperament. Jonson and his contemporaries used the term 'humour' to refer to various kinds of eccentricities and affectations as well as obsessions which often assume monstrous proportions. In this last sense, the conception of 'humour' has some relevance even to Jonson's later comedies. The humours theory is also particularly well suited to Jonson's satiric aim of holding up for ridicule various kinds of irrational behaviour.

Jonson's theory of comedy was essentially classical, though his comedy was also indebted to native English dramatic traditions like those of the morality play, trickster comedy, and citizen drama.

Jonson's theory of comedy was essentially classical, though his comedy was also indebted to native English dramatic traditions like those of the morality play, trickster comedy and citizen drama.

Jonson thus was not the first playwright to adopt the form of the comedy of humours, but he made some distinctive contributions to the form. First, he extended the scope of the form by including within it elements derived from non-dramatic satire, especially that of Hall, Marston, Donne and Nashe. The traits of behaviour and personality ridiculed by these satirists are more vividly depicted and acquire greater dramatic vitality in Jonson's plays. Secondly, Jonson's satiric norms are clearer and stricter than those of his contemporaries and predecessors, just as his exposure of follies and affectations was more merciless. His 'humours' characters are usually punished so severely that it is sometimes felt that the punishment exceeds the norms of comedy. The question has often been raised about the way both the knaves and the gulls are punished in *Volpone*. Thirdly, Jonson's condemnation of the 'humorous' characters is far more explicit than what we find in Chapman, who often presents affectations as amusing rather than punishable. The amused contemplation of human folly and its acceptance as a fact of the human condition, which we find in Shakespeare's comedies, were alien to Jonson's aims as a dramatist. Jonson's chief aim as a dramatist was to ridicule follies and affectations, and in this respect he was following the tradition of classical satiric comedy. Jonson's intention to follow a course different from that of most of his contemporaries, including Shakespeare, is more evident in his later comedies, beginning with *Every Man in His Humour*, a play which he

characterised in the Induction as 'strange, and of a particular kind by itself, somewhat, like *Vetus Comoedia*, [that is, Greek Old Comedy]. The only practitioner of Old Comedy whose plays have survived is Aristophanes and even in his case only eleven have survived, while the plays of two other practitioners of this form of comedy whose names we know – Cratinus and Eupolis – survive in fragments. Jonson must have found a close affinity between his comic aim of driving the 'humours' characters out of their affectations and the aggressive spirit of Aristophanic comedy. Other classical authors whom Jonson admired and followed are Pindar, Horace, Martial, Juvenal, Persius, Plautus, Terence and Quintilian. He saw their works not as products of a remote culture but as sources of wisdom and critical guidance for a serious writer seeking to offer a criticism of contemporary life. Jonson never imitated these authors uncritically, but adapted classical raw materials to contemporary social and political mores. The truths gleaned by him from the classical authors were enriched by his own shrewd and accurate observation of life. (Any annotated edition of *Volpone* will make you aware not only of the numerous classical reminiscences in the play but of Jonson's creative application of themes and ideas from classical authors to contemporary conditions). It is, therefore, appropriate that Jonson's classicism should be regarded as the most easily recognizable mark of his comic art. But an over-emphasis on this undoubtedly important aspect of his distinctive genius might lead us to ignore both his habitual independence of mind and his frequent use of native English traditions. In the Introduction to *Every Man out of His Humour* Jonson argues that modern writers of comedy should alter the form to suit the requirements of the age just as the ancient classical authors did. Indeed, in his great middle comedies, such as *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, he went beyond both ancient and modern authors by creatively adapting classical themes and conventions. In *Every Man out of His Humour* and *Cynthia's Revels* he extended the comedy of humours into a unique form of 'comical satire', a phrase that aptly sums up the distinctive form and spirit of most of Jonson's comedies. Satire was the natural bent of his mind and it was reinforced by his intimate knowledge of classical satiric comedy. Indeed, his comical satires were often too anti-authoritarian and following the example of Aristophanes, too libellous to be tolerated by the rigid censorship laws of England. He did not enjoy the freedom of Aristophanes to pillory his contemporaries and therefore several of his works provoked difficulties with the authorities. He was also involved in a mutual and bitterly recriminatory satiric quarrel with some of his fellow writers and this phase of English dramatic history is known as the War of the Theatres. Jonson also had a lofty conception of poetry and of himself as an advocate of the high poetic art, a conception which repeatedly led him to denounce lesser poets whom he contemptuously dismissed as 'poetasters'. He believed, moreover, that a satirist should have a didactic aim. It has been aptly remarked that for him aesthetics was finally at the service of ethics. Sidney had argued in his *Apology for Poetry* that the ideal comedy should be didactic and this observation, like many other pronouncements of Sidney in that treatise, exactly echoes Jonson's preoccupations. Thus Sidney emphasised that not only should comedy be an 'imitation of the common errors of life', but that these errors should be represented in the most ridiculous and scornful way, so that 'it is impossible that any one beholder can be content to be such a one'. In these observations we may find much of Jonson's aim and method in his own comedies.

By drawing on classical sources and by harnessing his natural inclination and talent for satire as well as his gift for poetry, Jonson wanted to create a new form of comedy, for which the most appropriate descriptive phrase is 'comical satire'. Jonson's great middle comedies– *Volpone, Epicene and The Alchemist* – are also, from one point of view, comical satires, far removed from the romantic comedy with love as its main theme that Shakespeare and most of his contemporaries practised. Jonson vehemently protested, moreover, against the non-naturalistic mode of much contemporary comedy, prefering a realistic and original kind of comedy which would present men rather than monsters. He was opposed to the common violation of the classical unities of time, place and action. In the prologue to *Every Man in His Humour* he makes it plain that he found the theatrical conventions of the time absurdly unrealistic, leading to crude violations of the unities in representing first a newly born child who then 'shoot[s] up, in one beard and weed/past three score years'. Jonson himself wanted to follow the classical unities and forms, though he recognized the need to adapt these to his own purposes. The action of *Volpone* takes place on a single day, not because Aristotle so required, but because Jonson needed speed and inevitability for his action. The true dramatist, he averred, 'will not run away from nature' and should present before his audience facts rather than fantasy. In following classical rules he would not thereforfe be servile. In the prologue to *Volpone* he declares, speaking of himself in the third person : 'The laws of time, Place, persons he observeth / From no **needful** rule he swerveth'. He did not consider the rule regarding unity of action 'needful' and so he introduced a sub-plot. He was also aware that the punishments meted outto the gulls and knaves in the end might apepear to many too severe and violative of the comic toneand unity of impression as it was classically conceived.

(b) : Let us sum up

Thus Jonson was right to think of himself as different from most of his contemporaries. He made classical authors and classical rules of drama the foundation of his comedy, though he 'English'his classical sources in such a way that they could be applied to contemporary conditions of which he was one of the shrewdest and most accurate observers. Though individual comedies have their own distinctive characteristics, most of Jonson's comedies can be aptly described as comical satires. His classical leanings, and his predilection for satire make his kind of comedy completely different from romantic comedy which was the chosen form for most of his contemporaries.

SUB-UNIT: II
JONSON'S CLASSICISM, LIFE AND WORKS,TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

(a) : JONSON'S CLASSICISM

The significance of Jonson's classicism for an assessment of his comic art has never been questioned, though the whole issue of his classical affiliations has been examined from different points of view. Edmund Wilson views Jonson's classicism as a 'dead weight' which merely drags his work down; for Wilson, Jonson's frequent assertions of the importance of classical authors in understanding his own work reveal his awareness of his own limitations and his eagerness to dignify

his achievement by invoking classical parallels. T. S. Eliot warned against the tendency to read Jonson in the manner of ancient classical authorities, though he also emphasized the need of 'study' for a proper appreciation of the dramatist's writings. The importance of classicism in studying Jonson lies not only in his constant assertion of his own Greek and Roman literary inheritance, but also in his view of dramatic art. Jonson's adoption of the 'plain' style a quality which distinguishes his work from that of most of his contemporaries, is one important way in which his art of writing is shaped by classical influence. Jonson consciously cultivated, in the manner of Horace, a style that is more argumentative than rhetorical and shows greater consideration for matter than for words. But Jonson's classicism helps to define not only his style but also his subject matter. Jonson's concern with ethical issues, with the bases of the good life, is derived from the 'Roman moralists'- Seneca. Cicero and Horace. The nature of this moralist influence explains various features of Jonson's plays, which at first sight might appear merely eccentric- his method of characterization, his didactic aims, his preference for certain kinds of plot, his self-conscious attempts to improve the audience's tastes. It is this moralist bias which explains the crucial importance of the trial scene in Jonson's comedies. As has been already pointed out, Jonson's use of classical models never took the form of imitation and was more like a creative assimilation. He was convinced of the relevance of classical attitudes and ideas to Renaissance England. His classical allusions and quotations not only enrich the immediate contexts but also extend the range and significance of such quotations by applying them to situations and character types different from those in his sources. R. Peterson has aptly remarked that fullness and digestion are the essential characteristics of this kind of imitation. While bad imitators always fail to transform borrowed materials a writer like Jonson continually illuminates both the borrowed ideas and the new contexts to which these ideas are applied. One other aspect of Jonson's classicism has been pointed out by Richard Dutton who argues that Jonson's invocation of classical authority was not simply a mark of his literary conservatism but also an anxious search for authority, a search that betrays the weak foundations of his own authority. The predominantly satirical thrust of Jonson's plays often led to conflicts with legal and political authorities. By invoking the authority of the ancient classical authors and by defining his dramatic creed in terms of formalistic and moralistic neoclassical laws, Jonson sought to evade confrontation with the laws and authority of the state which tried to curb unbridled self-expression. Dutton suggests that the clearest articulation of Jonson's classical creed in the 'Dedicatory Epistle' to *Volpone* can be taken to indicate that the classical principles derived from ancient Greek and Roman authors mark out for literature a space that should be free from the control exerted by Government agencies. Jonson's classicism is thus not only a dialogue between ancient and modern but also a means of dealing with political authority.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Make an assessment of Jonson's classicism.

(b): JONSON'S LIFE AND CLASSICISM

It is generally thought that Benjamin Jonson was born on 1 June 1572. His father, a minister, died before his birth, as the dramatist told the Scottish poet, William Drummond. The distinctive spelling of his name was the dramatist's own contribution. His mother married a bricklayer when Benjamin was an infant and for his early education Ben was indebted to his literate but by no means

affluent stepfather. The most significant part of his early education was his training at the prestigious Westminster School where he was taught by William Camden, a great and learned teacher, who exercised a profound influence on Jonson. The dramatist later claimed that he owed to this teacher 'All that I am in arts, all that I know'. Camden introduced him to many of the works of classical authors which proved to be a great formative influence on his works. Jonson also told Drummond that he was 'taken from' his education and 'put to another craft'. Though the exact date of this development is not known, it is believed that Jonson completed this stage of his education before becoming an apprentice of his stepfather's bricklaying profession. He therefore could not go for a university education. But his apprenticeship was also interrupted and he became a soldier involved in combat in the Netherlands. The military career did not contiue for long and in 1594, Jonson married Anne Lewis. The number of his children is not known, though contemporary records as well as Jonson's *Epigrams* mention two dauthters and three sons, all of whom died in his lifetime. Despite the breach in his apprenticeship Jonson worked as a bricklayer for some time and also became involved in the theatre, first as an actor and then as a playwright ; his first work in the latter capacity was *The Case is Altered***.** His collaboration with Thomas Nashe produced the now lost Isle of Dogs, a satirical play which was held to be seditious and slanderous by the Privy Councill and for which Jonson was briefly imprisoned, Nashe having fled to Norfolk. After his release Jonson collaborated on several plays for the theatre manager Philip Henslowe between 1598 and 1599; none of the plays has survived and Jonson made no attempts to preserve them, for reasons explained earlier (Section I). At the same time Jonson also composed *Every Man in His Humour* for the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1598 and *Every Man Out of his Humour* in the following year. Jonson then became embroiled in a duel with Gabriel Spencer, killing the latter and escaping execution for the capital offence by pleading 'benefit of clergy', a provision in contemporary law which enabled a literate person to escape hanging. But his goods were forfeited and he was branded on the thumb as a mark of his crime. The mark was also a warning to the effect that if Jonson committed the same offence again, he would be hanged. The confiscation of his property left Jonson penniless, forcing him to borrow money and when he failed to repay the debt he was imprisoned. He was released in 1600 after he had somehow managed to repay the debt.

The most significant part of Jonson's early education was his training at the prestigious Westminister School, where he was taught by Willium Camden who exercised a profound influence on Jonson, and who introduced him to many works of the classical writers
.....Jonson's apprenticeship in his stepfather's bricklaying profession was interrupted when he became a soldier. Later he, despite his problem, became involved in theatre, first as an actor and then as a playwright.

During his imprisonment Jonson converted to Catholicism. In the context of England in the last decade of the sixteenth century, this was a rash move, for Catholics were generally suspected of disloyalty and treason in Protestant England, especially after its skirmish with Catholic Spain in 1588. Religious faith was seen as an expression of political belief in a period when religious conflict was endemic. Jonson remained a Catholic for twelve years in this period of religious and political tensions which culminated in the Gunpowder Plot (1605), an attempt by Catholics to blow up Parliament along with King James I, who had succeeded Queen Elizabeth in 1603. The Gunpowder Plot failed, but Catholics became still more unpopular. It is therefore remarkable that despite his

Catholicism and despite his frequent brushes with the Establishment because of his incisive and trenchant satirical writings, Jonson emerged as the central figure in the literary and cultural scene of the Jacobean period. But the Gunpowder Plot led to a series of repressive measures against the Catholics and Jonson did not entirely escape suspicion. In 1606 Jonson was officially asked to explain his failure to take Anglican Communion, as required by the law. These developments prompted Jonson to abandon his Catholicism and by 1610 he had become an Anglican (a member of the Church of England). While he was a Catholic, however, Jonson still enjoyed a measure of court patronage, a fact which suggests that despite the general acceptance of the theory of the divine rights of monarchs, the State did not wield absolute power and was not a monolithic entity. The multiplicity of factions and the lack of integration between different components of the ruling power account for the paradox that Jonson became an important cultural figure in the very same court which also regarded him with suspicion. He became one of the writers whom the court favoured with commissions for courtly entertainments, such as masques, composite works consisting of dance, drama, song and visual spectacle. Working with the talented court architect Inigo Jones, Jonson produced some of the greatest masques of the time. He also emerged as a very successful playwright working for the public theatre and held in great esteem by the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, both of which were to confer on him honorary degrees. The King's Men, formerly Lord Chamberlain's Men, performed Volpone in 1606 with great success, and the success was repeated by their production of The Alchemist in 1610. In 1609 another of Jonson's comedies, Epicene, or The Silent Woman, had been performed by the Children of the Queen's Revels. His two tragedies, Sejanus and Catiline, did not however meet with the same degree of popular appreciation. Jonson had earlier been involved in what has come to be known as the 'War of the Theatres'. In Cynthia's Revels (1600) he had presented a satiric portrait of court life and the character of the noble poet Crites in that play is a thinly disguised version of himself. This provoked a satiric rejoinder by John Marston in his play, What you Will. Another dramatist, Thomas Dekker, joined the war with an uncomplimentary portrait of Jonson in his Satiromastix or The University of the Humorous Poet. Even before Dekker's play could be performed, Jonson launched a pre-emptive attack by portraying both Marston and Dekker as intellectually weak and associating them with sub-literary productions. However, the War of the Theatres did not last long. Jonson's association with the theatre continued till almost his death in 1637 and his later plays include *The Devil is an Ass*, *The Staple of News*, *The Magnetic Lady*, *A Tale of a Tub*.

The Gunpowder Plot having failed, Jonson, despite his Catholicism and his frequent brushes with the Establishment because of his incisive and trenchant satirical writings, emerged as the central figure in the literary and cultural scene of the Jacobean period. Later he became an Anglican. He became one of the writers whom the court favoured with commissions for courtly entertainments, such as masques, composite works consisting of dance, drama, song and visual spectacle .....
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Two other events of Jonson's life deserve brief mention. In 1616 he was awarded an annual pension of sixty six pounds by an order of the King of England and this made him England's first salaried laureate. His elevated status was confirmed by the publication, later in the same year, of his collected Works which contained his masques, his poems and his plays, though it surprisingly left out

his recent play, Bartholomew Fair, which modern criticism considers one of his greatest comedies. The importance of the Works lies not simply in the fact that Jonson took the initiative in publishing his own writings when Shakespeare was apparently so indifferent to his literary fame that he did not supervise the publication of any one of his plays, but rather in the novelty and uniqueness of the enterprise. In this early modern period the idea that the plays of an English dramatist could be accorded the status of Works, which were the province of classical writers, was not common. Jonson's Works in fact invited such comments as the remark of a critic who thought it absurd that 'the very plays of a modern poet are called in print Works'.

(c): Text and Performance

One of his contemporaries, Thomas Dekker, taunted Jonson for his alleged slowness of composition, calling him a 'nasty tortoise' in Satiromastix. But Volpone was composed in five weeks during the winter of 1605-06 ; Jonson announces with pride in the Prologue that 'five weeks fully penned it'. It was first performed by Shakespeare's company, then known as the King's Men, at the Globe in February or March 1606. It was subsequently performed at Oxford and Cambridge in 1606 or 1607. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the play was frequently performed, though many of its indecent and coarse passages were sometimes omitted in performance. The subplot was considered by some eighteenth ecntury critics as an excrescence and almost totally dropped in the 1771 performance of the play at Covent Garden. No performance of the play is recorded between 1785 and 1921. Since 1921 it has become the most frequently revived non-Shakespearean play of the Renaissance or early modern period. Distinguished twentieth century actors like Ralph Richardson, Anthony Quayle, Paul Scofield and Ben Kingsley appeared in the roles of Volpone and Mosca in some noteworthy productions of the play. In several of these productions the costume and characterization strongly stressed the beast fable elements of the play; for example, in a 1968 production, the Would-bes were represented as parrots. Film and television adaptations as well as adaptations for opera and musical comedy attest to the play's enduring popularity.

(d) *VOLPONE*

SYNOPSIS

A bare summary of the plot is given by Jonson himself in 'The Argument', where he uses the acrostic (as he also does in ***The Alchemist***), following the usual practice of Plautus. Volpone, a magnifico, that is, a nobleman of Venice, is old, wealthy and childless, though Mosca hints later in the play that the dwarf, Nano, the eunuch, Castrone and the hermaphrodite, Androgyno, who make up his unnatural household, are his illegitimate children. Volpone has no relatives either and plots with his parasite Mosca to defraud a group of men whose greed knows no bounds and who are anxious to inherit Volpone's wealth. These legacy-hunters are the gulls whose avarice leads them to behave like puppets in the hands of the knaves, Volpone and Mosca. Each of the legacy hunters is told separately by Mosca that the former is going to inherit all Volpone's wealth, while Volpone himself pretends to be so seriously ill that he has to be constantly bedridden. The three would-be heirs-

Voltore, an advocate, Corbaccio, an old gentleman, and Corvino, a merchant-vie with each other in showering gifts on the apparently dying Volpone. They are prepared to go further, as the plot gradually reveals. Corbaccio is ready to disinherit his only son, Bonario, and make Volpone his heir. Corvino, an absurdly jealous husband, has a beautiful wife Celia. Mosca's account of her beauty prompts his master to see Celia. He adopts the disguise of the mountebank Scoto of Mantua and has a glimpse of Celia at her window. Since Celia's beauty provokes a strong desire for her in Volpone, Mosca agrees to procure her for his master. Mosca persuades Corvino that Celia's Company is what the desperately ill Volpone needs to be restored to health and Corvino threatens, pleads with and abuses his virtuous wife, and forces her to enter Volpone's bedroom because Mosca has assured him that Corvino will be named Volpone's heir.

Meanwhile Mosca brings Corbaccio's son Bonario to Volpone's house so that he can overhear his father disown him. Mosca also asks Bonario to hide himself in the house, and it is done without Volpone's knowledge. When Corbaccio arrives, Mosca tells him the lie that Bonario has been looking for his father with drawn sword, determined to kill both Corbaccio and Volpone. This clever lie makes Corbaccio more determined to disinherit his son and he actually gives Mosca his will in which Volpone is named as his sole heir. Celia, who has refused to obey her husband's command that she should share Volpone's bed, is sought to be seduced by the old man, who then makes an attempt to rape her. At this point Bonario comes out of his hiding place and rescues Celia. To prevent Volpone's exposure by Bonario, Mosca persuades Corvino and Corbaccio to go to court and make false accusations against both Bonario and Celia. Voltore is theire advocate and uses his eloquence to convince the magistrates (Avocatori) that Bonario has an illicit affair with Celia, that they were caught in the act and that Bonario having come to Volpone's house in order to kill his father and having failed to find Corbaccio, dragged the mortally sick Volpone from his bed and accused the latter of attempted rape. These allegations are supported by Corbaccio and Corvino, and Celia and Bonario are ordered to be taken into custody.

But Volpone wants to torment the legacy hunters further and thinks of new mischief. He names Mosca as his heir and spreads the false news of his own death. The greedy gulls come to Volpone's house, each expecting to have been named Volpone's heir, and are furious when Mosca informs them that he is now the sole heir. Volpone relishes the discomfiture of the fortune hunters as he watches the whole scene from a place of concealment. Still seeking to torment the legacy hunters, Volpone in the disguise of a court official pursues them through the streets of Venice pouring ridicule on their extreme greed and total discomfiture. These new developments bring about a change in the legacy hunters' plans and Voltore tells the court, just when Celia and Bonario are about to be sentenced, that they are innocent and that Mosca is the man to blame for everything. But Voltore is led into further absurdity when Volpone, still disguised as a court official, whispers to him that Mosca's master is very much alive and that Voltore continues to be Volpone's heir. Voltore now pleads with great ingenuity that he is susceptible to fits of insanity and that his earlier statement about Celia and Bonario being innocent was the result of such a fit. Mosca, whose new found wealth and status encourage one of the magistrates to think of him as his prospective son-in-law, is now sent for. When Volpone whispers to him to inform the court that his master is alive, Mosca at first pretends

that he does not recognize his master and then demands from Volpone half of everything he owns. Volpone first refuses and then accepts Mosca's demand, but the latter, intoxicated by his own cleverness, indicates that he wants more. When the magistrates order that Volpone, still in disguise, should be whipped for insolence, he discards his disguise, reveals his identity and discloses the whole conspiracy from the beginning. Celia and Bonario are declared innocent and freed by the court which, however, orders severe punishments for Volpone, Mosca and the greedy legacy hunters.

The subplot of the play, far from being an excrescence, is a comic counterpoint to the main plot, as we shall see. It involves a foolish and talkative English traveller, Sir Politic Would-be, and his wife, a woman who pretends to be a know-all and who wants to seduce Volpone. She also turns out to be a legacy-hunter. A younger and more intelligent Englishman, Peregrine, teaches Sir Politic a bitter lesson by playing a practical joke on him. The sub-plot is the vehicle of a good deal of incisive topical satire on the follies of English.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Briefly narrate the story of *Volpone*.

(e): ASPECTS OF THE PLAY

Volpone has been called a triumph of creative assimilation. Jonson's extensive classical reading, his close acquaintance with native English literary, traditions, and his detailed and varied studies are here fused together in a brilliant whole. Jonson's borrowings from various sources are invariably appropriate to the dramatic context and yet the effect is not one of careful labour and cold calculation; indeed the effect has been aptly described as one of a lightning flash of illumination. The theme of legacy hunting can be found in Greek New Comedy, but Jonson's actual sources were the works of classical Latin satirists : Horace's *Satires*, Petronius's *Satyricon* and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*. All these tell stories of greedy heirs who flatter wealthy people in the hope of inheriting their wealth and are eventually outwitted by their victims. The closest parallel to *Volpone* is Petronius's *Satyricon* which describes a fictional town, Croton, where the roguish Eumolpus, a bachelor millionaire, pretends that he is dying in order to cheat the legacy-hunting inhabitants. Petronius describes the legacy-hunters metaphorically as carrion-eaters and this slight hint inspires Jonson to give his play the shape of an extended beast-fable for which he went to medieval and Renaissance sources. Of course the ultimate source for the beast fable elements in the play is classical : *Aesop's Fables*. Jonson's more immediate source was, however, the medieval beast-epic of Reynard the Fox, translated by William Caxton in 1481 as *The History of Reynard The Fox*. It tells the story of a sly fox who pretends to be dying in order to deceive and entrap predatory birds and to rape the crow's wife. In the beast-epic, the fox appears in many guises ; he is tried for his crimes, but always escapes the final judgment. The names of the main characters, besides indicating their beast or bird-like characteristics, suggest Jonson's debt to his friend John Florio, author of *A World of Words* (1598), an Italian-English dictionary Thus Volpone, an Italian name, means, according to Florio's definition, an 'old fox' and a 'sneaking, lurking willy deceiver'.

Jonson's borrowings from various sources are invariably appropriate to the dramatic context and yet the effect has been aptly described as one of a lightning flash of illumination. His actual sources were Horace's "Satires", Petronius's "Satyricon" and Lucian's "Dialogues of the Dead", Aesop's "Fables", and "Reynard the Fox".

In the play he has the fox's characteristic red hair. The character also reminds us of two of Aesop's fables : The Fox and the Grapes and the Fox, the Raven and the Cheese. Mosca is any kind of fly, including parasites. He is called in the play's list of characters Volpone's Parasite, that is, a hanger on who flatters the wealthy in exchange for hospitality. Aparasite is also a Latin comedy type, frequently appearing in the plays of Plautus. The name Voltore means, according to Florio's dictionary a 'ravenous bird called a vulture'. It was usual to describe legacy-hunters as vultures, because they battened on the dead. Corbaccio's name suggests a 'filthy great raven' (Florio). The croaking of the raven was supposed to foretell death. The raven was also supposed to possess keen sight and hearing, and these traits are parodied by Corbaccio's deafness and myopia. Corbaccio is also raven-like in his attitude to his son, for ravens were supposed by Elizabethans to be negligent parents. Corvino, on the other hand, is a gorcrow or carrion crow. Since the crow is united for life with its partner, Corvino, who does not care for marital fidelity, is ironically named. One of the means by which the subplot is integrated with the main plot is that it too suggests the beast fable through its principal figures. Sir Politic Would-be and Lady Would-be are parrot like in their incessant chatter, while Peregrine means a pilgrim-hawk, an apt name for a traveller. It has been pointed out by commentators that in Greek myth hawks, sacred to Apollo, the God of enlightenment, attacked ignorant fools. Yet another element of the beast-fable is to be found in Sir Pol's comical attempt to disguise himself asa tortoise. That the play is going to follow the pattern of a beast fable is evident from Volpone's own words in Act I Scene ii :

"Vulture, Kite,
Raven, and gorcrow, all my birds of prey
That think me turning carcass, now they come."

As for the remaining characters, apart from the anonymous group of merchants, officers, magistrates, women attending on Lady Would-be, some are physically abnormal, as their names indicate — Nano the dwarf Castrone the eunuch and Androgyno the hermaphrodite, one 'that is both male and female'. Names continue to be important with characters like Celia, the heavenly woman, and Bonario, 'honest, good, uncorrupt' (Florio).

The naming of the characters is significant. They, to some extent, strike the keynote of the play. E.g.-'Volpone' means 'an old fox', 'a sneaking, lurking wily deceiver'; Mosca is any kind of fly including parasites. 'Voltore' means a 'ravenous bird called vulture' and so on.

It is believed by many that Jonson had a real-life original for Volpone — the businessman Thomas Sutton. Jonson's sketch of a contemporary in his comedy can be compared with Aristophanes's libellous portrait of Socrates in *The Clouds*. Like Volpone, Sutton was of a retiring disposition and surrounded by flatterers who believed that they would inherit his wealth. Sutton, however, outwitted these legacy hunters by changing his will every six months. Sutton even had a Mosca in his agent, John Lawe, who managed his business Sutton made plans to endow a charitable hospital and made the necessary arrangements before his death. Jonson must have thought that Sutton's money should be most properly utilized in building a hospital, for this is how Volpone's confiscated estate is to be used, according to the judgement of the magistrates at the end of the play. Helen Ostovich has therefore concluded that the correlations between Sutton and

Volpone are too extensive to be accidental and too topical to be ignored. The fact that Sutton later offered Jonson a pension of £40 shows that he took the playwright's satire seriously. In the dedicatory epistle to his comedy Jonson strenuously denies that he had any 'uncharitable thought' or meant any 'malicious slander' but significantly adds that his satire is directed at 'creatures for their insolvencies worthy to be taxed'. Sutton must have served as a contemporary example of the corrupting power of gold. Like Aristophanes, Jonson used obscenity and elements of crude physical farce to enliven his satire. He claims that unlike his contemporaries, who only aimed to provoke laughter at any cost, he had a serious moral purpose. In a similar way, Aristophanes speaks of his rivals in The Clouds and tells the audience, 'If you find their plays funny, then do not laugh at mine'.

One of Jonson's most effective means for making his satire incisive is the use of Commedia dell'arte elements in his play. This form of comedy developed in sixteenth century Italy and had a great influence on European drama. The success of this kind of comedy depended to a great extent on the comic ingenuity of the performers and the entertainment had elements of farce, mime, clownish buffoonery. The main characters were stock comic types like Pantaloon, the Captain, a Doctor, and servants. The main female characters also were stock types. The adoption of an Italian mode of comedy is brilliantly suited to a play set in Italy. Each Commedia actor, usually, has a single obsession, which resembles a Jonsonian humour, and these obsessions are often defined by their physical or verbal traits, such as Corbaccio's deafness and Corvino's jealousy. The characters in the commedia are presented as wearing masks which are comparable with the beast-fable names of Jonson's characters The pantaloon, who is the main laughing stock, is sometimes a weak old man, as Volpone pretends to be, and sometimes a dictatorial father, like Corbaccio. The child of this father, like Bonario, in the end becomes independent. Sometimes the pantaloon is an ageing husband who thinks that he is cuckolded by his young wife, as Corvino believes in Act II Scene V, .23-26. Voltore corresponds to the pedantic Doctor of commedia dell'arte in his pompous speeches in court, The chief comic trickster is the Harlequin whose traditional costume consists of a mask and fox -tail and who can change his personality like a chameleon. The similarity with Volpone, especially in his role-playing, is unmistakable. The Harlequin may have a servant who seeks to emulate his master, as Mosca does in the last Act of Jonson's play.

One of Jonson's most effective means for making his satire incisive is the use of commedia dell arte featuring main characters who were stock comic types, commedia actor having a single obsession, characters wearing masks and so on.

Jonson's imagination makes a remarkable fusion of these and other disparate sources in Volpone. The sub-plot involving Sir Politic and Lady Would-be, by which Jonson links the Venetian setting and characters to his immediate audience, also has classical models, especially the character of Lady Pol whose talkativeness derives from the talkative, domineering women ridiculed by Juvenal in his Satire VI, while the details of her literary talk and her indefatigable spirit which enables her to brush aside intended rebuffs and turn these very rebuffs into fresh matter for conversation were suggested by a declamation of the Greek rhetorician Libanius. The first entertainment provided for Volpone by the freaks in Act I scene ii has for its main source Lucian's dialogue Somnium. The play is full of reminiscences of other classical and Renaissance authors, details of which can be found in

any good edition (some editions are listed in the section Suggested Reading). There is, for example, Jonson's parody of the Golden Age from Book I of Ovid's Metamorphoses (I.i. .14-20).

Volpone's description of ugly old age (I.iv. .144-159) is based on Juvenal's Satire X, while his song to Celia in Act III Scene vii is loosely based on Catullus's Ode 5. Numerous phrases in the play echo classical authors like Seneca, Pliny, Martial and Plautus. The fool's song in Act I scene ii was influenced by Erasmus's Praise of Folly. Details for the satire on doctors and lawyers were taken by Jonson from Cornelius Agrippa's The Vanity and Uncertainty of Arts and Sciences Chapters 83 and 93. Just as Sutton's name has been suggested as the original of Volpone, it has been argued that the portrait of Sir Politic Would-be too was based on a contemporary. Jonson may have acted as a government agent or spy and the man to whom he reported his findings was Sir Robert Cecil, Elizabeth's investigator into political conspiracies. But Jonson also suffered periodic accusations of sedition because of his pungent topical satires. The portrait of Sir Pol, a kind of Machiavel who delights in masterminding plots, may have been based on Cecil and perhaps reflects Jonson's growing disillusionment with Cecil and his awareness of the absurd lengths to which the whole business of espionage could be taken. Another possible original for Sir Pol was Sir Henry Wotton, who was a friend of Jonson's and who was named ambassador to Venice in 1604. Like Sir Pol, Wotton was a gossip, very much interested in foreign customs and languages, and had a habit of keeping notes and papers. Yet another model for Sir Pol was Anthony Sherley, the famous adventurer and world-traveller who plotted to become ambassador to Persia and was eventually disgraced.

(f) Let us sum up

Thus Jonson had numerous and diverse sources, classical, medieval and Renaissance as well as contemporary figures. Such diversity of source material not only shows Jonson's unquestioned learning but also reveals his extraordinary ability to assimilate a rich diversity of material and apply it to contemporary manners, customs and values. The fact that he took only five weeks to compose *Volpone* suggests that all this rich storehouse of knowledge, far from being laboriously culled from different sources, was part and parcel of his dramatic imagination.

LET'S CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Show how Jonson assimilated a rich diversity of material and applied it to contemporary manners, customs and values.

UNIT-10:

VOLPONE: SETTING AND BACKGROUND

CONTENT STRUCTURE :

UNIT 10 (a): *Volpone*: Setting And Background
UNIT 10 (b): Themes
UNIT 10 (c): Let us sum up
UNIT 10 (d): Structure
UNIT 10 (e): Let us sum up
UNIT 10 (f): The Ending
UNIT 10 (g): Let's sum up

The entire action of *Volpone* takes place in Venice. In selecting Venice as the setting of his comedy Jonson was no doubt motivated chiefly by the common Jacobean notion of Italy as the home of vice and criminality. This notion is strikingly expressed in the almost proverbial saying that 'An Englishman Italianate is a devil incarnate'. Jonson's choice of Italy was also influenced by his reading of Machiavelli. There are echoes of the Italian political thinker in *Volpone*: Sir politic should like very much to model himself upon 'Nic. Machiavel', while an important ingredient in the plot of the play is Machiavelli's advice in *The Prince* that one should not involve in one's plot associate who could prove treacherous. Jonson's use of commedia dell'arte elements in his play is peculiarly appropriate to the setting, for the commedia was Venice's indigenous dramatic tradition. Several other aspects of Venetian life, society and politics should be kept in mind in order to appreciate Jonson's choice of setting. Venice in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was the most cosmopolitan city of Europe. A large number of foreigners either settled permanently in the city or visited it because of its culture, climate and its status as a centre of trade and commerce. Venice was also famous for its wealth, its political intrigues, its architectural beauty and its courtesans. Many Englishmen in particular were attracted by the reputation of this city as the centre of degeneracy and perversion and *Volpone* is full of references to this typically English view of Venice.

In selecting Venice as the setting of his comedy, Jonson was no doubt motivated chiefly by the common Jacobean notion of Italy as the home of vice and criminality. Jonson's use of commedia dell arte elements in his play is peculiarly appropriate to the setting, for it was Venice's indigenous dramatic tradition.

Though a popular tourist spot for the English, Venice was rarely selected as the setting for English plays. Two of Shakespeare's plays, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, are set in Venice and a comparison between Shakespeare's and Jonson's use of the background is unavoidable and should be instructive. For Shakespeare the main appeal of Venice was as an exotic setting, and though his plays refer to such well-known features of Venice as the Rialto, the Jewish merchants, the courtesans, the navy and the legal system, these references reveal the kind of inadequate knowledge which most Europeans who never visited the city possessed. Middleton also used Venetian setting for *Blurt, Master Constable*, a play which has little local colour. Though Jonson never visited Venice, his play reveals a detailed knowledge of all aspects of Venetian life and portrays the

Venetian scenes, especially the area near the Piazza di San Marco, convincingly. Volpone is in this respect unique among Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. But Jonson derived his detailed knowledge of Venetian landmarks like the Arsenale, the Procuratia, the Piazza di San Marco, the Rialto, and of the commercial and social aspects of Venetian life like its shipping, its markets, its mountebanks and courtesans, from secondary sources, like his Italian friends, the musician Antonio Ferrobosco and John Florio, the author of the English-Italian dictionary, The World of Words, who supplied details of Venetian customs and expressions. Jonson' knowledge of the Venetian government and legal system came from Gasparino Contarini's *De Magistratibus et Republica Venetorum*: Jonson's choice of Venice as the setting of his play, far from making the work remote from the concerns of his time and his country, actually gave him greater freedom to deal with the vicious traits of the acquisitive society which were as pronounced in Renaissance England as in the Italy. of the period. The corrupting power of gold in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean English society is amply documented in history as well as in Jonson's middle comedies. Jonson's anti-acquisitive attitude is especially evident in Volpone and The Alchemist. Responding to the comment of Jonson's best known editors, Herford and Simpson, that the theme of legacy-hunting was not at home in Jacobean England, L. C. Knights rightly pointed out its real significance as manifestation of human greed, 'peculiarly appropriate in the era that was then beginning'. The greed of riches, which is the main subject of Volpone, was not only characteristic of the Jacobean age but also a defining phase of the rise of capitalism in the early modern period. Volpone's morning hymn to gold in Act I scene i strikes the keynote of the play. Volpone himself is more anxious to acquire wealth by adopting cunning devices than in its mere possession, but the legacy hunters are chillingly real embodiments of greed. Even among birds of prey, raven, crow and vulture represent a narrow and particularly predatory group differing only in their circumstances and not in their bent. Jonson's portrayal of the four judges completes his incisive satire on greed assuming the proportions of mania. When Mosca is revealed as Volpone's heir, the judges adopt a very polite tone in speaking to him, while the fourth judge considers him 'a fit match for my daughter'. Corbaccio is infirm, deaf and suffers from weak eyesight, but greed for wealth gives a new vitality to this virtually lifeless old man. Then there is Volpone's lust which, like the avarice of the legacy-hunters, results in a terrifying disregard of other human beings. It is not surprising that questions have sometimes been raised regarding the appropriateness of such monstrous wickedness as material for comedy but Jonson seems to consider it as funny enough to be the right stuff for his satiric comedy. But many might agree with Enid Welsford when she suggests in The Fool that 'when the mood of contempt is predominant - as for instance at the end of Volpone-one feels that comedy is losing its character and turning into pure satire'. Some might feel that Volpone is a black comedy, a form of comedy which displays a marked cynicism and in which the wit is mordant and the humour sardonic.

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LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Write a note on the setting and background of *Volpone.*

(b) : THEMES

The rise of capitalism in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period was due to a large extent to the huge amounts of gold and silver which were acquired from the colonised New World. A new class of financiers came into being and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few people led to a cult of individualism as well as to luxury and ostentatious display of wealth. The beast fable framework of Volpone gives Jonson the perfect opportunity to dramatize the dangers of greed and individualism. In the beast fable we find animals behaving like human beings, but in Volpone human beings descend to the level of beasts in their single-minded pursuit of wealth. A Venetian lawyer, an old gentleman and a wealthy merchant deny their human nature in their greed for gold which in the words of Volpone's hymn to gold in the opening scene, 'mak' st men do all things' and makes even hell 'worth heaven'. The exclusive pursuit of gold as the most desirable end in an acquisitive society is the major theme of Jonson's satiric comedy. Classical satire on legacy-hunting also exposed the excesses of greed and its delusions. Jonson's play focuses on the self-delusions of the legacy-hunters. Each of them believes that he is the sole heir of Volpone, is driven by Volpone and Mosca to extreme demonstrations of his affection for Volpone and is in the end left empty-handed. The actions of the legacy-hunters show that gold transcends 'All style of joy in children, parents, friends' and can override 'virtue, fame,/ Honour, and all things else' (I.i). Jonson adds a further ironic twist to this theme by extending the idea of cheating to the arch-cheaters, Volpone and Mosca. Volpone announces that he is dead and that Mosca is his heir. He does this in order to intensity the agony of the legacy-hunters. But this new plan turns out to be the fox-trap, in which he himself is caught. Here Volpone overreaches himself and this over-reaching is entirely consistent with his character. There are enough hints that Volpone's folloy lies in his susceptibility to Mosca's flattering words and his fondness for a variety of disguises. Volpone's various disguisings are an important aspect of the theme of transformation which is introduced by Mosca's masque in Act 'I. In a burlesque of the Pythagorean theory of transmigration of souls, the hermaphrodite Androgyno has now become the repository of the soul of Pythagoras which first came from the God Apollo. Again, the powder which Volpone, disguised as a mountebank, offers the crowd of on lookers in Act II scene ii, came from Apollo, but the powder which turned Venus into a goddess has now been reduced to a hair-rinse or mouth-wash. When noblest essences are debased and degraded, monstrous follies come into being.

The beast fable framework of Volpone gives Jonson the perfect opportunity to dramatize the dangers of greed and individualism. His play focuses on the self delusions of the legacy hunters. Another important theme here, is lust, brilliantly dramatized in Volpone's passion for Celia. Besides Jonson's handling of disguise reveals what has been called his "deep rooted antitheatricalism" which considers transformations of shape inauthentic.

Yet another important theme in Volpone is lust, brilliantly dramatized in Volpone's passion for Celia. His lust for Celia is the first significant plot-development that leads to Volpone's downhill slide. The linking of lust to the theme of legacy hunting was suggested to Jonson by his classical sources. In Horace's Satires II.v- Teiresias tells Ulysses that he should hand over his wife penelope, the classical model of feminine constancy, to a rich libertine whose favours Ulysses seeks. Petronius's Satyricon shows Eumolpus gaining sexual pleasure form the daughter of one of his suitors, despite the fact that Eumolpus is apparently impotent and paralysed. Jonson surpasses his classical models

first by making Corvino an extremely jealous husband, so that his offer of his wife Celia to Volpone not only shows how the greed of gold can override all values but appears as a comically shocking reversal, and secondly by using her resistance to temptations to expose the distorted values of Corvino and Volpone.

Jonson's handling of disguise reveals what has been called his 'deep-rooted antitheatricalism', which considers transformations of shape inauthentic. We may admire the skill with which Volpone plays many roles in the play, moving from one to another with obvious relish, such as his appearance as Scoto of Mantua and his imporsonation of a dying man ; but his disguisings always prove disastrous. For his impersonation of Scoto he receives a sound beating and his appearance in the guise of a commandatore mocking his victims leads Voltore to reveal the conspiracy to the Venetian court. In the end Volpone is unable to regain Mosca's loyalty and has to choose between being outwitted by his parasite, and confessing his mischief and receiving punishment. It is certainly ironical that Mosca, who applauds Volpone's skill in performing a variety of roles, is himself no mean actor and finally takes advantage of Volpone's pretence to make Mosca his heir.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Discuss the important themes of *Volpone.*

(c) : Let us sum up

In choosing Venice as the setting of Volpone Jonson was not seeking to give his play an exotic appeal. The choice of setting in fact enabled him to expose the greed and viciousness which were as characteristic of Renaissance England as of Italy. Jonson invented the sub-plot containing English travellers to underline further the relevance of the play to his English audience. The main themes of his play, apart from legacy-hunting, are the craving for gold in a society which was witnessing the rise of individualism and capitalism, the destructive power of lust and the transformation and shape-shifting effected by the two main characters' supreme skill in acting, a skill which however leads both to disaster. Many other themes in Volpone have been emphasized by recent critics and only a few may be mentioned : conspiracy, corruption, excess, folly, manipulation, materialism, misanthropy, misogyny, paranoia, patronage, pride, sadism, scheming, self-love, sickness, spying, corrupt authority, impotent innocence, perverse art. An alert reading of the play will enable you to trace these themes.

(d) : STRUCTURE

Many of Jonson's prologues and inductions to his plays are statements of his artistic aims, and the Prologue to Volpone is no exception. It is a manifesto in which the playwright paraphrases Horace's famous dictum that art should provide both pleasure and instruction. Jonson proudly asserts that 'In all his poems still hath been this measure : / To mix profit with your pleasure'. Jonson also asserts that his play has been constructed according to classical principles, observing the rules of classical decorum : 'The laws of time, place, persons be observeth. / From no needful rule he swerveth'. Thus Jonson limits his dramatic action to about twenty-four hours and to a single place (Venice). But he also asserts that he is not obliged

Jonson limits his dramatic action to about twenty-four hours and to a single place. He gives his play a double plot. If we agree that the subplot is a digression, we must also accept that it does not violate Jonson's artistic principles.

to follow unnecessary rules. In the Epistle he admits that the harshness of the catastrophe 'may, in the strict rigour of comic law, meet with censure', though he also justifies it on the grounds that the 'goings out' of several ancient classical comedies are not 'joyful' and that the ending of his comedy underlines its didactic efficacy. Another of Jonson's apparent departures from classical rules of construction is in giving his play a double plot. Dryden said that Jonson did not exactly observe 'the unity design' in *Volpone*.

John Dennis described the Politic Would-be pair as 'excrescencies' which have nothing to do with the design of the play. In his Timber Jonson declared that only two things should be considered to ensure that the action in a tragedy or a comedy grows 'till the necessity asks a conclusion' and that these two things are : the unity of time and the scope for 'digression and Art'. Thus even if we agree with Dennis and others that the sub-plot is a digression, we must also accept that it does not violate Jonson's artistic principles. In fact, however, the sub-plot is not a digression, but linked to the main plot on the thematic level. Sir Politic Would-be, his wife, and Peregrine are the three principal characters in the sub-plot and all of them derive their essence, like the chief characters of the main plot, from the beast fable. Sir Politic is the chattering poll parrot, his wife is a more obnoxious specimen of the same species, while Peregrine is the falcon, who, unite the carrion birds in the main plot, preys on other birds and animals and not on decaying flesh. The falcon is swift, bold, and beautiful in its movement. The falcon is an appropriate agent to expose the folly of the parrots. Another characteristic of parrots is that they are mimics, and Sir Pol and his wife imitate their environment. They also supply an element of burlesque in comically imitating, without of course knowing it, the actions of the main characters.

Sir Pol is the Englishman who tries to Italianize himself. He is the quintessential slow-witted Englishman who poses as a sophisticated, cosmopolitan know-all commenting glibly on affairs of the state. He is fond of devising complicated plans, as seen most vividly in his design for a machine to detect plague (IV.i). His views on international intrigue reveal the same love for complicated ideas. Through Sir Pol, Jonson Italianizes English plots, a good example of which was the Gunpowder Plot, a conspiracy to blow up James I and his Parliament on 5 November 1605. Sir Pol has been aptly described by Helen Ostovich as 'a double agent theatrically, if not politically'. The audience has mixed feelings about him, enjoying a feeling of superiority to him as an absurdly eccentric Englishman in a foreign land and sharing his apprehension that secret agents are a threat to the security and stability of European governments. Since Jonson was a Catholic and knew some of the conspirators involved in the Gunpowder Plot, he was treated with suspicion by busybodies like Sir Pol though Jonson was entirely innocent. The original audience of Volpone were no doubt aware of the atmosphere of intrigue and suspicion which prevailed in the royal court. Sir Pol's obsession with plots, state secrets and Machiavellian intrigue also represents his attempt to Italianize himself. His wife imitates Italian fashions and even practices the art of seduction in which the Venetians were supposed to be proficient. Sir Pol and his wife caricature the characters of the main plot too. Sir Pol, for example, is a comic travesty of Volpone, the would-be politician, while Volpone is the real politician, whose plans are cleverly executed. Like Volpone, Sir Pol is full of admiration for his own cleverness and harbours plans for amassing wealth, but he only talks about these plans, unable to execute them. Lady Would-be in her turn imitates the legacy-hunters, and her extravagantly absurd

behaviour parodies the more sinister gestures of Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino. In her jealousy she is like Corvino, in her pedantry she reminds us of Voltore, while like Corbaccio, she makes compromising proposals to Mosca who can therefore blackmail her. Like the three main legacy hunters, she becomes Mosca's dupe, blinder and more self-deluded than any of the three men. In their mimicry, Sir Pol and his wife, like Voltore, Corbaccio and Corvino, emphasise a major theme of the play — that it is unnatural for human beings to imitate animals and birds. By duplicating the habits of beasts, the characters in both the main plot and the sub-plot make a travesty of humanity. Another effect of the interaction between the main plot and the subplot is the heightening of Celia's chastity by contrasting it with Lady Would-be's lecherousness. Lady Would-be is very fond of cosmetics and makes explicit sexual advances to Volpone. In fact, the thwarting of Lady Would-be's attempted seduction of Volpone sets the stage for Volpone's attempted seduction of Celia. Celia's behaviour during this attempted seduction is a telling contrast to the conduct of Lady Would-be. While Lady Would-be is busy applying extravagant make-up, Celia, after realizing that Volpone lusts after her beauty, prays that her beautiful face may be disfigured by poison in order to prevent Volpone's lust. For Lady Would-be, the cosmetic art is an essential prelude to sexual conquest; for Celia, it is the desired disfigurement of her face which becomes a mark of her chastity. Again, Lady Would-be tries to ape Italian vices, but Celia's behaviour shows how uncontaminated she is by the prevailing immorality of Venice. Yet another reminder of the moral degeneration prevailing in Venice is to be found in Sir Pol's grandiose schemes for money-making. He tells Peregrine that he knows many sure ways of making money and only needs the help of a trustworthy assistant to execute those schemes. This could have provided a neat parallel with the Volpone-Mosca relationship if only Peregrine were willing to play Mosca to Sir Pol's Volpone. But Peregrine merely wants to know the particulars of Sir Pol's Plans. However, while Sir Pol is outlining his schemes to Peregrine, Lady Would-be suddenly bursts in on her husband, reminding us of an earlier scene where Corvino finds his wife conversing with a mountebank. Corvino beats away the mountebank; Lady Would-be abuses Peregrine. Both Corvino and Lady Would-be swear by 'honour', but both discard it when it proves inconvenient. Corvino forgets honour when it stands in the way of his avarice, his desire to inherit Volpone's wealth. Lady Would-be forgets all about honour when she discovers that Peregrine is a young gentleman and not, as she had suspected, a harlot in disguise. During the process of perverting justice in Act IV we see many instances of unnatural, beastly behaviour. The irony is that the characters who are beastlike in nature accuse the innocent people of behaving unnaturally. Thus Corbaccio calls his son 'the mere portent of nature', a 'Monster of men, swine, goat, wolf, parricide'. Lady Would-be, whose testimony almost clinches the false case against Celia, brands the latter as 'chameleon harlot' and 'hyena'. Corvino has earlier called Celia a crocodile, implying that she sheds false tears. Thus 'the beast characters in the play display an unerring faculty for describing the innocent as beasts'. It is only Bonario and Celia who are free from the tendency of all the other

Another effect of the interaction between the main plot and the subplot is the heightening of Celia's chastity by contrasting it with Lady Would be's lecherousness. A reminder of the moral degeneration prevailing in Venice is to be found in Sir Pol's grandiose schemes for money-making…What is ironical about the play is that the characters who are beastlike in nature accuse the innocent people of behaving unnaturally.

characters to try to become what they are not. In this overall tendency towards metamorphosis Bonario and Celia strike a different note in always being true to their essential natures. In the unnatural state of Venice, it is these unchanging characters who are castigated as chameleons and hyenas. In the monstrous perversion of justice during the first trial the avocatori express their horror at the unnaturalness of Celia and Bonario.

However, another trial is to follow in the course of which Volpone overreaches himself, as does Mosca, and both are given harsh sentences. Before we come to that part of the play it will be interesting to see what happens to the sub-plot characters. Lady Would-be has made sexual overtures not only to Volpone but also to Mosca and the latter threatens her with blackmail : 'use the poor Sir Pol, your knight, well; / For fear I tell some riddles : go, be melancholy' (V.iii). Thus the pedantic lady, who had earlier reeled off different exotic ways of curing Volpone's melancholy, is now told to treat herself for the same ailment. It is true that the justice meted out to her is less severe than that administered to the legacy hunters, but that is because a parrot is less dangerous than a crow or a vulture. Lady Would-be, therefore, is left to correct her folly privately. Much the same kind of treatment is received by her husband, Sir Pol, though his final humiliation is comparable to some extent with what happens to Volpone in the end. The group of mercatori organized by Peregrine perform the office of the avocatori who pronounce judgement on Volpone. On being told by Peregrine that his persecutors will put him to the rack, Sir Pol climbs into an engine' designed by himself, a tortoise shell. But the merchants by stamping and poking the shell, force Sir Pol to come out of it. This scene has been severely criticised by many, but its relevance to the theme of the play is unquestionable. The play has shown throughout men imitating beasts and the theme of mimicry reaches a visual climax in this farcical scene. Sir Pol, the most imitative of the characters, puts on the shape of an animal. The final unshelling of the tortoise provides a visual prefiguration of the fox in the last scene. However, Sir Pol, like his wife, displays folly rather than vice and is chastised by ridicule rather than any kind of severe punishment. Unlike the vicious characters, again, he is purged of his folly by the medicine of ridicule.

LET US DISCUSS OUR PROGRESS

Discuss the structure of the play, *Volpone.*

(e) : Let us sum up

It should be clear by now that the subplot is relevant to the total structure of Volpone. Jonson offers a contrast between Italian vice and English folly. The Would-be couple, who embody English folly, are like parrots who mimic Italian vice. The vice itself is also a kind of mimicry though much more venal in nature and much more comprehensive. These two aspects of unnaturalness are linked dramatically by the beast fable which provides the basis of the play.

(f) : THE ENDING

The ending of Volpone has aroused a great deal of critical controversy. It is often said that this ending is contrary to the spirit of comedy because of the severity of the punishments visited on the main characters. Jonson himself anticipated this criticism ; as he says in his Dedicatory Epistle, he wanted 'to put the snaffle in their mouths that cry out, we never punish vice in our interludes'.

Besides, we may detect a comic appropriateness in the sentences delivered on the beast-like characters. As the 1st Avocatori concludes : 'Mischiefs feed / Like beasts till they be fat, and then they bleed'. The five criminals are imprisoned in the shapes chosen by them : Mosca is a galley slave, Volpone is to be crippled in a way that matches his moral nature, Voltore is banished from the legal profession, Corbaccio is despatched to a monastery, and Corvino is turned into an object of public ridicule, wearing an ass's cap. Jonson maintanins, moreover, that the end of comedy is not always joyful and cites in this connection the example of some ancient classical writers. Jonson does not mention any classical dramatist by name, but it has been plausibly argued by Helen Ostovich that he has Aristophanes in mind, for Plautus and Terence offer no models of unhappy comedy. On the other hand, in Aristophanes's *Ecclesiazusae* everyone is satirically punished.

Ostovich, who cites Aristophanes's play as an example of comedy which does not end joyfully, calls *Ecclesiazusae* a 'black comedy'. T. S. Eliot thought that the terms 'burlesque' and 'farce' were more suitable to Jonsonian comedy. Some others maintain that comedy like Volpone could not be easily accommodated even within the flexible notions of comic art held by the Elizabethans. A possible explanation for the unmistakable difference in tone between Volpone and Jonson's earlier comedies has been found in the fact that Jonson wrote Volpone after his failure with the tragedy, Sejanus. The stern catastrophe of Volpone and the criminality of the characters, it has been argued, come nearer to Jonson's own view of tragedy ; he himself had stated in relation to an early comedy like Every Man in His Himour, that the aim of comedy was to 'sport with human follies, not with crime'. Coleridge suggested that the play would be more like a comedy if the role of Volpone could be diminished and if Celia were the ward or niece of Corvino rather than his wife; an ideally happy ending then would be to cast Bonario as Celia's lover.

But there are indications that Jonson was preparing the audience for the stern catastrophe of the play. In the first place, the cruel sentences delivered by the Avocatori are consistent with the tone of sadistic superiority that runs throughout the play. Secondly, as the play moves towards its close there are more frequent reminders of the bestiality of the characters than there have been earlier. It may also be suggested that the manner and sequence of the punishments are anticlimactic. Mosca and Volpone are sentenced first. Our attention is then directed to the minor criminals, to the less serious and more comical retributions. A farcical not is struck when Corbaccio, of whose deafness much fun has been made earlier in the play, is even unable to hear the sentence that has been pronounced. An ironic light is also thrown on the Avocatori's manner of dispensing justice. They are confused by the contradictory nature of Voltore's notes and equally contradictory reports of Volpone's death. They are impressed by Mosca and find him attractive, one of them even thinking of Mosca as a prospective son-in-law. Therefore the severity of their judgements may be taken as evidence of their venality. So far as Volpone himself is concerned, he is no doubt unnerved by the first trial, but recovers sufficiently to turn the tables on the lesser rogues, unmasking them and dismissing them with contempt. He even pours scorn on his punishment by punning on the word

It is often said that the ending of "Volpone" is contrary to the spirit of the comedy because of the severity of the punishments visited on the main characters. Perhaps Jonson had Aristophanes in mind.....The stern catastrophe of "Volpone" and the criminality of the characters come nearer to Jonson's own view of tragedy as he himself stated earlier that the aim of comedy was to "sport with human follies, not with crime".

'mortifying' in his response to the first Avocatori's pronouncement of judgement : 'This is called mortifying of a fox'. There is multiple pun here, for 'mortifying' means : (1) neutralizing or destroying power; (2)subjugating through bodily discipline; (3) humiliating; (4) disposing of property for charitable or public purposes; (5) hanging game to make it tender for cooking. Besides, Volpone comes back to deliver the epilogue in which he declares, 'though the fox be punished by the laws, / He yet doth hope there is no suffering due / For any fact which he hath done 'gainst you'. He even asks the audience to 'clap your hands' if they decide not to censure him. It may be suggested that the audience's applause for his versatility and vitality acquits him as Volpone appeals beyond moral condemnation to an appreciation of his role-playing. The way Volpone slips out of the plots of the play into the theatre is also reminiscent of the Reynard beast epic in which the fox adopts many disguises, is tried for his crimes which include rape and feigning death, but always escapes the final sentence of the court. Our general feeling is that the fox, his victims and the court which sits in judgement over them all are equally corrupt and that retribution is therefore pointless. The audience is appropriately asked to 'fare jovially'.

There are indications that Jonson was preparing the audience for the stern catastrophe. Mention may here be made of the cruel sentences delivered by the Avocatori which are consistent with the tone of sadistic superiority that runs throughout the play, and of the frequent reminders of the beastiality of the characters towards the closing of the play The severity of Volpone's and of Mosca's judgement may be taken as evidence of their venality. Our general feeling is that the fox, his victims and the court are all equally corrupt and that retribution is therefore pointless. The audience is appropriately asked to "fore jovially".

(g) : Let us sum up

The ending of *Volpone i*s very different from the traditional happy ending that is often supposed to be essential for comedy; it is also unlike the conclusions of Jonson's own earlier comedies in which follies are corrected by being subjected to the medicine of laughter. Some therefore call Volpone a 'black comedy', arguing that the extremely severe ways in which the main characters are punished darken the mood of the play. However, the punishments delivered by the judges raise questions about the judges' own motives and conduct. Jonson wanted his comedy to end with the punishments of vice. But by suggesting that the judges are almost as venal as the criminals Jonson portrays the very system of legal justice ironically. A further irony occurs when Volpone manages to escape the sentence delivered on him and speaks the epilogue in which he reminds us of the proverbial ability of the fox to escape punishment despite repeated trials.

UNIT-11

CONTENT STRUCTURE :

UNIT 11

SUB UNIT I(a): Character study of Volpone

SUB UNIT I(b): Character study of Mosca

SUB UNIT I(c): Character study of The Legacy Hunters

SUB UNIT I(d): Character study of Bonario

SUB UNIT I(e): Character study of Celia

SUB UNIT II(a): Anti Theatricality

SUB UNIT II(b): Carnival and Licence

SUB UNIT II(c): Gender and Sexuality

SUB UNIT II(d): New Historicism Approach

Suggested Reading

Assignment

An important clue to Volpone's character is to be found in Florio's explanation of the Italian name — 'an old fox', a 'sneaking, lurking wily deceiver'. From his opening speech deifying gold we are made aware of the fact that his 'humour' or obsession is greed and as the play progresses, this greed assumes monstrous proportions. He is also an accomplished performer till the very end when he responds to the sentence passed on him with the punning comment : 'This is call'd mortifying of a Fox'. He gives dazzling performances in all the varied roles he assumes; but even as we admire his skills, the dramatist ensures that our judgement is never suspended. It has been said that Jonson's characterization of Volpone draws upon the parallel between his own talents and those of his hero, both being supremely inventive, clever mimics, entertainers and virtuoso comedians. But Volpone is also Jonson's version of the paradox of the comedian. On the one hand, he is the master of a uniquely effective kind of oratory; on the other hand, this figure of the orator is accompanied by the double he can never get rid of : the clownish and shameless juggler whose boundless capacity for transformation or shape-shifting is subversive. Volpone's brilliant performance as Scoto of Mantua in Act II scene ii will serve as a good example. The scene is, from a Bakhtinian perspective, one of Jonson's most direct and positive reproductions of popular theatrical form. As a real-life actor, Scoto was known in England, not in the role of a seller of medicines but as a juggler and performer of card tricks. Volpone's virtuoso performance makes it difficult to say whether to regard his extravagant claims for his medicines as lies or as oratory. According to Bakhtin, the cries of quacks and druggists operating at fairs belong to the genres of folk humour. The quacks are ambivalent, filled with both laughter and irony. They may at any moment show their other side, turning into abuses and oaths. The powder which Volpone offers as the elixir of life is presented as the one 'that made Venus a goddess', 'kept her perpetually young' and 'from her, derived to Helen'. The invocation of these legendary beauties exalts the powder, but the powder also has the effect of undermining the dignity of the legend. Again Volpone's performance is a double falsehood — the powder is not the elixir of life, as he claims, and he himself is not Scoto of Mantua. Not only is this scene the broadest

and frankest statement of the carnival themes that run through Volpone's entire role, but it is also ofa piece with his other performances. He pretends to be a sick man, and this pretence is a falsehook,a criminal conspiracy to defraud those whose own greed and folly make them his easy prey. When Volpone and Mosca congratulate each other on the brilliance of their performances, we remain aware of the fact that their tricks are as immoral as the greed of their victims.

The same ambivalence can be found in Volpone's attempt to seduce Celia in Act III scene vii. Volpone plays the role of the lover rejuvenated by Celia's beauty and inspired by her to reach 'the true heaven of love' which will forever remain inaccessible to men like her husband, Corvino, who is prepared to sell her, that is, 'part of paradise', for 'ready money'. Volpone's magnificent poetic eulogy of Celia, his song urging her to prove, 'While we can, the sports of love', and his frequent allusions to legendary lovers might almost induce us to admire his vigour and his desire to transcend the bond that ties Celia to Corvino, especially as Volpone's condemnation of Corvino's acquisitive spirit is felt to be just. But we are also aware that Volpone is employing the seducer's classic techniques.

Moreover, Volpone too sees love as a commodity that can be bought. Natural instinct has been replaced in his character by an unnatural one — his mock family is both unnatural and unhealthy. His opening speech eulogising gold is of course satirical commentary on those for whom gold is the highest good, but Volpone himself is not exempt from this vice. He literally tries to purchase Celia's love by offering her 'a rope of pearl', 'a carbuncle', a diamond and various other things. Some have seen Volpone as indulging the fantasies of a Marlovian hero, like Faustus or Barabas, in a society of corrupt money lenders. Certainly Volpone has the Marlovian hero's ability to invest even immoral desires with the grandest poetic terms, as when he appeals to Celia in a song which recreates Catullus's famous fifth poem. But the song is used by Volpone to celebrate an illicit affair in terms of a contempt for ordinary human values. The seduction scene also shows Volpone's rich delight in sensuous pleasures a quality which distinguishes him from the other gold-lovers in the play. While Corvino is ready to sell his wife for gold, Volpone tells Mosca that Celia is 'Bright as your gold and lovely as your gold !' In so far as Volpone proves that other people are debased and materialistic and exposes their hypocrisy and pretense, he has a moral function in the play and the audience no doubt considers him the most fascinating character in the play. But in the end anarchic identification with the Fox's mischief-which is directed against creatures no better than himself-is overturned by condemnation of the evils he represents. However, the ambiguity of the character and of the response he arouses in the end has already been indicated earlier in the lesson. It only remains to examine the nature of his psychological appeal. Psychoanalytic theory maintains that the adjustment to reality which is the basis of all social standards can be achieved only by shedding the narcissism of infancy. But this is never completely achieved and adult fantasy too has recourse to various forms of self-gratification. Comedy becomes from the point of view of psychoanalysis the catharsis of such fantasies, so that Volpone becomes our surrogate escape from normal social and moral repressions. But sympathy at this pre-moral level can also contain an element of alienating cruelty. Volpone's greed for life has both positive and negative sides. On the one hand, there is a pleasure in sensual and material possession; on the other hand, there is fierce aggression, a desire to dominate others and to confirm this domination by watching the humiliation of others. Thus Volpone derives pleasure from

the spectacle of Mosca torturing the gulls in Act V scene ii; not content with this, he prolongs their humiliation by disguising himself as 'commandatore'.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

Write a note on the character and role of Volpone in the play *Volpone*

(b) : Mosca

Volpone's acting skills, superb as they are surpassed by those of Mosca, whose name in Italian means 'fly' and suggests almost total degeneration. On the stage this role may be played in such a manner that the character is felt to represent a fly. In a 1952 production of the play the actor Anthony Quayle wore shiny black clothes, and displayed great physical agility, often rubbed his hands together to suggest a fly massaging its legs and produced a buzzing sound while laughing. When he read out Volpone's will in Act V scene iii he was seated at a table whose four legs were shaped like his own shoe-clad legs so that he seemed to have six legs. But even without such visual representation, Mosca's fly-like character as well as his close resemblance to the parasite of classical Latin comedy is heavily stressed in the play. Mosca sees the world exclusively in terms of 'parasites or sub- parasites'. He is proud to be a parasite himself and defines the true parasite as being 'Present to any humour, all occasion'. According to him, a parasite must be able to 'change a visor, swifter than a thought' and his own extraordinary ability in this respect is displayed throughout the play. Flexibility is his most noticeable trait. Volpone is also a great shape-shifter, but once he assumes a role, he continues with it for some time ; but Mosca can shift roles in the twinkling of an eye. Thus he is by turns the humble servant of the legacy-hunters, a sympathetic friend of the virtuous Bonario telling him that he is about to be disinherited by his father, a panderer to Volpone's lust, a modest inheritor of Volpone's fortune, the dignified magnifico. His performance in all these roles isflawless. Even as we admire his acting skills, however, we cannot forget that he is simultaneously playing two major roles — in Volpone's presence he is the obedient and admiring servant, with thegulls he is whatever the occasion requires him to be, but essentially he is the cunning opportunist waiting for a chance to outwit his master. But is Mosca treacherous from the beginning, or does he turn against his master only when Volpone makes him his heir? The answer is that Mosca's cynical asides give us ample warning of his opportunistic nature. Besides, there is his soliloquy in Act III scene i, in which he reveals his real character directly to the audience. Some would even trace his animosity to his master to Act I scene v where he says, 'He's the true father of his family, / In all save me'. Some explanation for Mosca's perfidy is provided by a number of his speeches which reveal his painful awareness of his low birth and poverty.

Mosca shows his skills as a make-up man, as a producer, and at his best, as a director. The punishment he receives at the end may appear richly deserved, but the way he can impress people and deceive them all about his real nature is evident when one of the judges happily thinks of him as a prospective father-in-law.

It is possible to find in Mosca other theatrical talents. He shows his skills as a make-up man when he anoints Volpone's eyes as the eyes of a dying man. He acts as a costumer when he arranges fur robes on the 'sick' Volpone and later arranges a sergeant's uniform for his master. He is a producer when he helps in erecting the mountebank's platform in Act II. But he is at his best as a director. In the first four acts of the play, Mosca organizes all the little plays within the play, preparing

Volpone for his role in the sick-room scenes in Acts I and III, giving Volpone directions about how he should act his part, and opening and closing the curtains of Volpone's bed at the right moments. His greatest triumph as a director comes in the court-room scene of Act IV where he takes actors of varied talents, such as Voltore, Volpone, Corbaceio, Corvino and Lady Would-be, and draws from each an appropriate performance. So successful is his directorial skill that the innocent Celia and Bonario, despite their attempts to state the truth, are turned into villains of the piece. Indeed Mosca's treatment of Celia and Bonario shows his ruthlessness and his complete lack of moral considerations. Mosca behaves like a true fly again when he torments the disappointed legacy hunters. The punishment he receives in the end may appear richly deserved, but the way he can impress people and deceive them about his real nature is evident when one of the judges happily thinks of him as a prospective son-in-law.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Critically examine the character and Mosca in *Volpone*.

(c) : The Legacy Hunters

All the three legacy hunters have suggestive names; in fact, as pointed out earlier in the lesson, their names define their characters. Voltore is like a vulture and is a lawyer, a profession which Jonson intensely disliked. In several of his plays lawyers and the various means by which they make money are stirised by Jonson. Like the other legacy hunters, Voltore is avaricious, though there is a touch of unsuspected goodness in him when he tells the court that Celia and Bonario are innocent. But even this rare glimpse of goodness is quickly drowned in his greed. It is his argumentative skill as a lawyer which is perversely deployed to prove Celia and Bonario guilty at first. It is his greed which enables Volpone and Mosca to manipulate him. Greed is also the main characteristic of Corbaccio. Indeed his greed assumes monstrous proportions when he shows his readiness to disinherit his only son so that he can acquire Volpone's wealth. There is terrible irony in the fact that though older than Volpone, Corbaccio hopes to outlive the latter. His deafness makes him a plaything for Mosca, who makes jokes against him in his presence. In one respect he goes further than the other legacy hunters, for he is prepared to kill Volpone by using poison which is disguised as a sleeping draught. He is also distinguished from the others by the obvious delight he takes in hearing about Volpone's supposed illness. The more he learns about Volpone's allegedly deteriorating condition, the greater is his own desire to outlive Volpone : 'Excellent, excellent, sure I shall outlast him : /This makes me young again, a score of years'. He is probably the meanest of the three regarding money, as seen in his haggling with Mosca over the payment due to Voltore.

In Corvino we find yet another type of legacy hunter. He is expressly compared with a crow in Act I scene ii when Volpone refers to Aesop's fable of the fox and the crow. He is absurdly jealous about his beautiful wife, as seen in his mounting anger at his wife for looking out of the window at the mountebank in Act II scene v. We are repelled by the sexual nastiness of the chastity belt with which he threatens his wife. And then we are amazed by the depth of his depravity when he displays his readiness to offer her for Volpone's sexual pleasure. His avarice thus overrides whatever feeling he has for his wife's chastity. When he threatens Celia with the chastity belt, he swears by honour, but by the time it has been made clear to him that he can inherit Volpone's wealth only by prostituting his

wife, honour has come to mean for him 'a mere term invented to awe fools'. That he treats his wife as a commodity and not as a human being is clear from his attempt to persuade his wife to go to Volpone's bed by the specious argument that his 'gold' cannot be 'worse for touching'.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Write a note on the character and role of the legacy-hunters.

(d) : Bonario

Bonario and Celia are the only virtuous characters in the play. They cannot adapt their natures to circumstances and as such remain constant in their commitment to virtue, truth and justice. In a play which forces out of us a grudging admiration for the clever and quick-changing rogues, Volpone and Mosca, Bonario may appear dull and uninteresting. He has his heroic moment, of course, when he rushes on to the stage with a drawn sword to rescue the virtuous Celia, and certainly he draws our sympathy as a young man who, for no fault at all, is about to be disinherited by his venal father.

Bonario cannot adapt his nature to circumstances and as such remain constant in his commitment to virtue, truth and justice. He appears rather dull and uninteresting when compared with rogues like volpone or Mosca. If 'Volpone' were simply a play condemning evil, Bonario would have been presented as more active and effective.

His goodness is seen to be naive when Mosca easily deceives him. Even his rescue of Celia is the result of an error of judgement made by Mosca rather than the result of his active initiative. When both Volpone and Mosca are exposed in the end, Bonario has no role to play in the exposure. Both the clever rogues are punished because they overreach themselves and quarrel with each other. Perhaps Jonson presents Bonario's goodness as ineffective in a world where clever rogues are seen to have more wit and draw our unwilling admiration. If Volpone were simply a play condemning evil, Bonario would certainly have been presented as more active and effective. Since his name means 'honest, good, uncorrupt', Bonario is also, however, intended to suggest the standards by which we are to judge the actions of the other characters in the play. But in a play where everyone else is either a fool or a knave, Bonario and Celia neither know nor understand what they are doing, nor do they know what is happening to them. After seeing a performance of Volpone in 1921, W. B. Yeats made a significant comment on the roles of Bonario and Celia in the play : 'The great surprise to me was the pathos of the two young people, united not in love but in innocence, and going in the end their separate way. The pathos was so much greater because their suffering was an accident, neither sought nor noticed by the impersonal greed that caused it.'

(e) : Celia

Celia's Latin name means 'heavenly woman' and in so far as she represents incorruptible virtue, she may be said to live upto her name. She is also for Jonson the dramatic means for showing how private life mirrors the aggresive greed and parancia in public life among men. Thus Corvino has ensured that Celia is watched by 'a guard of ten spies thick'. Volpone's attempt to seduce her represents, at the sexual level, the prostitution of values which the play as a whole embodies. Celia may also be taken to symbolise the cure for such a state of affairs, but like Bonario she remains largely ineffective at a wider social level. Instead of restoring heavenly values, Celia simply confirms

their loss. Celia is the ideal wife of time-honoured tradition-chaste, silent and obedient ; but Jonson has little patience with this model of wifehood. She remains obedient to her unworthy husband in most respects, refusing only to let herself be raped by Volpone, as desired by Corvino.

It has been pointed out that Celia is like all other Jonsonian wives in lacking a conventionally good husband and Helen Ostovich suggests that she is a variation on the Aristophanic type of the silent bride, just as Lady Politic Would-be stands for the Aristophanic type of the Amazon. However. Celia's resemblance with the silent, compliant wives in Aristophanes's comedies is mostly physical: she has a body which excites Volpone's lust, prompting him to fantasize about her 'soft lips' and melting flesh. She is sometimes presented on the stage as the sort of woman who entices strangers to her bedroom and then screams for help. If Celia is seen to appear too soon at her window, enjoying the entertainment provided by Volpone disguised as Scoto of Mantua, and throwing down her handkerchief to him, she may appear as a temptress. But it is wiser to make her appear at the window after Scoto's claims about his wonder drugs have already been made, so that her action of throwing down her handkerchief appears to be a spontaneous response to Scoto's appeal to the crowd for some token 'to show I am not contemned of you'. But both Corvino and Volpone interpret the tossing of her handkerchief as a sexual provocation. This only shows the great discrepancy between the male view of her voluptuous body and the genuine chastity of her character. In this respect she provides an effective dramatic contrast with Lady Would-be; the latter is grotesquely eager to do what Celia is too pious even to contemplate. It is profoundly ironical that the more Celia pleads with Volpone not to feed his lust on her 'beauty', the more she draws his libidinous attention to that beauty. Celia's misfortune is that though she is herself a chaste woman, men only see her sex appeal. She seems to be an embodiment of passive, masochistic suffering. This is most remarkably dramatised when she pleads with Volpone to 'Flay my face / Or poison it with ointments' or plague her with 'leprosy' rather than stain her 'honour'. In the end she is silenced, returned to her father. Celia's fate in the play brings to the foreground the depravity 'inherent in social codes that entrench quantitative values' (Ostovich). For those who judge by such codes, like the avocatori, the sheer quantity of the charges levelled against Celia is enough to besmirch her good name. In their judgement, Volpone is not guilty of attempted rape, partly because he demonstrates that sickness renders him unfit to seduce other men's wives, but mostly because the volume of testimonies against her makes the judges condemn the victim. Although the avocatori find that Celia possesses 'unreproved name', the cumulative force of the attacks on her virtue leads them to voice suspicion: 'This woman has too many moods'. That domestic virtues and values cannot be a refuge from or a corrective against the corruption and contamination of public life is strikingly demonstrated in Volpone by the fate of Celia.

'Celia', meaning 'heavenly woman' represents in-corruptible virtue. She is, for Jonson, the dramatic means for showing how private life mirrors the aggressive greed and parancia in public life among men. Her resemblance with the silent, compliant wives in Aristophanes's comedies is mostly physical.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Comment on the character and role of Celia in the play *Volpone.*

SUB UNIT II: SOME IMPORTANT ISSUES

(a) : Anti-theatricality

Jonson's plays have been seen sometimes as embodiments of his deep-rooted anti-theatricality. Jonas Barish has shown in his Anti-Theatrical Prejudice that Jonson was fundamentally in agreement with those of his contemporaries who had nothing but contempt for the theatre. Jonson's anti-theatricality was not, however, simply an outcome of his classically cultivated snobbery for low, popular forms of entertainment. Jonson always prefers the plain, solid and stable, things which are exactly what they appear to be. His major plays are critiques of the instability which they embody : change is presented as something to be avoided, something which only the foolish characters and the rascals, gulls and knaves seek. In Volpone it is the knaves, Volpone and Mosca, who frequently change their shapes and adopt disguises. But Jonson's distrust of shape-shifting goes hand in hand with what may be called a subversive fascination for show and illusion, and this gives Volpone its unique tension, a tension which some would interpret as an uneasy synthesis between anti-theatricality and a pronounced refusal to make this anti-theatricality the last word. The parodic designs and satiric assaults on follies in Jonson's plays are explicitly theatrical. Like Volpone, who simply cannot refrain from creating complications and enjoying them, Jonson himself cannot stop emplying theatrical devices like parodic designs.

Jonson's major plays are critiques of the instability which they embody; change is presented as something to be avoided, something which only foolish characters and the rascals, gulls and knaves seek.

(b) : The Golden Age

Volpone's morning invocation to gold, with which the play opens, introduces a major theme of the play, that of the Golden Age. While expressing his adoration for gold, Volpone says, 'Well did wise poets, by thy glorious name / Title that age which they would have the best'. Later in the same scene he paraphrases Ovid's famous description of an ideal age when nobody had to strive for a living. But he finds in the idea of the Golden Age an excuse for realising his own perverted ends; as he declares at the end of the opening scene: 'What should I do / But cocker up my genius [give free rein to my natural talents], and live free / To all delights my fortune calls me to?' The concept of a Goden Age when humanity was sexually uninhibited and lived in harmony with animals and nature, without money, labour or agriculture, was central to much Renaissance literature. The idea of this Golden Age is used by Jonson in some of his other writings, notably *The Alchemist*. But in Volpone his treatment of the motif ,ideal to a ruthless pursuit of money while the second can be best described as a self-indulgent saturnalia. So far as the first form of degeneration is concerned, Volpone's opening speech and the subsequent behaviour of the legacy hunters amply demonstrate how the idea of a Golden Age has been reduced to mere lust for gold. For Volpone, gold is brighter than the sun, more desirable than sexual beauty, and the object which

In Volpone Jonson's treatment of the motif of using golden age is ironical, for he dramatises here two of its perversions. The first shows the degeneration of the ideal to a ruthless pursuit of money while the second can be best described as a self-indulgent saturnalia.

defines all human values. In Ovid's description of the Golden Age one of the features that stand out is freedom from toil made possible by the bounty of Nature, but Volpone's desire for an existence without toil is based on other people's greed. The Golden Age was marked by total harmony but in the world of crude materialism that replaces it in Volpone, gold is responsible for breaking even the most intimate of family bonds— those between father and son, between husband and wife. Volpone himself has an 'unnatural' family which consists of three freaks and a servant whom he embraces likea mistress. Greed for gold disrupts the family bonds of the legacy hunters. Another feature of the Golden Age, the harmony between men and beasts and mankind's need to learn some valuable lessons from animals, is parodied in Volpone where men imitate the bestiality of animals and not their wisdom.

The second perversion of the Golden Age takes the form of unbridled self-gratification in which wisdom and folly become interchangeable and fantasies of power and sensuality proliferate. As David Bevington and Brian Parker have shown, its roots lie in the classical celebrations of Saturnalia and Carnival, the German peasant's Land of Cockayne, or the Lubberland that Jonson referred to as an analogue to his comedy, *Bartholomew Fair*. Psychologically, its appeal can be understood in terms of the Freudian concept of 'pleasure principle', which insists that an individual's adjustment to reality on which all moral and social standards are based depends on his/her ability to get rid of narcissistic fantasies of self-gratification. But this adjustment is never wholly complete and childhood fantasies of self-gratification may surface any moment in adulthood. Volpone's appeal as a character lies in the way his unbridled self-indulgence taps the infantile narcissism of everyone. The marks of this kind of narcissism, as described by Freud, are found in ample measure in Volpone's character — 'imaginary gratification of ambition, grandiose erotic wishes' and the sense of wielding power over others. Another means of self-gratification on the part of Volpone is his play-acting. We have seen that Jonson distrusted man's instinct for mimesis. In his Discoveries he expresses an almost Platonic disapproval of acting, warning that 'we so insist on imitating others, as we cannot (when it is necessary) return to ourselves ... and make the habit to another Nature'. This is how Volpone comes to a sticky end and for 'feigning lame, gout, palsy, and such diseases', he is sentenced by the Avocatori 'to lie in prison, cramped with irons, / Till thou be'st sick and lame indeed'. Acting is one of Volpone's chief delights. The play as a whole also contains several play-within-the-play situations of characters either watching others play roles or playing different roles themselves. There are, moreover, several theatrical comparisons like that of Sir Pol's tortoise to a puppet show and the mountebank scene to the commedia dell'arte or a morality play. It is clear that acting so appeals to Volpone because it gives him a sense of power over others. Acting is also for him a mode of self-display, as is clear from his boastful mention to Celia of his acting as Antonius in his youth and from the flattery he expected from Mosca, especially for his performance as Scoto of Mantua. Finally, acting appeals to Volpone because it gives him a chance to humiliate others, as is most obvious in his role as commandotore.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Write a note on the theme of the golden age.

UNIT - 12
REVIEW OF CRITICISM

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

UNIT 12(a): Marxist Perspective

UNIT 12(b): Carnival and License

UNIT 12(c): Gender and Sexuality

Suggested Reading

Assignment

(a) : Marxist Perspective

A very influential early approach to Jonson's plays, that of L. C. Knights in his book *Drama and Society in the Age of Ben Jonson*, published in 1937, related Jonson's drama to the social and economic conditions of the time. Knights saw Jonson rather than Shakespeare as a representative figure in the growth of capitalism in the early modern period. However, Knights' approach was ultimately moral despite the new methodology adopted by him. He saw Jonson as an exponent of the anti-acquisitive attitude, upholding traditional moral and social values in an age which witnessed a sharp deterioration in socio-economic conditions. Knights recognized that Jonson's plays registered an awareness of a new order emerging out of a traditional, medieval view of the world, that Jonson understood the implications of the emergence of a new class, the bourgeoisie, which challenged the predominance of the feudal aristocracy. But for Knights the new economic conditions which Jonson's plays clearly depict are ultimately reducible to the moral aims of a satirist : Jonson's 'diagnosis was moral rather than economic. Or, to put it another way, the dramatic treatment of economic problems showed them as moral and individual problems — which in the last analysis they are'. It is this approach that was challenged by Don Wayne in his essay, 'Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson : An Alternative View'. Wayne's essay is, in his own words, an 'attempt to redefine the relationship between Jonsonian drama and its sociohistorical context'. While admitting that plays like *Volpone* satirize the acquisitiveness that was the hallmark of the rising mercantile capitalism, Wayne argues that Jonson's own identity as a playwright depended on 'the same emerging structure of social relationships that he satirized in his plays'. Wayne substantiates this view by means of a detailed analysis of *Bartholomew Fair*, a play which now receives more critical attention than any other Jonsonian play. Wayne admits that Knights' view that Jonson's criticism of bourgeois acquisitiveness in terms of traditional popular and religious values, values shared by author and audience alike, is applicable to a play like *Volpone*, but not to *Bartholomew Fair*, which Knights does not discuss at all. So far as *Volpone* is concerned, Knights is right in seeing it as a relentless critique of acquisitiveness. This play shows that the lust for gold is a disease that threatens the entire body politic and that this lust leads Jonson's characters to seek power and self-aggrandizement in one form or another. But Jonson's attitude to capitalism is far more complex than the phrase 'anti-acquisitive' would suggest. The complexity is due to the tension between the poet's authority, his need for self-assertion and that of the theatre audiences. Jonson often incorporates into his texts, generally in a prologue, induction

or epilogue, his awareness of the relationship between his own assertion of the power and authority of the poet and his audience's authority to pass judgement. *Volpone* is a play in which the poet's authority is stated categorically, asserting in the Epistle Dedicatory that the poet is a person 'that comes forth the interpreter and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things divine no less than human, a master in manners ; and can alone or with few, effect the business of mankind'. Jonson's confidence here indicates the special status of *Volpone* among his works : it is a play which shows little authorial intrusion into the action, a play where the moral is enforced without the appearance of a character like Crites in *Cynthia's Revels* who ensures that the audience grasps the author's meaning. In *Volpone* Jonson had found a formula by means of which he could bring together the diverse sections among his audience in the act of judging and censuring the action on the stage. Such a unity of judgment reinforced the author's claim of being the 'arbiter of nature'. But the ethical consistency of *Volpone* depended on what Wayne calls 'something of a red herring' — the choice of a Venetian setting. The unity of judgment between author and audience as well as the applicability of an accepted moral standard is rendered possible in the play by 'the scapegoating of the Italians'. Thus *Volpone* 'permitted a sense of common purpose and of social order based on a strictly negative appraisal of a certain kind of acquisitive behaviour that was conveniently displaced elsewhere'.

Leaving aside the question, raised by Wayne, of the authority of author and audience sharing a common judgement on the action of *Volpone*, we can try to understand the significance of that action in Marxist terms. Here an important insight is provided by Peter Womack in his Ben Jonson. Womack points out how Corvino betrays his wife, Lady Politic her husband and Corbaccio his son, as they seek to become Volpone's heirs. By the time Mosca too joins the legacy hunting and is seen by one of the magistrates as a prospective son-in-law, the competition for the legacy has assumed a form that can be best described by the famous words of Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*. The pursuit of money has 'pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors" and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment" '. It 'has torn away from the family its sentimental veil and has reduced the family to a mere money relation'. Thus we come back to the view that *Volpone* reflects a major trend that was emerging in Renaissance England — the decay of feudal values and the rise of capitalism.

(b) : Carnival and License

The 'saturnalian pattern' of clarification through release was traced in Shakespeare's comedies by C. L. Barber in the 1960s. The representation of popular festivity in Jonson's comedies has subsequently emerged as an important critical concern. Ian Donaldson demonstrated in his *The World Upside Down* how Jonson's plays take 'the festive idea as a starting point to explore questions of social freedom and social discipline, social equality and social distinction'. The link between Jonsonian comedy and Renaissance popular festivities provides the basis of some later critical studies undertaken from a Bakhtinian perspective. In his *Rabelais and His World* Mikhail Bakhtin added a political dimension to the study of Renaissance literature. For Bakhtin European culture in the early modern period was a rich medley of competing languages, high and low. The tradition of carnival, whose history is traced back to the Roman saturnalia, is described by Bakhtin as abolishing the distinctions between the public and private spheres and between performers and spectators, and as

establishing an inverted order in which fools and outsiders become kings for the day. It offers a mocking challenge to the serious official culture of the time by destroying social differences and making all social levels equal. Carnival was the time which most comprehensively embodied this levelling spirit. In his account of carnival festivity Bakhtin saw its particular value in the way it suggested cultural subversion, a bold political challenge to the official order. Peter Womack (**Ben Jonson**) applies Bakhtin's theory of carnival to the theatre, which is readily recognized as the space of carnival, a place where the official order, the order of monarchy which is singular in its absolutism, was challenged by a plurality of other voices and other faces. The single 'truth' of the official order was replaced in the theatre by the dialogue between different voices, the opening up of the possibility of other truths. The actor's role itself is the manifestation of an unstable identity. Thus Volpone's performance in the role of a sick man is susceptible to a double reading. On the one hand, we can see it as the representation of a falsehood, a criminal device to deceive people whose greed and folly are highlighted by the way they become easy prey for Volpone. On the other hand, as a performance Volpone's feigned sickness is a kind of carnival : a celebration, against the rigid categories of official culture and legality, of the continually dying and renewing body, 'the invincible resourcefulness with which it provokes fresh transformations'. The tricksters in the play are artists who challenge the authoritarian barrier between what is and what could be. Lying and deception are held up for our moral condemnation by the authorially controlled plot, but the show challenges this authorial control by its exuberant cleverness and entertainment. In other words, the play speaks in two voices, undermining its singular meaning and authority by the doubleness of its appeal. However, the inversions of the official order in Volpone ultimately produce only the mirror image of that order, a 'travesty court' over which Volpone rules and which produces not a carnivalesque celebration of generation and regeneration but 'a parodic apotheosis of money'. 'Its cold and abstract utopianism takes the form, not of a saturnatlian banquet for all the world, but of an infinitely large pile of precious metals'. Womack also shows that The Alchemist and Bartholomew Fair are more amenable to a carnivalesque interpretation.

(c) : Gender and Sexuality

It is feminist criticism which is most obviously concerned with the representation of women in Renaissance drama. But even some male critics had written, before feminist critics began to highlight it, about the marginalization of women in Jonson's plays. It was pointed out, for example, how few female roles there are in Jonsonian drama and how stereotypical these roles are. The frigidly virtuous Celia in Volpone is such a stereotype. Jonson's deficiencies in this respect become more pronounced when one thinks of the lively and assertive women in Shakespeare's comedies. However, there is a much more complex and sympathetic treatment of women in Jonson's later plays like The Devil is an Ass and The New Inn. Some feminist critics have also pointed out that the most crucial issue in this respect is the status of women in Renaissance Britain and that Jonson's plays do focus on this. In his plays women are shown to be marginalized or silenced and often pursued for values that are financial rather than personal or spiritual. Jonson reveals women as commodities in an increasingly market-dominated capitalistic ethos which reduced the relationships between the sexes to a mere money relation. In this respect feminist criticism reinforces Marxist insights into Jonsonian drama. Celia is revealingly identified with gold by Mosca : 'She's kept as warily as is your gold'. Her jealous

husband Carvino, before pushing her into Volpone's bedroom, tells her that, like his money, she will be none the worse for touching. Both Lady Would-be and Celia 'convey, by means of sexual shock, the depravity inherent in social codes that entrench quantitative values' (Ostovich). They also show how the wrongness of public life among men corrupts private life. Ostovich praises Jonson's insight in showing how private life mirrors the aggressive greed in public life among groups of men. In a play concerned with the prostitution of values, Lady Would-be and Celia sexualise plots as potential cures. But instead of restoring value, they simply confirm its loss. Not being married to conventionally good husbands both women share an affliction common to all Jonsonian wives. Lady Would-be resembles the Amazonian type of woman who is portrayed as a female intruder on masculine territory in Aristophanes's comedies like Lysistrata and Ecclesiazusae. She also refuses to conform to the prevailing cultural construction of the wife, though this only makes her offensively self-assertive, and sexually open. Ceilia is a complete contrast to her. But in the ultimate analysis Jonson makes no distinction between the aggressively seductive woman and her self-effacing counterpart : both are silenced and eliminated.

Some have argued that the comparative blankness of Jonson's plays regarding heterosexual love goes with a tolerance for homoeroticism. Mario di Gangi has traced the operation of homoeroticism in orderly and disorderly master-servant relationships in Renaissance drama. Some examples of this homoeroticism are marked as transgressive (*Volpone*), while some are obviously not so (*Epicene*). 'Volpone suggests that when transgressive of marriage, inheritance, and hierarchical authority, a partnership between master and servant can be powerful and profitable, even attractive, but is liable to be unstable and self-destructive'. Mosca gets his master's consent to violate social propriety, but in the end he destroys the master-servant hierarchy itself. Moreover, the erotically disordered master-servant relationship in the play mirrors the social disorder.

(d) New Historicist Approach

One of the central critical questions about Jonsonian drama is the nature and importance of the Jonsonian self and its relation to authority. A contrast is sometimes drawn in this connection between the centered or 'gathered self' and the 'loose self'. Jonson's own image of a broken compass which cannot trace a circle is often taken as emblematic. A confrontation between these two principles of selfhood is staged in the plays. The strain of this confrontation is made into a great work of art in Volpone. Volpone is a shape-shifter, a Protean man without core and principle. Once the ideal of moral constancy is abandoned, one has an almost infinite and vicious capacity to change the self at will. But this continual shape-shifting, this constant alteration of the self, in the end leads Volpone to disaster, as it does everyone else in the play, who is committed to the same principle. Thus the drama reflects the dangers of an always shifting self, a self which lacks inner poise and stability. Ian Donaldson suggests that this conflict is central to Jonson's plays and his non-dramatic verse. On the one hand, there is the 'gathered self' — collected, contained, morally strong but tending towards the position that only the self exists ; on the other hand, there is 'the loose self' ready to shift in an opportunistic manner from one role to another, a self which because of its instability is completely untrustworthy. This opposition has been taken by New Historicists to 'historicize' the Jonsonian self, to establish its relationship with the historical conditions in which such notions of selfhood were constructed. The critical trend of tracing social identity as a process of self-creation was pioneered by Stephen

Greenblatt's influential book Renaissance Self-Fashioning which does not, however, deal with Jonson. But an earlier essay by him, 'The False Ending in Volpone', has all the main traits of New Historicism. In that essay Greenblatt argues that part of the attraction of Volpone for us today is that we feel we are watching the beginning of modern consciousness. Volpone is a man who has created his own identity, fashioned for himself roles which he goes on to play with the consummate skill of a fine actor. From this view of a character in a play, the New Historicists proceed to a similar view of its creator. Selfhood, in the view of such critics, is an entity whose exact dimensions are determined by the structures of power and forms of discourse peculiar to the culture in which it is generated. The qualities of 'the gathered self' can be understood historically as related to a Renaissance ideal of the 'laureate self', a serious self-characterized by its knowledge of and fidelity to itself as well as the ethos of the age. This laureate self is authorial, a normative ideal against which contemporary varieties of authorship can be measured. But this self is also an authoritative self because of its conformity with the governing ethos of the age. In his early works Jonson tries to establish himself as this elevated kind of author. But a mere declaration of such status does not ensure laureate selfhood and Jonson's plays also reveal the paradox and difficulty involved in the process. Volpone is prefaced by an address to the Universities. As another means to ensure his elevated status as an author, Jonson also emphasizes his didactic intentions. But the paradox and difficulty lie in the fact that such a statusis sought in the alleged baseness of the theatrical world. Consequently, Jonson's aspiration towards the status of an elevated author involves him in a paradoxical downplaying of the form chosen byhim. He could be a laureate poet in the theatre only by opposing the theatre, by unmasking the moral emptiness of its mimicry (see the section on 'Anti-theatricality).

Suggested Reading

Editions:

1. Brockbank, Philip, ed. Volpone. London : A& C, Black 1968.
2. Nayar, M. G., ed., Volpone or the Fox. Delhi : Macmillan
3. Ostovich, Helen, ed., Jonson : Four Comedies. London : Longman, 1997.
4. Parker, Brian, and David Bevington, eds. Volpone. Manchester : University Press, 1983

Critical Studies:

1. Barton, Anne. Ben Jonson ; Dramatist Cambridge : University Press, 1986.
2. Bloom, Harold, ed., Ben Jonson : Modern Critical Views. New York : Chelsea Home Publishers, 1987.
3. Dutton, R., ed. Ben Jonson. London : Longman, 2000.
4. Harp, Richard, and Stanley Stewart, eds., The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson. Cambridge : University Press, 2000.
5. Knights, L. C., Drama and Society in the Age of Ben Jonson. London : Chatto & Windus, 1937.
6. Loxley, James. The Complete Critical Guide to Ben Jonson, London : Routledge, 2002.
7. Miles, Rosalind, Ben Jonson — His Craft and Art. London : Routledge, 1990.

8. Womack, Peter, Ben Jonson. Oxford : Blackwell, 1986

ASSIGNMENT

Short-answer type questions:

1. What do the names Volpone, Mosca Voltore, Carbaccio and Corvino mean ?
2. What does the nickname 'Sir Pol' suggest ? In what way is he contrasted with Peregrine ?
3. What are the Unities ? Does Jonson maintain them in Volpone ?
4. Briefly mention the reasons why Jonson is considered unique in British drama of the early modern period.
5. Mention the titles of four comedies and two tragedies by Jonson.
6. What was the War of the Theatres ? What role did Jonson play in it ?
7. Suggest two aspects of Jonson's classicism which make him unique.
8. Who was the first critic to relate Volpone to the emerging capitalism of the period ? Briefly mention his main argument.
9. What is the relationship between author and authority in Jonson's plays ?
10. How would you compare Jonson and Shakespeare in respect of their representation of women ?
11. Which aspect of Jonsonian drama do the New Historicists focus on ?
12. What are the marks of Jonson's anti-theatricality in Volpone ?

Answer the following questions in detail and with close reference to the text:

1. Attempt an estimate of Jonson's achievements as a comic dramatist with special reference to *Volpone*.
2. Comment on Jonson's handling of his sources in *Volpone.*
3. What is the significance of the Venetian setting in *Volpone* ?
4. Bring out the major themes of *Volpone.*
5. Analyze the structure of *Volpone* and show how the subplot is related to the main plot.
6. Does the ending of *Volpone* satisfy artistic requirements as well as the demands of comedy ?
7. Comment on the role and character of either Volpone or Mosca.
8. Does Celia live up to the meaning of her name ? How effective is her presence in the corrupt public world of Venice?
9. How does Jonson deal with the theme of the Golden Age in *Volpone* ?
10. What is Carnival ? Attempt a reading of Volpone in Carnivalesque terms.
11. Analyze *Volpone* from a Marxist perspective.

BLOCK IV

UNIT-13

THE DUCHESS OF MALFI: JOHN WEBSTER

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

UNIT 13(a): Objectives

UNIT 13(b): Jacobean Tragedy and the Distinctiveness of Webster as a tragic playwright

UNIT 13(a): OBJECTIVES

In this module we shall deal with one of the greatest Jacobean tragedies, *The Duchess of Malfi*, by John Webster. The Duchess also happens to be a revenge tragedy, very different in kind from the revenge tragedies of the earlier, Elizabethan, period, and its treatment of the theme of revenge has to be examined. The Jacobean period in the history of English drama introduced some important new trends. Again, compared with the earlier, Elizabethan, period's dramatic achievement, the Jacobeans appear to be decadent. The figure of the Duchess has a unique significance in respect of the status of women, especially when the question of the marriage of a widow came up, in a predominantly patriarchal society. Other figures of great interest in Webster's tragedy are Bosola, the Duke (Ferdinand) and his brother, the Cardinal. All these issues and aspects of the play have been thoroughly discussed in this module.

UNIT 13(b): JACOBEAN TRAGEDY AND THE DISTINCTIVE-NESS OF WEBSTER AS A TRAGIC PLAYWRIGHT

Just as the phenomenon of Elizabethan tragedy was followed a crest in the sea is followed by that of a trough, so also by Jacobean tragedy, indicating a distinct falling-off from the achieved standard of literary excellence. The patriotic outburst of national life after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the freedom illumined of mind and conscience, an offshoot of the initial phase of that biggest movement in human history known as the Renaissance, had already spent themselves, and reaction was inevitable. In Elizabethan tragedy there was much of exhilaration ; Jacobean tragedy was marked by decadence.

Contemporary tragic playwrights practically deprived people of any stable system of moral values, made them crave like inebriates for more and more abnormal stimulus and provided an authentic reinforcement of the pessimistic world-view of the Jacobean period. Elizabethan tragedy signified the triumph of life ; it was the dance of death that made Jacobean tragedy a powerful medium of evoking shudders. Instead of the exaltation of the cult of humanism in the most glowing terms, we have, in Jacobean tragedy, the 'dialect of despair' (Charles Lamb), the note of disjunction, the muddle of the positive values of life — obviously on account of a number of changes on various planes of thought, political, social, economic, religious, even cosmological. The whole assumption, the central message of Elizabethan England was summed up by Shakespeare's Viking prince:

> "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty ! in form, in 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 !" (Hamlet, II, ii.)

With the dismantling of the Ptolemaic theory of the universe, theocentric, hierarchic and immutable, and the erosion of the philosophical foundations of the medieval principle of cosmic harmony / order, however, things began to fall apart and lose their coherence. Morally and spiritually adrift, man found himself abandoned in a world of accelerated change. The rapid movement from feudalism to capitalism, the ceaseless conflict between orthodox Catholicism and radical Protestantism, the tense relationship between the King and Parliament over their rights and, above all, the astounding discoveries made by Copernicus and Kepler, Galileo and Vesalius converted Jacobean England into a land confusion and unease. Flamineo, in The White Devil, expresses the zeitgeist (time-spirit) when he says:

"While we look up to heaven we confound
Knowledge with knowledge. O I am in a mist." (V, vi)

In conformity with the pressures and principles of the Jacobean period George Chapman offered to the theatre-audience *Bussy D'Ambois* and *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*. Replete with sensational scenes and inspired by philosophical ideas, each of the tragedies presents a new version of the Marlovian superman. Marston wrote *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Malcontent*, and Thomas Heywood did his work in the field of domestic tragedy, the genre of *Arden of Feversham*. In Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, a revenge play without revenge, one in which murderous impulses are controlled and dispelled, we have a perfect antithesis to the grandiose events and high-minded philosophical reflections of Chapman. Much of the merit of Chapman's drama really consisted in his philosophical perception of the human condition. *Bussy D'Ambois*, like so many of the marginalised malcontents who followed him in the plays of the 1600s, was a misfit (primarily because of his fiery individualism) in the corrupt courtly world in which he moved. Marston however testified to the Jacobean spirit in a different way ; his discordant moral vision was reflected in his equally discordant rhetoric. He echoed Senecan stoicism and indulged in Senecan bombast, but he added to them his own mode of thought, his brooding despondency. Aside from Chapman and Marston, Ben Jonson wrote two tragedies, Sejanus and Catiline, both of which were concerned with the downfall of evil protagonists. J. B. Bamborough rightly observes : 'If *Sejanus* is an essay on the evils of Tyranny and Flattery, *Catiline* is a demonstration of the dangers of political turbulence'. (Ben Jonson).

Middleton, in collaboration with Rowley, wrote The Changeling, a tragedy of outstanding merit with a plot that is both dexterously articulated and deeply engrossing. The moral degeneration of the heroine, the deviant and duplicitous Beatrice-Joanna, and her total surrender to the diabolical creature, the ugly and lustful De Flores, are indeed acutely painful. Middleton's interest in women and their capacity for evil is further illustrated in *Women Beware Women* where tragic passions culminate in crude and atrocious slaughter. Tourneur was the author of *The Atheist's Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

The age saw the publication of a number of revenge tragedies, domestic tragedies, in the hands of Chapman, Ben Jonson, Marston and others.

In these, especially the second, there is ample evidence of a strong taste for the mercilessly perverse and the gratuitously horrible among the playgoers of the Jacobean period. Tourneur evidently tried to feed a public appetite almost as cruel as that of the Romans under Nero. The early revenge plays were as little terrifying as puppet-shows, but, in course of time, the theme of revenge handled by Tourneur came to be intensified and enriched by moral perceptiveness and proved both

credible and meaningful. Tourneur could give a whole inferno in a single line. The vision of evil he conjured up in his skillful verse is almost too menacing to observe. The Revenger's Tragedy is structurally the better of the two plays attributed to Tourneur and there is now a school of thought that would attribute it to Middleton. The most famous collaboration of the period was that between Beaumont and Fletcher. They wrote The Maid's Tragedy, a high-flown, aristocratic and neo-Greek drama, often characterized by a strain of implausibility.

The greatest tragic playwright of the Jacobean period was doubtless Webster who wrote two extremely fascinating and dynamic tragedies, *The White Devil* and The *Duchess of Malfi*. Webster has often been criticized for his defective plot-construction. Objections have been raised against his penchant for the decadent world-view and his predilection for the sinister and violent modes of action. But he forms a class by himself in the history of Jacobean drama, thanks to his tantalizing poetic power and his searching study of the riddling complexities of the human mind. In some respects Webster exhibited the true dramatist's skill in his treatment of sensational scenes ; and hardly any playwright of his time could match him in the construction of grim or grisly situations relieved by a poetic imagination ever dwelling on the gloomy thought of death. Perhaps he was the only Jacobean playwright who came nearest to Shakespeare in his power of character delineation, but his tragedies served to highlight Shakespeare's magnificent balance between plot and character rather than vying with his whole work. It should however be noted that Webster was by no means just a flamboyant sensation-monger, an unthinking composer of eloquent melodrama. He had a deep tragic vision and an expansive ethical consciousness. It is true that one of Webster's salient characteristics is his preoccupation with death. As T. S. Eliot says in his 'Whispers of Immortality':

"Webster was much possessed by death
And saw the skull beneath the skin:
And breastless creatures underground
Leaned backward with a lipless grin.
Daffodil bulbs instead of balls
Stared from the sockets of the eyes !
He knew that thought clings round dead limbs
Tightening its lusts and luxuries."

It is also true that Webster is often pessimistic, that he 'relishes with a near-psychopathic obsession the cruel variations of human mortality' (S. Gorley Putt : The Golden Age of English Drama), and that, while depicting a world where mankind is abandoned, he anticipates 'the Sartrean notion that it is death itself which renders life terrifyingly absurd and devoid of meaning.' (Rowland Wymer : Webster and Ford). But equally true is Webster's 'agonized search for moral order in the uncertain and chaotic world of Jacobean skepticism' (Irving Ribner : *Jacobean Tragedy : The Quest for Moral Order*) — his response to and appreciation of the luminous ideal of the suffering individual's 'integrity of life' in a heap of broken images. Reflecting on what he regards as 'a strictly moral universe' in Webster's plays D. C. Gunby has gone so far as to claim that 'all the resources of poetic drama are directed towards the embodiment of a complex, moving and deeply religious vision of human existence.'

John Ford, another playwright of the period, had something of the same sharpness of vision and depth of feeling and the same sort of fascination with Websterian horrors. His two tragedies, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore and The Broken Heart, are generally regarded as the last two great tragedies of the Jacobean period, though it must be conceded that the first one is great only in patches. In a sense, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore dealing, like Beaumont and Fletcher's A King and no King, with incest, is a persecution tragedy where a loving couple (brother and sister, we presently learn with revulsion) persist fatally in their love against a hostile world of traditional ethics. T. S. Eliot has characterized the lovers with clarity and precision Giovanni is merely selfish and self-willed, of a temperament to want a thing the more because it is forbidden : Annabella is pliant, vacillating and negative : the one almost a monster of egoism, the other virtually a moral defective. (*Elizabethan Essays)* Ford could face all the moral implications of a genuinely incestuous passion, but his poetic power was not often of an elevated quality or of a rich timbre. The Broken Heart is a more coherent study and has a more sustained plot-structure. Ford was content to represent life's tragic situations, knitting them into a unity. His focus of interest was not on any moral pattern, but on thematic relationships which he succeeded in making vibrant with a definable emotional tone of melancholy and grief.

With Massinger, an exact contemporary of Ford, we leave the Jacobean age for the Caroline age, and with Shirley, author of *The Traitor and The Cardinal*, we come to the end of the great period of English drama. Shirley's tragedies are well-crafted and without any glaring faults, but they lack the originality, spontaneity and vitality of his masterly predecessors.

T. S. Eliot examines Webster's view of life and arrives at the conclusion that his underlying philosophy is characterized by confusion, morbidity and disequilibrium. Equally responsive to Webster's decadent world-view is Gunnar Boklund who believes that Webster's purpose in *The White Devil* is to portray 'a world without a centre'— 'a world where mankind is abandoned, without foothold on an earth where the moral law does not apply, without real hope in a heaven that allows this predicament to prevail.' (The Sources of *The White Devil*) In *The Duchess of Malfi*, he asseverates, 'plot and theme combine and co-operate to' produce a final effect of unrelieved futility, foreshadowed several times in the past by Bosola's bitter denunciations of the world' (*The Duchess of Malfi: Sources, Themes, Characters*). Nevertheless, what marks Webster off from the other tragic playwrights of the Jacobean period is his ultimate focus on the positive values of life. It has been noted by D. C. Gunby that at the end of *The Duchess of Malfi*, Delio, presenting after the gory carnage Antonio's son as a symbol of hope and regeneration, expresses a larger view and a brighter philosophy. Using what is, significantly, the only sun image in a dark play, he points to 'the negativity and futility of evil' and reveals his deep-seated conviction that 'integrity of life' is rewarded beyond the grave.

The Jacobean period came to an end with John Ford, Massinger and Shirley Ford's focus of interest was on thematic relationships which he succeeded in making vibrant with a definable emotional tone of melancholy and grief.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. How would you characterize Jacobean Tragedy ?
2. What are the distinct features of John Webster as a playwright ?
3. Name some great dramatists of the Jacobean Period other than John Webster, and their plays.

UNIT 14(a):
LIFE AND WORKS OF WEBSTER

CONTENT STRUCTURE

UNIT 14(a): Life and Works of Webster

UNIT 14(b) Sources and Influences, Plot

Almost nothing is known of Webster's life except that he wrote a number of plays in collaboration and at least four unaided, as well as some poems and pageants. He was born most probably in 1580, but we do not know when he died. He might have been the John Webster buried at St. James's Clerkenwell on 3 March 1638, but scholars have been perturbed by the fact that in 1634 Heywood's *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels* referred to him in the past tense. As regards his ancestry Webster himself remarked in the Dedication to his pageant, *Monuments of Honour* (1624), that he was a Londoner, 'born free' of the Merchant Taylors' Company. It has been conjectured — mainly because of his considerable knowledge of the law — that, following the lead of another poet and dramatist, John Marston, he entered as a student at the Middle Temple in 1598, but, for some reason or other, he did not complete his course of studies. Webster's earliest surviving play is *Appius and Virginia* (C. 1608), a dignified masterpiece, though many modern critics believe that it was Webster's last work written probably in collaboration with Heywood. In his early years Webster wrote the Introduction to Marston's popular tragicomedy, *The Malcontent*. The play came out during 1603 or the spring of 1604. During 1604-5 Webster wrote two city comedies, *Westward Ho!* and *Northward Ho!* In collaboration with Dekker. Webster's reputation however rests on *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), two tragedies which really constitute the apogee of his dramatic ouvre, and to a lesser extent *The Devil's Law-Case* (1620), a deeply serious play, though in the tragicomic mode. These are all dark and violent works, shot through with passages of extraordinary poetry, and obsessed, even the last and lightest, with death, decay and doom. Of these three plays The White Devil, though acclaimed by Dekker for its *'Braue Triumphs of Poesie*, and Elaborate Industry', had a rather poor reception in the theatre'. The most successful production was *The Duchess of Malfi* ; it had an immediate impact on the audience. Webster offered the play, not to the Queen's Men, but to their rivals, the King's Majesty's Servants. The play was first produced at the Blackfriars and afterwards at the Globe.

Webster offered "The Duchess of Malfi", the most successful of his plays which had an immediate impact on the audience, to the King's Majesty's servants, the rivals of Queen's men. Other works that deserve mention are 'Keep the Widow Waking', 'A Monumental Column' etc.

Some other works of Webster deserve mention, although they tell us nothing special about Webster's artistic excellence or moral vision. One of his plays, *Keep the Widow Waking* (1624), written in collaboration with John Ford, put both of them into legal problematics. *A Monumental Column* (1613), an elegy on the death of Henry, Prince of Wales, serves as an aid to our understanding of Webster's tragic world-view. Another work of Webster's is the group of thirty-two prose 'characters' added to the 1615 edition of Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters*. Webster's comic genius was never as great as that of Shakespeare, but one full-length, full-fledged comedy entitled *Guise* (C. 1616) has been attributed to him. Webster himself mentioned it in the same breath as his two tragedies.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. What do you know of John Webster's life and works? Which one is the most successful of Webster's productions?

How to Approach *THE DUCHESS Of MALFI*?

Explorations of 'the rich network of finer effects' (to borrow Dover Wilson's phrase in What Happens in 'Hamlet') may contribute towards a better understanding of Webster's play. These 'effects' have been produced not only by what has been stated but also by what has been implied— by what lies in the contexts or on the margins. Unlike *Hamlet*, the *Duchess of Malfi* is not a mysterious character — her passion, ungovernable and active, is well pronounced and may bracket her together with a number of tragic heroines in the history of world drama, who are commonly regarded as deviant and disorderly (from Aeschylus's Clytemnestra to Ibsen's Rebecca via Shakespeare's Desdemona), though with some basic points of contrast. Thosewho want to punish and torture the Duchess, all representatives of relentless, feudal patriarchy, Ferdinand and the Cardinal and their tool, Bosola, the foul-mouthed malcontent and self-seeking opportunist (Machiavellian in astuteness and design), are however complex characters. The irresistible questions we have to answer are : Why do the two brothers want to take revenge on their sister ? What role does Bosola play in their scheme of revenge? Does Ferdinand entertain any guilty passion for the Duchess?

Webster was a Londoner, 'born free' of the Merchant Taylor' company He entered as a student at the Middle Temple in 1598, but did not complete his course of studies. ....He wrote a number of plays in collaboration and at least four unaided, as well as some poems and pageants — 'Appius and Virginia', his earliest play — he wrote a tragic comedy and two city comedies. However, "The White Devil" and "The Duchess of Malfi" constitute the apogee of his dramatic ouvre. These are dark and violent works, with passages of extraordinary poetry and obsessed with

Above all, we must try to find out what Webster seeks to spotlight as he presents the Duchess who is so radically different from her predecessors in Bandello, Belleforest and Painter) in the decadent social perspective of the Jacobean period. How does he deal with the problems of female sexuality, widow remarriage, class conflict and power-politics in a society that is absolutely male-dominated and integrate drama and literature in the resonances of contemporary culture? There are many magnificent passages of poetry in the play. Students should particularly concentrate on the dying speeches of different characters, which often throw a good deal light on contemporary human condition characterized by confusion of values. One must understand that Webster's poetry is indissociably intertwined with the total dramatic structure.

What may contribute toward a proper understanding of Webster's play are the explorations of "the rich network of finer effects", produced not only by what has been stated, but also by what has been implied. we must try to find out what Webster seeks to spotlight as he presents the Duchess.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. How should the reader approach *The Duchess of Malfi* ?

(b) : SOURCES, INFLUENCES AND PLOT

In his letter to the Reader, prefixed to *The White Devil*, Webster acknowledges his indebtedness to contemporary or near-contemporary playwrights, setting great store by their 'worthy labours'.

He speaks of the 'full and height'ned' style of Master Chapman, the labour'd and understanding works of Master Jonson : the no less worthy composures of the both worthily excellent Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher : and lastly (without wrong last to be named) the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood ...' Webster's dependence on borrowed material as a method or technique of composition was not looked upon in his age as the blemish of plagiarism. It was, on the other hand, a rhetorical virtue to make a creative use of the borrowed material.

While writing *The Duchess of Malfi,* Webster derived impetus from various sources and assimilated various influences within the orbit of his creative art. The device of the dead man's hand (used by Ferdinand in darkness) might have been derived from Barnabe Rich's translation of *The Famous Histories of Herodotus* (1584), while other features of the torturing of the Duchess most probably came from Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* and Sidney's *Arcadia.* Echo-scenes were quite common in Elizabethan / Jacobean drama. The works most likely to have influenced Webster in this respect included Dekker's *Old Fortunatus,* Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, the anonymous *Second Maiden's Tragedy* and George Wither's elegy, *Prince Henry's Obsequies*. The lunatics indulging in *charivari* perform in anti-masque which certainly suggested a distortion of the Elizabethan tradition of the court masque. Campion, Beaumont and Jonson also contributed towards the formation of a formal structure resembling that of the marriage-masque with Bosola as the 'presenter' of the bride (the Duchess) to the groom (Death).

The events of *The Duchess of Malfi* really took place during the years 1505-13, but in spite of their historical authenticity, they reached Webster in a fictional form. The tragic story of the strong-willed but ill-fated Duchess fascinated many writers and had a wide currency in contemporary literature. It occurred in George Whetstone's *An Heptameron of Civill Discourses* (1582), Thomas Beard's *The Theatre of Gods Judgements* (1597) and Edward Grimestone's translation of Goulart's *Admirable and Memorable Histories* (1607), to name only those works that Webster had read. Webster's immediate source of inspiration was however William Painter's collection of tales, *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566-67), which contained the account of the Duchess as it was given in the second volume of François de Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1565). Belleforest had however taken the account from Matteo Bandello's collection of *Novelle* (1554).

While Bandello only plays the role of a story-teller, fanciful, though by no means unrealistic, and surprisingly free from moral obligations, both Painter and Belleforest take an uncompromisingly rigorous and sternly moral attitude to the Duchess and look upon her as a wanton widow, lascivious and disorderly. Webster's focus of attention is however on the suffering of a woman (who is a widow, supposed to be disorderly) in confrontation with the patriarchal power of a feudal society.

Webster's immediate source of inspiration was William Painter's The Palace of Pleasure. But the events of The Duchess of Malfi reached Webster in a fictional form.

The story of the Duchess remains the same in all the sources mentioned above and Webster who comes closer to Painter's version of the story in tone and spirit does not depart from its basic structure. The Duchess in the story is Giovanna d'Aragona who was married to Alfonso, son and heir to the Duke of Malfi, in 1490 when she was only twelve years old. Alfonso succeeded to the Dukedom in 1495, but he died a premature death. His son, born posthumously, succeeded him and the Duchess ruled for him as regent. In 1504 Antonio Bologna

who belonged to an illustrious family in Naples was appointed as the steward in the household of the Duchess. The young widow fell in love with him and secretly married him because she was afraid that her marriage would make her brothers extremely angry. The marriage was successfully concealed for some years. In the meantime, children were born. No problem occurred after the birth of the first child, but the birth of the second child started rumours and her brothers employed a spy to watch her movements, Antonio took his children to Ancona and shortly afterwards the Duchess went to meet him along with a large retinue under the pretext of going on a pilgrimage to Loretto. The secret of her marriage became an open secret and one of the brothers of the Duchess, Lodovico, now the Cardinal of Aragon, persuaded the Legate of Ancona to banish Antonio. As advised by the Duchess, Antonio escaped to Milan with the eldest child. The Duchess was however taken prisoner before long and in the palace of Malfi ; she and her other children were ruthlessly killed. A year later Antonio was also killed by one Daniel da Bosola under instructions from the brothers of the Duchess.

Webster is indebted to contemporary or near contemporary playwrights e.g. Chapman, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Shakespeare, Dekker, Heywood, Barnabe Rich, Cinthio, Sidney, George Wither.....

Webster does not incorporate any striking changes in the plot-structure of his play, based on the received story-line, but some of his additions to Painter's story have not only enhanced the spectacular effect of the play but also intensified the emotions evoked — those of pity and fear. In the words of Frederick Allen (Introduction, *The Duchess of Malfi*):

To Painter's story the dramatist added the brothers' definite instructions to the Duchess against a second marriage, the whole of the part assigned to Bosola prior to his killing Antonio, the sudden visit of the sudden visit of the Duke of Calabria to the Duchess's bed-chamber, the spectacular 'instalment' at Loretto, the whole of the sub-plot concerning. Castruchi Julia and the Cardinal, and practically the whole of the Fourth and Fifth Acts — the incident of the dead hand, the artificial figures of Antonio and his children appearing as if they were dead, the madmen with their song and dance, the episode of the tomb-maker and of the bellman, Antonio's visit to the Cardinal, the 'echo' scene, the soldier-scene at Rome and Milan, the intrigues and counter- intrigues of Bosola and the Cardinal, Antonio's death by mistake, the deaths of Ferdinand and the Cardinal and Bosola. It cannot in denied that Webster is often derivative, dependent on borrowings, but what is of central importance in his handling of the sources is his originality of perception, which never leaves him in his art of character delineation. Indeed, much of the merit of Webster as a dramatist consists in his ability to explore the psychological and the introspective, the mysterious mindset of man — what the Swedish playwright, August Strindberg, would have described as 'the richness of the soul complex'. It is in this respect that Webster invites comparison with Shakespeare and Brecht: while putting old wine in a new bottle (to use a trite but pardonable colloquialism), each of them reveals an insight that probes and plumbs the unknown modes of being. Ferdinand, by far the most complex character in *The Duchess of Malfi* testifies to Webster's rare skill in the art of character drawing and recalls Shakespeare's depiction of Iago (in *Othello*), Edmund (in *King Lear*) and Angelo (in *Measure for Measure*).

Webster does not incorporate any striking change in the plot- structure of his play, but some of his additions to Painter's story not only enhanced the spectacular effect of the play, but also intensified the emotions evoked — those of pity and fear.

ACT I: Antonio, newly returned from France, talks to his friend, Delio. He speaks highly of the well-governed French court. The judicious king of France has driven out of his court all the flattering sycophants and dissolute persons. Soon come in Bosola, the court-gall, disgruntled and embittered, railing at one and all, and the Cardinal who has deprived Bosola of his due rewards in spite of the services he has done him. Ferdinand then comes in along with some courtiers. Antonio tells Delio that the Cardinal is cold and taciturn, while. Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, is of 'a most perverse and turbulent nature'. Soon the Cardinal who went out in scene i comes in with his sister, the 'Duchess of Malfi, for whose rapturous discourse, sweet countenance and noble virtue Antonio has only words of unstinting praise. The Duchess agrees to employ Bosola as the provisor of the horses at Malfi, as desired by the Duke, without relalizing that Bosola's main purpose is to spy on her. The brothers depart but not before giving a stern warning to their sister against a remarriage that will most specifically witness to her lasciviousness. But after their departure the Duchess reveals her secrets in Cariola her waiting-woman, who agrees to keep them concealed from the world. Antonio and the Duchess meet; words of love are exchanged under a veneer of ambiguity; and at the end Antonio responds to the Duchess's amorous proposals positively but with some apprehension. Their clandestine marriage takes place, though without the approval of the Church, and Cariola finds in it a sure evidence of the Duchess's 'fearful madness'.

Webster's originality of perception, though he is derivative and dependant never leaves him in his art of character delineation. He is skilled in exploring the psychological and the introspective, the mysterious mindset of man.

ACT II: Bosola's conversation with Castruchio, an elderly courtier, husband to Julia, proves as cynical as his conversation with the Old Lady. Antonio communicates the secret of his marriage to Delio who is genuinely amazed. Bosola sees the Duchess, grown fat and 'exceeding short-winded', and suspects that she is pregnant. He devises a scheme to test the validity of his suspicion. He gives her some apricots which she eats with great relish and consequently falls into premature labour. Antonio panics, but is saved by the resourceful Delio. The Duchess however gives birth to a son and Bosola comes to know of this new-born child from a horoscope which Antonio accidentally drops. He is still in the dark as to who the father of the child is, but he proceeds to give this piece of information (regarding the Duchess's motherhood) to Ferdinand and the Cardinal. At the place of the Cardinal the conversation between Julia and the Cardinal reveals their adulterous relationship, but Delio's appearance and suit to Julia, along with his offer of money, make way to further advance towards degeneration in the human condition. On receiving the news of their sister's remarriage Ferdinand flies into a rage and displays in his ravings his obsessive concern with sexuality, whereas the Cardinal, though not less angry, remains outwardly cool, and expresses his disapproval in a laconic fashion.

ACT III: At the outset there is a conversation between Antonio and Delio regarding the Duchess who, meanwhile, 'hath had two children more, a son and daughter'. The two brothers have become extremely angry. Ferdinand comes to Malfi and cunningly concealing his evil designs, puts up a show of affection for his sister. Afterwards however he steals into the Duchess's bed-chamber and hurlsthe wildest reproaches to her as she mumbles about her hidden passion. Ferdinand gives her a dagger, asking her to commit suicide, and chastises her in a language of unmatched foulness for being shamelessly wanton. The Duchess urges Antonio to escape to Ancona and spreads the storythat he has cheated her in accounts. Bosola doubts the genuineness of the story and goes on praising

the virtues of Antonio, his honesty and integrity. Tired and worried, the Duchess finds a kindred soul in Bosola and confides her secret to him. Bosola advises her to pretend to go on a pilgrimage to Loretto, but at the same time, in sick self-hatred, he decides to pass the secret on to Ferdinand. The Cardinal gives up his religious portfolio and prepares to take up arms for the Emperor, and Ferdinand sends a seemingly affectionate letter to the Duchess to bring Antonio to him. The Duchess has however grown wiser than she was; she now understands every move of her brother's dirty stratagem. Eventually Antonio goes to Milan and Bosola arrests the Duchess and takes her to Malfi.

ACT IV: Enraged by the Duchess's calm acceptance of her suffering in her solitary confinement, Ferdinand decides to torture her in a more ruthless way. Again he visits her in darkness and gives her the severed hand of a dead man to kiss, hinting that this hand is that of Antonio's. The Duchess is then shown the wax-effigies of Antonio and their children; the 'sad spectacle of her near and dear ones, appearing as if they were dead', brings the Duchess to the brink of despair. But she bears her suffering with dignity and fortitude. Then come the madmen with all their pranks, producing raucous notes and unleashing the forces of chaos. The climax is reached when Bosola appears in a variety of roles, first, as tomb-maker, and then, as bellman, and then again, as the guide of the executioners. The Duchess is strangled and so is Cariola. Ferdinand is deeply shocked then he sees the deadbody of the Duchess, and when Bosola demands his reward for what he has done, Ferdinand gives him only a 'pardon'. Unable to face what he has brought about in the name of honour or justice, he goes mad. Bosola is also tormented by his conscience, and with the temporary recovery of the Duchess he entertains hopes of redeeming himself. He will execute the Duchess's last will — he will deliver her dead body 'to the reverend dispose / Of some good women'. He will thus avenge her death and then go to Milan to assist Antonio.

ACT V: Pescara is willing to give Antonio's land to Julia, though not to Delio, and Antonio, a pathetic and inglorious man, thinks of going to the Cardinal's chamber at midnight to request him for reconciliation. Ferdinand has been afflicted with lycanthropy; the Cardinal suffering from 'wondrous melancholy' looks upon Julia as his 'ling 'ring consumption'; Julia, enamoured of Bosola, seeks, at his instruction, the information about the cause of his melancholy and is made to kiss a poisoned religious book when she tells the Cardinal that she will not be able to conceal the secret about the Duchess's death. Bosola decides to retaliate, but before killing the Cardinal, he kills Antonio by mistake. The Cardinal, obviously a victim of 'guilty conscience', dies 'like a leveret / Without any resistance '. He is stabbed by both Bosola and Ferdinand. Bosola also kills Ferdinand, but he has been given his death-wound by Ferdinand in their scuffle with the Cardinal. After the death of Bosola, Delio, along with the eldest son of Antonio, enters, and the play comes to an end with the final words of Delio, suggesting the emergence of a new order of hope and assurance out of 'this great ruin'.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Write a note on the sources of Webster when he wrote *The Duchess of Malfi*?
2. What alteration did Webster make to the story of Painter and to what effect?
3. Briefly narrate the story of *The Duchess of Malfi*?

UNIT 15

MARKS OF DECADENCE

Marks of decadence in *The Duchess of Malfi*

CONTENT STRUCTURE:

UNIT 15(a): Theme : Marks of Decadence

UNIT 15(b): Theme of Revenge

UNIT 15(c): Webster's presentation of the Duchess

The Duchess of Malfi has often been regarded as a revenge tragedy with a liberal dose of melodrama. Disintegration and bewilderment, so characteristic of the Jacobean period, seem to have characterized Webster's perception of life as revealed in this play. One feels inclined to believe that in spite of Webster's emphasis on the integrity of a courageous woman's struggle to remain true to herself, it provides an evidence of the decadent world-view of the Jacobean period. Ian Jack who looks upon Webster as a 'decadent' speaks of his lack of a profound hold on any system of moral values. He dwells on Webster's proclivity towards the representation of flesh-creeping horrors and expresses the view:

The sensationalism of his [Webster's] plays is the stigma of an outlook on life as narrow as it is intense. Webster sees the human situation as a chaotic struggle, lit indeed by flashes of 'bitter lightning', but, fated to sink again into a mist of confusion and sub-human activity.

['The Case of John Webster', Scrutiny 16]

L.G. Salingear is equally emphatic about Webster's turgid sensations and inflamed emotions and the judgement he pronounces is unambiguous: Webster is sophisticated, but his sophistication belongs to decadence. The poet's solemnity and his groping for a new basis for tragedy only serve to expose his inner bewilderment.

['Tourneur and the Tragedy of Revenge', The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol 2, ed. Boris Ford]

The Duchess' brothers suffering from moral decadence become uncompromising in their scheme of revenge. What the two brothers and the spy do is bring the Duchess to "mortification" by degrees.

Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal, two creatures of hell, decide to take revenge on their sister, the Duchess of Malfi, who has deviated from the accepted norms of social hierarchy by marrying her major domo. Her clandestine marriage with Antonio (described by Ferdinand as 'a slave that only smell'd of ink and counters') has brought dishonour to the royal family of Aragon and Castile. The free choice and active sexuality of a widow further prove disruptive of the patriarchal confines. The two brothers suffering from moral decadence become uncompromising in their scheme of revenge. Ferdinand seems to entertain a guilty passion for his own sister and the Cardinal who is expected to embrace the ideal of the spiritual welfare of mankind is nothing short of a cold-blooded villain remorselessly cruel. Imagining his sister with a tormenting vividness 'in the shameful act of sin', Ferdinand conjures up for the lovers a punishment demonic in its implications. And in exchanging his priest's vestments for the arms of the soldier, the Cardinal not merely takes up arms under the orders of the Emperor

but also puts off his priestly office in order to persecute his sister the better. The two brothers employ Bosola, an embittered cynic and blunt moralist, to watch the movements of the Duchess. What the two brothers and the spy do is bring the Duchess to 'mortification' by degrees. The gratuitous horrors they incorporate in their scheme of revenge have disgusted a number of critics, including Bernard Shaw who crowns Webster 'Tussaud Laureate'.

Morbidity and pessimism intensify the atmosphere of decadence in *The Duchess of Malfi*. We have the impression that there is no point of reference, no regulating principle for the sceptic people of the Jacobean age. 'The world called Webster' which Rupert Brooke sees as one where life 'seems to flow into forms and shapes with an irregular, abnormal and horrible volume'(*John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama*) suggests an abandonment of values. The fundamental problems of ethics generated in this world have been traced to the spiritual exhaustion of the Jacobean age, the 'dread of death and horror of life' (Una Ellis-Fermor : *The Jacobean Drama*), the predicament and anguish of Jacobean negation. It is in this world that the passions of retribution spin the plot of a persecution tragedy. The two brothers confine the Duchess in a solitary prison made hideous by the disconcerting clamour of a group of lunatics who embody the forces of chaos. The lunatics are instructed to indulge in charivari in the presence of the Duchess so that she may lose her wits, despair and die an inglorious death. On one occasion Ferdinand offers the Duchess the severed hand of a dead man and makes her kiss it in darkness. On another occasion he shows her the wax-effigies of Antonio and her sweet children so that, in the words of Bosola, she 'may, wisely, cease to grieve / For that which cannot, be recovered'. 'The case of John Webster, and in particular The Duchess of Malfi', T.S. Eliot says in his essay, 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists', 'will provide an interesting example of a very great literary and dramatic genius directed towards chaos. Scenes of murder and madness in Webster's play witness to the central ideas of instability and dislocation associated with this 'chaos'. The form Ferdinand's madness takes after the death of the Duchess is as appropriate as it is extraordinary. He falls victim to lycanthropy which not only suggests guilt and remorse but is also associated with witchcraft and love-melancholy. His obedience to light as well as his fear of his own shadow leads us to endorse Bosola's feeling that 'a fatal judgment hath fallen upon this Ferdinand'. In the Cardinal we find neither guilt not fear, only continuing villainy : he makes Julia kiss a poisoned book of prayers. Murder after murder takes place in Act V of the play : deeds of revenge with harrowing bloodshed are performed as an inexplicable and monstrous wrong. But before they die, all the characters in *The Duchess of Malfi* are made to acknowledge the prevailing atmosphere of confusion. Theirs has always been a life of erroneous judgment, hopeless and anguished. The Duchess is almost on the verge of despair when she says in Act IV, scene i:

"The world called Webster", where life "seems to flow into forms and shapes with an irregular, abnormal and horrible volume" suggests an abandonment of values. Morbidity and pessimism intensify the atmosphere of decadence in the play.

"I account this world a tedious theatre,
For I do play a part in't 'gainst my will."

The echo-scene (Act. V, scene iii) registers the 'deadly accent' of inexorable fatalism that leads to Antonio's sad realization :

"Pleasure of life, what is't ?

Only the good hours

Of an ague : merely a preparative to rest,

To endure vexation." (V, iv)

In Act V, scene v, Ferdinand says with intense agony,

"I do account this world but a dog-kennel;

I will vault credit, and affect high pleasures Beyond death."

At the end of the play, before his death, Bosola feels he is 'in a mist'. Reflecting on the pointlessness and misery of human life, he cries out:

"O this gloomy world,

In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness

Doth, womanish, and fearful, mankind live"?

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS

1. Describe, how the marks of decadence in the Jacobean period is reflected in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

B) The Theme of Revenge:

The Duchess of Malfi as a Revenge Tragedy

The ancestry of the dramatic genre known as revenge tragedy (a genre itself part of a larger group under the heading of the tragedy of blood) may be traced back to Aeschylus's Oresteia. In Agamemnon, the first play of the trilogy, Clytemnestra, in collusion with Aegisthus, murders her husband Agamemnon. An outraged mother, she is the horrifying instrument of pitiless justice, but in the second play of the trilogy, The Choephori, she is murdered by her son Orestes. The tragic playwrights of the Elizabethan period took a keen interest in devising stirring revenge plots for a variety of reasons. Dwelling on the rich vein of norms and assumptions in revenge tragedy, social, political and religious, L.G. Salingar says in his essay 'Tourneut and the Tragedy of Revenge':

> "The theme of revenge [the 'wild justice 'of Bacon's essay] was popular in Elizabethan tragedy; because it touched important questions of the day; the social problems of personal honour and the survival of feudal lawlessness; the political problem of tyranny and resistance; and the supreme question of providence, with its provocative contrasts between human vengeance and divine."

The Spanish Tragedy where Kyd made the most effective use of the Senecan apparatus is by far the most outstanding revenge tragedy of the Elizabethan period. Full of action that is rapid and exciting, Kyd's play testifies to some striking characteristics of Elizabethan revenge tragedy — stoic moralizing, descriptive skill and macabre blood-thirstiness.

The Duchess of Malfi is also a revenge tragedy where Webster depicts a world of murder in violent detail. Marrow-freezing horrors abound, but in this characteristic product of the Jacobean period, it is the element introspection rather than that of action which predominates. Elizabeth Brennan, in her introduction to the New Mermaids edition of *The Duchess of Malfi*, observes that Webster's play has the dramatic framework of a revenge tragedy, but she can trace in this framework only a

few conventions which were popular on the English stage between 1580 and 1642. Two important actions, the Cardinal's investiture as a soldier and the Duchess's banishment, are performed in a dumb-show. There is no ghost, though the echo from the Duchess's tomb fulfils one of the functions of the ghost of revenge tragedy by warning a doomed man of the dangers in store for him and at the same time pointing towards the unknown but inexorable fact of his own death. The final action of the play, consisting of accidental or mistaken murders, the treacherous poisoning of Julia and the repeated stabbings of the last scene, produces enough bloodshed and a number of corpses to remind us of the sensational, gory tragedies of the 1590s.

In Webster's play the Duchess is obviously the protagonist, but it is not she who takes revenge on the perpetrators of injustice. Her brothers are, on the other hand, the revengers; they look upon her clandestine marriage with Antonio as a blot on the escutcheon and think of the Duchess as a lascivious woman both deviant and disorderly, since her active sexuality has proved to be disruptive of the existing patriarchal confines. The comparison between the Duchess and Shakespeare's Hamlet is too tenuous to last, for Hamlet appears both as revenger and as object of revenge, having a dual role and a dual situation. Gripped by an uncontrollable passion, the Duchess marries Antonio, but her marriage makes her brothers so angry that they decide to punish her by bringing her to 'mortification' by degrees. The revengeful brothers are both villains, creatures of hell, who carry their villainy to the farthest verge of human depravity. They submit themselves to an insensate fury that blinds the vision, maddens the intellect and poisons the springs of pity — a pity that in the more choleric temper of Ferdinand, leads to horrifying remorse and in the more phlegmatic constitution of the Cardinal, to a callousness that strikes one cold.

The conventions of madness and the masque are combined in the charivari of lunatics which forms part of the complicated mental torture to which the Duchess is subjected by Ferdinand. Madness has indeed been incorporated in the action of the play in a strikingly original fashion. Ferdinand's lycanthropy certainly serves a double purpose. Grounded in the crude animality of his nature, it constitutes a significant part of Webster's art of character-drawing. As lycanthropy was a recognized symptom of love-melancholy, it confirms, as Lawrence Babb points out, Webster's depiction of Ferdinand as a jealous lover of his sister. In the art of plot-construction, it enables the playwright to make use of an unpredictable element in the final conflict. The device of madness is also treated with considerable skill in the character of the Duchess, and at the beginning of the play, it is anticipated not only in some of Antonio's words, which also focus on the later presentation of Ferdinand, but in the revealing lines which Cariola speaks at the end of Act I :

> "Whether the spirit of greatness, or of woman Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows A fearful madness : I owe her much of pity."

In Act IV the Duchess's madness is more powerful as a threat than in its brief and intermittent reality; there is no doubt of her sanity when the moment of death approaches, making her a tragic heroine, humble and graceful. As a revenge tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi* is considered less action-oriented than *The Spanish Tragedy*, but it forms a class by itself. What actually enriches Webster's play and redeems it froth the stereotypical charges of melodramatic excess and structural imbalance is the element of true tragedy it contains. One of the most scrupulous adherents of the Senecan

revenge tradition, Webster nevertheless turns from the mere horror of event to the deep and subtle analysis of character. In the heroic death of the Duchess, in her firm preservation of the 'integrity of life', and in her gradual progress from arrogance to humility, Webster finds the stable basis of a suffering woman's character that evokes endless admiration. Surrounding the Duchess with madmen in her solitary cell, the revengers seek to crush her soul out, but she remains stoical till the end and proudly vindicates her self-dignity with the assertion : 'I am Duchess of Malfi still'(IV, ii) The Duchess's assertion may admit of different interpretations, and Ania Loomba, in *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama*, raises a pertinent question

> Is she here affirming her identify as a member of the aristocracy which she has threatened by marrying her steward and which, in turn, has tried to punish her, or is she asserting her feminine self who has rebelled against patriarchal control ?

The genre, revenge tragedy, traces back to 'Oresteia' of Aeschylus, Agamemnon, The Choephori, The Spanish Tragedy, Hamlet.....
Webster's play has the dramatic framework of a revenge tragedy, but one can trace few conventions of that genre in this play, e.g. Instead of the Duchess, the main protagonists, her brothers are revengers ; there is no ghost....
Madness has been incorporated in this play in a strikingly original fashion. In the art of plot-construction it enables Webster to make use of an unpredictable element in the final conflict. The play is less action oriented than "The Spanish Tragedy". What enriches the play is the element of true tragedy it contains.

Whatever be the answer to Loomba's question, the final impression left by the Duchess is that she is courage incarnate in a state of grace. She suffers because she challenges the conservative imperatives of a patriarchal social ethos, but she triumphs over her suffering by virtue of her self-composure and self-assertion.

LET US CHECK OUR PROGRESS:

1. Consider Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* as a revenge tragedy

(b): WEBSTER'S PRESENTATION OF THE DUCHESS

The story of the Duchess of Malfi had a firm basis in fact. It gained a wide currency in the works of George Whetstone, Thomas Beard and Edward Grimestone, with which Webster was familiar. The treatment of the Duchess by Belleforest and Painter as a wanton and lascivious widow who remarried for the gratification of her carnal desires however captured the attention of Webster most, but his Duchess is a woman of a different kind. In Painter's Palace of Pleasure (1567) which contained a translation from Matteo Bandello's original story of the Duchess, she is a 'fine and subtile dame who lusts for Antonio in order to make her way to pleasure' and her marriage is just a 'coverture to hide her follies and shameless lusts'. Webster does not deny the Duchess's active sexuality, but he wants to show how despite her voluntary confinement in the domestic arena, she is thwarted, not merely within the family, but by public authority — by all the institutions of feudal and mercantile patriarchy. Ania Loomba, in Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama, comments in this connection :

Although the Duchess is a good wife and mother she violates some of the notions of ideal femininity, as indeed she must, for such notions are total only within a stereotype. Precisely because she is so compliant, she cannot be demonised as a totally deviant woman. Yet she is destroyed even as a witch would be. It is this combination of the normal and the radical, the domestic and the

political, that makes the implications of the story so deeply disturbing, particularly in a situation where the most everyday normal woman is subject to the most violent fate.

The Duchess would be regarded as a misogynist's delight because of her disorderliness and duplicity as evident in her choice of a second husband. In respect of her active female sexuality, her breach of patriarchal decorum and her violation of the public order she would invite comparison with Vittoria, Bianca, Beatrice-Joanna and Desdemone. But Webster turns our attention to the helplessness of the Duchess enclosed in a male-dominated castle. She has been denied an independent identity, even a name. She suffers miserably and has to endure torture and humiliation only because she marries Antonio, a man of her choice, who happens to be her steward, a man much inferior to her in social status. The clandestine marriage of the Duchess is obviously a challenge to the internalized imperatives of the patriarchal social ethos in which she lives. The case of a widow remarriage, though not looked upon with resentful disfavour in the Jacobean age, was only grudgingly accepted by those who wanted to maintain the phallocentric status quo.

The Duchess would be regarded as a mysogynist's delight. But Webster turns over attention to the helplessness of the Duchess enclosed in a male-dominated castle. The clandestine and hasty marriage of the Duchess is a challenge to the internalized imperatives of the patriarchal social ethos and that's why produces a shocking effect on those who conform to it.

The two brothers of the Duchess, the choleric Ferdinand and the phlegmatic Cardinal, two creatures of hell, strongly disapprove of their sister's marriage with Antonio. They think that this marriage has been an affront to the prestige of the royal family of Aragon and Castile. Of the two brothers Ferdinand is vocal about the class inferiority of Antonio whom he calls 'A slave, that only smell'd of ink and counters' (III, iii). Moreover, as Gunnar Boklund says in *The Duchess of Malfi* : Sources, Themes, Characters, he entertains a guilty passion for his own sister. His assessment of the Duchess is larded with explicitly sexual innuendoes which prove too outrageous to be confined within the permitted zone of a family relationship. The hasty marriage of the Duchess, indicative of sexual waywardness and female duplicity by the standards of conservative ethics, produces a shocking effect on all those who conform to the principles of patriarchy. Even Cariola, the maid-servant of the Duchess, is at a loss to understand the nature of the Duchess's love. At the end of Act I of the play she says:

Whether the spirit of greatness, or of woman
Reign most in her, I know not, but it shows
A fearful madness : I owe her much of pity.

Orthodox morality discovers elements of pity in the ungovernable passion displayed by the Duchess. In The Duchess of Malfi we are fascinated by the evil-doers, Bosola, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, but their power to attract is more than matched by the warm and luminous figure of the Duchess. David Gunby rightly observes in his *Introduction to John Webster: Three Plays*. Watching her progress from pride to humility and hence to salvation through a providential care which not even Bosola, the agent through whom it is provided, recognizes, we are introduced to a positive element greater than the implied values of The White Devil can reveal.

Watching her progress from pride to humility and hence to salvation through a providential carewhich not even Bosola, the agent through whom it is provided, recognizes, we are introduced to a positive element greater than the implied values of The White Devil can reveal. In the heroic death of the Duchess — in her preservation of the 'integrity of life' even when she is being strangled — Webster is able to excite our admiration for a woman who has an independence of spirit and thus can leave the audience with the positive value, attainable only in death, in a world where all moral assumptions are in a sad disarray. Surrounding the Duchess with madmen, bawds and ruffians in a solitary cell, Bosola tries to crush her soul out and bring her on to the brink of despair. But the Duchess's stoic proclamation — 'I am Duchess of Malfi still' — and her calm acceptance of the dire cruelties of Fate initiate Webster's search for a new moral order. The time is out of joint, but the Duchess achieves great heights of moral dignity. In the face of evil and danger she is able to think and speak of heaven ; she accepts persecution as a necessary means of divine guidance ; she meets death, kneeling, in an attitude of Christian humility. When life briefly revives in her strangled body, Bosola sees her as the 'fair soul' capable of leading him to salvation. When she is dead at last, she epitomizes 'the sacred innocence, that sweetly sleeps/ On turtles' feathers'. (IV, ii)

Orthodox morality discovers elements of pity in the ungovernable passion displayed by the Duchess. Watching her progress from pride to humility and hence to salvation through a providential care, we are introduced to a positive element greater than the implied values of "The White Devil", can reveal.

At the beginning of the play the Duchess is arrogant and impudent. She woos Antonio in a manner that attests to her almost unrestrained passion. To Antonio she says :

"This is flesh, and blood,
sir, 'Tis not the figure cut in
alabasterKneels at my husband's
tomb.
Awake, awake, man,
I do here put off all vain ceremony
And only do appear to you, a young widow
That claims you for her husband, and like a widow,
I use but half a blush in't." (I, ii).

It is true that she suffers because of her passion, but incessant suffering in a world of debased humanity chastens her and she musters courage so much so that she conquers despair. She succeeds in sailing over the crooked clutches of her monstrous brothers into a realm of peace and harmony where the screech-owls will not disturb her any more. Her rare power of mind defeats both 'solitude' and 'anguish' characterizing, as Eugene Ionesco would have said, 'the fundamental condition of man'. She is not afraid even of death :

Who would be afraid on't ?
Knowing to meet such excellent company In
th' other world. (IV, ii)

Death is, she says, the best gift she has received from her brothers. At the moment of her death her soul is prepared for heaven — and she is full of courage and grace as the executioners strangle her.

UNIT 16
THE ART OF CHARACTERIZATION
Machiavellian elements in Webster's art of character delineation:

CONTENT STRUCTURE

UNIT 16(a): The Art of Characterization

UNIT 16(b): Some Important Issues in the Play

Suggested Readings

Assignment

The Elizabethans had hardly any direct access to the weightiest writings of Machiavelli, the terribly fascinating political philosopher of Florence, because no English translations of The Prince (Il Principe) and the Discourses (II Discorsi) were printed before those of Edward Dacres of 1636 and 1640 respectively. Yet both of these works were read by Elizabethan intellectuals in Italian, in French and Latin translations, and in various English translations circulated in manuscript well before 1600. Machiavelli's doctrines and maxims of political conduct were however severely attacked by the French Huguenot Innocent Gentillet in 1576.A slanderous misrepresentation in print of a political philosopher as an embodiment of cunning, cruelty, cynicism and immorality, his book attracted universal attention and was immediately translated into English (1577) by Simon Patericke under the title of A Discourse upon the Means of Well Governing, popularly known as Contre-Machiavel (unpublished till 1602). Machiavelli's ideas and advice, as the average reader in Tudor England understood them from the corrupt version of Gentillet were readily incorporated into the English drama of the Renaissance. The Machiavellian character came to be distorted by exaggeration; undue emphasis was laid on his deceitful machinations and pitiless atrocities. The commendable qualities of strength, sagacity, astuteness and will (called virtu) that made him a match for the blind and capricious fortune were hardly brought to the fore. Iago, Edmund and Richard III are Shakespeare's Machiavellian characters; no less Machiavellian were Marlowe's Barabas, young Mortimer and the Duke of Guise, while Flamineo in Webster's The White Devil gloats over 'the rare tricks of a Machivillian'. (V, iii)

By far the most Machiavellian of all the evil characters in The Duchess of Malfi is Bosola whom Webster delineates as a man of 'foul melancholy'. Frustrated in all his material ambitions, he has become a 'courtgall'; he is cynicism incarnate and projected into action. A Jacobean malcontent, ruthless, unscrupulous and amoral to a fault, he is at once a blunt moralist and a self-seeking adventurer. He rails against the world he lives in, exposes the vices and follies of mankind, and yet the critical observation of Antonio and Delio as a discontented follower of the Cardinal. When Bosola appeals to the Cardinal for some compensation for the services he has rendered him, he is reproved for over-emphasizing his own merit. After the Cardinal's departure, this slighted soldier banteringly comments on the life of a court-dependent :

Who would rely upon these miserable dependences, in expectation to be advanc'd tomorrow ? What creature ever fed worse, than hoping Tantalus; nor ever died any man more fearfully, than he

that hop'd for a pardon ? There are rewards for hawks, and dogs, when they have done us service; but for a soldier, that hazards his limbs in a battle, nothing but a kind of geometry is his last supportation. (I, i) To 'hang in a fair pair of slings, take his latter swing in the world, upon an honourable pair of crutches, from hospital to hospital' seems to him much too ridiculous an idea to accept with grateful acknowledgment.

Bosola is sour and sardonic; there is 'inward rust' in his soul, thanks to his 'want of action' (as Delio says in Act I, scene i) which 'Breeds all black malcontents, and their close rearing, / Like moths in cloth, do hurt for want of wearing'. But shortly afterwards he is given employment, though his employment is by no means honest or honourable. He is hired by Ferdinand — by the Cardinal as well — to spy on their sister. In a society where moral decadence is all-pervasive, Bosola becomes the most effective tool of Ferdinand and the Cardinal and manipulates his relentless scheme to bring the Duchess to 'mortification' by degrees. He is the perfect agent of the two brothers, who are the revengers, but he is not out and out a Machiavellian. When Ferdinand refuses to give him his due, he decides to wean himself from evil and atone for the sin he has committed. When he sees the Duchess stirring, he refers to her as a 'fair soul' which certainly reinforces the impression of her goodness and virtue. The Duchess's revival is however only momentary, and her death extinguishes all the possibilities of Bosola's salvation.

Ferdinand and the Cardinal, mentioned by Antonio at the beginning of the play, are partly Machiavellian. Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, is a man of 'most perverse and turbulent nature'. If he laughs heartily, it is to laugh 'All honesty out of fashion'. (I, ii) The Cardinal is supposed to be an honest man with moral purity, but Antonio believes that the devil speaks in the oracles that 'hang at his lips'. Incidentally, the popular imagination of the Elizabethan / Jacobean age came to associate Machiavelli with the devil himself. Ferdinand is choleric; he flies into rage and reacts very strongly against the clandestine marriage of the Duchess. The Cardinal is, on the other hand, phlegmatic; he is rather unenthusiastic, even callous in his approach to life and believes that there is not a thing in nature that makes man 'so deform'd, so beastly / As doth intemperate anger'. (II, v) Like his brother, he is also opposed to the marriage of his sister with Antonio, a man much inferior to her in respect of rank and position. His inordinate vanity about his aristocratic lineage and his profound shock at its defilement by the Duchess have been manifest in the reaction to his news of her marriage which he obviously looks upon as a blot on the escutcheon :

"Shall our blood ?
The royal blood of Aragon and Castile,
Be thus attainted ?" (II, v)

The Cardinal is no less infuriated than Ferdinand, but he has the deceptive composure of a demonically possessed villain. Indeed he is a man with a mask on his face. He is supposed to supervise the spiritual welfare of his fellowmen, but he has himself formed an illicit relationship with Julia, wife of Castruchio. So treacherous is he that in order to keep his own image untarnished he brings about the death of Julia by making her kiss a poisoned book of prayers.

Webster has however added new levels of significance to all the three evil characters in The Duchees of Malfi. Ferdinand, the Cardinal and Bosola are Machiavellian, in parts, at least, but they touch greater depths and reach greater heights. Ania Loomba, in her *Gender Race, Renaissance Drama*, speaks of the affinities between Ferdinand and Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Iago loves Desdemona; this is racial love — this is the love of a self-appointed, self-styled protector of the white community facing the problems of fissures and schisms caused by the encroaching Others. Ferdinand's 'love' for the Duchess is compounded of brotherly possessiveness, erotic desire and male authoritarianism, but like Iago, he suspects and castigates active female sexuality which proves disruptive of the patriarchal enclosures. It is because of his love-melancholy that he falls victim to lycanthropy after the death of his sister. The Cardinal becomes absolutely helpless and isolated in his last hour ; both Bosola and Ferdinand give him the death-wound and he learns of the power and inexorability of Justice. He has to pay the penalty for the sins he has committed. Bosola is vicious and villainous, like the two evil brothers, but it is his personal tragedy that having sold his services to them, he is forced to be the destroyer of the luminous goodness that is personified in their sister. Bosola is indeed powerless to prevent himself from destroying the Duchess. He admires her courage and integrity and speaks of her purity and innocence, but he cannot turn his mind away from the thoughts of his own material benefit. Elizabeth Brennan expresses the view that Bosola's appearances in a variety of disguises are not further acts of torment, they are sympathetic attempts to make the Duchess rise from despair. As the tomb-maker, he not only makes her see the emptiness of rank and position but also emphasizes the importance of the soul by reminding her of the frailty of the body. His message about the soul is one of Christian comfort, and it is to this message that the Duchess responds, asserting the dignity of her soul. In spite of the collapse of traditional ethics he encounters, Bosola tries to work out his own salvation, but the darkness of the 'sensible hell' lengthens out, engulfing his whole being in bewildering pessimism.

Focus on some Important Issues in the Play

(1) Ferdinand's lycanthropy : After the Duchess's death, Ferdinand sinks into a state of derangement. He falls victim to lycanthropy which is a form of madness manifesting itself in violent paroxysms of wolfish anger. To Webster's contemporaries this disease not only suggested guilt and remorse but was also associated with witchcraft and love melancholy. One does not require to be told that Ferdinand, twin brother to the Duchess, had sinister thoughts of incest in his mind. But guilty passion had its most appalling nemesis. Ferdinand's avoidance of the light and fear of his shadow lead us to endorse Bosola's verdict that 'a fatal judgement hath fall'n upon this Ferdinand'. The symptoms of lycanthropy, a delusion having its roots in 'malancholy humour', have been referred to by the Doctor. Those who are 'possessed' with this disease imagine

> "themselves to be transformed into wolves, Steal forth to churchyards in the dead of night, And dig dead bodies up" (V, ii)

In the Elizabethan / Jacobean times lycanthropy was regarded as a 'diabolic possession'. Thus William Perkins observed in *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*:

> "The devil, knowing the constitution of men, and the particular diseases whereunto they are inclined, takes the vantage of some and secondeth the nature of the disease by the concurrence

of his own delusion, thereby corrupting the imagination and working in the mind a strong persuasion that they are become that which in truth they are not. This is apparent in thatdisease, which is termed Lycanthropia, where some, having their brains distempered with melancholy, have verily thought themselves to be wolves and so have behaved themselves".

(2) *The 'echo'-scene* : Act IV, scene iii in *The Duchess of Malfi* is known as the 'echo'-scene. Antonio and Delio look at the Cardinal's window in the fort which has grown from the ruins of an ancient abbey. On the other side of the river they approach a cloister which produces the best echo. There is really nothing supernatural about the echo produced and to think of the echo as rendering the voice of the dead Duchess seems to be a product of over-stretched imagination. The echo however creates an ominous and eerie impression. Repeating the words of the two friends, especially Antonio, the echo points towards a future of bewildering pessimism. Words and phrases like 'death', 'sorrow', 'deadly accent', 'dead thing', 'do not' and 'fate' are echoed, much in the disturbance and agony of the two friends. When Antonio's 'Never see her more' is repeated, he thinks of the Duchess's face 'folded in sorrow'. Delio however says that this is only a figment of his imagination. Nevertheless, the purpose of an echo is to duplicate a voice, and in Webster's play, it is in fact the voice of Fate which has been duplicated. In spite of Delio's observation that Fate sympathizes with those who encounter sorrows and sufferings with dignity, Fate proves really malevolent in Antonio's life. Bosola kills Antonio 'in a mist of error' — and such are the ways of Fate, mysterious and inscrutable

(2) The Italian Setting : The typical Englishman of the sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries acquainted with the sternly pragmatic political contrivances of Machiavelli, author of *The Prince*, thought of Italy as a hotbed of intrigue and corruption. It became 'a mode of human experience' (G. K. Hunter) rather than a country, a centre of vice and violence, of moral transgressions and manipulative stratagems, mainly because of the distortions of truth in contemporary writings. Historians like Guicciardini made the English Protestants hate Italy as the home of Anti-Christ and his army of Jesuits. They filled their minds with horrifying accounts of papists, politicians and poisoners at work. In *The Unfortunate Traveller*; or *The Life of Jack Wilton* (1594), Thomas Nashe wrote about Italy thus:

> O Italie, the Académie of man-slaughter, the sporting place of murther, the Apothecary-shop of poison for all Nations : how many kinds of weapons hast thou invented for malice?

Considerably influenced by Seneca (whose plays were translated into English between 1559 and 1581) and Cinthio (whose *Hecatommithi* was published in 1565), the English playwrights sought to spin their revenge plots in the exotic setting of Italy. We may remember in this context the Italian setting of *Othello*, the most moving domestic tragedy of Shakespeare, and the Italian villain, Iago, he depicts as a tragic parasite with consummate virtuosity in crime.

Use of imagery : Exhaustive and insightful studies of Shakespeare's imagery have been made by many distinguished critics including, among others, Caroline Spurgeon, Wolfgang Clemen, Robert Heilman and Maurice Charney. But critical and scholarly discussions of Webster's imagery are indeed sparse. The essays written by Inga-Stina Ekeblad, H.T. Price and David Gunby,

however useful, can by no means be regarded as full-length studies of Webster's imagery. Whether literal or figurative, decorative or functional, Websterian imagery not only provides us with a sense of vividness and immediacy but also suggests or symbolizes larger meanings or themes. The blood-imagery in *The Duchess of Malfi* is doubtless predominant, as it is in *Macbeth* (so penetratingly observed by Jan Kott in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*) in the descriptions of the bleeding Captain, the murdered Banquo shaking his 'gory locks' and the blood-thirsty Macbeth himself, whose hand 'will rather / The multitudinous seas incarnadine / Making the green one red, The blood-imagery in Webster's play evokes the ideas of violence and atrocity, passion and murder, but its prime emphasis is on the idea of family honour. The Cardinal's opposition to the possible remarriage of the Duchess — 'No, nor anything without the addition Honour / Sway your high blood' (I, ii) or Ferdinand's frenzied cry after he has come to know of the remarriage of her sister — 'Apply desperate physic, / We must not now use balsamum, but fire / The smarting cupping-glass, for that's the mean / To purge infected blood, such as hers (II, v) highlights in imagistic language one of the central concerns of the play. Almost equally important are the death-imagery and the diabolic imagery ; the former intensifies the atmosphere of doom and gloom generated by the Duchess's second marriage and its reaction upon her brothers, while the latter seeks to stress the evil of the Aragonian brothers, who are devilish in their designs, and their agent Bosola. The Duchess and her husband are under the shadows of inevitable death from start to finish. The Duchess has practically taken their death for granted when she says to Antonio:

> "Let me look upon you once more: for that speech
> Came from a dying father: your kiss is colder
> Than I have seen an holy anchorite
> Give to a deadman's skull" (III, v)

In the same scene, seeing through the Machiavellian design of Ferdinand, the Duchess indentifies him with the devil :

> "The devil is not cunning enough
> To circumvent us in riddles."

A short while after Antonio's exit Bosola comes in, putting on a mask on his face and when he tells the Duchess that she is her 'adventure' and that she will see Antonio no more, she questions him thus : 'What devil art thou, that counterfeits Heaven's thunder ?' The devil is, she knows, wily enough to deceive ordinary mortals with false shows.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. John Webster — *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. J. R. Brown.
2. *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Elizabeth Brennan (New Mermaids).
3. *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Frederick Allen.
4. *John Webster — Three Plays*, ed. D.C. Gunby.
5. *The Selected Plays of John Webster*, eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield.

6. Travis Bogard — *The Tragic Satire of John Webster*.
7. M.C. Bradbrook — *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*.
8. Gunnar Boklund — *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Sources, Themes, Characters.*
9. Clifford Leech — *John Webster* : *A Critical Study*.
10. Clifford Leech — *Webster : The Duchess of Malfi*.
11. G.K. and S. K. Hunter (eds.) — *John Webster.*
12. Brian Morris (ed.) — *John Webster : A Critical Symposium.*
13. Irving Ribner — *Jacobean Tragedy : The Quest for Moral Order.*
14. Robert Ornstein — *The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy.*
15. Ania Loomba — *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama.*
16. Lisa Jardine — *Still Harping on Daughters : Women in Seventeenth Century Drama.*
17. Catherine Belsey — *The Subject of Tragedy.*
18. Una Ellis-Fermor — *The Jacobean Drama.*
19. Ralph Berry — *The Art of John Webster*.
20. David Cecil — *Poets and Story- Tellers.*
21. Ranajit Basu — *Webster's Plays* : *Functions of Imagery in Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy*.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Point out the marks of decadence in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
2. Assess *The Duchess of Malfi* as a revenge tragedy.
3. Would you regard *The Duchess of Malfi* as a melodrama or a tragedy ? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Examine the role and function of Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
5. Comment on Webster's handling of the sources in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
6. Discuss Webster's art of character-drawing in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
7. Comment on Webster's presentation of *The Duchess of Malfi*.
8. The Duchess is obviously a misogynist's delight, but she achieves tragic dignity. Examine the validity of the statement with close reference to the text.
9. 'The.... atmosphere, its poetry, and the two or three supreme scenes — these are the greatness of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Discuss.
10. Write a critical note on the use and function of imagery in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
11. Discuss the element of Machiavellianism in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
12. *The Duchess of Malfi* has magnificent passages of poetry, but these are not ingrained into the total dramatic structure. Discuss.

13. Assess the adequacy of the view that *The Duchess of Malfi* is remarkable for its strikingly effective individual scenes.

ENDNOTES

[1] coat-of-arms : the family insignia granted by the office of the Herald against payment. The permission to wear this sign on one's coat signified that the concerned person and his successors would henceforth be considered as gentlemen.

[2] groat : an old English coin worth four pennies

[3] epitaph : words written or said about a dead person, usually on the gravestone

[4] The dates in parenthesis indicate the date of printing of the first authoritative version of the play, many of which were published for the first time in the

First Folio of 1623.