

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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Total Credits - 4
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

Shakespeare's Life : born in Stratford-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.

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 gentry¹. 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

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 epitaph³ 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/tragi-comedies	Important events
1588-91		<i>The Comedy of Errors</i> (1623)				British navy defeats the Spanish Armada; William Lee invents the steel Knitting loom; Lyly: <i>Endymion</i> ; Greene: <i>Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay</i> ; Kyd: <i>Hamlet</i> ; Marlowe: <i>Jew of Malta</i>
1590-91	<i>Henry VI</i> (1594) <i>Henry VI</i> (1595)	<i>The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i> (1623)				Law students & apprentices clash in London; <i>Edward III & King Leir</i> (Anon.) published; tea comes to England; Earl of Essex leads expedition to aid Henry IV of France
1591-92	<i>Henry VI</i> (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.

Composi- tion Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Roman- ces/tragi- comedies	Important events
						<i>Dr. Faustus</i> ; Greene: <i>Groatsworth of Wit</i>
1592-94	<i>Richard III</i> (1597)	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> (1623)	<i>Titus Androni- cus</i> (1594)			Plague continues; church attendance made mandatory; Henry IV of France embraces Catholicism
1594-96	<i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> (1598) <i>A Mid- summer Night's Dream</i> (1600)	<i>Romeo And Juliet</i> (1597)				Portuguese Roderigo Lopez convicted of plotting against Elizabeth I; Henry IV ascends French throne
1595	<i>Richard II</i> (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	<i>King John</i> (1623)	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i> (1600)				Rain destroys crop; steep rise in food prices; men conscripted for French wars; peace pact between England & France

Composi- tion Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Roman- ces/tragi- comedies	Important events
1597	<i>Henry IV</i> (1598)					King of Polonia arrives to woo Elizabeth I; Burbage builds 2nd Blackfriars Theatre
1597-98	<i>Henry IV</i> (1600)	<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i> (1602)				Philip II, King of Dies
1598		<i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> (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	<i>Henry V</i> (1600)	<i>As You Like It</i> (1623)				Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, leads Irish expedition, defeated, returns secretly to London; great frost freezes River Thames
1599			<i>Julius Caesa r</i> (1623)			London tense; offensive satires banned; Nashe & Harvey forbidden to publish their work
1599- 1600		<i>Twelfth Night</i> (1623)				Globe theatre opens; famous comedian Will Kempe leaves

Composition Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Roman-ces/tragi-comedies	Important events
						Shakespeare's Company & dances from London to Norwich; East India Company founded for trade with India & Far East
1600-02			<i>Hamlet</i> (1603)			Jonson : Cynthia's Revels; Alleyn & Henslowe build to compete Fortune theatre with Globe
1601-02				<i>Troilus and Cressida</i> (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				<i>All's Well That Ends Well</i> (1623)		Irish rebellion crushed; Bodleian Library opens at Oxford; Salmon Pavy, a famous boy

Composi- tion Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Roman- ces/tragi- comedies	Important events
						actor, dies; <i>Timon</i> (Anon.)
1603-04			<i>Othello</i> (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				<i>Measure for Measure</i> (1623)		Peace with Spain; tax on tobacco; The Book of Common Prayer; Marston : The Malcontent;
1605			<i>King Lear</i> (1607-08) <i>Macbeth</i> (1623)			Gunpowder plot by Guy Fox to blow up James & the Parliament uncovered; Red Bull Theatre built; Jonson's 1st court masque
1605-07			<i>Timon of Athens</i> (1623)			Jesuit Henry Garnet executed for involvement in Gunpowder Plot
1606-07			<i>Antony And Cleopatra</i> (1623)			London & Plymouth Companies given charter to colonise Virginia in America;

Composition Date	Histories	Comedies	Tragedies	Problem plays	Roman-ces/tragi-comedies	Important events
						Act passed to restrain abuses of players : Jonson : <i>Volpone; The Revenger's Tragedy</i> (Anon.)
1607-08			<i>Coriolanus</i> (1623)		<i>Pericles</i> (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: <i>Birth of Merlin</i>
1609-10					<i>Cymbeline</i> (1623)	Mulberry trees planted across England by royal order, to encourage silk trade; Moors expelled from Spain

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

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

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.

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 brother Antonio took advantage of Prospero's lack of attention to his duties as the Duke of Milan and deposed him with the help of 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.

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

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.

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.

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, Prospero raises a 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 Milan 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,
Filt' 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 encounter 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 as a 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? You 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 Aeneas in his *Aeneid*, transforming this chaste an

heroic queen into an obsessed, hapless lover. Sebastian's "widower Aeneas" is ironically referring to 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-Machiavellian 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 1612 and 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 crisis 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 made to 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 Ayler 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 Ayler's simple romance. Similar claims have been made on behalf of two Spanish works — Antonio de Esclava'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 Strachey's description of the same, including the mysterious fires that Ariel 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 binaries which 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 together as binary

opposites helps us to highlight the contrast but simplifies or obscures the complexities that lie outside the 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 lightning 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 authority 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 problematizes 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 Aeyenste... 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 thysel/ 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 -

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.

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. 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 mastery over 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

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.

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).

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 ’twixt 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

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.

“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

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

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.

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.

(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 made to 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

'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.

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!

(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 misappropriate, 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 of 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 become a 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 form, 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, Prospero 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 Trinculo, is in poetry. Prospero's 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

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.

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.

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

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.

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

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 <i>The Tempest</i> . |
|--|

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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 text 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 Isabella's appeal to the Duke was taken from the Italian author Giraldo 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

The primary source of Measure for Measure was Giraldo Cinthio's Hecatommithi. But Shakespeare reshaped the 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

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*.

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 I.

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 Isabella and admitted that his sexual appetite had keenly been aroused by Isabella. Finally he confessed his guilt and was punished.

Claudio's 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.

Isabella, 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 Isabella 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 Isabella 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 Isabella 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 Isabella's eloquence or by her prayers. He falls violently in love with her and tells her to come back the following day. Isabella 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 Isabella "Sweet sister, let me live."

Isabella 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 Isabella 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 Isabella 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, Isabella 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 Isabella'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 Isabella that her brother is still alive. The Duke comes back. As directed by the friar, Isabella 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 his life, and so does Isabella for Mariana's happiness. Since Claudio has not been executed, Angelo is forgiven. The Duke then turns to Isabella 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 Italian 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 evencynical 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 Isabella 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 Isabella 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 Isabella's appeal 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 Isabella.

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 playwright, 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

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.

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 fluids – 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

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.

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 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, preferring 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 therefore 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 out to the gulls and knaves in the end might appear to many too severe and violative of the comic tone and 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 'Englished' 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

The most significant part of Jonson's early education was his training at the prestigious Westminster School, where he was taught by William Camden who exercised a profound influence on Jonson, and who introduced him to many works of the classical writersJonson'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.

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 continue 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 daughters 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 Council 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.

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*

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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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.

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 century 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 their 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;

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".

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'.

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. A parasite 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 batted 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 gorgon 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 as a 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 gorgon, 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 Androgynio 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 Pantaloone, 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

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.

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 pantaloone, 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 pantaloone 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.

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

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.

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.

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's 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

Jonson's choice of Venice as the setting of his play, 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.

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.

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

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.

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 intensify 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* folly 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.

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 from 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 impersonation 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

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.

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

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, <i>Volpone</i> .

(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 maintains, 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 Humour*, 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 note 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 :

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 bestiality 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 “fare jovially”.

(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’.

(g) : Let us sum up

The ending of *Volpone* is 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 of a 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 is flawless. 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 the gulls he is whatever the occasion requires him to be, but essentially he is the cunning opportunist

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.

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.

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, Corbaccio, 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 aggressive 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

'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.

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.

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:

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.

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 employing theatrical devices like parodic designs.

(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 Golden 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 like a 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 commandatore.

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 saturnalian 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 status is 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 by him. 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.

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 Carnavalesque 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 Jacobean 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, geocentric, 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*.

<p><i>The age saw the publication of a number of revenge tragedies, domestic tragedies, in the hands of Chapman, Ben Jonson, Marston and others.</i></p>
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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 cooperate 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 oeuvre, 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

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.

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.

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. Those who 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?

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

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.

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.

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 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'

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.

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 be 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*).

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

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.

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 realizing 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'.

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 hurls the 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 story that 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.

['Touneur 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 nor 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:

"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 Choephoroi*, 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 ‘Tournent 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 of 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 ?

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 subtle 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

The genre, revenge tragedy, traces back to 'Oresteia' of Aeschylus, Agamemnon, The Choephoroi, 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.

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 phallogocentric status quo.

The Duchess would be regarded as a misogynist'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.

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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)

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
alabaster
Kneels 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 hopping 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 Dukes 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 that disease, 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 identifies 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 counterfeit 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.

POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME (CBCS)

M.A. in ENGLISH

SEMESTER - 1

COR - 102

**RENAISSANCE TO RESTORATION: POETRY AND PROSE
(1485 - 1649)**

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 - 102

Renaissance to Restoration (1485 - 1659): Poetry and Prose

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Total Credits - 4
Study Hours - 16

BLOCK I

UNIT - 1

UNIT 1 (a): INTRODUCTION

TEN RENAISSANCE ENGLISH SONNETS

Content Structure

UNIT 1(a): Introduction

UNIT 1(b): The origin of the Sonnet : the Italian sonneteers

UNIT 1(c): The uniqueness of the sonnet as a poetic kind

UNIT 1(d): The Sonnet in Renaissance Britain: the beginnings

UNIT 1(e): Later Development of the Sonnet in Britain: Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare

UNIT 1(f): Spenser's *Amoretti*

In this module we are going to discuss the sonnets that you have to read in your study of British

The sonnet—an Italian genre by origin—began in the hands of Giacomo da Lentino who introduced the form : fourteen lines, eleven syllables in each line, rhyme scheme — ABAB ABAB CDE CDE — in later Italian sonnets, the order of rhymes changed — sonnet form was selected by Dante Alighieri in his “La Vita nuova”. In his hands, this form first acquired a quality Revealed in the lover’s response to the beauty and virtue of his beloved Beatrice —Supreme example: Shakespearean sonnets.

Literature of the Renaissance, or early modern period. From the sonnets mentioned in your syllabus, we select ten — six by Shakespeare, two by Sidney and one each by Wyatt and Spenser. Chronologically Wyatt comes first, as we shall see in our account of the development of the sonnet in England in the sixteenth century. The brief history of the evolution of the sonnet will be followed by a short discussion of the uniqueness of the poetic genre, its formal characteristics, the contribution of the individual sonneteers, and critical estimates of the sonnets selected for study.

UNIT 1 (b):

THE ORIGIN OF THE SONNET: THE ITALIAN SONNETEERS

The sonnet was invented in Italy about the year 1235 and till about 1520 remained exclusively an Italian genre. By the time Francis Petrarch, whose name is permanently linked with a widely followed form of the sonnet, began to write poems of this kind in the middle of the fourteenth century, it had already become established as a sophisticated poetic form. The inventor of the form was Giacomo da Lentini, one of the educated courtiers of Frederick II. He wrote altogether 25 sonnets and his example inspired some of his courtier friends to employ the form for their own poetic exercises. Fifteen of da Lentini’s sonnets have the number of lines, rhymes and syllables which soon became standard in Italian sonnets: they have fourteen lines, eleven syllables in each line and five

different rhymes in a scheme which can be represented as ABABABAB CDE CDE: In later Italian sonnets the number of lines remained the same, though their orders became changed. The sonnet

form was selected by Dante Alighieri for his autobiographical work *La Vita nuova* ('The New Life'). It was in Dante's hands that the new sonnet came to acquire a quality which would enhance its appeal to love poets, for each of Dante's sonnets is about the lover's response to the beauty and virtue of his beloved Beatrice. Since the 26 sonnets, along with five other poems, introduced into the narrative of *La Vita nuova* trace the psychological development of the lover along with a chronological account given by the prose narrative, Dante is also regarded as the first poet to have conceived a sonnet sequence, which may be defined as separate sonnets linked in a kind of half narrative, of which the supreme example in English is *Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

<p><i>Petrarchan idealization of lady love is found echoed in most of the Renaissance English sonneteers, except in lower-class poets like Shakespeare and Donne.</i></p>

But it was Petrarch who almost single-handedly made the sonnet a vehicle for the themes and motifs of love poetry in a way which caught the imagination of the poets of Renaissance Europe. Indeed his influence was so pervasive that "no later sonnet-writer could fail to be influenced either by Petrarch himself (Petrarchan writing) or by his imitators (Petrarchist writing)". This is as much true of Shakespeare, whose sonnets have even been called anti-Petrarchan, as of any early modern European sonneteer. Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, or *Rime*, as it is more commonly called, is a collection of 317 sonnets and 40 poems in other genres (29 *canzoni*, 7 *ballate* and 4 madrigals). While it would be simplistic to identify Dante with sacred love and Petrarch with the profane kind, it is indisputably true that the latter was the greatest single inspiration for the European poetry of sexual love in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The *Rime* is one of the most influential sonnet-sequences in any language, and "though the sonnet was not Petrarch's creation, it was certainly his creature". The remarkable unity of the *Rime* derives from the fact that almost all the poems deal with the most important event of Petrarch's life, his love for Laura. Her identity is not definitely known, though it is generally accepted that behind the poet's Laura there was a real-life individual, Laura de Sade, wife of an Italian merchant. Petrarch himself tells us that he saw her on 6 April 1327 and loved her till his death. Laura herself, however, died much earlier, on 6 April 1348. Dante's love for Beatrice had also inspired him to write a number of sonnets, but the death of Beatrice turned him to a higher kind of writing; the death of Laura, however, only strengthened Petrarch's resolve to go on writing love-sonnets. Laura's death profoundly affected Petrarch, sort of 'self-fashioning', a term given wide currency by the New Historicists, is not, therefore, exclusive to the modern, post-Freudian consciousness; from his reading of St. Augustine's *Confessions* and the autobiographical writings of Cicero, Seneca and Pliny, Petrarch too formed a conception of self not very different from the modern notion of self. The very idea that people can write about themselves brings with it the notion of the divided self. It is obvious that the person who writes now is in important ways the same as and different from his past self: the present self can not only recall the experiences of the past self, but can judge those experiences with greater awareness, with the advantage of hindsight. The sonnet has

sometimes been called a poem in the confessional mode and historians of the genre have traced the growth of self-awareness and self-scrutiny, as it is found in Petrarch and then with increasing complexity in later sonneteers, to the emergence in the late Middle Ages of the mode of writing known as

Stereotypical figure of the lady love in Petrarchan sonnets — golden hair and complexion, ebony brows, rosy lips and cheeks, teeth and fingers of pearl and so on — ‘Laura’ derives from ‘laurus’, the laurel tree sacred to Apollo. While the lady love’s physical beauty prompts desire, her moral beauty gives rise to despair

‘confession’. There was also the influence of the confessional practice of the Catholic Church which encouraged individuals not only to think of themselves as different from others, but also to evaluate their past behaviour and experiences either in an approving manner or as a warning to others. Since a single sonnet is never enough to tell a story, Dante discovered that a number of sonnets can be organized in a sequence to tell a coherent story of the self. Petrarch attached the confessional principle of self-organization more firmly to the sonnet sequence, and that is another reason why his *Rime* exerted such a powerful influence on Renaissance sonneteers. Finally, Petrarch was the first major poet to establish a correspondence between the sonnet and the conventions of courtly love. Courtly love idealizes the woman, putting her on a high pedestal, while her lover offers abject devotion to her, making her the mistress who deserves complete allegiance from the lover. Since the woman is usually married to someone else, the lover cannot hope for a consummation of his passion. In fact, the woman is the epitome of chastity, which appears as cruelty to the lover, since her chastity prevents her from giving herself over to the lover’s desire. This desire is prompted by the woman’s exquisite beauty: chastity and beauty are in fact the twin pillars of the Petrarchan love convention. It has recently been suggested that the idealizing process in the discourse of courtly love fulfilled an emotional need of the aristocracy, the need for power and domination over women. The idealization of the figure of the woman was a means of constructing a myth for the nobility. This may be one explanation for the fact that lower-class poets like Shakespeare and Donne did not idealize women in their love sonnets. So far as the Petrarchan lover is concerned, he is a pitiful figure sighing and shedding tears because the chastity of the woman makes her inaccessible. Petrarch’s Laura has certain physical characteristics most of which were reproduced in the sonnet heroines of Renaissance English sonneteers. These physical features were so often presented as desirable and indeed as the exclusive criteria of feminine beauty that they hardened into a stereotype. This stereotypical figure of the lady-love has golden hair and complexion, ebony eyebrows, rosy lips and cheeks, teeth and fingers of pearl, foreheads or hands of ivory, neck of alabaster. Her eyes are stars or suns and have the power of life and death over the lover. The beautiful eyes of the lady-love are a significant motif Petrarch’s love sonnets, as the following translated excerpt from Sonnet 71 of *Rime* illustrates: “Charming eyes where Love makes his nest, to you I apply my feeble style, inert in itself, but great delight spurs it . . .” (Trans. J.B. Leishman). Petrarch also provided an example for later poets in the name that she used, whether real or invented by the poet, for his mistress. ‘Laura’ derives from ‘laurus’, the laurel tree sacred to

Apollo, patron of poets. Thus the object of the speaker's love also represented the object of the writer's aspiration - the woman Laura and the laurel crown of poetry combined in a single figure. It has also been pointed out by Leishman, Spiller and others that 'Laura' can be heard and read in Italian as 'l'aura', 'the breeze' and also 'l'auro', 'gold', so that Laura is the breeze of poetic inspiration and a golden-haired woman. Morally the Petrarchan sonnet-heroine is chaste, angelic, and has absolute power over men. Her beauty and chastity lead to contrasting effects : physical beauty prompts desire, while moral beauty gives rise to despair. Countless sonnets addressed to the mistress's hands, eyes and hair were composed by different poets imitating Petrarch. Such hyperboles were soon so much overworked and the entire love convention became so much of a stereotype that you should not be surprised to find great original poets like Shakespeare and Donne mocking the whole Petrarchan tradition. Indeed, the term 'Petrarchistic' acquired a pejorative connotation because of the over-enthusiastic imitation of Petrarch by countless poets of western Europe.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What do you know about the origin of the form 'sonnet'?
2. What are the chief features of Petrarchan sonnet?
3. Write the names of some exponents of this form.

UNIT 1(c): THE UNIQUENESS OF THE SONNET AS A POETIC KIND

The sonnet has lived longer than any other short poetic form in European literature. So far as British literature is concerned, only the Augustan poets were not attracted by the sonnet. All other major poets, from the sixteenth century onwards, had written sonnets and the form is still very much alive. Although some poets have written poems containing more or less than fourteen lines— Donne wrote a sonnet with eighteen lines, Milton wrote one with twenty lines, and G.M. Hopkins wrote some 'curtal' sonnets, in which the octave and sestet are 'curtailed' into three-quarters of the normal length — the sonnet is a poem with a fixed number of lines. Compared with the drama, the novel and the epic, the fourteen-line sonnet is therefore, a very small literary form. It is also a prescribed form. The term 'prescribed form', or 'closed form' is applied to the sonnet because it is one of only a few kinds of poems which have their length and shape determined even before the poet begins to write; two other examples are the limerick and the triolet. Like these two kinds, the sonnet is identified by its form and not by its theme, which determines the identity of the tragedy or the ode. Far from being a stifling constraint, this prescribed length is actually helpful to the poet. In his wide ranging examination of 'kinds of literature', Alistair Fowler says that "far from inhibiting the author, genres are a positive support. They offer room...for him to write in..." The room offered by the genre of the sonnet is small and is therefore both a challenge and a security for the poet, as Michael Spiller has pointed out.

Except Augustans, almost all other major poets adopted this form. Its 'prescribed' form is its uniqueness. This form is both a challenge and a

Let us check our Progress:

1. What is the uniqueness of sonnet as poetic form?
2. Is the form sonnet a help or a hindrance to the poet? Explain.

UNIT 1(d): THE SONNET IN RENAISSANCE BRITAIN: THE BEGINNINGS

The sixteenth century not only saw the birth of the English Sonnet, but has been characterized as ‘the century of the sonnet’. The statistics alone are enough to substantiate this observation.

Historians of the sonnet have shown that between 1530 and 1650, about 3000 poets produced some 200,000 sonnets; moreover, every poet who won some recognition tried his hand at this small literary form. So far as British poetry is concerned, the years

mentioned above define the age of the sonnet; it was almost totally neglected after 1650 till it was revived in the nineteenth century, since when it has had a steady course. While on the continent sonnets could be and were written on various themes apart from the theme of love, in Britain love-sonnets were

The sixteenth century: “the century of the sonnet”. Sonnets were neglected between 1650 and its revival in the 19th century. In Britain love sonnets were preponderant and of quality springing from the hands of Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare.....

preponderant. Again, where other European poets, such as Tasso in Italy and Ronsard in France, wrote hundreds of sonnets (Tasso wrote 1,000 and Ronsard is credited with 700 or so), the output of no British sonneteer comes anywhere near these numbers. It can be said, however, that what they lacked in quantity, the British sonneteers made up for in quality, for the most distinctive and original poets of the time turned to the sonnet form : Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert and Milton.

The first British writer of the sonnet was Thomas Wyatt, a courtier, like the inventor of the sonnet, Giacomo da Lentino. The parallel between the two has been stretched further to include their sovereigns. Like Emperor Frederick II, Henry VIII of England was a cultured, enlightened and

Thomas Wyatt, first British sonneteer started writing sonnets under French and Italian influence. In the hands of Wyatt and Surrey “our rude and homely manner of vulgar Poesie” became polished — Petrarchan poetic style was the best model for emulation.

ruthless despot. Like da Lentino, Wyatt was a courtier trained for diplomatic service. Wyatt’s diplomatic service took him abroad, in particular to France and Italy, and it is a reasonable assumption that he began writing sonnets after his visit to Italy in 1527. In fact the sonnet entered Spain and France at about the same time under the influence of Italian poetry. Wyatt, along with Surrey, was acclaimed by his contemporaries for polishing “our rude and vulgar manner of homely poesie, from that that it had been before”, as George Puttenham commented in the 1580s in *The Arte of English Poesie*. Wyatt and Surrey could achieve this, according to Puttenham, because they tasted the “sweet and stately measures and style of the Italian poetry.” For any one with literary

and cultural accomplishments in Renaissance Europe, Italian literature, art and music were the ultimate standards of taste. For courtiers especially, Petrarchan poetic style was the best model for emulation. It is not surprising therefore that Wyatt should have been inspired by Petrarch's example to

write sonnets in English. His own admiration for Petrarchan sonnets was reinforced by French and Spanish pioneers of the sonnet, Marot and Boscan, who wrote sonnets in imitation of Petrarch in their native tongues. However, though Petrarch wrote a prefatory sonnet to his sequence, expressing his own need to employ the sonnet form for conveying his experiences, Wyatt has left no such explanation either in his sonnets or outside them. Altogether thirty-three sonnets can be attributed to Wyatt and a number of them are translations from Petrarch.

It is also clear from these sonnets that Wyatt took his inspiration not only from Petrarch but also from Italian followers of Petrarch. Some of Wyatt's sonnets, again, are adaptations of Petrarch's and others are completely original. What is most

Wyatt introduced the final couplet, but Surrey invented it as a whole. Their sonnets found a wider readership, because of their publication in 'Tottel's Miscellany'. Here, though, Wyatt, as an eal, outranked Surrey and others, yet Surrey contributed more in influencing the later course of the sonnet form in England. Surrey invented a sonnet form (rhyme scheme 4+4+4+2) better suited to the character of the English language

remarkable, however, is that Wyatt did not adopt the form of the Petrarchan sonnet, but invented a new form. In the Italian sonnet, as we have seen, the sestet consists of two tercets; but Wyatt created with the following rhyme scheme: CDDC EE. However, one of his sonnets, though ending with a couplet, rhymes CDC CDD. The final couplet introduced by Wyatt was rarely seen in Italian

The English, were trying hard to fit a recalcitrant language to the demands of a difficult prescribed form tended to employ a new version (ABAB CDCD EFEF GG) as found in Surrey. Surrey was influenced by the Petrarchan themes of suffering and idealisation, of various purposes — religious, satirical and amatory and of private integrity.

or French sonnets, but British sonneteers were immediately drawn to it. The final couplet plays an important role in subsequent British Sonnets too, and it may be said that a large part of the effect of a British sonnet derives from it, though Keats said that he faced problems in giving the couplet appropriate form and finality. Since the concluding couplet cannot be found in most Italian or French sonnets, Wyatt must have either invented it or derived it from some other source.

Recent scholars have shown that Wyatt borrowed the rhyming couplet from another short verse form in Italian, the *Strambotto* (pl. *Strambotti*). The *Strambotto*, an eight-line verse form rhyming ABABABCC, was mainly associated with the Italian poet, Serafino dell'Aquila, who contributed another verse form to English court poetry of the 1520s and 1530s - the stanzaic *frottola*. Serafino used the *Strambotto* as a shortened form of the sonnet, developing wittily a single conceit or antithesis. Elizabeth Heale has shown that Wyatt's sonnet "My heart I gave thee, not to do it pain" combines two of Serafino's *Strambotti*. Serafino used the *Strambotto* as a witty exercise on Petrarchan conceits and as a text for singing; Wyatt, however, was drawn to its epigrammatic quality and used the form as a means of increasing the effectiveness of the concluding couplets of his sonnets. By

introducing the final couplet into the sonnet form Wyatt anticipated one important feature of the English form; but the form as a whole was invented by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, who saw himself as a poetic disciple of Wyatt. Their sonnets found a wider readership after the publication, by the bookseller Richard Tottel, of an anthology entitled *Songs and Sonnets written by the Right Honourable Lord Henry Howard late Earl of Surrey and other*. Published in 1557, this anthology is better known as *Tottel's Miscellany* and contained 271 poems by Wyatt, Surrey, Nicholas Grimald and some other unnamed writers in a number of forms imported from continental literature and sought to be naturalized in English. Surrey was mentioned in the title of the anthology, not because he was a better poet, but because he was an earl and therefore outranked Wyatt and others.

Moreover, Surrey's contribution to the anthology was far less in volume than that of Wyatt. But in the matter of influencing the later course of the sonnet form in England, Surrey's contribution was much more important than that of Wyatt. Surrey invented the English form of the sonnet, later

The English, were trying hard to fit a recalcitrant language to the demands of a difficult prescribed form tended to employ a new version (ABAB CDCD EFEF GG) as found in Surrey. Surrey was influenced by the Petrarchan themes of suffering and idealisation, of various purposes — religious, satirical and amatory and of private integrity.

adopted by Shakespeare and hence better known as the Shakespearean sonnet. Surrey attempted the Italian form only once and then moved towards greater freedom of rhyme and stanzaic pattern. While the strict Petrarchan form employs two quatrains followed by two tercets (4+4+3+3), using only five rhymes, the English form uses three quatrains in which the single lines rhyme alternately followed by a rhyming couplet (4+4+4+2). It uses seven rhymes and it is possible to suggest

that Surrey invented a sonnet form better suited to the character of the English language. It has been observed by F. T. Prince, in his essay titled "The Sonnet From Wyatt to Shakespeare", that rhyme in Italian is abundant, which made it possible for the intricate Petrarchan form to be employed almost endlessly since its invention. The English, on the other hand, were trying hard to fit a recalcitrant language to the demands of a difficult prescribed form. They therefore tended to employ versions of the form which would be more suited to the genius of their pattern. While the strict Petrarchan form employs two quatrains followed by two tercets (4+4+3+3), using only five rhymes, the English form uses three quatrains in which the single lines rhyme alternately followed by a rhyming couplet (4+4+4+2). It uses seven rhymes and it is possible to suggest that Surrey invented a sonnet form better suited to the character of the English language. It has been observed by F. T. Prince, in his essay titled "The Sonnet From Wyatt to Shakespeare", that rhyme in Italian is abundant, which made it possible for the intricate Petrarchan form to be employed almost endlessly since its invention. The English, on the other hand, were trying hard to fit a recalcitrant language to the demands of a difficult prescribed form. They therefore tended to employ versions of the form which would be more suited to the genius of their language. Surrey, by employing as many as seven rhymes in his

version of the sonnet (ABAB CDCD EFEF GG) therefore, invented an enduring sonnet form which was destined to be the site of many a poetic triumph. Surrey seems to have moved to this sonnet form only after having written three sonnets in an awkward rhyme scheme : ABAB ABAB ABAB CC.

It is clear that he did not like this pattern, for he introduced a change of rhyme in the second quatrain, another change in the third, and a different rhyme in the couplet. This form is easier to write, since no rhyme sound is used more than twice. Its acceptability to British sonneteers was proved by the form's immediate success: a large number of sonnets in *Tottel's Miscellany*, written by Surrey's acquaintances, are in his rhyme scheme rather than Wyatt's. Although Surrey rejected the strict discipline of the Petrarchan form, he was attracted by the Petrarchan themes of suffering and idealization. He was also influenced by Petrarch's use of the sonnet for various purposes - religious, satirical and amatory. Following Petrarch, he also cultivated the theme of private integrity as opposed to a public world of corruption and change. In his elegiac sonnet on Wyatt, "Diverse thy death too diversely bemoan", the dead poet is feminized as Thisbe.

Like the dead Laura in the second part of Petrarch's *Rime*, Wyatt is transformed into a figure of spiritual greatness. No account of the beginnings of the English sonnet would be complete without a brief glance at the first female writer of sonnets in Britain. Earlier

accounts of the evolution of the sonnet in Britain completely ignored her and the sonnet was thus presented as an exclusively male preserve. Just as in sixteenth and early seventeenth century love sonnets the woman was, to use Sidney's witty Oxymoron, an "absent presence", so her point of view was unrepresented in the sonnet. Indeed, it was not until Elizabeth Barrett Browning published her sequence of love sonnets, *Sonnets from the*

Anne Lock, the first female English sonneteer (sonnets published in Tottel's Miscellany, 1560) — But Elizabeth Barret Browning ("Sonnets from the Portuguese", 1850) was the first active participant in the sonnet tradition — Lock was a follower of Surrey. But she characterized her sonnet sequence as "A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner."

Portuguese, in 1850, those women poets were said to become active participants in the sonnet tradition.

No account of the beginnings of the English sonnet would be complete without a brief glance at the first female writer of sonnets in Britain. Earlier accounts of the evolution of the sonnet in Britain completely ignored her and the sonnet was thus presented as an exclusively male preserve. Just as in sixteenth and early seventeenth century love sonnets the woman was, to use Sidney's witty Oxymoron, an "absent presence", so her point of view was unrepresented in the sonnet. Indeed, it was not until Elizabeth Barrett Browning published her sequence of love sonnets, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, in 1850, that women poets were said to become active participants in the sonnet tradition. The sixteenth century woman poet, Anne Lock can now be credited with the considerable

achievement of composing the first sonnet sequence in English. This sequence was published within three years of *Tottel's Miscellany*, in 1560. One reason for its obscurity was that the whole sequence was hidden away at the back of a small volume of Calvin's sermons. Lock used the sonnet form invented by Surrey to compose a sequence of twenty one sonnets. Each one of her sonnets was a paraphrase of one verse of Psalm 51, and therefore her sonnets are not erotic in interest; in fact, she characterised the sequence as 'A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner'. Her sonnet persona is unique in the history of the sonnet so far, since it is a development of the /I/ of the Psalms. A historian of the development of the sonnet, Michael Spiller, has commented that though Lock's verse is metaphorically simple, "her ear is fault-less - better than Surrey's - and her command of enjambment in the service of the flow of passion is astonishing at so early a date and unequalled until Sidney began to write". As we saw earlier, Calvin's sermons had the effect of taking all attention away from the sonnets which followed in the same volume, and the unfortunate consequence was that only Wyatt and Surrey were recognized, by Puttenham and others, as the English poets who sweetened their native tongue as "the first reformers of our English metre and style".

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Compare between Wyatt and Surrey as sonneteers.
2. Write a short note on the female sonneteers in English.

**UNIT 1 (e): LATER DEVELOPMENT OF THE SONNET IN
BRITAIN: SIDNEY, SPENSER, SHAKESPEARE**

It is a curious fact in the history of the British sonnet that though Wyatt and Surrey (and of course, Ann Lock) introduced the sonnet and effected major innovations in the form, no British poet followed their example until Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, was published posthumously in 1591. Another poet, Thomas Watson, had earlier written a sequence of love-

Thomas Watson's "Hekatompathia : Passionate Century of Love" — erotic in subject matter — Watson followed Petrarch, e.g. his second group of poems represent some kind of moral revolt against Love.

poems which he called sonnets, but no one else would accept this classification. Watson's sequence, given the Greek title *Hekatompathia* by the poet, consisted of poems each of which contain eighteen-line stanzas in the following rhyme scheme : ABABCC DE DEFF GHGH. The poems obviously do not conform to the prescribed limits of the sonnet form or to the arrangement of rhymes in any known sonnet. Nevertheless, Watson's sequence did exert some influence on later sonneteers. One important reason for its subsequent influence is to be found in the sub-title of *Hekatompathia: Passionate Century of Love*. The adjective 'passionate', along with the word 'Love', makes it clear that these poems are erotic in subject matter, not didactic or religious. The term 'century' gives a numerological coherence to the sonnets and in this Watson probably

followed Petrarch's example. In his *Rime* Petrarch included 366 poems to correspond with a year and a day. Moreover, Watson divides his so called sonnets into two groups, the second group consisting of poems which represent some kind of moral revolt against Love, just as Petrarch had divided his *Rime* into two parts, comprising sonnets before and after the death of Laura.

Michael Spiller has shown that the use of the term 'sonnet' to mean short poems which might contain more than fourteen lines was not confined to Watson.

In early Italian usage too, *sonnet* or *sonetto* simply meant 'a short lyric poem', but the sonnets of Petrarch, along with numerous sonnets composed by other Italian poets, had the effect of making the term stable in its meaning, so that very early in the history of Italian poetry, the term was exclusively linked with poems of fourteen lines divided into octave and

In Italian poetry, sonnet meant poems of 14 lines divided into octave and sestet — In Britain it meant "a light poem". After Wyatt and Surrey, next British sonneteer of any importance was Sidney. — No major poetic talent turned to the sonnet form during the long gap between 1557 and 1582.

sestet. But in Britain, throughout the sixteenth century and even in the early seventeenth century, the word 'sonnet', especially when used in the phrase 'Songs and Sonnets', as it was used by Tottel in the title of his *Miscellany*, frequently meant 'a light poem'. No contemporary of Watson would have found it incongruous when one of the two true sonnets in *Hekatompathia* hailed Watson as the English Petrarch. Tottel's *Miscellany* did not make the true sonnet immediately popular, but when the sonnet eventually became current in Britain in the 1590s, it was the form invented by Surrey which became most popular since Surrey's poems were printed first in Tottel's anthology.

The fact that most English sonneteers tended to use the final couplet may be traced to the influence of Wyatt as well. It is significant that neither the Italian sonnet, nor the sonnets of French poets who had been using the form from the late 1540s onwards, showed any marked preference for the concluding couplet. But if the sonnet form introduced by Wyatt and Surrey exerted so much influence on later British sonnets, how can we explain the fact that the next British sonneteer of any importance was Sidney, who composed his sonnet sequence only in 1582? Earlier historians of the sonnet such as Sidney Lee and J. W. Lever, blamed a negative cast of mind among sixteenth century British poets for the non-appearance of the sonnet during the long gap between 1557 and 1582. However, a comparatively recent historian like Michael Spiller has shown that sonnets were being written in British during these twenty five years and that since no major poetic talent turned to the form and since sonnets were not always clearly distinguished from other short lyrics, these poetic exercises failed to draw much attention. But the prestige attached to the name of Sir Philip Sidney gave a tremendous boost to the process of popularizing the sonnet.

Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, initiated the vogue for writing sonnets and between 1592, one year after the posthumous publication of Sidney's sonnet sequence, and 1609, the year in which Shakespeare's sonnet sequence was published, more than twenty sequences were composed in English. However, it is not simply the glamour associated Sidney's name which made

love sonnets popular in Britain. A more important factor was the way in which Petrarchan conventions of love and service fulfilled the needs of the British Queen Elizabeth's court. Sonnet sequences

Sir Philip Sidney's "Astrophil and Stella" (1582) initiated the vogue for writing sonnets — twenty sequences composed between 1592 and 1609 — Petrarchan conventions of love and service fulfilled the needs of the British Queen Elizabeth's court — She helped create myths about her own divinity to legitimate her power — Sidney's sequence, revealing his passion for Penelope Devereux interpreted as an act of political courtship of a knight, "Sir Philisides". Sidney's development of sonnet sequence — sequence, not restricted like individual sonnet enables the poet to play variations on the theme, to develop connection and contracts from sonnet to sonnet.

dominated literary fashion during the last decade or so of Elizabeth's reign, while the vogue effectively ended with her death. A more important factor was the way in which the Petrarchan conventions of love and service fulfilled the needs of the British Queen Elizabeth's court. Sonnet sequences dominated literary fashion during the last decade or so of Elizabeth's reign, while the vogue effectively ended with her death. A female monarch governing a society defined by patriarchy, and surrounded by powerful and potentially dangerous nobles, Elizabeth consciously adopted a policy of encouraging ideas which would legitimate her power. She helped create myths about her own divinity and patronized ceremonies and festivals which foregrounded a romanticized medievalism based on ideas of loyalty and service. Sidney's sonnet sequence,

despite having its roots in his passion for a real woman, Penelope Devereux, has been seen partly as an act of political courtship on the part of a chivalrous knight who participated in tournaments under the name 'Sir Philisides'. It has been rightly said by Peter Hyland that "any work that attempted to win the favour of a woman who was powerful, distant and cruel, beautiful and virtuous and, above all, unattainable, clearly coded within its fictions an account of the courtier's relationship to his monarch". From a technical point of view, Sidney's development of the sonnet sequence (Watson too must be credited with initiating the idea of a sequence) was partly intended to compensate for the limitations of the individual sonnet, because a sequence, free

from the restrictions of the individual sonnet's short space, enables the poet to play variations on his theme, to develop connections and contracts from sonnet to sonnet.

Sidney made several other innovations. The relationship between an adoring lover and an unattainable lady-love had been a convention of sonnet sequences from Petrarch onwards, but the title of Sidney's sequence was chosen by the poet to set up multiple resonances. *Astrophil and Stella* translates as "star-lover and star", wittily and in an entirely original manner conveying the distance between the pining lover and the cold, beautiful

Sidney's "Astrophil and Stella" conveys the distance between the pining lover and the lady love—Several criticisms concerning the autobiographical element in Sidney's sequence— Sidney's sonnets are full of humour, simple fun, sarcasm, wit and irony— He uses the apostrophe most liberally— Astrophil appears to be sometimes a frustrated lover, sometimes the butt of the poet's irony, and sometimes a restless lover — Sidney experimented with various sonnet forms — Surrey's model, Petrarchan form, British form.

woman. Since the name 'Astrophil' partly contains within itself the name of Philip Sidney, the title hints at an autobiographical situation Penelope Devereux was married to Lord Rich, and there are at least three sonnets in Sidney's sequence which contain puns on the word 'rich'. However, since the

references are cryptic, it has been suggested by J.G. Nicholls that *Astrophil and Stella* could have been read by Sidney's contemporaries in two distinct ways : "as biography by those in Sidney's circle and therefore in the know, or as a piece of fiction by those outside this circle". Nicholls also gives a salutary warning against the tendency to look for auto-biographical truth in early modern love sonnets, by pointing out that contemporary readers did not attach as much importance to the biographical interpretation of poetry as we are apt to do. The relationship between Stella and Penelope, like that between Petrarch's Laura and the real-life figure of Laura de Sade, was as complex as that between art and life. In fact, Sidney's sequence continually raises tantalizing questions like the following: Is Sidney wholly serious or just wittily playing variations upon a convention? How seriously should we take the protestations of love in *Astrophil and Stella*? Are these protestations Sidney's Astrophil's? Such questions arise because of another significant feature which distinguishes Sidney's sonnet sequence from any other sequence composed earlier or even afterwards. Sidney's sonnets are full of humour, simple fun, sarcasm, wit and irony; very often the irony and the sarcasm are directed against Astrophil himself, so that we tend to regard him not only as a frustrated lover but also as the butt of the poet's irony. This ironical presentation of the lover raises an interesting question regarding the poet's handling of the sonnet persona. Petrarch made his readers aware of the gap between the /I/ who writes and the /I/ who suffers as a lover. Sidney deconstructed this /I/ further by deliberately enhancing the artifice of the text, as Spiller has pointed out; the result is that both /I/s, the writing /I/ and the suffering /I/, are "the invention of a sign system - in this case the Petrarchan convention - which is itself the product of an implied Writer concealed behind the text." The reader thus is taken to a metafictional level, continually aware of the fictionality of the text. All Sidney's sonnets are not humorous, however; there are some like Sidney's second sonnet in your course, which express an intense sadness. Again, a large number of Sidney's sonnets are cast in the form of apostrophe beginning with or containing a passionate address to a person or an object (like the first Sidney sonnet in your course). In fact, Sidney uses the apostrophe far more liberally than any other British sonneteer. Many of these apostrophes create the illusion of the presence of a third party. Moreover, though the effect of this figure of speech is more often serious, solemn or sad, too many apostrophes as used by Sidney create an impression of excited movement, so that Astrophil appears to be a restless lover. That Sidney was very conscious of the sonnet tradition and of his own artistic role and resources is evident from the very opening sonnet of his sequence. This sonnet can be called "a sonnet on sonnet" and it sets out the poet's artistic aims in composing sonnets. That opening sonnet declares that originality, rather than derivativeness, is the poet's motto. This need not imply that Sidney invented a whole new sonnet form; it means only that the sonneteer must not cull flowers of rhetoric from other poets. Sidney had earlier experimented with different sonnet forms. There are nineteen sonnets in his pastoral romance, *Arcadia*. Nine of these sonnets follow Surrey's model, five are Petrarchan in form and five have entirely unprecedented rhyme schemes invented by

Sidney himself, including one sonnet using a single rhyme :AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA. Sidney mostly used the Italian octave followed by an English sestet, but he also sometimes adopted the English form of three quatrains followed by a couplet. (An interesting exercise for you will be a comparison of the forms of the two Sidney sonnets in your course.) Sidney’s sonnets also have a dramatic quality, using rhythms and phrases which give the impression of actual speech; appropriately enough, the playwright Thomas Nashe described *Astrophil and Stella* as “the tragicomedy of love”.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What are the salient features of Sidney’s sonnet sequence?
2. What autobiographical element do you find in Sidney’s sonnet sequence?

UNIT 1(f): SPENSER’S *AMORETTI*

Astrophil and Stella led to an explosion of sonnet sequences in Renaissance Britain, but very few of them could instill new life into the convention of the love sonnet. One of the few exceptions was Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti*, “little love-offerings”. (Among the other sonnet sequences, at least two have powerful individual sonnets: Samuel Daniel’s *Delia* and Michael Drayton’s *Ideas Mirrour*.) Spenser’s sequence celebrates his love for Elizabeth Boyle, whom he eventually married, and though the 88 sonnets (one was printed twice, which explains why the number is often taken to be 89) follow the Petrarchan convention by ending in disappointment, the sequence was published along with *Epithalamion*, a joyous hymn celebrating the poet’s marriage. Thus in one important respect Spenser’s sonnets reversed the Petrarchan love convention: Petrarch (and Sidney, too) celebrated adulterous love for an unattainable mistress, but Spenser commemorates marriage, thereby domesticating desire into Christian marriage. In this respect Spenser is said to have effected an uneasy fusion between the erotic and the spiritual, the conventional and the autobiographical. This is not only a unique contribution to the Petrarchan sonnet tradition; it also solves what has been called the fundamental problem of the Petrarchan sonnet: “that its space is the space of disjunction”, since its speaker is always responding to a mistress who is absent. It is true that *Amoretti* ends in disappointment, with a sonnet which expresses, perhaps more intensely than any other sonnet on absence, the lover’s sad awareness that the beloved is not with him. But Spenser could afford to do this because he was going to follow it with the marriage song, *Epithalamion*, in which the separation of the lover and his desired Other is ended. Scholars have found great significance in the way the *Amoretti* sonnets were printed in the original, 1595, volume: apart from Sonnet I, all the rest faced each other in mirror fashion. Thus Sonnet 75 (in your course), which is about the erasure of the name of the beloved, confronts Sonnet 74, which is about the significance of the name. Since the links are closer in the later part of the sequence, one may suggest that “the pairings are designed to reflect the increasing closeness of the sequence’s subject-pair, the lover and his beloved”. (Brooks-Davies).

Spenser's handling of the sonnet persona is very different from that of either Petrarch or Sidney. The narrator of *Amoretti* appears to be a naive, artless figure, never subjected to irony, unlike Astrophil in Sidney's sequence. Though many dates in Spenser's own life are given in the sonnets, they do not form a coherent narrative of an important chapter in the poet's biography. In fact, too much emphasis on the autobiographical truth of the sonnets obscures a very important feature of *Amoretti*. Spenser had been composing his great epical poem meant as a homage to Queen Elizabeth, *Faerie Queene*, when he chose to write the sonnets. He thus allowed private love to supersede his public love for Queen Elizabeth. Significantly, the poet's private

beloved was also called Elizabeth. It may be said therefore that the themes of desire and distance in the love sonnets mirror the poet's feelings for his Queen - the poet seeking the Queen's favour, sometimes successfully receiving it, but sometimes feeling the threat of withdrawal of royal favour. Therefore the author of *Amoretti* compensates by indulging in fantasies about Elizabeth and also by creating, controlling, criticizing and textually mastering his beloved. A very good example of this textual mastering is provided by the sonnet in your course. In

The sonnet persona in 'Amoretti' appears to be a naive, artless figure, never subjected to irony — Spenser allowed his private love to supersede his public love for Queen Elizabeth in the sonnets. — Spenser fantasizes indulges in about Elizabeth and creates, controls and criticizes and textually masters his beloved. Spenser's rhyme scheme — ABAB BCBC CDCD EE increases the sense of flow in each sonnet and firmly lies the octave to the sestet.

that sonnet waves wash away the name of Elizabeth inscribed by the lover on the shore, the lover can write the name again. The waves are of course, in the first place, an image of temporal process; but they are also “an assertion of authorial power to erase the mightiest name in the land - to achieve in script and on paper an act of unnamming that compensates for the months and years spent creating Queen Elizabeth through the fictions of the *Faerie Queene*” (Brooks-Davies). Thus, as Brooks-Davies goes on to say, the queen is one of the “baser things” which will inevitably “die in dust” in this sonnet, while Elizabeth Boyle is the woman assured of eternal life in her lover's poetry. This sonnet seriously questions the view that the narrator in *Amoretti* is naive and artless. As for the poet himself, the sonnet form chosen by him is a supreme triumph of poetic art.

Spenser cannot be said to have invented this form, which uses five rhymes instead of the usual seven in the form invented by Surrey. The rhyme scheme of the Spenserian sonnet is ABAB BCBC CDCD EE; the quatrains are interlinked in a manner reminiscent of the “rhyme royal” stanza. But whether or not he invented this form, he is certainly its most accomplished and celebrated practitioner. This form is more complicated than any other sonnet form and no one used it after Spenser. The repetition of the rhymes not only links the quatrains, but increases the sense of flow in each sonnet and firmly ties the octave to the sestet. F. T. Prince maintains that only Spenser could have used this complex form for an entire sonnet sequence. The difficulty of finding so many rhymes and interlacing them so firmly was far less for him than for any other sonneteer, because of “his unusual facility in rhyme”.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What are the distinct features of Spenser's sonnets sequence?
2. Write a short note on the autobiographical element in Spenser's *Amoretti*.
3. Write a note on Spenser's handling of rhyme- scheme.

SUMMING UP

The sonnet, invented in Italy in the thirteenth century, was turned into a major and influential poetic genre by Francis Petrarch. Petrarch, in writing love sonnets for Laura, a woman he might have loved only in his imagination, created an entire set of conventions in the love sonnet, including their organization in a sequence, which were imitated by a host of later European poets. It has been rightly said that his *Rime* became “the Bible of European love poetry” (Spiller). Petrarch used the already established Italian form of the sonnet, and though this form was often adopted by later sonneteers, British sonnet writers like Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney and Spenser each introduced distinctive thematic and structural modifications. The sonnet came to Britain rather late, the first examples being those of Wyatt and Surrey published in *Tottel's Miscellany* in 1557. After a gap of twenty five years, during which some individual sonnets might have been composed by minor poets, Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* led to a flood of sonnet sequences addressed to mostly fictional mistresses. To Sidney thus belongs the credit of writing the first sonnet sequence in English, for Watson's *Hekatompathia*, which had come out earlier, was a sequence of poems which cannot be called sonnets. If these early British Sonneteers made important innovations in the sonnet tradition, Shakespeare was to make radical departures from the Petrarchan tradition.

UNIT 2 (a)

ANTI-PETRARCHANISM

Content Structure

UNIT 2(a): Anti-Petrarchanism

UNIT 2(b): Autobiographical truth

UNIT 2(c): “Two loves”

UNIT 2(d): The Formal Features of the Shakespearian Sonnet

Almost all the sonnet sequences written in Renaissance Britain had titles, but it was long believed that Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence had none. Recent scholarship has however, firmly

established the fact that Shakespeare’s sonnet sequence too has a title. Thus Katherine Duncan-Jones, the editor of the Sonnets in the Arden Shakespeare (1997) series, unhesitatingly declares, “The title of Shakespeare’s sonnets is *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*.” A later editor, Colin Burrow (*The Oxford Shakespeare*, 2002), says, “The title Shakespeare’s Sonnets sounds conclusive”. This kind of “genitive title” is one of the many features which completely distinguish Shakespeare’s Sonnets from any other sonnet collections of the time. Only one other sonnet sequence of the time, as Duncan-Jones points out, carries the author’s name in the possessive as part of the title - Syr. P.S. his Astrophel and Stella, but since the sequence was published posthumously, the title must have been given by the publisher for the purpose of publicity. It one motive behind the mention of the poet’s name in the title was to emulate the example set by the title of Astrophel and Stella, a sequence Shakespeare is known to have liked, another and more important aim was to draw attention to the unique qualities of the sequence by boldly claiming that the sonnets were the work of one individual genius. Far from following the Petrarchan convention in any way, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* possess features which are non-Petrarchan, even anti-Petrarchan. Instead of presenting an idealized lady love as the object of the lover’s intense devotion and desire, the sonnets of Shakespeare (actually the first 126 sonnets) express an equally intense love for a young man, thereby rendering the traditional sonnet heroine completely redundant. Like Petrarch’s Laura and Sidney’s Stella, the sonnet heroines of Petrarch’s English imitators, such as Lodge, Drayton, Daniel, Constable and others, are also female. No doubt in order to defend the moral integrity of Britain’s greatest poet against the charge of homoeroticism, a late nineteenth century Shakespearean scholar, Sidney Lee, claimed that it was exceedingly common for Renaissance European sonneteers to celebrate the charms of young men.

The fact, however, is that only one British Sonneteer, Richard Barnfield, wrote about the charms of a young man in a group of twenty sonnets included in his *Cynthia* and addressed to a boy whom

the poet, following classical mythology, calls Ganymede. The young man in Shakespeare's sonnets is not given any name, actual or invented, and scholars are still trying to identify him with a real-life individual. The sonnets of Shakespeare are not all about love of

one man for another; there also is a woman who is the object of tempestuous passion. But this woman features in only 28 sonnets, which brutally defy Petrarchanism. The Petrarchan sonnet heroine is a chaste and aristocratic lady who remains unattainable for the lover. But sonnets 127-154 in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* present an obviously non-aristocratic woman who does not have any of the characteristics of the Petrarchan heroine—youth, beauty, intelligence and chastity. While the sonnet heroine of tradition is fair, the woman who draws both fascination and repulsion from the lover in Shakespeare's

Controversies over the title of Shakespeare's sonnet series — some say, it is "Shakespeare's Sonnets". Shakespearean sonnets possess features that are non-Petrarchan and sometimes anti-Petrarchan — they express intense love for a young man (in first 126 sonnets) — the last 28 sonnets deal with 'black lady' who is ugly and promiscuous — the lover in the sonnets puts biology before beauty — the lady is a butt of male disdain — we find deliberate rejection of hyperboles in these sonnets.

sonnets is dark. Yet another pillar of the Petrarchan love convention is the mistress's chastity. But the "dark lady" in Shakespeare's sonnets is promiscuous, "as black as hell, as dark as night". (Sonnet 147). It is not only her complexion that is a complete contrast to that of the Petrarchan mistress; her breath is foul, her walk is ungainly, her wit is short. She seems to exist solely as an object of male

In Shakespearean Sonnets, the Petrarchan adoration for his lady love or apotheosis is directed towards the male lover — the man is presented as psychologically and morally far superior to the woman.

lust. The Petrarchan lover is prompted by the beauty of his mistress to feel desire for her, but the lover in Shakespeare's sonnets puts biology before beauty. Moreover, since the lover thinks that the woman is unintelligent, he presents her as a butt of male disdain at the same time as she is a convenient outlet for male desire. That is why we find, in the sonnets dealing with the

dark woman, a strong note of misogyny which is as far removed from Petrarchan mistress-worship as the "dark lady" is from Laura. Shakespeare's deliberate rejection of the hyperboles of Petrarchanism is best seen in Sonnet 130.

In the majority of the sonnets of Shakespeare, the adoration reserved for the Petrarchan sonnet heroine is directed towards the male lover. The effect is that of a total rejection of Petrarchanism. We have seen that in his later sonnets Petrarch presents Laura as the source of his spiritual enlightenment, by associating her with a heavenly being. This sort of apotheosis is by and large absent from the sonnets of Shakespeare. The terms of Christian worship employed by Petrarch to spiritualize Laura are in fact used to glorify the male lover in the *Sonnets*. Sonnet 105 appears to be a mockery of the Christian concept of Trinity as the speaker finds in his male lover "Three themes in one". The male is explicitly presented as superior to any woman in Sonnet 18 and Sonnet 20. In the former sonnet the friend is not only fairer than a summer's day, but also, more significantly, unaffected

by “nature’s changing course”. As Duncan-Smith explains, the phrase refers to menstruation, known in Shakespeare’s time as “monthly courses”. In Sonnet 20 the young man is praised for possessing female beauty without female fickleness and for being unacquainted with “shifting change as is false woman’s fashion”. As Duncan-Smith glosses the lines, the reference is to the misogynistic commonplace that all women are fickle. Also implicit in the lines is a derogatory comment on women’s need to change clothes because of menstruation. Thus in the *Sonnets* as a whole not only are two forms of love sharply contrasted, but as an object of love the man is presented as psychologically and morally superior to the woman, so that when, in Sonnet 144, the speaker says, “Two loves I have,

There are negation of self, self-criticism, self-abasement and a kind of deconstructive self-doubt in the Shakespearean sonnet sequence.

of comfort and despair,” it is not at all difficult to determine which love gives him comfort and which other plunges him into despair. It is clear now why Shakespeare could not have chosen as his title those conventionalized ones containing allusions to idealized females with names borrowed from classical mythology — *Astrophil and Stella*, *Delia*, *Diana* and so on. The point of calling his sonnets *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* must have been to draw attention to the poet’s redefinition of the genre and conventions of the Petrarchan love sonnet. The sonnet form adopted by Shakespeare was also unPetrarchan, of course, but in this he was not unique, and in any case his handling of the sonnet form will be the subject of a separate discussion.

Finally, as we have done with other sonneteers, we must examine the role of the speaker or sonnet persona in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. Since Shakespeare was a dramatist as well, we might expect to hear more than one voice in his sonnets. He does not even start a single sonnet as a reply to something said by someone, as Sidney not infrequently does. “There is something very lonely about Shakespeare’s sonnets” (Spiller). The very nature of Petrarchan love requires the love sonnets to be preoccupied with absence; but Shakespeare’s sonnets are more obsessed with absence than those of any other contemporary sonneteer. The speaker of the sonnets is constantly grappling with the problem that the absence of the beloved is somehow a negation of his own self. There is also an infinitely greater note of self-criticism and self-abasement in these sonnets than in any other sequence. In the opening seventeen sonnets of the sequence, in sonnet 18 and several others, the speaker is confident, and free from self-doubt as he promises immortality to the young friend. But more and more as the sequence proceeds, he is assailed by anguish and uncertainty in a way that may be called existential or deconstructive. Deconstruction is achieved through ambiguation of language, as in the following lines from Sonnet 55:

So till the judgement that yourself arise, You live in this, and dwell in lovers’ eyes. The plain meaning of the lines is that “your (the beloved’s) image will be reflected in the eyes of the lovers”. But since lovers’ eyes were proverbially fickle, the image introduces a note of deconstructive doubt.

Similar doubt is introduced about the speaker's own self, his capacity for loyalty, his attitude to others.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What are the distinct features of Shakespearean sonnet sequence ?
2. How far is the Shakespearean sonnet sequence anti-Petrarchan ? Is it a conventional literary practice ? Discuss.

UNIT 2(b): AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TRUTH

Despite more than two centuries of research, there are very few biographical facts that may be said to have been proved beyond reasonable doubt. Since the themes of the *Sonnets* are so unconventional and the speaker's sexual intimacy with a man and a woman so unusual, it has been thought by many that they must be rooted in the poet's life, though it is equally plausible that Shakespeare invented the complex relationships, as he invented many complicated relationships and encounters in his plays. Equally uncertain is the dating of the *Sonnets*, for though Francis Meres referred in 1598 in his *Palladis Tamia* to Shakespeare's "sugred [sugared] Sonnets among his private friends," the reference only proves that some of the sonnets were written in or before 1598. But the *Sonnets* as a sequence were published only in 1609. It is possible to argue that the individual sonnets had been written much earlier, for by 1609 the fashion

for writing love sonnets had declined. However, some scholars still argue for this later date because many of the sonnets display the stylistic boldness and startling image patterns which we associate with Shakespeare's mature plays. Again, it is impossible to say whether Shakespeare intended the sonnets

Several controversies over the autobiographical element in Shakespearean sonnets for their unusual theme and uncertain dating—controversies over the identity of some 'W.H.' and of the 'Dark lady'.

as a coherent sequence since there is neither external nor internal evidence regarding this. Indeed, various attempts have been made to rearrange the sonnets in different orders, but by and large the tendency of scholars and critics is to keep intact the sequence in which the sonnets were originally published. The *Sonnets* were dedicated to one who is identified only by the initials W.H., and it is usually assumed that this figure is the young man who is the speaker's beloved. The names of two noblemen of the period are mainly suggested as the real-life originals of W.H. - William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and Henry Wriothesley (whose initials are thus the wrong way round), Earl of Southampton. The "dark lady" is a more intriguing figure, and though attempts have been made to identify her with real women like Mary Fitton and Emilia Lanier, conclusive evidence is still lacking. It can be said, in fact, that the concentration on the autobiographical nature of the sonnets has largely been a waste of scholarly energy. Moreover, it has only deflected attention from the real significance of the *Sonnets* as works of art, as poetry. Any attempt to understand the sonnets as art must involve regarding them as fiction, in the same way as the plays are treated as fiction. Biographical

speculations are also kept out of this discussion because we are reading only six of Shakespeare's sonnets and these issues are not our concern.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write a short note on the autobiographical element in the Shakespearean sonnets.

UNIT 2(c): 'TWO LOVES'

As indicated earlier, most commentators on *Shakespeare's Sonnets* till the beginning of the 20th century anxious to purify the sonnets of the slightest taint of homoeroticism, which was regarded as

Shakespeare's sonnets were not gender-specific : Colin Burrow — "Shakespeare's homosexuality is a 'readerly' fiction generated by a desire to read narrative coherence into a loosely associated group of poems." — The poems encourage the readers to imagine circumstances which would fit the texts, but they also multiply the possible meanings and their

immoral as well as illegal for a long time, presented the lover's relationship with his male friend as essentially spiritual. A further consequence of this denial was the foregrounding of the sonnet lover's passion for the "dark lady". This enabled the critics to claim that love in the sonnets is predominantly heterosexual. The foregrounding of the "dark lady" also makes it possible to relate her to the *femme fatale* or fatal woman of the European Romantic tradition, to figures like Petrarch's Laura, Keats' Fanny Brawne and W.B. Yeats's Maud Gonne. Thus, as Duncan-Smith

has pointed out, the sonnets were sought to be linked to the same courtly love tradition which Shakespeare was rejecting. I should now like to mention and explain four recent views on the love relationships in the *Sonnets* and leave it to you to judge which one makes more sense.

Let us start with the view that the sonnets are not mainly about same-sex love, that many of those traditionally regarded as expressions of homoerotic passion are not in fact gender-specific. The most persuasive exponent of this view is Colin Burrow (The Oxford Shakespeare edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*). Burrow says that many of the poems in the group 1-126 which are treated as poems to a "young man" carefully avoid giving a fixed gender to their addressee. These poems deal with general themes like the lure of homoerotic attraction, the power of love, the pull of ethical admiration, and the fears, tension and anxiety of the lover.

Moreover, the "young man" of biographical critics is never actually so called in this group of sonnets. One of the terms used for the young man is "friend", which could have a double

Sonnet No. 18 is not gender specific. It is a great love poem.

meaning - a lover as well as a moral equal and confidant; however, "friend" was also a double-gendered word in Shakespeare's time, meaning either mistress or a male companion. What causes the sonnet persona both frustration and delight is that the object of his desire refuses to be confined to one thing. These aspects of the *Sonnets* problematize the nature of the love, expressed in the first 126 sonnets. Even if we take it to be homoerotic, we cannot be sure whether it is physically consummated, or whether Shakespeare was a homosexual.

Perhaps these are wrong questions to ask, because the sonnets refuse to be fixed in setting, tantalizingly coming close to love, sexual desire and admiration for the friend. “Shakespeare’s homosexuality is a ‘readerly’ fiction generated by a desire to read narrative coherence into a loosely associated group of poems” (A “readerly” text, fulfills the reader’s expectations regarding structure and meaning). On the other hand, addressing the friend as “sweet boy” or “lovely boy”, does raise questions about the exact nature of the relationship between the speaker and his young friend. These questions have to be examined in the context of early modern notions of sexuality. No one in that period would have called himself “homosexual”, a term which entered English only in the 1890s; indeed, no one of the period would have attempted to define his identity by his sexual activity. The language used to describe same-sex love was not precise and had many gaps. The actual physical relationship between men was called “sodomy”, a crime punishable by death. But the young boys playing the roles of women in Shakespeare’s comedies aroused some kind of desire in the minds of the predominantly male audiences. The boys’ relationship with the adult male actors in a company often verged on, or even partook of, homoeroticism. Against this is to be placed the custom of the period which made it common and acceptable for men to kiss and embrace each other freely, though such behaviour could also be presented by hostile observers as the outward marks of sodomy. All these observations lead to the realization of the most important aspect of the same-sex relationship in the *Sonnets*, namely that the form of sexuality presented here encompasses all the prevailing notions about love between men, even deriving pleasure from their incompatibility. “So should readers of the Sonnets give up on the real pleasure and the real and liberating disturbance which comes from thinking that Shakespeare was homosexual ?” To this question Burrow’s answer is Yes and No. The poems encourage the readers to imagine circumstances which would fit the texts, but they also multiply the possible meanings and their application.

Much the same point can be made about the male-female relationship in the group of sonnets 127-154. The “dark lady”, like the “young man”, is never called the name given to her by critics.

Like the friend, she is a complex figure, becoming different things in different sonnets. She is the antithesis of the Petrarchan mistress in Sonnet 130; she is beautiful and desirable in Sonnet 127. Like the term “friend”, “mistress” also was a semantically mobile word, meaning “the woman who commands a man’s affection” and also “a woman with whom the man has an illicit relationship”.

<p><i>The sonnets about the young man are the narrative of a love affair, with a beginning (sonnet 1-19) describing how the speaker falls in love, a middle (sonnets 20-99) suggesting the consummation of the poet’s passion and an end (sonnets 100-126) showing the decline of the affair.</i></p>

The presence of the “dark woman” outside the exclusively male bonds of earlier sonnets makes the love depicted in the Sonnets triangular. Two points can be made about Sonnet 18. It can be taken independently as one of the greatest love poems in the *Sonnets*, which will corroborate Burrow’s views. The sonnet belongs to the “young man” group, but does not give a

definite gender to the addressee, and can therefore also be taken as addressed to a woman. The lover is addressed as “thou”, which was an intimate mode of address equally applicable to a man and a woman. Richard Danson Brown (*Shakespeare 1609: “Cymbeline” and the “Sonnets”*) gives two examples from twentieth century literature and culture which show how the poem can be used as a love poem addressed to a woman. In Evelyn Waugh’s novel *The Loved One* (1948) an Englishman with poetic aspirations and living in Hollywood wants to seduce an American woman and in order to impress her, passes off famous English poems as his own composition. One such poem used by him is *Shall I Compare thee to a Summer’s Day*, which is so well-known that even his culturally backward fancee vaguely recalls having read it somewhere. The second instance cited by Brown to prove the status of the sonnet as a love poem that can be addressed to a woman is from the film *Shakespeare in Love*, made in 1999. In this film the lovelorn Shakespeare himself is made to write the sonnet for a glamorous woman called Viola de Lesseps. It is an interesting fact that the makers of the film chose not to present Shakespeare as a homosexual, though presenting him as such in the much more liberal sexual climate of the end of the twentieth century would not have aroused moral outrage of the kind which eighteenth and nineteenth century critics generally expressed.

There is, nevertheless, a growing interest in the representation of homoeroticism in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* and many readers are convinced that the “young man” group of sonnets are essentially about same-sex love. As a representative of this view one may choose Bruce Smith. What follows is a brief summary of Smith’s arguments in his book *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics*. In the first seventeen sonnets of Shakespeare the speaker’s sexual feelings for the friend are carefully held in check, as the friend is urged to get married and perpetuate his virtue and beauty through his offspring. This plea to the friend may be characterized as homosocial desire which, however, changes by degrees into homosexual desire. The friend, who is requested to enter matrimony for the sake of his love for the speaker, is soon being addressed as “dear my love” (sonnet 13) until the speaker confidently asserts that the friend’s beauty will be eternized through his verse: “in eternal lines to time thou grow’st” (sonnet 18). “Love” in fact becomes the speaker’s favourite epithet for the young man. The word, like the related “lover” and “lovely”, was ambiguous in sixteenth and seventeenth-century usage. The “dark woman” is only once called a “friend”, and she is more often characterized as a “mistress”, a word which had an explicitly sexual reference. The word “friend”, on the other hand, had a largely non-sexual reference. “We have, then, two people- and three terms for talking about them”. But the young man and the dark woman are both referred to as the speaker’s “loves” in sonnet 144, though one is called an “angel”, while the other, “the woman coloured ill”, is the “worser spirit”. Sonnet 20 is generally considered crucial in determining the exact nature of the speaker’s feelings for the young man. This sonnet (“A woman’s face with nature’s own hand painted/ Hast thou”) can be read both as an affirmation of sexual desire for the

friend and as a negation of such desire. Obviously, those who settle for the view that the *Sonnets* express a homoerotic passion read the sonnet in the former sense. (Though the sonnet is not in your course, you should read it with the help of Duncan-Jones's annotations in the *Arden Shakespeare* edition to recognize its implied homoeroticism). It is difficult to

escape the impression that the whole sonnet deliberately casts a male in the role which most sonnets would assign to a female. Moreover, Shakespeare does not stop at sonnet 20; in the poems that follow the poet writes about what happens when emotional desire becomes physical act. This sexual experience, according to Smith, resides largely in the puns, many of which do not simply occur in individual sonnets but are sustained through the whole sequence: "have" (sonnets 52, 87, 129), "will" (standing for male and female sexual organs as well as for sexual desire, in sonnets 57, 112, 134, 135, 136), "pride" (for male sexual organ, in sonnets 52, 64, 151). It is possible to maintain

During his moments of self- confession in the sonnets following sonnet no.-20, Shakespeare grapples with questions of authority which bypass law and morality — In sonnets 20-126, there is frustrated idealism which is in sharp contrast even to the cynical tone of the sonnets addressed to the dark lady. The reader should recognize how the speaker's shifting moods from jealousy through self-advertisement to self-disparagement run counter to Renaissance ideals of friendship.

that in the sexual puns of the sonnets about the young man, as in the similar puns in the sonnets about the mistress (see commentary), Shakespeare lays bare the psychological and anatomical realities of sexual love. The sonnets about the young man are the narrative of a love affair, with beginning, middle and end. The beginning (sonnets 1-19) describes how the speaker falls in love; the middle (sonnets 20-99) suggests the consummation of the poet's passion; and the end (sonnets 100-126) shows the decline of the affair.

After the sonnet persona's first admission of sexual passion in sonnet 20, we might legitimately expect an awareness on the part of the speaker of the moral and legal constraints imposed on homosexuality by the social, political and religious orthodoxy. But no moral and legal reservations are even implied in the *Sonnets*. During his moments of self-confession in the sonnets following sonnet 20, Shakespeare's speaker does grapple with questions of authority, but these questions bypass law and morality. The authority with which the speaker struggles is the authority in being another man's lover and the further authority in writing about homosexual love. Once the speaker declares homosexual desire in sonnet 20 and begins to act on it in subsequent sonnets there is a profound change. "Conventional structures of ideology and power explode". In the early sonnets, the persona has all the power. His age, his experience, and most of all, his poetic powers put him in command of the situation. But once the passion is admitted, the power equations change. The person who doubts his own abilities in sonnet 29 ("When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes/I all alone bewep my outcast state") is entirely different from the one who confidently declared the power of his verse to confer immortality on his beloved in sonnet 18. The love sonnets to the young man not only differ from the first seventeen sonnets in respect of the implied relationship between the

speaker and the beloved, but also differ from the sonnets about the mistress. In sonnets 20-126 there is frustrated idealism, which is in sharp contrast to the cynical tone of the sonnets addressed to the dark lady. "Shakespeare devotes 126 highly varied sonnets to the young man and only 28 alternately affable and sarcastic sonnets to the mistress for the same reason that the fourth and fifth century Greeks devoted so much more attention in their philosophical writings to the love between men and boys than to the love between men and women : in each case it was the bond between male and male that seemed the more complicated and problematic". Smith concludes therefore, that those who fail to recognize how the shifting moods of the speaker from jealousy through self-advertisement to self-disparagement run counter to Renaissance ideals of friendship and still interpret the *Sonnets* in terms of those ideals, have not read their Aristotle, Cicero and Plutarch.

Nevertheless there are many apologists for the *Sonnets* as testimonials to friendship untainted by physical intimacy. One such prominent apologist is C.L. Barber who, in *An Essay on Shakespeare's Sonnets*, refers to the large number of editors and commentators, beginning with John Benson (1640), who have been embarrassed by the fact that a man is the addressee in these love poems. It is clear from the *Sonnets* that the role of beloved young friend or "lover" corresponds to a need in the poet to live in and through another person. Love which embodies the powers and perfections of life is usually experienced through the beauty of some one of the opposite sex. But in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* the poems addressed to a woman, "the dark lady", are concerned more with her imperfections than with her beauty or virtue, frequently expressing the paradox that with all her faults, she nevertheless arouses sexual desire. In the poems addressed to the young man, on the other hand, there is wonder aroused by the addressee's ineffable beauty, but no hint of physical desire. What one would normally call the "higher" love is expressed towards a man, while the "lower" love is confined to the woman. Moreover, in the sonnets dealing with both the man and the woman, there is a strange development : the young man becomes involved with his friend's mistress. The speaker is pained, baffled, humiliated, but still wants to keep the young man's love rather than that of the woman. It is true that in the early modern period, there was a cult of friendship and that writers often regarded this friendship as higher than sexual love. The issue is comprehensively explored by Edward Hubler in his book *The Sense of Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Hubler points out in that book that Elizabethans used the term "lover" between men without any embarrassment. In Shakespeare's play *Coriolanus* a character called Menenius, trying to visit Coriolanus in the Volscian camp, tells the guard, "Thy general was my lover." A further point made by Hubler and referred to with approval by Barber is that homosexuality is never an issue in Shakespeare's plays. [This sweeping statement could only have been made in the 1950s when homosexuality in either life or literature still faced resistance. In some recent criticism however, homosexual relationships have been discovered in several Shakespearean plays, for example, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* - Author's note] So far as the crucial Sonnet 20 is concerned, Barber's position is the exact opposite of that of

Smith. The bawdy joke at the end of the sonnet acknowledges, according to Barber, that the friend's sexuality is masculine and directed to women; "such a pleasantry could only be pleasant where physical relations of the poet with the friend were out of the

question". Barber admits that the love expressed for the friend is love, such love is central to other relations of life, notably that between parents and children. Barber's conclusion is that so far as Shakespeare's sonnets are concerned, specific sexual love is delinked from adoring and cherishing love.

Come finally to a reading of the sonnets in the context of Renaissance social and cultural developments, particularly as regards the relationship between men and men, and between men and women. This is the reading of Paul Innes in his book.

Shakespeare and the English Renaissance Sonnet: Verses of Feigning Love. The subtitle of the book clearly points to one of its important concerns: the fictionality of the sonnets, for the subtitle refers to Touchstone's famous remark explaining the meaning of "poetical" in Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It*. To Audrey's question whether "poetical" is a "true thing", Touchstone replies: "No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most feigning, and lovers are given to poetry, and what they swear in poetry may be said as lovers they do feign" (Act III scene iii, ll. 17-20). Other critics have spoken of the fictionality of the *Sonnets*, but the idea is central to Innes's theory about the poems. As he says, "The young man is constituted as a product of the poetry - literally written into the verse. One way to look at it is to acknowledge that there may not have been any 'real' young man to whom Shakespeare actually wrote these poems.

Certainly the sonnets themselves posit his existence as purely fictional, on at least one of these multiple levels of meaning. It is possible that it is irrelevant whether

Sonnet has no smooth history of development- the English sonnets reflect the disjunction between the ideal and the historical-the sonnets of Shakespeare can be seen as participating in a project of seeking patronage. The social changes in the Renaissance gave rise to a new kind of "male-male, but not sexual relation" — In the sonnets, the young man is the person's social superior. So the persona has to accept his own subjection and to celebrate it.

he existed, since the whole thing becomes an exercise in working out the problems encountered in writing about (in sonnet form) an upper-class male figure who should be but is not — defined in accordance with aristocratic ideology. Even if Shakespeare was writing about some young nobleman, the issues these sonnets raise cannot simply be reduced to that specific occasion only". Class and aristocratic ideology, mentioned in this extract, are of crucial importance to Innes's reading of the *Sonnets*, which sees the poems as fundamentally "homosocial" in

accordance with the power relations emerging in Renaissance society and culture.

Paul Innes : "The young man is constituted as a product of the poetry Certainly the sonnets themselves posit his existence as purely fictional, on at least one of these multiple levels of meaning". Innes sees the poems as fundamentally "homo-social" in accordance with the power relations emerging in Renaissance society and culture.

Before examining the meaning and significance of the term “homosocial”, we should first acquaint ourselves with Innes’s approach to the *Sonnets*. He begins by refusing to adopt a developmental model for the Renaissance English sonnet, because he does not believe that the sonnet has a smooth history of development. He is more interested in the rewriting of courtly love that takes place in the English Renaissance. A product of feudalism, the courtly love convention was for the Renaissance poet an idealization of the past in a society which was being transformed by the centralizing impulse of royal authority. One can therefore perceive a disjunction between the ideal and the historical, and it is this disjunction which the Renaissance English sonnets reflect, in particular the sonnets of Shakespeare. In the court of Queen Elizabeth, other cultural forms of the past were rewritten, such as the romance (Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*) and the pastoral (Sidney’s *Arcadia*), to suit the new aristocracy. But the sonnet was not a purely aristocratic form, since the pace of social change ensured the spread of education to other classes. For a non-aristocratic poet like Shakespeare, this meant a new social mobility requiring new forms of social advancement. The sonnets of Shakespeare can be seen as participating in a project of seeking patronage, and it is patronage relations that produce the addressee of the first 126 of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. Such a view almost rules out any homosexual relationship between the sonnet persona and his male friend. But there is another reason why such a relationship seems doubtful : the social changes in the Renaissance gave rise to a new kind of class relations which were also in accord with the rational thinking encouraged by humanism. “The relationship this kind of thinking produced was a new kind of male-male, but not sexual, relation”. In this new kind of relationship mutuality was usually absent. In *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* the sonnet persona is often tormented by his social inferiority to his addressee, and this awareness of a gulf between them leads to another kind of disjunction. Moreover, love in this period was not what love is today. It can be, and has been, shown that the language of love employed in sonnet 29 is laden with the contemporary ethos of patronage. The question inevitably raised by this line of argument is : Did Shakespeare address his sonnets to a real patron ? Part of the answer to this question is implicit in the earlier discussion, and one may now add the further point that by presenting a fictional situation in his sonnets, Shakespeare was focusing upon contemporary concerns regarding the poet-patron relationship. The sonnets make it clear that the relationship between the poetic persona and the friend is not equal and that the young man is the persona’s social superior. The implication of this is that patriarchy situates some men as socially inferior to others. “In other words, it constructs various forms of masculinity as well as femininity.” The resultant dilemma cannot be resolved by the persona, who recognizes and accepts his subjection but has to celebrate it. Besides, the friend is not strictly true and honest, and this raises further problems for the persona. Here we have, to use the language of deconstruction, an *aporia*. The *Sonnets* deal with a potentially revolutionary issue, but cannot pursue it to its revolutionary consequences. [*Aporia* literally means “an unpassable path”. In Greek philosophy it is used to describe the perplexity caused by a group of statements which are

inconsistent or contradictory when taken together, though perfectly plausible individually. The idea of *aporia* has been taken up by deconstructionists like Derrida, who use it to describe the impossibility of reconciling terms which cannot be reduced to binary opposites.] We come across a bigger *aporia*

in the sonnets about the dark woman, which irresistibly move to the conclusion that woman cannot be controlled. The dark woman even succeeds in entangling the young friend, bypassing the sonnet persona. We cannot help feeling that the persona is thereby relegated to a position lower than that of the woman. Thus within a patriarchal structure we have the curious situation of a woman becoming, by virtue of her independent love affair

Innes concludes that the young man sonnets are homo-social, a term which refers to the structure of patriarchy, which requires the silent submission of women. The attribution of fairness belonging to a woman to a man means, the woman should be dark, so that the masculine opposition is retained.

with another man, superior to the sonnet persona. Shakespeare's sonnets belong to a tradition that is generally associated with courtly love given to idealisation of women. It is significant that the sonnets were written during a period of transition from feudal notions of patriarchy to a bourgeois social structure.

Innes arrives at the conclusion that the young man sonnets are "homosocial", a term adopted and given critical currency by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book *Between Men : English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Sedgwick herself defines the term as "a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex". Sedgwick observes further that the term is "obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'". Innes adopts the term mainly because of the precise way it refers to the structure of patriarchy, which requires the silent submission of women. Both these aspects of the *Sonnets* are then illustrated by Innes by means of a systematic analysis of some of the "young man" and the "dark lady" sonnets. In the first group of sonnets, a beauty previously reserved for women is transferred to a male figure; the dislocation caused by this transfer leads, in the second group of sonnets, to the representation of a woman who does not conform to the female stereotype in sonnets belonging to the courtly love tradition. The attribution of fairness, the most sought after criterion of feminine beauty, to a man means that, logically, the woman should be dark, so that the masculine-feminine opposition is retained. An analysis of Sonnet 18 will show how the process works. In this sonnet the friend has the physical characteristics possessed by conventional sonnet heroines. The repetition of "fair" in lines 7 and 10 is significant, especially when the adjective is combined with another - "lovely" in line 2. These attributes, traditionally considered feminine, are then transferred to the sun in lines 5-6, reminding us of the close relationship between "son" and "sun" already indicated in an earlier sonnet (Sonnet 7). Line 3 has complex associations : May is the month of the Virgin Mary, but being mentioned in relation to a man, it has the effect of detaching the ideal of beauty from a woman; "buds" was Renaissance slang for the female breast, and taken with "darling", which was the name for a type of apple at the time, Mary's opposite, Eve,

is indicated with her dangerous sexuality epitomized by the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. This does not leave many of the traditionally beautiful feminine attributes

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. How far is the claim of homosexuality in Shakespearean sonnets feasible? Discuss with reference to the sonnets.

for the dark lady, who is therefore demonized as a whore in sharp opposition to the virgin. “The beauty that previously helped constitute femininity is now, precisely, owned by men, as demonstrated in line 10 with ‘ow’s’t’ “. It is not an accident that Sonnet 18 ends with a promise of immortality for the friend that is explicitly homosocial : “so long as men can breathe”. Sonnet 20 may be taken as another clear statement of homosocial relationship : the young man can have physical relationships with as many women as he desires, but his love is to be reserved for the sonnet persona, another man. “This is entirely in keeping with the structure of homosocial patriarchy”. So far as the “dark lady” sonnets are concerned, they clearly suggest a breakdown in the heterosexual conventions followed in other sonnet sequences. Here, involvement with a woman is presented as dangerous because it could be a threat to masculinity itself, to the homosocial order. The sonnet persona, therefore, condemns not only female sexuality, but the lust it arouses in men. It is this lust in action that is “The expense of spirit” in Sonnet 129.

Summing up the entire discussion, one comes across various ways of looking at the theme of love in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. If a number of commentators today are boldly characterizing the sonnet persona’s interest in the young man as explicitly homosexual, thus increasingly shedding earlier prejudices against this type of relationship, there are also those who view the relationship between two men as pure friendship, without any touch of sexuality, while the dark lady of the sonnets is seen as an embodiment of carnal passion. It has also been said that many of the sonnets in the “young man” group could in fact have been addressed to a woman and that these sonnets are not gender-specific. Moreover, both the young man and the dark woman mean different things on different occasions, and it is only our desire to find a satisfactory narrative in the Sonnets that makes us discern two contrasted love affairs here. Finally, the sonnets in the first group can be seen in terms of the homosocial relationship in the patriarchal order that characterised the replacement of the courtly love tradition by a male-male relationship. The homosocial character of the young man sonnets also explains the demonisation of the dark woman by stripping her of all the traditional attributes of feminine beauty and chastity which are then relocated in the young man.

UNIT 2 (d): THE FORMAL FEATURES OF THE SONNET

Shakespeare chose the English form of the sonnet introduced by Surrey, and from the outside it appears that he uses the form without any significant variations. But once you read a few of the

sonnets in succession, you begin to be aware of the many experiments with form that Shakespeare was continually making. The English form, consisting of three quatrains and a couplet, is generally thought to be very different from the Italian form with an octave and a sestet. We have seen that in the Italian form the transition from the octave to the sestet is marked by a “turn”. The sestet in the Italian form is often, as pointed out by Kenneth Muir, a particular application of a general statement made in the octave, and sometimes a reply to it. In the English or Shakespearian form, the three quatrains are sometimes parallel statements and sometimes a continuous argument, either contradicted or reinforced or given a completely new turn by the epigrammatic couplet. However, this generalization is soon found to be inadequate as we come to the individual sonnets. We gradually begin to realize that Shakespeare many different kinds of sonnets and that a neat definition of the form is not possible. In his introduction to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *The Sonnets*, Anthony Hecht shows how Sonnet 18 offers a direct contrast to Sonnet 73 in form and structure. In the Shakespearian form, the final six lines can often have the effect of a sestet, and this makes it possible to suggest that Shakespeare not infrequently thought of his sonnets in terms of the Italian division between octave and sestet. Sonnet 73 is a perfect example of the Shakespearian form. The three quatrains each use the image of decline and become parallel statements on the subject of decay. The couplet reinforces the idea hauntingly by bringing together ideas of love and loss. Sonnet 18, on the other hand, though it uses the Shakespearian rhyme scheme, has a Petrarchan structure. The sonnet is rhetorically divided into octave and sestet, the “turn” from the one to the other signified by the conjunction “But”, which heralds a new movement of thought, a contradiction of the idea contained in the octave. Stephen Booth has detected “a perceptibly distinct octave” in as many as 96 of the *Sonnets*, despite their surface conformity to the English form.

The four-part division of Shakespearian form makes it flexible and it can be set in any number of logical relations to each other: successive, equal, hierarchical, contrastive, analogous-the couplet has been most subjected to adverse criticism- Scaliger divided the epigram into ‘mel’, ‘fel’, ‘actum’ and ‘sal’. The distinction between ‘mel’ and ‘sal’ provide an insight into the essential unity of the

Shakespeare did not invent the Shakespearian sonnet form, but he manipulates it in ways unknown to his predecessors, as Helen Vendler has demonstrated in detail in her edition of the *Sonnets*. Its four-part division makes it far more flexible than the two-part Italian sonnet. The four SECTIONS of the Shakespearian sonnet can be set in any number of logical relations to each other; successive and equal; hierarchical; contrastive; analogous; logically contradictory. The list does not exhaust the possibilities of the combination of the four parts. Of the four parts, it is the couplet which has been most subjected to adverse criticism. One remembers Keats, who wrote both Italian and English sonnets, complaining about the difficulty of handling the couplet. Since the couplet of the Shakespearian sonnet is often epigrammatic, some critics have found the sonnet form unsatisfactory : a lyric, according to them, should not end with an epigram. It is also felt by some that even Shakespeare sometimes fails to make the most of the couplet : there are sonnets in which the couplets strike us as

insincere or false in comparison to the genuine feelings expressed in the preceding quatrains. But the couplet has been ably defended by Rosalie Colie. In her book *Shakespeare's Living Art* Colie refers to the distinction drawn in Renaissance theories of rhetoric between sonnet and epigram, sugar and salt. The sixteenth century Italian neo-classical critic Scaliger divided the epigram into *mel* (honey), *fel* (gall), *acctum* (vinegar) and *sal* (salt). The distinction drawn by Colie between the *mel* (honey) of love poetry and the *sal* (salt) of epigram — a genre conventionally used for satiric purposes — provides an insight into the essential unity of the Shakespearian sonnet, by suggesting that the sonnet persona is a figure who wishes to analyze and summarize his experience besides describing it. “The distance from one’s own experience necessitated by an analytic stance is symbolised most fully by the couplet, whereas the empathetic perception necessary to display one’s state of mind is symbolised by the quatrains.” Some readers have often found the couplet of the Shakespearean sonnet redundant. But the couplet is firmly related to the rest of the sonnet not only on the level of the paraphrasable meaning, but by the repetition in the couplet of significant words from the body of the poem. Vendler calls the aggregate of such words “Couplet Tie”. “These words are usually thematically central and to see Shakespeare’s careful reiteration of them is to be directed in one’s interpretation by them”. Shakespeare obviously depended on this device not only to point up the thematic concerns of the sonnet but also to show how the same words assume different emotional tones as the sonnet progresses. Thus in Sonnet 18 the Couplet Ties are “time”, occurring in lines 1&13, and “life” [variant forms “alive”, “live”] in lines 4, 13 and 14. In Sonnet 55, these are “live” in lines 2, 8, 9, 14 and “eyes” in lines 11 and 14. The key word “live” at first seems absent in the third quatrain, though visibly present in the first and second quatrains as well as in the couplet. After noticing these examples, those of us who might have missed the word in the third quatrain would detect with pleasurable surprise that “live” is concealed in “oblivious” by a stroke of poetic ingenuity. You may find such key words and Couplet Ties in the other sonnets in your course. Shakespeare’s poetic ingenuity is also revealed in the various other functions which the couplet is made to serve. As Kenneth Muir has pointed out, “One structural device used by Shakespeare is to make the couplet act as a kind of QED to the argument used in the quatrains.” [QED is the abbreviation for a Latin phrase that means “which was to be proved”. It is written after an argument in mathematics to show that one has proved something that one wanted to prove.] In such cases the couplet begins with words like “Thus”, “Therefore”, “Then” and “So”, as in Sonnet 55. Sometimes the couplet offers a reason to confirm what has gone before, as in Sonnet 18. But the couplet is used more commonly to contradict or modify the quatrains. In such cases the couplet begins with words like “But” and “Yet”, or “And yet”, as in Sonnets 60, 130. Other couplets may carry on and complete the ideas expressed in the quatrains, and such couplets may begin with “And”. A similar variety of functions is performed by the quatrains. Sometimes the three quatrains appear to be variations on a single theme, using different metaphors in parallel statements. Thus in Sonnet 55 the theme of

immortalising the friend's beauty and virtue in the face of the ruthless onslaught of Time is repeated, with variations of imagery, in the three quatrains. More often the quatrains are used in order to develop an argument, and in such cases there is a continuity of idea through all three quatrains. The quatrains in Sonnet 60 develop by stages the argument about the inexorable march of time. In some sonnets one of the quatrains qualifies the idea expressed in the earlier quatrains. In sonnet 18 the third quatrain, beginning with "But", significantly qualifies the comparison between the young friend and "a summer's day", drawn in the first two quatrains.

Much earlier criticism of the *Sonnets* was preoccupied with the discovery of biographical clues. The unfortunate result of this overemphasis was the neglect of the poems as works of art. The emergence of formalist criticism in the twentieth century was a natural reaction to biographical criticism. The formalists insisted on seeing the sonnets of Shakespeare first and foremost as poems and some of them stressed their lyrical character. Such a one is Helen Vendler, who has no patience with a critical approach that focuses on a sonnet's "paraphrasable propositional content". As she says, "The true 'actors' in lyric are words, not 'dramatic persons'; and the drama of any lyric is constituted by the successive entrances of new sets of words, or new stylistic arrangements (grammatical, syntactical, phonetic) which are visibly in conflict with previous arrangements used with reference to the 'same' situation". A close study of Sonnet 116 makes us realize that it is not just a definition of love, as generally interpreted. The negatives of which the poem is so full - one *nor*, two *no's*, two *never's* and four *not's* - suggest that it is a rebuttal rather than a definition, a dramatic refutation of a point of view that may be ascribed to the young man. Such criticism is in the tradition of L.C. Knights and William Empson who, in the 1930s, made sensitive studies of the language of the sonnets. Stephen Booth is another formalist critic whose edition of the *Sonnets* is "analytic", annotated elaborately on Empsonian principles. But it may be said against the formalists that they are so engrossed in the study of individual words and their effects that they ignore the larger contexts in which the sonnets must be set. There is another group of formalist critics who read the sonnets as dramatic texts. These critics start with the obvious point that Shakespeare's non-dramatic poetry is informed by his work as a dramatist. G.K. Hunter observed in 1953, in an essay titled "The Dramatic Technique of Shakespeare's Sonnets" [You will find the essay in the casebook, ed Jones] that the approach to the Sonnets as lyric, narrative or metaphysical exercises is misdirected; nor should the poems be seen in autobiographical terms; they must be regarded as essentially dramatic. In the Sonnets Shakespeare uses conventional poetic imagery to dramatize "felt human situations".

Hunter does not see the poems as speeches delivered by dramatic characters, but as voicing emotional dilemmas and conflicts in which the reader can participate. The Sonnets do not present psychological analyses of *dramatis personae*, such as Hamlet or Macbeth; they convey rather the "personal tensions" by giving a dramatic outline of the poet-speaker, whom Hunter calls the lover, and his dilemmas. But though there are many links in respect of theme and style between the Sonnets

and the plays, the conception of the poems as dramatic has been challenged by other critics. It has been pointed out that since Shakespeare was a dramatist, we expect his sonnets to be dramatic; but actually they are less dramatic than the sonnets of many of his contemporaries. They do not present miniature dramas, or narrate specific events, as the sonnets of Spenser or Drayton often do. The Sonnets of Shakespeare do not present different characters and their points of view; from beginning to end the sequence is concentrated on the fluctuating moods of one speaker alone. For us the central issue is not which point of view is right. We should rather recognize that every one of these points of view carries some measure of truth and together they point to different aspects of the sonnet form employed by Shakespeare. While summing up the different viewpoints on the formal features of the Sonnets, we see how Shakespeare introduced variations into the apparently uniform structure of 152 sonnets (Sonnet 126 contains 6 rhymed couplets or 12 lines, while Sonnet 145 is a unique sonnet in octosyllabic lines). Both the quatrains and the couplets in the Sonnets have varied structures and functions. The Sonnets have been seen as miniature dramas, as lyrics in which the only actors are the words, though such formalist approaches have been challenged by those who emphasize the importance of placing the sonnets in broader literary, historical and cultural contexts.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Discuss, in brief, the formal features of Shakespearean sonnet.

UNIT 3 (a):
BRIEF COMMENTARIES ON THE TEN SONNETS

Content Structure:

UNIT 3(a): Brief Commentaries on the Ten Sonnets

UNIT 3(b): Text 1: Sonnet by Wyatt

UNIT 3(c): Two Sonnets by Sidney (Text 2 & Text3)

UNIT 3(d): Text 4

In this part of the Study Material, each of the ten individual sonnets in your course will be briefly examined. Since the texts of the sonnets of Wyatt, Sidney and Spenser are not readily available, they are printed here. The sonnets of Shakespeare are of course easily available.

UNIT 3(b): SONNET BY WYATT

The following Sonnet written by Thomas Wyatt is sometimes printed with the title “A Renouncing of Love”, but no title was given to any of his sonnets by the poet himself. However, Tottel added titles to the poems he printed.

Farewell, love, and all thy laws for ever;	A
Thy baited hooks shall tangle me no more;	B
Senec and Plato call me from thy lore;	B
To perfect wealth, my wit for to endeavour;	A
In blind error when I did persever;	A
Thy sharp repulse that pricketh aye so sore	B
Hath taught me to set in trifles no store;	B
And scape forth, since liberty is lever.	A
Therefore, farewell ! Go trouble younger hearts,	C
And in me claim no more authority;	D
With idle youth go use thy property,	D
And thereon spend thy many brittle darts.	C
For hitherto though I have lost all my time,	E
Me lusteth no longer rotten boughs to climb.	E

Notes

Senec- Senec “the Younger” or “the Philosopher” (c.4BCE – AD65). His prose works are an important source for the history of Stoicism.

Lever- Dearer

Lusteth-to want/ care someone

The theme of this sonnet is anti-Petrarchan inasmuch as it is the utterance of a rebellious lover who wants to have nothing more to do with love. This theme, according to Elizabeth Heale, owes something to Serafino, while the final line of the closing couplet is a deflating proverb. Such a conclusion is very much in the spirit of Serafino's *strambotti*. The sonnet creates the impression of a troubled, emphatic speaking voice, characteristic of several other sonnets of Wyatt. Several of Wyatt's sonnets are translations of Petrarchan originals, but this is one of his own original sonnets. Even in the translations a sense of complexity and paradox is unmistakable; in the original sonnets this sense becomes more pronounced, accompanied as it is by other characteristics like brevity, antitheses and flexible syntax as well as punctuation. The combined effect of all these is to subvert and question the identity of the speaker. This sonnet illustrates all the characteristics mentioned so far. From the beginning the /I/ or the speaker seems determined to renounce love, but his motives for doing so change and turn as the sonnet progresses. Apparently the sonnet persona has grown wiser, but there is a deliberate ambiguity about the source of this wisdom. We wonder whether he has acquired wisdom from the philosophy of Plato or Seneca, or from the pricking of love. A further ambiguity creeps in when the speaker announces his renunciation of love in more emphatic terms. Again we are not sure whether he is too old for love now, or sullen because of his failure in love. But the height of ambiguity is reached in the last line of the sonnet. J. W. Lever finds no ambiguity in the line which he interprets as a figure for "getting to the top of the tree", characteristic of an ambitious courtier of the Tudor monarchy. Lever in fact reads the whole sonnet as an unequivocal rejection of romance for the sake of Plato and Seneca, the chief inspirers of Renaissance humanism. But the ambiguities and paradoxes running throughout the sonnet and culminating in the last line are not so easily ignored. We are intrigued by the phrase "rotten boughs". If the speaker refers to women, then are we to suppose he has become a misogynist and considers all women as rotten? Another interpretation of the line could be that the speaker is renouncing, not all women, but only the rotten or unchaste ones.

UNIT 3(c): 2 SONNETS BY SIDNEY

Text 2

With how sad steps, O moon, thou climb'st the skies	A
How silently, and with how wan a face !	B
What ! may it be that even in heavenly place	B
That busy archer his sharp arrows tries ?	A
Sure, if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes	A
Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case;	B

I read it in thy looks, — thy languished grace	B
To me, that feel the like, thy state describes.	A
Then, even of fellowship, O moon, tell me,	C
Is constant love deemed there but want of wit ?	D
Are beauties there as proud as here they be ?	C
Do they above love to be loved, and yet	D
Those lovers scorn whom that love doth possess ?	E
Do they call virtue there ungratefulness ?	E

Perhaps the first thing you will notice about this sonnet is that it is cast in the form of an apostrophe, a figure of speech that recurs through the sonnets in *Astrophil and Stella*. Astrophil's address to the moon is a good example of Sidney's original use of a familiar commonplace. The moon is inconstant, frequently changing, and therefore traditionally seen as symbolic of the vicissitudes of fortune, or the mutability of human life, or the irresolution of the foolish. The sonnet starts with a simple analogy — the pale moon represents for Astrophil the symptoms of his own love-melancholy. But as the sonnet progresses, the analogy is developed in wholly unfamiliar ways. In the first place, the truth of the comparison between the pale moon and the pale lover is established through a series of questions. Although this procedure is typical of the argumentative quality of some sonnets in the sequence, Germaine Warkentin has pointed out in her essay, "Sidney and the Supple Muse" that the effect here comes from a familiar rhetorical embellishment, the figure of *erotema*, or *interrogatio*. But the interrogation leads to an unexpected conclusion, which comes from Sidney's original use of the theme of inconstancy suggested by the moon. The plight of the moon, like that of the lover, is caused by the fact that both are faithful in love, not wavering. By the time we come to the questions which close the sonnet, the process of interrogation undertaken by Astrophil has exploited the idea of inconstancy in such a way that the lover and the moon share a fellowship which has become, paradoxically, an emblem of constancy. The last line of the poem has given rise to different interpretations. The simplest interpretation is that "virtue" here means "constancy in love" and that Astrophil, therefore, is asking if constancy is found unpleasing in heaven as it is on earth. But if "virtue" here means "constancy", the effect of the sonnet is considerably weakened. Charles Lamb suggested a reading which seems to be more appropriate : "The last line of this poem is a little obscured by transposition. He means, Do they call ungratefulness there a virtue ?" This interpretation has been accepted by many and it has been strengthened by the discovery of several possible sources in Italian. But Sidney was not bound to follow his sources. Moreover, the reading depends on an awkward transposition. Sidney does occasionally invert the normal word-order of a sentence, but never to such an extent. The inversion assumed by Lamb would make the line read like this : "Do they call virtue there ungratefulness ?" Perhaps the best interpretation of the closing lines of the

sonnet is that offered by Kenneth Muir in his *Sir Philip Sidney*. Muir points out that in the sestet four questions are asked. The first is meant for those who consider Astrophil's constancy foolish. The next two are aimed at Stella who, it is implied, is the conventional disdainful beauty who scorns the lover whom she deliberately attracts. The last question of Astrophil is aimed at himself for questioning Stella's virtue, or chastity, as ingratitude. This interpretation seems to be the best because first of all, it is based upon the usual meaning of "virtue" in love sonnets — "chastity". Secondly, it avoids an awkward inversion which makes it almost impossible to read the line intelligently. Thirdly, the sudden reversal which makes Astrophil question his own attitude is characteristic of the sonnet sequence as a whole. We noticed earlier that Sidney's sonnets are often steeped in irony, as a result of which the speaker emerges as an unstable figure. This effect is achieved by what has been called the sonneteer's "deconstructive irony". As J.G. Nichols says, "There is nothing against this reading except the shock which it gives to an over-serious or romantic reader; and such a reader must either get used to shocks or give up Sidney for another poet".

I should also like to point out another feature of the sonnet which gives us a good idea about Sidney's artistry. While the structure of the sestet is built on the regular English pattern of 4+2 (the octave is Petrarchan), the syntax creates a counterpointing Petrarchan pattern of two triplets. Each of these triplets is subdivided into a question taking up two lines followed by one occupying a single line. The second of these triplets is further organized by head rhyme — "Do they?" Thus the final line is integrated with the rest of the sonnet by tail rhyme with line 13, by head rhyme with line 12, and by syntactic parallelism with line 11.

Text 3

Leave me, O Love which reachest but to dust;	A
And thou my mind, aspire to higher things;	B
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust,	A
Whatever fades but fading pleasure brings.	B
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might	C
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;	D
Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light,	C
That doth both shine and give us sight to see.	D
O take fast hold; let that light be thy guide	E
In this small course which birth draws out to death,	F
And think how evil becometh him to slide,	E
Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.	F
Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see;	G
Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me	G

While the earlier sonnet belongs to *Astrophil and Stella* (Sonnet 31), there is some controversy as to where this sonnet should belong. Along with another sonnet, “Thou blind man’s mark, thou fool’s self-chosen snare”, this poem is sometimes added to *Astrophil and Stella*, though it was originally included in another collection, *Certain Sonnets*, also published posthumously, but assembled by Sidney himself. The reasons why the two sonnets are added to *Astrophil and Stella* are, first, because they provide a satisfying closure to the narrative of a love affair which thus begins with great passion and ends with disillusionment, and secondly, because they seem to provide support to biographical speculations about Sidney’s sonnet sequence. In his edition of the *Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, A. B. Grosart included “Leave me, O Love” in his text of *Astrophil and Stella* as Sonnet 110 on both these grounds. He argued that the word “rich” in the third line of the sonnet is a pun on the name of the husband of Penelope Devereux, Lord Rich. It is a plausible suggestion, for Sidney does pun on the name “Rich” in Sonnets 24 and 35. But the argument loses its force once we remember that *Certain Sonnets*, to which the sonnet originally belonged, were probably written before *Astrophil and Stella*, and that there is no textual indication that Sidney wanted the sonnet to conclude his sequence of love sonnets. We must therefore abandon the idea that Sidney is telling in his *Astrophil and Stella* a story beginning with his realization that he loved Penelope too late and ending with his renunciation of sexual love.

As a renunciation of love, however, this sonnet written in the English form containing three quatrains and a couplet is profoundly appealing, no matter where it belongs. It is impressive not as an expression of a personal point of view, but as a distillation of the Christian view of life. Sidney has been called a Christian humanist and a poem like this, with its deliberate echoes of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, justifies that description.

For many Christian readers, the words of the poem gain great authority once they are recognized as rooted in the time-honoured Christian tradition. The imagery of the third line is resonant with the words describing the Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew: “Lay not up treasures for yourselves upon the earth, where the moth and canker corrupt... But lay up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither the moth nor canker corrupteth ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”. (Matt. 6.19-21). The antithetical sixth line, using the image of the sweet yoke which alone promises eternal freedom, is an echo of a prayer, in the Book of Common Prayer, to God “in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom”. Again, the light that both shines and gives us sight to see (ll.7-8) echoes a Psalm: “in thy light shall we see light”. In lines 13-14 too a Biblical echo has been detected though it is a more distant echo: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2.7).

The common echo also makes it possible for us to connect these lines with the first line of the sonnet: “Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust.” Once we make the connection it becomes

clear that the theme of the poem is the contrast between earthly love and heavenly love. The contrast is reinforced by the use of the word “love” in the first and last lines : the same word picks up different meanings in the two lines by the way it is qualified. The Love in the first line is “that which reachest but to dust” but in the last line it is “Eternal Love”. Such careful balancing is a sign of Sidney’s conscious artistry. A further example of such artistry is the line “Whatever fades but fading pleasure brings” (line 7) where we find repetition with a difference in “fades” and “fading”.

UNIT 3(d): TEXT 4

Edmund Spenser in Sonnet 75 (‘One Day I wrote her name upon the strand’) of the *Amoretti*

One day I wrote her name upon the strand,	A
But came the waves and washed it away;	B
Again I wrote it with a second hand,	A
But came the tide, and made my pains his prey.	B
“Vain man”, said she, ‘that dost in vain assay	B
A mortal thing so to immortalise;	C
For I myself shall like to this decay,	B
And eke my name be wiped out likewise’	C
‘Not so’, quod I, ‘let baser things devise	C
To die in dust, but you shall live by fame	D
My verse your virtues rare shall eternise,	C
And in the heavens write your glorious name	D
Where; whenas Death shall all the world subdue	E
Our love shall live, and later life renew.’	E

Line 1. *strand*— shore, with the implication that the sand is unstable.

Line 2. — punning on the other meaning of ‘strand’ — sea.

Line 3. *second* — a second time. The “second hand” of a watch came into being only in the eighteenth century.

hand— two meanings : (i) script; (ii) signature

Line 4.

tide — (i) of the sea; (ii) temporal period.

Line 5. *assay*— attempt something difficult

Line 8. *eke*— also

Line 9. *Devise*- arrange

Line 11. *Rare*— (i) distinguished; (ii) exceptional

As we shall see when we discuss Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, Sonnet 55 and Sonnet 60, the ravages wreaked by time on love, beauty and youth, and the way in which love can triumph over mutability are traditional themes of poetry. In fact, the poetic war with time is the theme which links this sonnet of Spenser with the three Shakespearian Sonnets mentioned earlier (and a host of other Shakespearian Sonnets not in your course). It will be an interesting literary exercise for you to make a comparative study of these sonnets. Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 promises immortality to its subject, not because the poet anticipated the posthumous fame of his poem but because he, along with many classical and modern poets, believes that poetry perpetuates. This assertion of poetry's ability to provide fame in fact became a stock ingredient of the persuasive rhetoric of Renaissance sonneteers. Many sonneteers of the Renaissance, in England as well as in other European countries, bribed their mistresses with the promise of conferring immortality on them. The sixteenth century French poet Ronsard in his sonnets addressed to the famous court beauty H el ene claimed that if he had not loved her, she would be forgotten. Spenser in this sonnet tells his Elizabeth that his poetry will immortalize her virtues.

While in Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 the promise of immortality to the beloved is made with an almost boastful confidence, the strident note of confidence gives way to a timid "hope" in Sonnet 60 that the verse praising the beloved may defy the destructive power of Time. We may say that in Sonnet 18 poetry itself is a powerful agent of immortalization, but in Sonnet 60 its powers are more doubtful. A Shakespearian Sonnet in which the doubt becomes more pronounced is Sonnet 65. But Spenser's Sonnet asserts the power of poetry to "eternise" the beloved without any qualifications or uncertainties. Thus the tone of Spenser's Sonnet is closer to that of Sonnet 18 than that of Sonnet 60 or 65. There is a note of doubt in Spenser's Sonnet, in fact, but the doubt is expressed by the woman who reminds the speaker that she is a "mortal thing". But the speaker confidently tells her that she will live "by fame", the fame conferred on her by his poetry and that their love will "later life renew" after their own deaths. This is of course hyperbolic, but such hyperboles are common to poems which assure immortality. The really important point is that the sonnet differs from Shakespeare's Sonnets on Time in asserting the capacity of poetry to give new life to the dead. Poetry thus becomes a regenerative force. The second unique feature of Spenser's sonnet is that it is a dialogue, or to put it more accurately, a miniature drama, an anecdote with a dialogue. I have remarked earlier that one shortcoming of Renaissance love sonnets is that the woman and her point of view are absent from them. But Spenser's sonnet is a remarkable exception to that generalization. By contrast, Shakespeare's Sonnets on love and time are meditative, brooding and sometimes even sad in contemplating the ravages of Time. In Spenser's sonnet we find a particular occasion marked by a witty verbal exchange between the speaker and his mistress. Shakespeare's Sonnet 60 gives voice to a melancholy contemplation of the fact of transience against which the immortalizing power of poetry seems to be the last hope. Thus, though Spenser's sonnet participates in the same poetic tradition to which Shakespeare's Sonnets (18 and 60) also belong, the poets' treatment of tradition is radically different.

UNIT 4 (a):
6 SONNETS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Content Structure:

UNIT 4(a): Six Sonnets of Shakespeare:

UNIT 4(b): Text 5

UNIT 4(c): Text 6

UNIT 4(d): Text 7

UNIT 4(e): Text 8

UNIT 4(f): Text 9

UNIT 4(g): Text 10

Suggested Reading

Assignment

(In this part of the Study Material neither the texts of the Sonnets nor annotations of difficult words or phrases or lines would be necessary for these are easily available. Some of the most helpful and reliable editions are mentioned at the end.)

UNIT 4 (b): “SHALL I COMPARE THEE TO A SUMMER’S DAY”

Much has already been said in this module about Sonnet 18, perhaps the most generally familiar of the Sonnets. Since it can easily be read as a poem addressed by a male speaker to a woman and since nothing in the poem indicates the gender of either speaker or addressee, it is imperative to remember the context. In the first 17 Sonnets the speaker has been urging the young man to marry since begetting children would be one way of perpetuating his beauty and virtue. These sonnets are clearly addressed to a handsome youth. With the context in mind, we can read the sonnet as completely unconventional in having a man as a love object; detached from its context, it would appear as a conventional love poem. Hence the context is important for understanding the poem. While in the earlier seventeen sonnets marriage and procreation are seen as the means to overcome time’s tyranny, in this Sonnet it is the power of poetry which will defeat time’s enmity. The young man is compared to summertime nature and then found to be more beautiful and more even-tempered, following a middle course between two extremes. The blossoms of May spoiled by rough winds suggest premature death or thwarted love, while the legal image in the next line indicates the transitory nature of springtime beauty. (“Lease” means “temporary period of legal possession”). Even “the eye of heaven” or the sun is subject to change, sometimes shining too brightly and sometimes dimmed by clouds. The image of the sun suggests a beautiful male, apart from its punning association with “son”.

In fact, every beautiful thing loses its beauty; since both the adjective and the noun “fair” were frequently associated with beautiful women, the image conveys the youth’s superior beauty which is not trimmed or deprived of elegance by the “monthly curse” to which women are subject. The friend’s beauty is eternal because it will defy the shade of death (The expression “the valley of the shadow of death” occurs in psalm 23:4). There is another legal metaphor in line 10, which has been ably glossed by Burrow : The youth will not lose control over the beauty which he owns absolutely and in perpetuity. This contrasts with the impermanent lease of line 4, and does so by emphatically linking possession with ownership. In law, in order to enjoy something fully, one must have both ownership and permanent possession of it. The friend will achieve immortality by being celebrated in verse which defies time. But the friend is visualized as growing in eternal lines and it may appear at first that he is imagined as growing through lines of descent, his growing children. However, to “grow” is to be an organic or integral part, so that there is a clear sense that the young man will become a living part of time. The friend therefore is given eternal life through “this”, that is, this particular sonnet and also this work of art, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, as a whole.

Sonnet 18, read along with Sonnets 55 and 60, shows that one major issue preoccupying the sonnets of Shakespeare is time and stratagems to overcome it, of which *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* itself is one. J.B. Leishman has shown that time’s destructive power and the ability of poetry to defeat it are traditional themes since the time of the ancient classical poets. In the last ode of *Book III* Horace asserts : “A monument by me is brought to pass,/Outliving pyramids, or lasting brass,/ The sepulchre of kings; which eating rain,/Nor the fierce northern tempest can restrain,/Nor years though numberless, nor Time’s swift start”. (*Horace : The Odes* in Wordsworth’s Classics). At the end of his *Metamorphoses*, one of the classical works which exerted the greatest influence on Renaissance literature, Ovid declares that his poetry will outlive the fires of war and other catastrophic events. It will be seen from these two examples that both poets are asserting the immortality of their own art, their powerful verse. Shakespeare, by contrast, claims immortality for his subject; he thinks of his poetry “as a thing wholly dedicated, wholly subordinated, to the person it professes to honour.” Leishman points out two other significant differences between Shakespeare’s treatment of the themes of time and love and that of classical poets like Horace Ovid and Catullus. The poetry of the ancient classical poets is often inspired by the moral *carpe diem*, which means “seize today”, “enjoy the present”, which alone is within our power. A related theme is *Carpe florem*, or “gather the flower”. Both topics are characteristic of ancient love poetry which often reminds lovers, especially women, that those who are now unwilling to make the best use of youth and beauty will find themselves alone and forsaken. But in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* the topics do not occur at all. In fact, nowhere in the sonnets of Shakespeare is there anything approaching an invitation to pleasure. Leishman traces this absence to a fundamental difference in outlook between Shakespeare and the ancient poets. “In their poetry on the topics *carpe diem* and *carpe florem* the ancient poets and their imitators are,

one might almost say, recommending a cooperation with Time, submission to the conditions it imposes ...” What distinguishes Shakespeare’s love sonnets from almost all other love poetry, which is concerned with the theme of time and transience, is that Shakespeare “will have none of this collaboration with the enemy.” Shakespeare always speaks of time as an enemy to be defied, not as a power whose laws are to be accepted and submitted to.

UNIT 4 (c): “NOT MARBLE NOR THE GUILDED MONUMENTS”

The immortalizing power of poetry is the theme of this sonnet too; in fact, as we have seen, it is a theme to which Shakespeare returns again and again, sometimes with great confidence as in Sonnet 18 and this sonnet, sometimes doubtfully, as in Sonnet 60 to some extent, and Sonnet 65, where the confidence gives way to the timid hope of a “miracle”. The theme is first broached in Sonnet 15, though that sonnet is part of the group which urge the youth to marry and beget children. Frequently in the Sonnets time is visualized as a deadly enemy inflicting deep wounds on youth, beauty and love. The wounding physicality of Time’s “scythe” is referred to in Sonnet 60, and its “bending sickle,” mentioned in Sonnet 116. These may be called commonplace ideas, but in the Sonnets the concentration on Time’s corroding effects becomes almost an obsession. It has been calculated (by Kenneth Muir and others) that there are more references to Time in *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* than in those of Sidney, Spenser, Daniel and Drayton taken together. Time’s almost physical power to wound fatally was no doubt suggested by the figure of Father Time, conceived as both human and inhuman, but in the Sonnets transcending the conventional associations. In Sonnet 55 the speaker’s claim that his poetry will confer a kind of immortality on the young man is made in the context of Time’s all conquering power. Indeed the speaker here repeatedly suggests the futility of most human endeavours to avoid disintegration. In speaking of Time’s ravages and of the power of his poetry to immortalize its subject, the sonnet repeatedly echoes Horace’s (the relevant lines have been quoted earlier) and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The lines from Ovid are quoted by Burrow from Golding’s translation : “Now have I brought a work to end which neither Jove’s fierce wrath, / Nor sword, nor fire, nor fretting age with all the force it hath / Are able to abolish quite. Let come that fatal hour / which (saving of this brittle flesh) hath over me no power, / And at his pleasure make an end of mine uncertain time. / Yet shall the better part of me assured be to climb / Aloft above the starry sky. And all the world shall never / Be able for to quench my name. For look how far so ever / The Roman empire by the right of conquest shall extend, / So far shall all folk read this work. And time without all end / (If poets as by prophecy about the truth may aim) / My life shall everlastingly be lengthened still by fame.” The word “room” in line 10 of this sonnet would certainly remind Shakespeare’s contemporaries of “Rome,” because the two words were pronounced alike and Shakespeare quibbles on the words elsewhere, for example, in *Julius Caesar*. After pointing out the double meaning of “room”, J. W. Lever comments : “As the sonnet sweeps to its conclusion, the

great name of Rome is coupled with the friend's eternalization. Wherever Roman power extends over the conquered lands, Ovid proclaimed, there he would live on throughout all the ages. Thus the conquest of time is also a conquest of space." However, as Burrow aptly remarks, Horace and Ovid both make the life of their verse coextensive with the spread of the Roman Empire in time and space, while Shakespeare promises endurance in all lands till Judgement Day. Another important difference between this sonnet and the verses of Horace and Ovid is, as we have noted earlier, that the poet immortalizes not himself, as Horace and Ovid do, but the friend, whose literary afterlife is assured. Although the strong and supposedly durable objects symbolizing immortality, such as marble structures and gilded memorials dedicated to mighty kings and princes crumble to dust in the course of time, the speaker is confident of the ability of his verse to defy the ravages of time. Indeed the handsome youth will shine more brightly in "these contents" than long-neglected structures of stone. Following Duncan-Jones and Burrow, we may interpret "contents" as "contents or matter of these poems," and also as "these poems which contain you" and "these poems which are a source of lasting happiness or contentment." In the next line (l.4) time is personified as a careless housewife who has allowed stone buildings to crumble and go black. The Youth will outshine these symbols of durability which have lost their lustre as a result of time's erosion. The verses carrying the living record of the friend's greatness will survive the fires of war and internal disturbances like rebellion and civil war ("broils" and "Mars his sword", Mars being the god of war). Wars also cause the decay of monuments and therefore bring about oblivion of the past : "all-oblivious enmity" means "hostilities which destroy records of antiquity." But even in the face of such widespread ruin, the friend, being eternized by the speaker's verse, will confidently stride out, like a warrior, till the very end of the world. Till then, when the friend will be resurrected in his own body on the Day of Judgement, "this" (meaning not only this poem but the whole sequence of sonnets) will perpetuate his image in the eyes of future lovers.

Though we have throughout treated this sonnet as another confident assertion (like Sonnet 18) of the immortalizing power of poetry Duncan-Jones thinks that the concluding image introduces a note of subversive doubt, since lovers' eyes were proverbially unreliable, as in the saying, "love is blind."

UNIT 4 (d): "LIKE AS THE WAVES MAKE TOWARD THE PEBBLED SHORE"

We now come to a sonnet which contemplates, with a note of pessimism, the struggle of nature and of human life. To be sure, there are optimistic interpretations which present the sonnet in terms of the cyclical patterns of nature. But the patterns of nature are seen in this sonnet in terms of the linear direction of human life. The theme of the sonnet is the inevitable process of maturity and decay in the natural world, though the poem also suggests the possibility of countering this process by verses written in praise of the young man. The passage of minutes is compared to the movement of

the waves of the ocean, and the number of the sonnet, sixtieth in the sequence, is appropriate in this respect. The sixtieth sonnet in Spenser's *Amoretti* is similarly concerned with the passing of time. For the comparison between the passing of minutes and the movement of waves Shakespeare was indebted to the following lines in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (trans. Arthur Golding): "But look / As every wave drives other forth, and that that comes behind / Both thrusteth and is thrust itself: Even so the times by kind / Do fly and follow both at once, and evermore renew. / For that that was before is left, and straight there doth ensue / Another that was never erst. Each twinkling of an eye / Doth change." The idea of infinite cyclical repetition is present in the immediately preceding sonnet, but in this sonnet the cycle is one of constant movement and loss. The onward movement of the waves and the minutes suggests both haste and toil. The image casts its shadow over the chronicle of human life from birth ("Nativity") to youth, a journey which begins with the crawling movement of the baby towards a youth which is scarred by Time's scythe. Contemplation of this troubled journey affects the speaker to such an extent that he can no longer confidently assert the immortalising power of his poetry, as he did in Sonnets 18 and 55. At best his claim is tentative: he can only say that his verse will stand "in hope", "despite" the cruel hand of Time. It is true that "to times in hope" means "until future, or hoped for, times", but the expression "in hope" also surely modifies and gives a provisional character to the poet's claim that his verse will defy time. One of the most vivid personifications of time is to be found in the third quatrain, which visualises Time as armed with a sharp and pointed instrument to pierce ("transfix") the "flourish" of beautiful young people. ("Flourish" means both vital "livelines" and "beautiful ornament.") Time also digs parallel lines, like military trenches, in the foreheads of young people to hasten the process of growing old. Time takes a perverse and morbid delight in devouring the delicate perfection of youth. Only verse praising the beauty and worth of the friend can hope to survive Time's pervasive and wanton destruction.

These three sonnets, along with Sonnet 65, are often taken together in respect of their subject matter, which has been memorably labelled by Peter Hyland as "Time's tyranny and the Poet's Pen". The same critic discusses the whole topic from a perspective which is very illuminating and which I am going to summarize now. Sonnet 55 suggests that the very materiality of statues and monuments will make their eventual destruction inevitable. But that sonnet, like Sonnet 18, makes the self-referential statement that it (the poem) will outlive monuments. A logical gap occurs here, because this claim erases the material nature of the poem itself, since it is possible to suggest that the fact that a poem can be reproduced makes it more likely to survive than a statue or a monument. However, the continued existence of the poem still depends on the materiality of the paper on which it is printed. In this connection it is relevant to observe that poems by many of Shakespeare's contemporaries disappeared long ago; and this means that the generalization that all poetry is immortal is simply not valid. In fact, there is a problem which is usually overlooked whenever the claim is made that poetry can confer immortality on its subject. The problem is that it is essentially a literary

trick as, for example, Keats acknowledges at the end of his “Ode to a Nightingale”. In that poem the speaker intoxicates himself through poetic imagination, so that he can believe in something that will defeat time. But in the end he is forced to admit that “the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.”

The hope of triumphing over time and death is only human and such a hope explains why powerful people build memorials with durable things like brass, marble and stone. It is important for them to know that something that they have had made for them will perpetuate their memory. But for most of us there is no such hope, for we can see that death, from the material perspective from which we have to look at it, is, sadly, final. The *Sonnets* seem to be aware of this deception and self-deception. In claiming that poetry can immortalize his friend the speaker is also claiming immortality for himself; not only the young man but the speaker himself also “lives” in his lines. The real subject of the sonnets conferring immortality on the friend can then be seen as the fear in the speaker’s mind about what time can do to humanity which seems so vulnerable when set against marauding time. The defiance of time in the *Sonnets* might therefore appear historical. After all the “eternal lines” of Sonnet 18 are eternal only so long as men can breathe or eyes can see. Shakespeare therefore knew the truth of Keats’s discovery of the deception played upon us by imagination.

UNIT 4 (e): “LET ME NOT TO THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS”

In the sonnets discussed so far poetry seems to guarantee immortality against the ravages of time. In Sonnet 116 the immortalizing agent is love itself, not poetry. In a world of change, only love promises constancy for true love is unaltered and unalterable. It would be tempting to summarize the theme of this sonnet (and of the less famous Sonnet 123) as “Love’s Triumph over Time”. But such a neat summary would, as L.C. Knights pointed out in his essay “Shakespeare’s Sonnets” (1934) ignore the equally important theme of change, which the sonnet contemplates. Knights agrees that it is perfectly natural to seek in the *Sonnets* a coherently developing attitude culminating in an emotionally satisfying solution. But he warns that unless we are prepared to accept assertion as poetry, we shall not find that solution in the *Sonnets*. Sonnet 116 is “assertion”, that is, as Knights explains, “bare statement deliberately willed instead of communication in all its depth, fullness and complexity, of an experience that has been lived”. The truth, according to Knights, is that in all the sonnets dealing with time and its inevitable process of change it is the contemplation of change, not boasting and defiance, which produces the finest poetry. He also points out that in the Shakespearian plays in which the theme of Time occurs, there is no defiance; the conflict is resolved by an explicit or implicit acceptance of mutability. If Knights calls Sonnet 116 “assertion” rather than great poetry, Stephen Booth finds in the sonnet little that is not “bombast”. In his edition of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, Booth defines “bombast” as “high-sounding, energetic nonsense that addresses its topic but does not indicate what is being said about it.” Booth concedes, however, that having called the poem “bombast”, “one

would have only to reread the poem to be again moved by it and convinced of its greatness.”

Sonnet 116 asserts the speaker’s unchanging love, despite the changes in the friend’s attitude to him. (These changes have been alluded to in some earlier sonnets.) Thus the position of the sonnet persona is the only constant in the midst of change. The change of the grammatical subject from “me” in line 1 to “love” in line 2 has the effect of identifying the persona with love. The final couplet states that the truth of the assertion can be tested on the persona; but the couplet also admits other possibilities, since it begins with the conditional “if”, implying that other outcomes are possible. The second line of the couplet, however, is teasingly ambiguous. It may mean, “Since I have written and men have loved, this belief in love’s constancy is no error.” But it can also mean, “I ever writ, nor ever loved any man”. Spiller thinks that the ambiguity is deliberate and masks a homoerotic construction under a conventional one. However, in their edition of the **Sonnets**, Ingram and Redpath read the sonnet as “a meditative attempt to define perfect love,” with no direct reference to the young man. But this reading is unacceptable, since the context of the young man group of sonnets makes such direct reference unnecessary. It has been suggested that the person who has changed and become inconstant is the speaker. This is how the sonnet is interpreted by Hilton Landry, who maintains that if any one is to allow impediments to the marriage of true minds, it is the friend, while the remover is the speaker himself, the one who is guilty of alteration. Therefore, in this reading, it is the friend’s love which must not alter in the face of alteration. But this reading also ignores the general context of the young man sonnets, which contain many examples of the friend’s coldness and inconstancy. Moreover, if the image of “rosy lips and cheeks” refers to any individual, it must be to the “master-mistress” of the speaker’s passion and not to the speaker himself. True love, this sonnet asserts, does not depend upon mutuality or constancy in the beloved; such love also survives the decay of physical beauty, symbolised by rosy lips and cheeks. The opening lines of the sonnet echo the marriage service in the Book of Common Prayer. True love is then seen metaphorically as “an ever-fixed mark”, that is, a permanent beacon or signal for ships. Just as the beacon is unshaken by tempests, so is love unaffected by the stormy passions and vicissitudes of life. In the succeeding metaphor, love is the North Star or the pole star, which was regarded by mariners as the most reliable guide when their ship strayed, but the value of which is beyond human measurement. Wandering lovers, like wandering ships, are brought back to the right path by the star-like love. Extending the metaphor, the poem identifies two other points of similarity between love and the pole star : both have a value and significance which can never be understood by imperfect human beings, though the altitude (of the star) and the peak (of love) can be measured, Time, personified again as an enemy with a “bending sickle” which cuts as well as gathers, preys on physical beauty, but cannot diminish true love in any way. Love is never altered by Time’s hours and weeks (notice how Time is reductively measured in terms of weeks and hours), but perpetuates itself to the very end of the world on the Day of Judgement. Duncan Jones has pointed out that though the Christian marriage service calls

upon the couple to affirm the lawfulness of their union “as you will answer at the dreadful day of judgement”, the bond is clearly dissolved with the death of one of the partners. But the love defined in this poem “appears not merely life-long but world-long.”

This sonnet is often read as a definition of true love and thus treated as an example of the genre of definition. It can, however, be read differently — as an example not of definition but of refutation or rebuttal. This is how Helen Vendler reads it. She maintains that the motivation of the poem springs from the fiction of an earlier utterance by another person, which the sonnet is trying to repudiate. There are too many negatives in this poem — one *nor*, two *no*'s, two *never*'s, and four *not*'s — which suggest that it is not a definition, but a rebuttal.

UNIT 4 (f): “TH’ EXPENSE OF SPIRIT IS A WASTE OF SHAME”

Just as Sonnet 116 is often seen as a definition of love, Sonnet 129 is also frequently treated as an example of the genre of definition. As Kenneth Muir explains, one is concerned with the marriage of true minds, while the other deals with the coupling of untrue bodies; one with constancy even when the partner is inconstant, the other with a momentary act; one eternal, the other ephemeral. Sonnet 116 is concerned with the marriage of true minds, with any sexual element excluded. The other sonnet appears to exclude everything except the sexual. Sonnet 129 also differs from the earlier sonnet in construction. It depends on rhetorical structure and rhythmic power rather than on imagery. The division among the quatrains is almost obliterated as the first twelve lines rush on like a single sentence. There is also an unusual accumulation of powerfully derogatory epithets, which sound like the hammering of nails in a coffin. The sonnet also makes liberal use of antitheses, as many as eight lines being antithetical, and the antitheses are made emphatic by alliteration. All in all, it can be said that the form of the sonnet is as remarkable as its content : it explores heterosexual passion with an explicitness which appears shocking even to our modern sensibilities. Scholars have shown that there was a thriving culture of erotica in the 1950s, and Shakespeare’s own long poem *Venus and Adonis* is taken as an example of this fashion. But it was rare even then for a poem to be as brutally frank and as seriously concerned with sex as Sonnet 129. *The Norton Shakespeare* points out that the first line and a half of Sonnet 129 contain at least two viciously obscene puns to convey the idea that sexual intercourse is the expenditure (“expense”) of semen (“spirit”) “in a shameful waste” (waist). The tone of the poem, characterized by a commentator as one of “impersonal profundity”, is also unusual : despite its sexual explicitness, the poem is remarkably abstract. The speaker is not offering a description of sexual union experienced by him : that would have made the poem the exploration of an individual’s experience. But the poem is actually a condensed, compact and vehement exposition of the lethal attractions of sex. The couplet makes the general nature of the subject clearer by pointing out that the whole world knows the dangers of sex, but nobody knows how to avoid it.

We saw earlier, in the case of Sonnet 116, that to detach a sonnet from its overall context might mislead us as to its precise meaning and significance. Let us follow the same procedure in the case of Sonnet 129. It belongs to the series dealing with the speaker's relationship with the dark woman, in other words, a heterosexual relationship. In the immediately preceding sonnet there is a teasing ambiguity as to whether the speaker's feeling for the woman is love or lust. The erotic ambiguities of sonnet 128 crystallize into an attitude of deep loathing in this poem. The poem obviously describes the consequence of sexual intercourse. From this starting point the speaker begins to generalize, so that his erotic appetites become generalized into a frightening sequence of desire, its realization and the disillusionment that follows. We have noted the sexual connotations of "expense", but the word's commercial associations are also important, yielding the further suggestion that sexual activity is a matter of spending rather than earning, dissipating physical energy and diminishing the soul. Lust is such a degrading experience that it turns a man into a brute who will use any means from deceit to the exercise of force in order to achieve his end, "lust in action". But fulfilment of lust, instead of giving satisfaction, gives rise to a sense of shame, but that does not prevent the lust-driven man from seeking the ephemeral pleasure again. According to a very ingenious reading, that of Peter Hyland, the structure of the sonnet enacts this sexual movement, building from the violent and deceitful pressures of "perjured" lust, to the "possession" of lust in action, to the woe of lust "proved". The peculiar reverse ordering of "had, having, and in quest to have" in line 10 suggests a compulsion in which the having leads to the desire to have again in a vicious circle. The irony is that the lust-driven man, who seemed to be "hunting" his prey, himself swallows the bait, in the manner of a fish. The transition from the last word in line 8, "mad" to the first word in line 9, "Mad," is apt to create some difficulty. Some editors have suggested that "Mad" (l.9) should be replaced by "Made", which was the word in one original version (Quarto edition). But Burrow has pointed out that "so" at the end of line 9 requires an adjective to refer back to. Moreover, by following "mad" with "Mad" in the very next line, the poet has achieved *anadiplosis* or repetition at the end of one clause and the beginning of the next. This device bridges the gap between two quatrains. Line 12 may also cause a minor problem as to the meaning of "dream". The line as a whole probably means : "in anticipation a joy which is looked forward to; in retrospect an insubstantial dream". The couplet does not offer any solution to this universal problem; rather, it accepts as inevitable the sexual imprisonment of man. (Note that lust is presented in the sonnet as an exclusively male passion). The couplet is, moreover, misogynistic in implication. (Think of the characteristics of the "dark lady" sonnets discussed earlier.) The couplet extends the mingled fascination and revulsion of lust to all : "everyone knows this proverbial piece of wisdom; but no one really knows when it comes to practice". Since in the second line of the couplet there is an explicit reference to female genitalia, "everyone" should perhaps be read as "every male". The term "hell" was at the time a common term for the female sexual organ and "heaven" may be taken to refer to female beauty, which is presented as a trap. The man who is

lured by this heaven soon finds himself in hell. Such strongly misogynistic bias can be found in traditional Christian teachings. However, in Shakespeare's sonnet the horrific import of the couplet is due to a different reason. The speaker (to think in terms of the context) is first attracted by the unconventional appearance of the woman, then led to desire her and finally think of her as the root cause of his spiritual affliction, even of his damnation. Sonnet 129 also shows that the sonnet persona condemns not only female sexuality but also the lust which it arouses in men. If we interpret the sonnet in homosocial terms, we may paraphrase the theme in the terms used by Innes : a man can be infected by passion, an element which the *Sonnets* want to locate only in women, forgetting that "reason" is the true masculine quality ("Past reason hunted, and no sooner had, / Past reason hated.") This is extremely dangerous, and it is this "lust in action" that is "Th'expense of spirit". The body is here intruding too forcefully upon the separation between the male and the female.

UNIT 4 (g): "MY MISTRESS' EYES ARE NOTHING LIKE THE SUN"

This is perhaps the most obviously anti-Petrarchan of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. So far as the context is concerned, one may note that it follows immediately on the sonnet dealing with lust. Sonnet 130 then might suggest that though the woman desired by the speaker lacks all recognized attributes of female beauty, she can still provoke desire, for all that is needed to arouse male lust is that the object of desire is female and readily available. The sonnet also deflates Petrarchan hyperboles about a golden-haired goddess with rosy lips and cheeks, offering instead a "real" woman. The very first word, "My," is given great emphasis to distinguish the speaker's mistress from the majority of Elizabethan sonneteers' mistresses. Of course, one way of looking at the sonnet is to see how the speaker dismisses the conventional notions of female beauty because he wants to redefine that beauty. From that point of view, it has been wittily remarked by Hyland that "the joke rebounds against the speaker for he endures greater suffering at the hands of this hot, available woman than the Petrarchan lover ever did from his cold, distant mistress." The same critic characterizes the sonnet as an elaborate joke that depends on the reader's understanding of literary convention. The lady is described as the negative of all the Petrarchan similes : sun-like eyes, coral lips, snowy breasts, rosy cheeks, perfumed breath, musical voice and goddess-like gait. In thus offering a woman who is the complete antithesis of conventional sonnet heroines the speaker is making a statement that is as much about poetry as it is about the woman. Petrarchan poetic lovers are liars because they employ a language which has been deprived of all meaning by being reduced to clichés. The speaker offers this realistic account of his mistress and thereby presents both a critique of poetic fashion and a statement about the woman that can be understood as true. In other words, "one way of understanding the *Sonnets* is to see them as engaged with literature at least as much as with life". Hyland also makes another crucially important point : if we take the *Sonnets* as fiction, we must distinguish clearly between poet and speaker; in that case the poet's key relationship is with the reader, for whom he has created a voice that can express a varied and complex range of experiences.

Thus Sonnet 130 does not necessarily assume an awareness, on the part of the readers, of biographical details about Shakespeare; but it certainly does assume a knowledge of the conventions of the sonnet tradition on the part of the readers.

What follows is largely a summary of Helen Vendler's views about Sonnet 130's negation of Petrarchan conventions. The structure of the sonnet changes in each part. The first quatrain simply denies the usual hyperboles about the sonnet heroine, but each line is a clever variant on denial :

1. eyes — sun ("nothing like")
2. coral — lips ("far more red")
3. "If snow is your standard" for whiteness, her breasts are "dun."
4. If one can call hairs wires, hers are *black* wires.

The familiar resorts of contemporary love poets, satirized in this sonnet, are : (i) comparison by simile; (ii) hierarchizing; (iii) valuing by a standard; (iv) metaphorizing. The sonnet shows that all these devices can be preposterous when judged by standards of accuracy. The second quatrain is divided between personal observation ("I have seen") and impersonal observation ("there is"). The latter records hierarchy against the mistress, saying that perfume is sweeter than her breath, while the former denies metaphor altogether, saying cheeks are nothing like roses. In the third quatrain and the couplet, the hierarchizing reaches its humorous climax : the speaker has not seen goddesses go, but he can still say that his mistress does not walk like a goddess. The speaker's irritation, so long largely suppressed, at the excesses of sonneteers bursts out in his final oath — "And yet by heaven." He also dismisses other poets' grandiose similes as "false." (Any good edition of the *Sonnets* will give you more than one concrete example from Shakespeare's contemporaries for each simile or metaphor negated by the speaker in this sonnet.)

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. When and where was the sonnet invented ? Briefly discuss the technical features of the earliest form of the sonnet.
2. Consider in detail the contributions made by Dante and Petrarch to the sonnet tradition.
3. In what ways did Petrarch's love sonnets and his sonnet heroine influence later European poets ?

4. Who introduced the sonnet into English poetry? Discuss the thematic and formal features of his sonnets.
5. Who invented the English form of the sonnet? What are the technical characteristics of the form?
6. Name the first woman sonneteer in English. What kind of sonnets did she write?
7. Explain the historical significance of Watson's sequence. What is its title? How does the title point to the sequence's main theme?
8. Why is Philip Sidney considered the first British author of a sonnet sequence? Write a brief note on the thematic and formal characteristics of Sidney's sonnets.
9. Discuss Spenser's handling of the love sonnet and mention at least one example of his departure from Petrarchanism.
10. Analyze Wyatt's sonnet, bringing out the ambiguities in the poem's language.
11. Attempt a critical appreciation of any *one* of Sidney's sonnets and bring out his originality in the handling of the conventions of the love sonnet.
12. Analyze Spenser's sonnet "One day I wrote her name". How does the poet make use of his relationship with two Elizabeths?
13. Do you agree with the view that *Shakespeare's Sonnets* are anti-Petrarchan? Substantiate your answer with appropriate references to the text.
14. Discuss, with suitable examples, Shakespeare's handling of the sonnet form.
15. What are the two loves depicted in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*? How are they distinguished from each other? Which of the two is more appealing to the lover, and why?
16. How is Time's tyranny depicted in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*? Which forces are pitted against Time's destructive power? How can they overcome the tyranny?
17. How does the lover in *Shakespeare's Sonnets* propose to immortalise his beloved? Is the immortalization proposed with the same level of confidence throughout?
18. Examine the different ways in which Spenser and Shakespeare seek to overcome the enmity of Time in their sonnets.
19. Comment on the interaction of tradition and individual talent in Shakespeare's sonnets on time.
20. How would you characterise the relationship between the speaker and the "Young man" in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*?
21. What is a "homosocial" relationship? Discuss whether this is the nature of the relationship depicted in the *Sonnets*.
22. Attempt a critical appreciation of any *one* of the sonnets of Shakespeare in your course.

BLOCK II:

UNIT-5

PARADISE LOST BOOK IV by JOHN MILTON

Content Structure:

UNIT 5 (a): Milton's Life and Works

UNIT 5 (b): Milton's Important Literary Works

UNIT 5 (a): MILTON'S LIFE & WORKS

John Milton (1608-1674) was born in London, the son of a scrivener and musician whose own father had in his youth disinherited him for becoming a Protestant. John Milton was educated at St. Paul's School in London and Christ's College, Cambridge, where the fastidiousness of his morals and perhaps a feminine quality in his personal appearance caused him to be nicknamed "the Lady of Christ's". He left Cambridge in 1632 and in 1638 set out on a course of foreign travel through Paris, Genoa, Florence, Rome to Naples, meeting a number of distinguished men of learning including Galileo. In Naples he heard of the approaching outbreak of the Civil War in England, and decided to return. His sympathies were already engaged on the side of Parliament on religious grounds; he had declined to enter the Church on leaving Cambridge owing to his disapproval of the religious policy of King Charles the First, and Archbishop Laud, which he regarded as too near Roman Catholic authoritarianism. From 1641 he abandoned poetry, reluctantly, for prose polemics on behalf of the Parliamentary and Puritan causes. Not all his writing performed this function, however. In 1643, he married the daughter of a Royalist family who almost immediately abandoned him, and this led to the first of his Pamphlets in favour of divorce. This in turn led to his quarrel with the Stationers Company, since he had published the work without their license. Parliament supported the stationers, whereupon Milton published his *Areopagitica*, one of the noblest appeals for freedom of expression ever written. In 1649, the year of the king's execution, he was appointed Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth for the purpose of corresponding with foreign governments, a post he continued to hold until the Restoration. In addition, he continued his prose propaganda on behalf of the Republican Commonwealth and Oliver Cromwell. He was defending the Republican system in print only a month before the Restoration. Nonetheless, the restored monarch left him in freedom, perhaps owing to the influence in Parliament of his fellow-poet Andrew Marvell, and at court to that of the Earl of Anglesey. Milton, though he was now blind, as left in peace to produce his most ambitious poetic works. In the meantime, his domestic life had been varied. His first wife had returned to him after the defeat of the king's forces in 1646, but had died in 1653, leaving him three daughters. His

second wife died fifteen months after their marriage in 1656, but his third wife whom he married in 1662 looked after him devotedly to the end.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Milton's life was altogether varied and chequered— Discuss.

UNIT 5 (b): IMPORTANT LITERARY WORKS BY JOHN MILTON

Milton's literary career divides sharply into three periods. During the first, (1625-1640) he wrote a considerable quantity of verse in Latin and in English *Ode on the morning of Christs' Nativity* (1629), *L' Allegro* and *IL Penseroso* (1632), the masque *Comus* (1634) and the elegy *Lycidas* (1637). There were lesser works, including a short poem on Shakespeare (1630), to be found in the second folio edition of Shakespeare's works in 1632.

In the second period (1640-1660), Milton wrote little verse but produced a large quantity of prose treatises and pamphlets. Apart from *Areopagitica, a speech for the Liberty of Unlicenced Printing* (1644) there was the treatise *On Education* (1644). These are mostly of historical interest. The massacre of the Protestant Waldensians by the Duke of Savoy in 1655 caused his noble sonnet in protest *On the Late massacre in Piedmond*.

In the last period (1660-1674), Milton produced all his ambitious poems on which his fame chiefly rests. The epic *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667 and brought him great prestige. Its sequel *Paradise Regained* and the tragedy on the Greek model *Samson Agonistes* were published together in 1671. The most important influence upon him in English was Spenser, but the earlier poetry shows the influence of Elizabethan dramatists, particularly in *Comus* and of the Metaphysical Poets in the early Ode. Milton as a poet and literary figure has been the subject of more controversy among modern critics than any other of the great poets. The first full-length assessment of his literary compositions was made by Dr. Johnson in his well-known essay *Life of Milton*. The 20th century interest in Milton was initiated by T.S. Eliot in his two essays *Milton I* and *Milton II*. Eliot's re-assessment of Milton's poetry and poetic art was followed by a spate of critical writings, particularly on *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. E.M.W. Tillyard wrote two memorable works of criticism, entitled *Milton* and *The Miltonic Setting*. One may also recall C.S. Lewis' *Preface to Paradise Lost*, Helen Gardner's *A Reading of Paradise Lost* and William Empson's *Milton's God*. Reference may also be given to the book *The Living Milton*, (ed.) Prof. Frank Kermode. Another significant contribution to the 20th century Milton criticism is Prof. J.B. Broadbent's *The Graver subjects*.

Milton succeeded in arousing such warm critical responses simply because his literary and poetic genius was all embracing, and therefore touched upon the different areas of prose and poetry. As a prose writer he was never circuitious either in his style or in his arguments. The quality of

directness and straightforwardness distinguishes his prose writings. As a poet he was one of the leading sonneteers in the history of English poetry. As a lyric poet, he wrote some beautiful odes, but it is mainly as an epic poet that has occupied a permanent position of name and fame in the history of English literature. *Paradise Lost* in the true sense of the term is his *magnum opus*, although *Paradise Regained* does not have the touch of poetic excellence which one finds in *Paradise Lost*. As a playwright, he was not much successful because the play *Samson Agonistes* resembles generically and characteristically a closet drama rather than a play appropriate for the stage.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write a note on Milton's important literary works.
2. How would you characterize Milton as a writer?

UNIT 6 (a): *PARADISE LOST*

Content Structure:

UNIT 6(a): *Paradise Lost* (1667)

UNIT 6(b): A Brief Summary of Book-IV

Milton had long intended to write an epic to rival Virgil's *Aeneid* and Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. From Dr. Johnson's *Life of Milton* and the account given by Milton's nephew Philips, we come to know that Milton had originally intended to write a five-act drama on the the Fall of Man. Accordingly in the manuscript of the proposed play he introduced the human characters and the divine figures together with the personified images of human virtues or vices. He had therefore the original intention to interfuse the features of a tragedy with those of a Mystery and Morality play. He went so far as to entitle the proposed play as *Adam Unparadised*, but subsequently he gave up the idea although he stuck to the decision that the theme of his proposed epic should be something new 'yet unattempted in Prose or rhyme'. In the 1st book of *Paradise Lost* in the first twenty six lines, by way of Proposition and Invocation, he refers to the theme of his epic poem which is 'Man's first disobedience' and the 'fruit of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste' was responsible for bringing death and woe to humanity. In the following passage, a brief summary of *Paradise Lost* from Book I to Book XII is given.

<i>Milton gave up the idea of writing an epic the theme of which would be the Fall of Man, "something yet unattempted in Prose or Rhyme"</i>
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Book I : Satan lies prostrate in Hell, having been cast down from Heaven after the failure of his great war against God; around him lie the fallen angels who have shared in his defeat.

Book II : In a council of war the strategy of continuing the war against the reign of God is debated; it is decided that a campaign is to be conducted against the new creation — the Earth; Satan sets out on a voyage of discovery of the Earth, first passing through the gates of Hell, guarded by Sin and Death, and then voyaging through chaos.

Book III : God foretells Satan's assault on the Earth and the consequent fall of man. The Son offers himself as man's ransom; Satan alights on the Earth.

Book IV : The Garden of Eden is described; Satan spies on Adam and Eve, and learns about the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

Book V : The archangel Raphael is sent to the Earth, and relates to Adam how Satan, through pride, was incited to rebel against God

Book VI : Raphael continues his account of the War in Heaven, and describes how the Son of God drove the rebellions angels out of Heaven.

Book VII : The creation of Earth is described by Raphael.

Book VIII : Further conversation between Adam and Raphael, about the creation of the Universe, and about Adam's relationship with Eve.

Book IX : Satan, entering into the Serpent, persuades Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge; Adam in despair at losing her, follows her example.

Book X : The Son comes to judge Adam and Eve for their sin, and Sin and Death make their way upward to the Earth; Satan returns in triumph to Hell.

Book XI : The Archangel Michael is sent to expel Adam and Eve from the Garden; an Angel shows them the future of man until the Flood.

Book XII : Michael foretells the Messiah, the history of the Church and its corruption, and the Second Coming.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Narrate in brief, the theme of Milton's 'Paradise Lost', from Book I to Book XII.

UNIT 6 (b): BOOK IV OF MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

Paradise Lost is the singular specimen of English epic poetry, moulded by the fashion and practice of Virgilian epic. It is, no doubt, an epic of art, as contrasted with the Homeric epic of growth—an epic poem where Milton shows his excellence as a poet. In this poem Milton is erudite and he makes good use of his erudition to write a poem which is capable of enkindling our imagination, enlightening our intellect and vitalising our spirit. About the merit and characteristic quality of *Paradise lost* Verity wrote in his editorial introduction, “We must indeed recognize in *Paradise Lost*, the meeting-point of Renaissance and Reformation. The impress of four great influences : The Bible, the classics the Italian poets and English literature.”

My immediate concern is, however, to introduce to you The Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost*, which occupies an important position in the total thematic design of the epic. Indeed, the Fourth Book for multiple reasons is as meaningful to the readers of this epic as for example, the First Book and the Ninth Book. The significance of the Fourth Book is as much thematic as also stylistic. In this Book, for the first time the readers are introduced to Adam and Eve, the first parents of mankind, the place of their habitation, the Garden of Eden. The human and the cosmic elements mingle together in the epic narrative; and in addition to all these, there are the usual features of Milton's grand style, the successful use of epic similes and the dramatisation of the poetic narrative in the closing section of the poem. A brief summary of the Fourth Book is given below.

Milton begins the poem with a sincere feeling of regret for mankind. “. that now,/while time was, our first parents had been warned/the coming of their secret foe, and ‘scaped,/Haply so’ scaped, his mortal snare!” The lines are immediately followed by the poet’s reference to and description of Satan, “The tempter ere the accuser of mankind”, who now swims upward through the vast chaos in order to reach the newly-created Eden where in a splendid garden, the new favourites of God are happily placed in the midst of their blissful ignorance of evil. The Fourth Book virtually opens with one long soliloquy by Satan—the soliloquy (32–112) that brings to light the complex working of his mind and his crooked intention to corrupt Adam and Eve, and thereby to avenge himself on God.

John Milton, a Protestant, even from His childhood disapproved the religious policy of King Charles. He married the daughter of a Royalist family who almost immediately abandoned him. His quarrel with the stationers Company led to his publication of Areopagitica. After the king’s execution he was appointed Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth. But even after Restoration, the monarch left him in freedom. Altogether his life was varied and chequered.

The long soliloquy that intends to present Satan exclusively from the psychological point of view is succeeded by an excellent and grand description of the Garden of Eden and its surroundings (131-287). Milton’s descriptive power reaches the pinnacle of perfection when in a short but poetically suggestive passage he introduces Adam and Eve (288 - 318). In this connection Milton also describes the ‘togetherness’ of Adam and Eve in the midst of the pleasant pastoral atmosphere of the Garden. Satan’s feeling of envy at the sight of the happy pair in recorded is his second soliloquy (358–392).

Satan’s feeling of envy is caused by his realisation that amity, friendship and mutual understanding exist between Adam and Eve. From the exchange of their dialogue it appears that Adam is the repository of wisdom; while Eve is intellectually much inferior to him. Through the lips of Eve, we are intimated about the occasion when Adam and Eve for the first time meet together. Eve’s vanity and Adam’s infatuated feeling for Eve are clearly suggested. From their exchange of thoughts and ideas Satan learns about the Tree of Knowledge and the danger it poses for them. In the meantime the Archangels who guard the Garden of Eden have the feeling that one of the evil spirits of Inferno has perhaps entered the Garden to disturb the peaceful atmosphere.

The Garden of Eden is also referred to as the bower of bliss. Adam and Eve enter the bower to celebrate the joys of the conjugal life which enrages Satan more. Milton in this connection idealises wedded love. In the closing section the encounter between Satan and the angelic guards takes place. The fierce cosmic war is on the verge of breaking out, but it is avoided. Satan escapes and with him “fled the shades of night.”

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write, in brief, the summary of Book- IV of *Paradise Lost* and explain its significance.

UNIT 7 (a): SATAN'S SOLILOQUIES

Content Structure:

UNIT 7(a): Satan's Soliloquies

UNIT 7(b): The Portrayal of Adam and Eve

UNIT 7(c): The Garden of Eden

UNIT 7(d): Milton's Handling of Epic Similes

Thematically the Fourth Book may be divided into several sections. These are (a) Satan's soliloquies; (b) the description of the Garden of Eden; (c) the portrayal of Adam and Eve. Besides, critical attention may also be focused on Milton's style and his use of epic similes.

I may begin my critical discussion on the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost* by briefly analyzing Satan's soliloquies. The dictionary meaning of the word 'soliloquy' refers to "a speech in a play which the character speaks to himself or herself or to the people watching rather than to the other characters." (*Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*). According to M.H. Abrams, "Soliloquy

Soliloquy is the act of talking to one self — Satan's soliloquies, devised in the true tradition of Marlowe and Shakespeare, are made use of to 'humanise' the skeleton figure of evil and to foreground the theatre of the mind. Satan's opening soliloquy brings out his psychic framework, crowded with heterogeneous passions and feelings. It is a fusion of a feeling of derision for God's Universe, his self-awareness and self-castigation, knowledge of his own self and his final agonising thought.

is the act of talking to oneself, whether silently or aloud. In drama it denotes the convention by which a character, alone on the stage, utters his thoughts aloud; playwrights use this device as a convenient way to convey information about a character's motives and state of mind, or for purposes of general exposition, and sometimes in order to guide the judgement and responses of the audience." (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*). Abrams's definition of soliloquy proves its appropriateness when one goes through the famous soliloquies, delivered by Doctor Faustus in Marlowe's play, and by several Shakespearean characters like

Hamlet, Macbeth, Iago in *Othello*, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and Edmund in *King Lear*.

Satan's soliloquies in the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost* are devised in the true tradition of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Milton makes use of these soliloquies in order to (a) 'humanise' the otherwise skeleton figure of evil, as one finds it in the pages of the Bible; (b) to foreground the theatre of the mind/the inner psychological drama of the rebel Archangel. Satan's opening soliloquy (32 – 113) is addressed to "the full-blazing sun" (129) because the sun represents the glory and greatness of God. It stands at the centre of the cosmos, created by God. The sun, therefore, is a reminder of Godly glory, which is unbearable to Satan. The opening soliloquy brings out his psychic framework, crowded with heterogeneous passions and feelings. It is a fusion of a feeling of derision for God's universe ("..... to thee I call/ But with no friendly voice." ll.35-36), his self-awareness

and self-castigation (“yet all his good proved ill in me/And wraught but malice”, ll.48-49) his knowledge about his own self (“Till pride and worse ambition threw me down - l.40) and his final agonizing thought (“which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell”, l.75) . Side by side, there are the words of self-disparagement (“... outcast, exiled”). The soliloquy ends with his farewell words to hope and remorse. Instead, there is the negative tendency to idolize Evil and confusing it with Good (“Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least/Divided empire with Heaven’s king I hold,/By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign;/As Man ere long and this new world shall know.” (Lines 110-113)

Milton comments that, as Satan continues to speak out the soliloquy, different passions dim his face and “marred his borrowed visage.” The passions referred to are “ire, envy and despair.” The second soliloquy of Satan has interesting situational contexts. He has already trespassed into the Garden of Eden and he has also watched secretly Adam and Eve with their “far nobler shape”, naked majesty. Even Satan who is evil incarnate cannot but discover in these the replica of their Maker. It is this sight of Adam and Eve and the congenial pastoral atmosphere of the Garden in which they are placed that generate in his mind the feelings of envy and

Satan in his second soliloquy, replete with every and jealousy, introduces himself as the veritable enemy of mankind. Consequently his initial feeling of appreciation for the gentle and beautiful pair is supplemented by the feelings of sadness for their incoming change and prospective banishment from the state of innocence and unadulterated purity. This soliloquy is full of sarcasm, irony and grim humour.

jealousy. In the second soliloquy (Lines 358-392) Satan expresses this sense of envy. In this soliloquy he introduces himself as the veritable enemy of mankind and consequently his initial feeling of appreciation for the gentle and beautiful pair is supplemented by the feeling of sadness for their incoming change and prospective banishment from the state of innocence and unadulterated purity. He therefore says “Ah! gentle pair, ye little think how nigh/your change approaches, when all these delights/Will vanish, and deliver ye to woe”

In this particular soliloquy Satan addresses Adam and Eve with sarcasm, irony and grim humour.

Satan, in his third soliloquy, is a voyeurist. The intimate and confidential moments of Adam and Eve awakens in his mind the feeling of malignity, corroding envy. He comprehends the situation of antithesis between his own self and Adam and Eve and gets tormented. Like any Renaissance encyclopaedist, Satan feels that the horizon of knowledge is boundless.

He suggests that very shortly “mutual amity” will be established between the gentle pair and his own self. He sounds sarcastic and ironic when he says that his dwelling, thereby referring to Hell, may not please their sense as the fair Paradise. There is a touch of dark humour when he further comments that after their downfall they will be greeted and entertained by all the inhabitants of Hell including their numerous offspring. The periphery of their existence will be widened and they will be able to share the

expansive limits of Hell with Satan’s own self. The second soliloquy undoubtedly gives a new dimension to the character of Satan. He proves without any ambiguity that he intends to be the sworn enemy of mankind and his motive is to avenge himself on God by reducing and corrupting the new favourites of the Omnipotent.

Satan's third soliloquy (Lines 505-535) appears to be psychologically much more interesting than the second. According to C.S. Lewis (*Preface to Paradise Lost*) Satan in the third soliloquy in Book IV of *Paradise Lost* is a voyeurist who gains a close look of Adam and Eve at one of their intimate and confidential moments which however awakens in his mind the feeling of malignity, corroding envy. The soliloquy begins with two exclamatory explanations "sight hateful, sight tormenting!" The reason behind the exclamation is not difficult to find. He comprehends the situation of antithesis between his own self and Adam and Eve while they are enjoying the Paradisiacal pleasures of love. He himself is getting tormented with his agonizing life in Hell where there are neither joy nor love but compelling and fierce desires. From the lips of Adam and Eve he has however gathered one important information about the restriction imposed on them by God, in respect of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Satan feels suspicious and therefore in a self-questioning mood, he says "Knowledge forbidden ? / Suspicious, reasonless ! Why should their Lord / Envy them that ? Can it be sin to know ?" (Lines 515-517). The interrogations quoted above add a fresh dimension to his attitude and personality. Like any Renaissance encyclopaedist, Satan feels that the three soliloquies of Satan bring up to the surface Satan's characteristic peculiarities, his attitude and temperamental peculiarity. A fallen archangel, he suffers from the incurable feeling of jealousy. He is almost always instigated by a sense of pride, vanity and conceit. There is also intolerance for his personal servitude and for the happiness of the newly created favourites of God. Side by side there is a dark ambition in his mind to widen and extend his power and authority, but in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Satan exhibits some definite symptoms of his characteristic degeneration.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write a critical note on Satan's Soliloquies in Milton's *Paradise Lost* Book IV.

UNIT 7(b): THE PORTRAYAL OF ADAM AND EVE

Milton's recreation of Adam and Eve out of the scanty biblical material is significant, for, firstly, it introduced in the poetic narrative the human interest, secondly, in the poem the earthly and the heavenly get coalesced with each other, and lastly, with a superb touch of irony the beauty and grace of Adam and Eve are foregrounded through the eyes of Satan. They represent the uncorrupted state of existence for they embody godliness. Their description "is a poetic texture of conceptual images".

The figure of Satan occupies a position of central importance in Book IV of *Paradise Lost* but no less important is Milton's portrayal of Adam and Eve. The original and primary reference to Adam and Eve is found in *The Book of Genesis*: "And Jehovah God proceeded to form the man out of dust from the Ground and to blow into his nostril the breath of life, and the man came to be a living soul" and further, "And Jehovah God proceeded to take the man and settle him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and to take care of it." This is followed by the story of Eve's creation. "Hence Jehovah God had a deep sleep fall upon the man and while he was sleeping, he took one

of his ribs and then closed up the flesh over its place. And Jehovah God proceeded to build the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman and to bring her to the man.” Milton in *Paradise Lost* re-creates the figures of Adam and Eve out of these scanty biblical materials. The portrayal of Adam and Eve in the Fourth Book has a significance of its own for more than one reason. First, it introduces in the poetic narrative human interest; secondly, for the first time

in the poem the earthly and the heavenly get coalesced with each other and lastly, with a superb touch of irony the beauty and grace of Adam and Eve are foregrounded through the eyes of Satan. Indeed, one of the important sections of the Fourth Book is Milton’s presentation of the first parents of humanity in the lines 288-318. Milton begins this famous description by referring to their “nobler shape, erect and tall.” They look on the one hand ‘God-like’ and on the other majestic and lordly, as though they are the first emperor and empress of the earth.

They represent the uncorrupted state of existence and they embody godliness in themselves, and, consequently, the image of God seems to be shining in them with essential glory. According to Prof. Tillyard, the passage, describing Adam and Eve, “is a poetic texture of conceptual images.” Prof. Helen Gardner concludes that Adam and Eve are not simply royal but they are also idealised moral beings. The same view is upheld by Prof. J.B. Broadbent when he draws the attention of the readers of the poem to the following statements of the poet. “For contemplation he and valour formed, / For softness she and sweet attractive grace.” (lines 297-298). The lines are succeeded by that famous and debatable poetic observation on the mutual relationship between Adam and Eve : “He for God only, she for God in him.” The statement undoubtedly brings into focus the bourgeois, Puritanic concept of the man-woman relationship — the idea that man is intellectually much superior to woman and because of her inferiority, a woman should be worshipping the God in man. Since Milton looks upon Eve as an archetypal woman, he is in the task of typifying her characteristic attributes and look. For example, Milton describes, “She, as a veil down to the slender waist, / Her unadorned Golden tresses wore / Dishevelled, but in wanton ringlets waved, / As the vine curls her tendrils...” (lines 304-307), and further “yielded with coy submission, modest pride, / And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay, ...” (lines 310-311). Milton the poet expresses himself in the Petrarchan poetic idiom. Side by side, he also typifies the male beauty of Adam and presents him in such a manner as he appears to be the graceful knightly protagonist of a medieval romance. “His fair large front and eye sublime declared / Absolute rule; and hyacinthine locks / Round from his parted forlock manly hung / Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad.” (Lines 300-303). The idealisation of Adam and Eve is complete when Milton moralises on their nakedness (Lines 313-318) and seems to link them with the Golden

The statement that “He for God only, she for God in him.” bring into focus the bourgeois, Puritanic concept of the man-woman relationship — the idea that man is intellectually much superior to woman. Milton looks upon Eve as an archetypal woman. Adam appears to be the graceful knightly protagonist of a medieval romance. Milton moralises on their nakedness and seems to link them with the Golden age. But he, too suggestively describes that these two idealized beings have their own characteristic limitations.

Age. In this context we may note down the remarks of Prof. Frank Kermode : “For one needs to understand the general primitivistic position which held that custom and honour were shabby modern expedients unnecessary in a Golden Age society, with all its corollaries in Renaissance ‘naturalism’.” Milton, however, adds something more to the character-portrayal of Adam and Eve. The formal, ceremonial manner in which they address each other further reinforces the royalty of their nature, their dignity and sublimity as the protagonists of an epic.

The question which, however, disturbs our mind is whether Adam and Eve really stand for “Simplicity and spotless innocence”. Milton suggestively describes that even these two idealised beings have their characteristic limitations. In a magnificently written passage Eve recounts the day of her first meeting with Adam (Lines 456-490). The passage draws our attention to Eve’s narcissistic self-love and Adam’s partially infatuated feeling for her. The scene also demonstrates that the love between Adam and Eve is not spontaneous, but an induced and a superimposed one. It may also have the mythical association of Apollo beckoning and calling back the escaping Daphne.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. How does Milton depict Adam and Eve ?
2. What is the significance of the portrayal of Adam and Eve in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* Book IV.

UNIT 7 (c): THE GARDEN OF EDEN

From the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden, let us now move forward to the Garden itself. The initial reference to the Garden is found in *The Book of Genesis* : “Further, Jehovah God planted a Garden in Eden, towards the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Thus Jehovah God made to grow out of the ground every tree desirable to one’s sight and good for food, and also The Tree of Life in the middle of the Garden and the Tree of Knowledge of good and bad.” Milton has elaborated on these scanty Scriptural material and has ultimately transformed it into, what Prof. Kermode has called, “the Garden of Love.”

The Garden of Eden is considered as the Garden of Love, by Prof. Kermode, I may conclude, for one specific reason. Its atmosphere and its beneficial impact may be realised in the light of the flawlessly harmonious relationship that exists between Adam and Eve. As the Garden of Love, it functions as a complementary image to Adam and Eve. That is why, the beauty and significance of the Garden of Eden can never be realised without any reference to Adam and Eve. In another respect the description of the Garden of Eden has in itself an inherent sense of irony because, as in the case of Adam and Eve, the pristine freshness and beauty of the Garden can be explored only through the eyes of Satan. As a trespasser into that idyllic place of natural beauty, Satan primarily overcomes all the barriers to the entrance of the Garden. Milton offers the suggestion that the

Garden appears to be fenced with adequate protection. But to the archenemy of God and mankind no obstacles are insuperable. That is why he jumps over all the barriers and finds himself stationed

Milton has transformed the Garden of Eden, found in The Book of Genesis into "the Garden of Love". It functions as a complementary image to Adam and Eve. But it has in itself, an inherent sense of irony too, because its pristine freshness and beauty can be explored only through the eyes of Satan. The Garden is fenced with adequate protection. But to the archenemy of God and mankind no obstacles are insuperable. The Garden is both sublime and sensuous, paradisaical and earthly.

in the middle of the Garden. There to his utter surprise he finds "undelighted all delight, all kind / Of living creatures, new to sight and strange."

Satan discovers the Garden as a place unique and peculiar because it is at the same time sublime and sensuous, paradisaical and earthly. The question which has been frequently raised is where the Garden of Eden was actually situated — whether it had really any earthly geographical identity. According to Masson "Eden the whole tract or the district of Western Asia wherein the creator has designed that men should first dwell; Paradise is the Happy Garden situated in one particular spot of this Eden — on its eastern side."

"Eden stretched her line / From Auran eastward to the royal towers / of great Seleucia, built by Grecian kings, / Or where the sons of Eden long before / Dwelt in Telassar." The physical and geographical reality of the Garden of Eden is, however, superseded by the sublime touch of Milton's poetic imagination. He designates it as "A Heaven on Earth" and thereby celestializes what might have transpired as closely real and mundane. It is a pleasant garden with the fertile super abundance of nature. Milton writes "...In this pleasant soil / His far more pleasant garden God ordained / Out of the fertile ground he caused to grow / All trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste." (lines 214-217). Milton seems to be recalling the primary source materials to be found in the *Genesis*; and side by side he looks upon it as sensuously rich and gratifying. It is a garden that has in itself the prospect of the life eternal and deathless, symbolised by the Tree of Life and "eminent, blooming, ambrosial fruit/of vegetable gold", but in addition to this, there is the contrary existence of the Tree of Knowledge that ominously anticipates man's permanent banishment from the Garden of Eden. It is also a richly watery place which signifies that the fountains of life flow free in the Garden of Eden. Nature's boon in every shape and form is showered spontaneously on the Garden. Milton throws the suggestion that, sensuality should be one of the essential paradigms of the Garden because it is the Garden of Love; and anything which is mundane and sensuous is rooted in the 'amor'. Adam and Eve, integrated with the picture of Eden, are the archetypal lovers, the perennial symbols of youth and beauty. In fact, Milton's description of the Garden reminds one of the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's *As you Like It* because it accommodates the flora and fauna of all types and hue. Here are to be found "cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm" and fig tree; and "all beasts of the earth" — "bears, tigers, ounces, pards and lions." Milton's Renaissance sensibility considers the Garden as Nature

systematised (reference in this connection may be given to Bacon’s ‘Of Garden’) and also an ideally conceived pastoral existence — “a happy rural seat of various view” (Line 247) Milton’s Renaissance mind also adopts the meticulous, mosaic details of the baroque art and painting when he describes topography and other colourful aspects of the Garden of Eden — “Sapphire fount”, “Orient pearl”, “sands of gold”, “mantling vine”, “purple grape” “palmy hillock”, “flowery lap / of some irriguous valley”. Then again, the floral beauty of the Garden looks matchless. There are in the Garden “flowers of all hues”, including roses and Jessamine, crocus and hyacinth. The flowers create a rich inlay of embroidery “more coloured than with stone / of costliest emblem” (lines 700-703). The Garden on the whole impresses the readers of the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost* as an idealised state of existence which we can dream of, but which we cannot translate into reality. Notwithstanding its probable geographical location, this “Assyrian garden” looks much more beautiful than all other noted man-made gardens, celebrated in myth and literature (Line 268-265).

In Milton’s poetic imagination, the Garden is designated as “A Heaven on Earth.” It is a garden that has in itself the prospect of life eternal and deathless, symbolised by the Tree of Knowledge ominously anticipates man’s permanent banishment from the Garden of Eden and Eve, the archetypal lovers, are the symbols of youth and beauty. Milton’s

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What is the significance of Milton’s delineation of the Garden of Eden in his *Paradise Lost*, Book-IV ?

UNIT 7(d): MILTON’S HANDLING OF EPIC SIMILES

One of the important areas of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is Milton’s use of epic similes. The use of such similes is rooted in the Homeric tradition of epic mode and style. For their effectiveness and

Dr. Johnson referred to the abundance and variety of Milton’s handling of epic similes. But they seem to be existing in their own rights for their beauty, exquisiteness of details and fine imaginative appeal. Milton seems to borrow them from different sources.

artistic appeal and beauty the epic similes are sustained by elaboration and extraneous details which may not have anything to do with the immediate point of comparison. The descriptive details in such similes simultaneously divert and distract the readers, giving them the ideas of digression, amplitude and magnificence which qualify an epic poem. Dr. Johnson in his ‘Life of Milton’ appreciated the inclusion of epic similes in

Paradise Lost. He referred to abundance and variety as two important attributes of Milton’s handling of epic similes. But notwithstanding their variety and copiousness, the similes are rarely connected with the main epic narrative or story element. They seem to be existing in their own rights for their beauty; for the exquisiteness of details and for their fine imaginative appeal. Milton seems to be

borrowing these similes from different sources — myth, history, geography, travel account and, at times, from his personal experiences.

In the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost* the epic similes are however, used with certain a difference. For the first time the similes appear to be organically related to the epic narrative sometimes exploring their contextual relevance and sometimes commenting on the concerned characters and situations. Take,

In the Fourth Book of 'Paradise Lost', for the first time, the similes appear to be organically related to the epic narrative sometime exploring their contextual relevance and sometimes commenting on the concerned characters and situations.

for example, two consecutive epic similes (lines 183-192) where Satan in the first case is compared to a 'Prowling wolf', and thereafter to a "thief, bent to unhoard the cash / Of some rich burgher ..."

In the first epic simile (lines 183-187) the points of comparison, in spite of its extension and elaboration, are more than one and quite relevant too. Satan is identified with a 'prowling wolf' because of his shyness, craftiness, and envy the 'flocks' refer to Adam and Eve, while Shepherd's pen — a close and confined enclosure — has its parallel to the Garden of Eden and the shepherd is the customary Christian image for God. In the second epic simile, Satan is like a thief, intent upon

At one point, the similes are interrelated because three out of four similes reinforce the basic thematic contexts of the seduction, jealousy and sedition, and thereby they bring within their purview the entire cosmic and human drama of 'Paradise Lost'.

taking away the rich treasure of "some rich burgher", just as Satan is willing to take away the simplicity and spotless innocence of Adam and Eve, the rich treasures of God. In the Fourth Book Milton appears to be luxuriating with the similes he has employed. In lines 268-283, we come across four successive epic similes which emphasize the superiority of the Garden of Eden vis-a-vis the other gardens, celebrated either in myth or popular history. The first of the four epic similes recalls the mythic

story of Proserpine, her abduction by the god of the underworld and the search made by Ceres "through the world" to find her out. The second is concerned with the temple of Daphne, near the city of Antioche on the Orontes ; the third refers to young Bacchus, and her mother Amatheia, hid in Nyseian isle, to escape the jealous eyes of the stepmother Rhea. The fourth and last tells the story of the Abyssinian kings who kept their sons in the palace on Mt. Amara, so that they might not be affected by the spirit of sedition. The immediate sources of these similes are different.

Yet, at one specific point they are mutually interrelated because three out of four similes reinforce the basic thematic contexts of the poem — the themes of seduction, jealousy and sedition, and thereby they bring within their purview the entire cosmic and human drama of *Paradise Lost*. The specimens of typical epic simile with all its grand and magnificent superfluity may also be cited in this connection.

1. "As when to them who sail

Beyond the Cape of Hope, and now are past Mozambic, off at sea north-east winds blow Sabacan odours from the spicy shore

Of Araby the Blest : with such delay

Owell pleased they slack their course, and many league Cheered with the grateful smell old Ocean smiles.

2. "...swift as a shooting star

In autumn thwarts the night, when vapours fired Impress the air, and shows the mariner From what point of his compass to beware Impetuous winds."

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write a note on Milton's use of epic simile in *Paradise Lost* Book IV. What purpose do they serve?

UNIT 8 (a):
EPICAL, LYRICAL AND DRAMATIC QUALITIES
IN *PARADISE LOST* (BOOK - IV)

Content Structure:

UNIT 8 (a): Epical, Lyrical and Dramatic Qualities in Paradise Lost (Book-IV)

UNIT 8 (b): Important Critical Observations on Milton

UNIT 8 (c): Important Critical Observations on Milton

UNIT 8 (d): Milton and Posterity

Suggested Readings

Assignments

Adam Unparadis'd was the title of the play which Milton had planned to write on the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden which resulted in the fall of humanity and which according to Milton himself was the most tragic incident in the entire course of the history of humanity. But

Milton realised that the epic, Poetic mode should be the most appropriate to deal with such a cosmic theme like the fall of humanity. The structure of 'Paradise Lost' Book-IV is definitely dramatic since it contains exposition, Rising action, climax, denouement and resolution or catastrophe. The epic similes are instrumental in building up dramatic suspense and tension

subsequently he gave up the idea of writing any play on this theme particularly because a theme of such a cosmic dimension could not be accommodated within the specific and definitive structure of a play. He, therefore, realized that the epic, poetic mode should be the most appropriate to deal with such a theme of cosmic dimension. Accordingly the different books of *Paradise Lost* have distinctive dramatic design and structure of their own. The Structure of the Fourth Book is definitely dramatic, since it can be stratified into a conventional pattern of

a play with exposition, rising action, climax, denouement and resolution or catastrophe. The exposition sets the action apace with the opening speech of Satan which clarifies the cause of his rebellion against God and his defiance of the ultimate authority of the

universe. In Book IV the dramatic qualities are foregrounded in the soliloquizing speeches of Satan which in sudden flashes throw some light on Satan's state of mind. In fact, Milton at the end of Book IV constructs the dialogues of Satan and Gabriel in such a manner as to produce the effect of stichomythia. The style of

The epic qualities of Book-IV are also discernible in its narrative (e.g. there is the large, spacious canvas crowded both with angelic and human beings) and in its style (e.g. the variable use of the run-on lines of blank verse). Book IV is also unique in lyrical quality (e.g. there is the description of the evening accompanied by excellent figurative devices.

Milton, now and then, borders on the verge of the dramatic. In this connection, to a number of epic similes which are instrumental in building up dramatic suspense and tension (Explain the lines

183-191 ; lines 268-285). *Paradise Lost* (Book IV) in its narrative is also graced with epic qualities. First there is the large, spacious canvas which is crowded not only with the angelic beings but also

with human beings. Heaven and earth combine together in Book IV. Adam and Eve the first parents of mankind, are protected by Gabriel, Uriel and Ithuriel and as a result, the overlapping of the terrestrial and the extra-terrestrial takes place. The epic suggests not simply the terrestrial but the terrestrial in this poem is sublimated, as it is evident in Milton's glorified and heightened description of the Garden, and the depiction of Adam and Eve.

The epic qualities are most discernible in its style. One may note down the variable use of the run-on lines of blank verse. The pompous marching of the blank verse lines is unquestionably remarkable ; equally so, is his employment of the blank verse lines to suit the conversational and colloquial mode. He is informal when he allows Satan to be conversational — sarcastic, ironic, caustic not only at his own cost but also at the cost of Adam and Eve. *Paradise Lost* (Book IV) is unique among the other books because the lyrical tenderness is sporadically introduced throughout the book. First, there is the description of evening accompanied by excellent figurative devices (lines 598-609). The mellowed tone of the passage acts as a pleasant anti thesis to the splendour and gravity of the epic mode. The lyrical and epical modes are mixed with the dynamism of the dramatic mode, which gives the poem a distinctive flavour of its own.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write a note on the epical, lyrical and dramatic qualities in *Paradise Lost* (Book IV).

UNIT 8 (b): IMPORTANT CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON MILTON

About Milton's achievement as a poet and his relevance Dr. Johnson in his essay 'Life of Milton' and Christopher Hill in *Milton and the English Revolution* respectively have made the following observations :

“The highest praise of genius is original invention. Milton cannot be said to have contrived the structure of an epic poem, and therefore owes reverence to that vigour and amplitude of mind to which all generations must be indebted for the art of poetical narration, for the texture of the fable the variation of incidents, the interposition of dialogue, and all the stratagems that surprise and enchain attention. But, of all the borrowers from Homer, Milton is perhaps the least indebted. He was naturally a thinker for himself, confident of his own abilities, and disdainful of help or hindrance : he did not refuse admission to the thoughts or images of his predecessors, but he did not seek them. From his contemporaries he neither courted nor received support ; there is in his writings nothing by which the pride of other authors might be gratified, or favour gained ; no exchange of praise, nor solicitation of support. His great works were performed under discountenance, and in blindness, but difficulties vanished at his touch ; he was born for whatever is arduous ; and his work is not the greatest of heroic poems, only because it is not the first.”

— Dr Samuel Johnson in 'Life of Milton'

THE RELEVANCE OF MILTON CHRISTOPHER HILL-MILTON AND THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION

Counter-culture radicalism *is* in some respects more personal and introspective than past radicalisms normally have been ... This ... reflects the perception that the revolutionary theory and practice of the past have placed too much faith in economic and institutional changes, and have neglected the need to change people's way of thought and modes of personal behaviour.

Anthony Arblaster, *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 June 1975

UNIT 8 (c): MILTON AGONISTES

Mr. Arblaster might have excepted Milton from the charge against 'past radicalisms'. Milton's political experience led him to attach more importance to changes in people's modes of thought and conduct, less to political manipulation and institutional change. This would seem to give him a certain modern relevance.

But we have to work a little to grasp Milton's relevance, We cannot just 'let the poetry speak for itself'. Some of it will, most of the ideas will not; and Milton is nothing if not a poet of ideas. To understand his relevance we must see him as a man of total political commitment. Like Wordsworth, he started out with extravagantly high hopes: unlike Wordsworth, he strove to cling on to them. Like Yeats, Milton wrote his greatest poetry when he was over the age of fifty. Like Blake, unlike

Milton attached more importance to changes in people's modes of thought and conduct and less to political manipulation and institutional change which gave him a certain modern relevance. He is basically a poet of ideas — a man of total political commitment. Self-respect prevented Milton from looking for a divine scape-goat, defeat of his cause left him probing deeper into his own nature and that of others, in order to find out what was needed for the good cause to succeed.

Wordsworth and Auden, Milton did not renege on the political convictions which had inspired him in his younger days. When Milton's revolution had turned sour, he did not seek the facile way out of saying that his God had failed. He knew that any human beings who thought God had failed them must have idolatrously set up as an object of worship their own desires and fancies. Believers were included in the failure: self-respect prevented Milton from looking for a divine scapegoat, Defeat of his cause left him not bewailing and lamenting but probing deeper into his own nature and that of others, in order to find out what was needed for the good cause to succeed. Milton wrestled with God for the blessing which had so signally been withheld, convinced that it was not unattainable. His most mature writings were aimed at the politically dedicated minority, fit though few, who could with him face defeat without whining, without self-exculpation.

But Milton's relevance can hardly be grasped without some understanding of his theology, thought which his initial radicalism and his final synthesis were expressed. If we regard the theology as merely out-of-date lumber — which on the surface it is — or, worse still, if we regard it as

something we have to believe if we are to appreciate the poetry, then Milton is mostly dead for us. We must see, for instance, the Fall of Man as a myth or metaphor through which Milton (and not only Milton) expresses determination to change *this* world : only so can we grasp the relevance of his poetry to men women living in a world which still needs transforming but which is not going to be transformed except by human effort. Above all Milton fought

this resolution not to surrender what he believes to be right, however complete the apparent defeat of his cause, makes Milton every age's contemporary. Properly understood, he will be outdated only when the millennium arrives. And that, he would have grimly agreed, is long enough. I have spoken of Milton as an individualist. But the this-worldliness of his thought makes

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him far less concerned with his own soul or with the afterlife than many of his contemporaries. There is no evidence that Milton ever underwent the conversion that was almost *de rigueur* among certain Puritan groups. There is in him none of the fevered search for personal salvation that we find in Vaughan on the one hand, in Bunyan on the other. Milton is concerned with Christ's kingdom the good society, rather than with personal consolations or rewards. Even in *Lycidas*, reference to personal immortality is perfunctory : the real consolation is the two-handed engine, ready like Samson to smite the enemies of the church, of Christ's kingdom. Milton's virtual abandonment of the idea of sacrificial atonement, his failure to emphasize the miracles of the New Testament, including the incarnation, the resurrection, the ascension and Pentecost, all make his approach verge on the secular.

The dominant characters in Milton's last three great poems are not merely individuals : they are public persons, representatives. This role is traditional for Adam and Jesus Christ in the Christian scheme of salvation. ('Adam, the parent and head of all men, either stood or fell as a representative of the whole human race.') The Son of God is the second Adam throughout *Paradise Regained*, though at the very end 'he unobserved and head of all men, either stood or fell as a representative of the whole human race.') The Son of God is the second Adam throughout *Paradise Regained*, though at the very end 'he unobserved Milton was not an original thinker, about politics or theology. He synthesized other people's ideas, and he spoke out fearlessly. His attack on Constantine in 1641, his defence of Familism in 1642, his advocacy of divorce, of the accountability of kings to their peoples, his defence of republicanism in 1660, were all acts of great courage. He was a profoundly political character, dedicated to the cause which he believed to be right. But he tried also to be a realist. *Areopagitica* in 1644, *The Ready and Easy Way* in 1660, *Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism, Toleration* in 1673, all show considerable political shrewdness. The Leveller and Digger appeal to a wider democracy is attractive to modern eyes, but Milton was more realistic in his refusal to attach any revolutionary regime that he hoped could be radicalized.

Even Milton's silences were often politically significant. Between 1645 and 1649, as the conflict between Presbyterian City, Independent Grandees and Leveller rank and file shook the unity of the Parliamentary cause, Milton published nothing. He never attacked Oliver Cromwell so long as the latter lived to unite the Good Old Cause. In 1659-60 Milton tried desperately to popularize his schemes for reunion, and he returned to this activity just as soon as the political climate permitted it in the sixteen-seventies. His enemies remained constant-tyranny and superstition, always allied to one another. The defects to which his own side were liable were avarice and ambition, also always twinned.

His heresies were the common currency of radical circles, with their powerful emphasis on this world. Where Milton was unique was in his vast attempt to combine these heresies into a coherent system, and to put it forward in Latin with a view to reSECTIONing the Protestant world. His ambition, his dedication, where what he believed to be God's cause was at stake, knew no bounds. In the *De Doctrina Christiana* and in the last pamphlets we find him still repaying in the international obligations which he had incurred

Together with the re-imposition of the censorship, the failure of Milton's audience enabled and forced him to return to poetry. Poetry had its own logic and rhetoric, and into Poetry he could pour all the conflicts, doubts, uncertainties that had racked him as he played the propagandist.

in Italy in the thirties. The optimism of the forties, focused on England as the chosen nation, had been succeeded by the beleaguered defensive nationalism of the fifties, the near-despair of the sixties when he felt he had no country. In the seventies hope stirred again.

The failure of Milton's audience was not, as it turned out, unmitigated disaster. Together with the reimposition of the censorship, it enabled and forced him to abandon left-handed prose propaganda and return to poetry. Now he could write for a select audience, no longer worrying about problems

Some of Milton's ideas are much advanced. But unfortunately, the areas in which he was striking blows for freedom are areas in which he now seems old-fashioned — e.g. his advocacy of religious liberty, of divorce in the sphere of domestic liberty, of political liberty and so on.

of communication, no longer trying ever new styles, none of them totally to his satisfaction. Now he could listen to the Muse and write as she dictated, confident that those would hear who were fit to hear. In poetry he no longer had to pretend that grey was white because it was whiter than black. He could give the devil his due, be as ambiguous and ambivalent as he knew the real world was, without feeling that he was betraying the good cause. Poetry had its own logic and its own rhetoric, and into poetry he could pour all the conflicts, the doubts, the uncertainties that had racked him as he played the propagandist. But in it too he could express the moral certainty, far beyond rational prose argument, of what he knew to be right: Adam's love for Eve, the assurance that worldly strong will be subverted by things deemed weak, that the perfect man will miraculously stand in face of all temptations, that even a failed leader can

make good by standing and waiting for the moment in which the Lord delivers the Philistines into his hands, made strong again, as he had delivered the Scots into those of Oliver Cromwell at Dunbar.

Into the last poems Milton could pour, too, his astonishingly surviving sensuous delight in the plenitude of God's creation, in the overgrown thickets of the earthly Paradise and in the burning brightness of the tigress Dalila, as well as in words, their sonority, their overtones, their ambiguities, their use to conceal as well as to communicate. F. T. Prince illustrates Milton's 'armoury of puns and jingles' in *Paradise Lost*. The sheer vitality of the blind man in his late fifties and sixties is astonishing, the man who had worked so hard and suffered so much, who should have been cynical or self-defensive, and who instead summons God to judgment and finally pronounces him not guilty. I cannot think of Milton as a tragic figure in those last years when, in defeat, he wrote *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. He was not only affirming the survival of a remnant; he was proclaiming that from these would grow an hundredfold, that victory would still come in the end, however tragic the present, provided we do not lose our heads or our hearts.

Milton's radicalism, I have suggested, had its limits. On occasion it was cut short by social considerations of which he was only partly aware. This relates to the paradox of his passionate and simultaneous belief in both liberty and discipline. Counterposing liberty to licence assumes certain social stabilities as a check on the intellectual iconoclasm which also attracted him. Milton's rejections of conservative views are rational : his rejections to the left are emotional, social. 'For who loves that must first be wise and good' raises questions of definition, which Milton consistently begged. His contemporary Thomas Hobbes had a short way with those who used words like 'justice', 'reason', 'liberty', 'goodness' in Milton's manner. 'Their moral philosophy is but a description of their own passions', Hobbes wrote. 'Whatsoever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth good.' Milton's Whiggish use of such words covers a Whiggish double-think about equality.

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Milton never resolved his tensions between liberty and discipline, passion and reason, human love and God’s providence, the necessity of individualism and of society, radicalism and elitism. In the great poems he tried to face up to the brute facts which he called God. It seemed that only divine intervention could solve the problems of the English Revolution.

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Part of the difficulty in assessing Milton is that some of his ideas are so advanced that we tend to treat him as though he were our contemporary. Unfortunately, the three areas in which he rightly felt that he was striking blows for freedom are areas in which he now seems old-fashioned. His superb advocacy of religious liberty seems deficient in that it is restricted to Protestants. But this is because international Catholicism no longer poses the threat which it did in the seventeenth century. Catholic emancipation now seems to us the acid test of sincerity and consistency in this respect. But Catholic emancipation is a nineteenth-century phrase. ‘The emancipation of Antichrist’ would not have seemed a good slogan to the English revolutionaries, nor indeed to many Englishmen so long as Louis XIV’s France appeared to threaten national independence. In the sphere of domestic liberty, Milton’s advocacy of divorce for incompatibility now seems excessively male-orientated. Again we have to put Milton back into the seventeenth century (and to remember *Jane Eyre* and *Jude the Obscure*) to see how advanced he was in his day. In the sphere of political liberty Milton suffers in twentieth-century eyes because he was no democrat. I have tried to explain the Recognizing Milton’s contradictions, and placing them in their social context, is essential to understanding the poet. ‘When a man tells us unprovoked lies about himself’, Tillyard mildly observed, ‘you may reasonably infer that his emotions are seriously involved.’ By saying in *Paradise Lost* that he was unskilled in and unstudious of the literary artifices of the romances, Milton ‘betrays the deep feelings which made him turn against them.’ We should look out for all the points at which Milton is fiercest — in attacking his former allies among the Presbyterian clergy or the Long Parliament, in denouncing mere humanist culture in *Paradise Regained*, in his contemptuous references to the common people or in his discussion of the relation of the sexes. Here Milton is arguing with himself, or feels that his ideals or standards have let him down. His anger springs from disappointment; it may be anger with himself rather than with those it was ostensibly directed against.

Milton never resolved his tensions — between liberty and discipline, passion and reason, human love and God’s providence, the necessity of individualism and the necessity of society, radicalism and élitism. They ultimately perhaps seemed insoluble on earth: the pressures of the everyday world worked against the intensity of Milton’s inner vision. But he tried again and again — in *Areopagitica*,

in defending and warning Cromwell, in his appeal to the virtuous few in *The Ready and Easy Way*. At the end he was forced into withdrawal from all churches, despite his continuing belief in the godly remnant. In the great poems he tried to face up to the brute facts which he called God. It seemed that only divine intervention could solve the problems of the English Revolution : near hopelessness about effective political action underlies both *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Yet if no one but God can produce the solutions, what becomes of human freedom ? And had God shown himself worthy of this trust ? Milton's is a tension between decorum and right reason on the one hand, and on the other the radical revolutionaries of individual consciences through which right reason was expressed. The mediating term was 'the middling sort', among whom he had seen the greatest hope of finding good men who would love freedom. Milton's ideological contradictions must all be related to his social position, and to the nature of the revolution in which he took part. When even the middling sort let him down in 1660, he still wanted to fight on : but he could see no solution beyond concentrating on small things in the hope that great may come of them when God gives the sign. Reformism was forced on him by the failure of the Revolution ; he no longer hoped that the masses of the population might bring about the sort of revolution he wanted to see. Moses Wall proved right : centuries of economic development were necessary before solutions were possible on earth without divine intervention.

I tried to suggest, I hope not too schematically, that after the eclipse of the traditional culture of court and bishops, Milton found his allegiance divided between the culture of the Protestant ethic and the lower-class third culture ; and that this may underlie many of the tensions revealed in his writings. Newton and Locke, who shared many of Milton's secret heresies and tensions, were of a younger generation, and lived on into the world of triumphant Whiggery. But they still, like Milton, censored themselves before publication. Milton concealed his views so successfully that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries he came to be regarded as the orthodox Puritan poet. Newton— secret anti-Trinitarian and millenarian — was seen by Blake as the personification of rational science; Locke — anti-Trinitarian and millenarian, Arminian and Mortalist — as the personification of rational philosophy. Against them Blake looked upon Milton as a potential ally. But in fact all three were furtively attracted by many of the ideas of the radical underground which were not to survive the triumph of 'Newtonian' science and 'Lockean' philosophy and politics. There are many ironies here to be incorporated in the history of English popular culture when it comes to be written.

Agonistes is a fittingly ambiguous word to describe Milton's relation to his public in the first century and a half after the publication of 'Paradise Lost', as he was deceiving his audience whilst entertaining them.

In 1642 Milton used prophetic words which he must have recalled in 1659-60 : 'Timorous and ungrateful, the church of God is now again at the foot of her insulting enemies : and thou bewailest. What matters it for thee or thy bewailing ? When time was thou couldst not find a syllable of all that

thou hadst read or studied to utter in her behalf. Yet ease and leisure was given thee for thy retired thoughts out of the sweat of other men.' 'Of other men': the reference is not just to his father, but social. Milton was as aware of his responsibilities to society as any guilt-ridden intellectual of to-day. Milton had passed his own test, had not spared himself. 'If I be not heard nor believed, the event will bear me witness to have spoken truth; and I in the meanwhile have borne witness, not out of season, to the church and to my country.' He early came to see his role as that of the dedicated national poet. In *Of Reformation* he shows himself in the wings, ready to come on stage and celebrate successful revolutionary action. In *Areopagitica* he anticipated a more positive leading role for learned men, and felt a greater confidence in popular creativity. He certainly did not think of himself then as an aloof and austere scholar. Disappointment at the reception of his divorce pamphlets made him want to cut himself off from his too radical admirers; he was more isolated in his self-portraits than in reality. In *Eikonoklastes* and the *Defences of the People of England* he seemed to have attained the position of leader, smashing the idols, defending 'the most heroic and exemplary achievements since the foundation of the world', those of the English republican nation. Even in the *De Doctrina Christiana* he still aspired to teach European Protestants in the traditional English manner. *Paradise Regained* renounces some of this. Where is this great deliverer now? But we must not exaggerate the renunciation: the brief epic ends with the Son of God entering on his active mission of preaching. In *Samson Agonistes* the emphasis is again on action after preparatory waiting; perhaps Milton looked forward to publication of the *De Doctrina* as his destruction of the Temple, a secret time-bomb which would ultimately explode in the face of the orthodox. He was not to know how long it would be before it saw the light of day, or how near it came to never being published at all. But he must have smiled with grim irony as men praised *Paradise Lost* who would have recoiled in horror at the heresies of the *De Doctrina*.

The Word *Agonistes*, we are told, means not only wrestler, struggler, but also one who deceives whilst entertaining. Saurat saw Milton *Agonistes*, 'wrecked in hope, blind and poor, ... meditating and perfecting the glorious revenge of *Paradise Lost*'. Milton, like Samson, was deceiving his audience whilst entertaining them; he was God's fool at the same time as he was God's Wrestler and champion. Job, so influential for the structure and tone of *Samson Agonistes*, was also depicted as a wrestler. *Agonistes* is a fittingly ambiguous word to describe Milton's relation to his public in the first century and a half after publication of *Paradise Lost*. Now that nearly as long again has elapsed since the appearance of the *De Doctrina*, we might begin to see Milton's point.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Is the term 'Agonistes', appropriate to describe Milton? Justify your answer.
2. Write a critical note on the relevance of Milton.

UNIT 8 (d): MILTON AND POSTERITY

I have called Milton a Whig, a revolutionary but no democrat. But though this places him in one respect, it does scant justice to his heretical radicalism. Milton was used by the Whigs in 1688 and after, but not all Whigs applauded regicide. It all depended in whose pocket the King was. Milton's revolutionary principles may have inspired the Calves' Head Club ; they had no serious appeal for men of reason and compromise. But if, for instance, the *De Doctrina Christiana* had achieved publication in 1676, what would have been its effect on intellectual history ? *Paradise Lost* could never have been built up as the classic of orthodoxy, and the image of Milton would have looked very different. It was exceptionally bad luck for the poet that the accident of historical development made *Paradise Lost* as a bad model for later poets as T. S. Eliot himself has been ; and that Milton's dearest and best possession was published too late, when religious heresy was no longer revolutionary. That it should have been translated and edited by a bishop was only the last twist of the knife. The dynamite of the sixteen-sixties became the damp squib of the eighteen-twenties — an embarrassment to Milton's respectable admirers, but one that could be ignored. By this time Milton seemed out of the main stream of republican radicalism. He was no less opposed to clericalism than Voltaire, but since Voltaire those who wished to crush *l'infâme* had different alternatives. Milton's alternatives. Milton's radicalism was still rooted in the Bible, in Christian heresy, in the dialectical thinking of the pre-Newtonian age. Only through Blake was this element communicated to the nineteenth century.

So we must not see Milton only as a precursor of eighteenth-century unitarians and deists, of Priestley and Paine ; not only of the radical Whig republicans, the Commonwealthmen, a man to whom Francis Place and the Chartists looked back with affection and admiration ; not only a figure in the international history of revolution, influencing Jefferson and the American revolutionaries, Mirabeau and the French revolutionaries. He also influenced Herzen and the Russian romantic revolutionaries, and this reminds us that Voltaire said that no one before Milton had spoken in favour of romantic love. Even if not strictly true, it was a striking thing for Voltaire to say : and it links *Paradise Lost* with the English romantic poets, with Blake again, with Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley. As against the selfishness, hypocrisy and fear of death taught by priests and churches, Blake saw Milton's role as being.

to teach men to despise death
and to go on
In fearless majesty annihilating self,
laughing to scorn
Thy laws and terrors,
shaking down thy synagogues as webs.

Just because Milton participated in the dialogue between two cultures in seventeenth-century England, he looks forward to Blake as well as to Paine, to romanticism as well as to deistic rationalism. Shelley reunited something of the two revolutionary traditions. Milton was Freud's favourite poet.

The curve of Milton's posthumous reputation is not entirely haphazard. 'Works of inspiration are always being annexed by orthodoxy, which hardens itself against every new incursion of the spirit' : Joseph Wicksteed's words are applied to Milton by J. A. Wittreich, who speaks of commentators 'surreptitiously snaring the poet in their own net of orthodoxy'. During the century and more after more after the defeat and suppression of the

third culture Milton became the great Puritan poet. Every decade of the eighteenth century saw on average ten editions of *Paradise Lost* and seven of Milton's complete poems. A change came only with the revival of political activity among the lower and middle classes. Dr. Johnson smelt danger and roundly denounced Milton's ideas. But the radicals picked them up and

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emphasized unorthodoxies which had been ignored since the revolutionary decades. Blake, who certainly knew about the Ranter past, picked Milton out as the historical figure with whom the radicals' argument must be continued. He gave them the last word against Milton by claiming that he was of the devil's party without knowing it ; Shelley called Satan the hero of *Paradise Lost*, though in a sense different from Dryden and Dennis. The reforming Major Cartwright associated enthusiasm with love of livery and hatred of corruption.

The revival of Milton's radical reputation was accompanied by similar revivals of trends which had been suppressed for over a century. Sociological history was picked up by the Scottish school where Harrington had left it, political economy by Adam Smith where Petty had left it. The advance of chemistry, checked since Boyle, was resumed by Priestley and Lavoisier. Political radicals, from Wilkes to the Chartists, looked back to their seventeenth-century precursors, to the Levellers and Milton. After a long struggle, the Reform Bill of 1832 re-enacted something very like the Parliamentary franchise of 1654. Robert Owen and some Chartists rediscovered ideas of communal production, though there is no evidence that they read Winstanley : men did not need to read Milton to reject tithes. English society in the age of the French Revolution had caught up with the teeming freedom of the English Revolution. The publication in 1825 of the *De Doctrina Christiana* ought to have been a match to gunpowder ; but by that date political radicalism had left religious heresy behind.

Chartism failed no less than Levellers, Diggers and Fifth Monarchists. Samson's hair was trimmed again. From Macaulay onwards Milton was re-annexed to orthodoxy, this time to English liberalism. In our own day the heirs of the third culture are waving their locks again. The attempt to dislodge Milton having failed, the neo-Christians tried to annex him. In the nineteen-fifties, the decade of the

coldest war, which proclaimed the end of ideology, which saw Shakespeare as a Christian humanist and not much else, an effort was made to deny that Milton had really been a heretic at all. History has shown up the superficiality of pretending that ideology can cease to exist in a class-divided society (though, to do them justice, some of the end-of-ideologists imagined that the welfare state had abolished class divisions too-alas !). Shakespeare and Milton have escaped from the little nets which were cast around them. Saurat, Caudwell, Wolfe, Kelley, Empson, Ricks, have all helped to restore Milton to his proper place in the English tradition.

Milton was *sui generis*, wedded and glued to no forms, the great eclectic. But he was open to the left and closed to the right — intolerant of papists though embracing all varieties of Protestantism, merciless to the Philistine aristocracy and priests but merciful to the excluded vulgar, linking himself with the radicals just as far as his strong sense of the necessity of bourgeois society would permit.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Doctor Samuel Johnson — ‘The Life of Milton’
2. T. S. Eliot — *Selected Essays*, ‘Milton I’, ‘Milton II’.
3. E. M. W. Tillyard — Milton.
4. C. S. Lewis — *Preface to Paradise Lost*.
5. Helen Gardner — *A Reading of Paradise Lost*.

BLOCK III
UNIT 9 (a):
Thomas More's *UTOPIA*

Content Structure

UNIT 9 (a): Introduction of Thomas More: His Life and Works
(b): Brief Summary of *Utopia*

UNIT 9 (a):
INTRODUCTION TO THOMAS MORE: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Thomas More (1478-1535) was born in London on 7 February, 1477. He belongs to an affluent family. His father, Mr. John More, was a barrister and in his later life he became a judge. More went to St. Anthony's school at the age of thirteen. In his later life More became a page boy for Reverend John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England. It was a prestigious event in the life of young Thomas More. Morton highly appreciated the intellectual potentials of young Thomas. More got the opportunity to study at Oxford University; it was partially an arrangement made by Reverend John Morton. Thomas More studied at Oxford University from 1492-1494. He studied Classical languages like Latin, Greek, Mathematics, French, and History. More developed interest in law and he after returning London in 1494 started studying law at New Inn. He studied there for two years. He was quickly gaining skill in legal matters and he started working as an appointed lecturer. The year 1497 was a remarkable year for More. In the year he met the famous humanist thinker Erasmus of Rotterdam. From this year onwards he started giving lectures on both legal and philosophical subjects.

In his adulthood More was contemplating on the idea of joining the church. More stayed at a monastery for more than four years. The monastery was located very close to Lincoln's Inn. More's friends and acquaintances told that to More the life of a priest was a noble way of living life. And he aspired to attain that prestigious way of living his life. More's deep respect for the life of a priest gets reflected in his magnum opus titled *Utopia* where More has designed the lives of Utopians modelled on the lives of monastic communities. Though More was ambitious in his early adulthood to live the life of a priest, but due to circumstantial differences he left the thought of joining a monastery and started to concentrate on Law. In the year 1501 More was elected as a parliament member and he got the opportunity to serve the House of Commons. In the year 1505 More tied the knot with Jane Colte of Newhall. Jane died in the year 1511 after giving birth to four children: Margaret, Elizabeth, Cecilia, and John. Later More married Alice Middleton who was seven years older than More

More gained his reputation as a famous lawyer in the year 1510 and he became Under-Sheriff of London. The next ten years More's life finds its smooth pace and approbation. He served the king and received the pension of hundred pounds for life. During this period More travels extensively as an ambassador of the king. He travelled to Flanders and Calais and France in order to protect the British commercial interest. In the year 1516 *Utopia* was published and it gave More wide fame and recognition. It is being considered by critics till date More's most successful literary creation. More accompanied King Henry VIII to a meeting with Francis I of France. More represented the king so well that after his return to London King Henry VIII made him king's sub-treasurer and conferred on him the title of knight in the year 1521. In later life More was elected as the High Steward of Cambridge University and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

In the following years More wrote a number of works answering Martin Luther's indictment against Catholicism in 1523. In order to defend King Henry VIII More wrote *Responsio ad Lutherum*. In 1529 More succeeded Cardinal Wolsey as Chancellor of England – a post that had never been occupied by a layman. More suffered from religious persecution. In 1532 he resigned from his position because he disagreed to accept King Henry VIII as the head of the church of England. He was imprisoned at the Tower of London, and accused of treason. More was beheaded in the year 1535. The title of saint had been conferred on More after his death.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Briefly describe the political life and student life of Thomas More.

WORKS

Thomas More tried his hands in the historical writings before writing his magnum opus *Utopia*. He started writing *History of King Richard III* between the years 1512-1519. It remained as an unfinished writing. It was published after More's death. The *history of King Richard III* dealt with the Renaissance history. Scholarly opinions on the book appreciate the literary skill and More's wonderful skill of handling the classical motifs. Though More aimed at writing a historical study but the book never achieved that level of perfection to represent historical facts with accuracy. Some consider the book as a medium to expose royal tyranny. *The History of Richard III* was composed and published both in Latin and English. Each version of the book was written separately by More. The importance of *The History of King Richard III* lies in the fact that the book was considered as a major influence for Shakespearean play *Richard III*.

More's remarkable literary creation is *Utopia*. It was written in Latin. More finished the novel in 1516 and Erasmus published it. The book was translated into English and published in England in

1551, which is really a long time after More's execution. In the year 1684 the book's translation gains its fame. More himself appears as a character. More and a traveller cum narrator Raphael Hythloday constitute the conversations in the book. The name Raphael Hythloday appears as an allusion. It alludes to the name of angel Raphael. In their conversation they were discussing the social customs and political beliefs in the imaginary land, called Utopia. In More's imagination the concept of the imaginary land appears as a foil to the corruption and turmoils of the Europe in the-then time. Quite interestingly, in the imaginary land there is no lawyer, because the legal issues are so simple. In Utopia, men and women both have education. The utopians believe in the communal ownership of property rather than individual ownership of property. In the imaginary land there is religious tolerance, though a sect of atheists exists but they are despised by the religious utopians. The riches are despised by the utopians and a person without any belief on God and afterlife is also being condemned. Interestingly, More's concept of a land where equality should be the basic principle paves the path in later time to the formation of Marxist thought.

Utopia gives More fame and recognition. At the same time it gives birth to controversy. More's outstanding work finally gives birth to a new genre. It is known as utopian Fiction. The opposite to Utopian fiction is dystopian fiction. In English lexicon a new word has been added "utopia" which means nowhere or no place. Finally, the term utopia signifies an imaginary land where all difficulties cease to exist and life moves smoothly. More's work has left its deep impact on a number of literary works which have been shaped by More's idea of an imaginary land where equality is the guiding principle. Examples of such Works are: *New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon, *Erewhon* by Samuel Butler, and *Candida* by Voltaire. The concept of an equal and perfect society was conceived earlier by Aristotle and Plato. It is evident that More's knowledge on the classical literature made him acquainted with the belief of an ideal society which was imagined by both the classical masters Aristotle and Plato.

Apart from *Utopia* More composed a number of Latin Poems, *Responsio ad Lutherum*, *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529,1530), *Supplication of Souls* (1529), *Letter Against Frith* (1532), *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (1532, 1533), *Apology* (1533), *Debellation of Salem and Bizance* (1533), and *The Answer to A Poisoned Book* (1533).

Let Us Check Our Progress:

1. Write down names of few important works by Thomas More.

UNIT 9 (B): BRIEF SUMMARY OF *UTOPIA*

Utopia is divided into two books: Book I and Book II. In book I at More's house Hythloday, More along with More's friend Peter Giles were discussing the stories of adventures of Hythloday.

As an explorer he has visited numerous lands and had witnessed different customs of the people. In this regard, Hythloday mentions about his visit to the land Utopia. The interesting political affairs of the land attracted More's attention and the second book is entirely devoted to the discussions about customs of the land Utopia.

Book II has been divided into several sections. This part is largely written based on Hythloday's experiences in the land Utopia. Hythloday describes in this book the history of the land called Utopia, its religion, politics system, philosophy, and people. Hythloday goes on saying that Utopia is an old land. It was conquered by general Utopus 1760 years before Hythloday's arrival on the land. He civilized the land and according to his name the place has been named as Utopia. The utopians are very disciplined people. They are not Christians but they have their own God. The Atheists exist in utopia but they are despised. In Utopia the rulers are selected by the order of scholars. The language, social customs, dress, religion, architecture, and education are same in the fifty four cities of Utopia. Laws and social customs heavily shape Individual's life. A child is shifted to another household if he is keen on learning another trade. The utopians believe in afterlife, and they believe after death the spirits of their ancestors take care of them. The marriage custom is also different in utopia from other lands. Before marriage, a would be bride is presented as naked in front of the would be groom, and in this entire event the wise old women remain present. For such innovativemarriage custom utopians posit the logic that before buying a livestock people use to judge very meticulously whether it is worthy enough of the money they are going to spend on it or not. Therefore, in this marriage custom, why do not people check whether the bride is suitable or not. The logic of the utopians reinforces the notion of objectification. It means that a woman is being viewed as a commodity or object. Her intrinsic worth as a human being is overlooked. This is absolutely a chauvinist thought.

At the beginning of the book II More writes a letter to his friend Peter Giles. In the letter he writes about the interesting experiences of Raphael Hythloday which he has composed in a book form. Interestingly, More ends book II with a letter. This letter is Peter Giles's reply to More's previous letter. Quite interestingly, More throughout the narrative mentions the fictional quality of the imaginary land Utopia. In fact, this fictional representation of the land Utopia with all its principles of equality, and justice turn out to be a plea on More's part to rejuvenate the corruption and evils of the sixteenth century Europe.

Let Us Check Our Progress:

1. Who are the three characters in Utopia? And mention briefly their roles in the narrative.
2. Write a summary of *Utopia*.
3. Critically evaluate the relevance of Book I of *Utopia*.

UNIT 10 (a): *UTOPIA* THEMES

Content Structure:

UNIT 10 (a): Utopia Theme

(b): Origin of the Term “Utopia”

(c): Source of the text

The concept of the imaginary land utopia basically serves as a model for an ideal commonwealth. More in his magnum opus *utopia* has raised important critical issues that arrest attention of the scholars since its publication. One of the important issues in the text is the letters which have been exchanged between Thomas More and his friend Peter Giles. The letters in a way, give birth to the fact that the imaginary land is not solely the concept of More, rather he is trying to breach the gap between the fact and fiction of the concept of “utopia”. The imagination of the ideal land is coloured by the fantasy of the traveller Raphael Hythloday. More’s intention is to represent the imaginative fantasy of Raphael Hythloday with a mooring of reality. Therefore the narrative design of *Utopia* serves three purposes simultaneously:

(a): More continuously keeps his readers aware of the fact that he is merely combining the experiences of Raphael Hythloday into the readable form through his narrative.

(b): The text *Utopia* generically belongs to the category of fiction ; at the same time it has elements of non-fiction. The examples of non-fictional elements in *Utopia* are the letters which are being exchanged between More and his friend Peter Giles. Therefore, it becomes very difficult on part of scholars and readers to attribute any particular generic identity on *Utopia*. It seems like a fiction as it deals with the imaginative fantasy of Raphael Hythloday, but curiously it has non-fictional elements as well and the coexistence of both the fictional and non-fictional elements in *Utopia* makes the task problematic to attribute any fixed generic identity on the text.

(c): The narrative design of *Utopia* serves satirical purpose on part of Thomas More. The fictional representation of the ideal state utopia appears as a foil to the existing nations. The flawless socio-political features in the imaginary land, in a roundabout way point to the innumerable loopholes and corruptions that do exist in the real nations.

The aspect of religious tolerance in *Utopia* is a broad commentary on the religious intolerance and the highly publicized feuds between Protestantism and Catholicism. The aspect of communal ownership of property and the dismissal of individual interest in order to safeguard the interest of the nation –are considered as a stepping stone towards the concept and acceptance of Marxist ideology in the 1990s. The notion of equality and justice that the utopians believe also in a way gears critical

thoughts towards the emergence of Marxist ideology of a nation which will be functioning on the principles of equality and justice.

Let Us Check Our Progress:

1. Comment on the narrative technique of Thomas More in *Utopia*.

10 (b): ORIGIN OF THE TERM “UTOPIA”

Thomas More was introducing the new word “utopia” in English lexicon. The word comes from Greek origin. The word “utopia” is a combined form of the two Greek words “ou” and “topos”. “ou” means in English “no” or “not” and “topos” means “place”. Therefore, the meaning of the term “utopia” means “no place”. The term utopia signifies an imaginary ideal place where government and socio-political structures are corruption free.

10 (c): SOURCE OF *UTOPIA*

Critical views on *Utopia* claim that it is a work on the tradition of Renaissance Humanism. Renaissance Humanism is a further development of the concept of Humanism during the period of Renaissance in England. Humanism talks about the value and significance of humans in the created world of God. Humanist philosophy attributes on man the dignity and honour of being the supreme creation of God. Man is being viewed in Humanist cult as “animale rationale” which means man is the rational animal, and therefore, he is the best creation of God. In medieval time human life was condemned. Renaissance Humanism is a new form of humanist thought which posits the view that human life is something which should be celebrated. Man is capable of performing outstanding feats. Critics have placed *Utopia* in this tradition of Renaissance Humanism and in this endeavour they find parallels and even contrasts with *Utopia* and other texts which have been written in this tradition. Even they find literary echoes of *Utopia* in Greek and Latin texts. Critical views on *Utopia* has established that no place is actually a place and to establish the view they present examples of such ideal commonwealth from other literary works. Thomas More’s *Utopia* deliberately parodies “Las Casas’s first plan for the reform of the encomienda system of the Spanish colonists in North America to the Marxist- Freudian reading included in Richard Halpern’s *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* and finally to Jeffrey Knapp’s *An Empire Nowhere*.” *Utopia* can be read as a blueprint for English Imperialism. Eminent critic Colin Starnes’s reading of *Utopia* finds similarities between Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Plato’s *The Republic*. Knapp finds apart from general similarities between the two books phrases, and ideas which he thinks that More has borrowed from Plato’s work. Apart from Plato, Aristotle’s *Poetics* also serves as an important source for More’s *Utopia*. More in the two books of *Utopia* tries to find an answer to the problems of constructing an ideal land.

UNIT 11 (a):

ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT *UTOPIA*

Content Structure:

UNIT 11 (a): Analysis

Thomas More in *Utopia* wonderfully uses names of the characters to convey a thought and at the same time it reinforces Plato's influence on More's thought pattern to write such a book like *Utopia*. It has been accepted unanimously that lot of similarities exist between Plato's the *Republic* and More's *Utopia*. The name Raphael Hythloday is being used by More to convey a thought and also it bears testimony to More's being influenced by Plato. The name Raphael is an allusion of the archangel Raphael and it means "the healing of God". The surname Hythlodæus was made up by More. It is a combination of two Greek roots – most probably meaning "knowing nonsense". Therefore the meaning of the name Raphael Hythloday can be translated into English like "the healing (one) of God, knowing nonsense". The character of Raphael Hythloday has many similarities of the character called Socrates who appears in Plato's the *Republic*. Plato represents Socrates in his work as the philosopher and the one who devotes his entire life for the quest of truth. More begins his narrative in *Utopia* by describing the character of Raphael Hythloday. The character sketch of Hythloday by More at the beginning of *Utopia* justifies More's intention to emulate the character of Socrates as described by Plato in his the *Republic*. Many scholarly observations on the character of Raphael Hythloday has established the fact that "More characterizes Hythloday largely in terms of traditional attributes of the philosopher". More intended his readers to see Raphael's position as similar to that of Socrates in the *Republic*. There is remarkable likeness between the two characters Raphael and Socrates. Like Plato, More describes Raphael in Book I of *Utopia* as a "*vir eximius*" which means "an extraordinary man". He is just like Socrates because he has devoted his entire life to philosophy. He is "desirous neither of riches nor of power" and he has freed himself from family concerns. He refuses to enter political life. Peter Giles in his formal manner of introducing Raphael Hythloday to More mentions that just like Ulysses, Raphael Hythloday has travelled all over the world. More painstakingly creates the character of Raphael Hythloday in order to represent him as the wisest man in sixteenth century Europe. Therefore More describes Hythloday as the traveller who travels extensively throughout the world and out of his adventures he gains wisdom. Here is a difference between Socrates and Raphael Hythloday. Socrates never travels outside Athens. More deliberately creates this difference in his character sketch of Raphael in order to make the character convincing to the sixteenth century European readers. The sixteenth century itself is being considered as the era of expansion and exploration. When a character lives in such a

time without his exposure to the outer world he would not be accepted by the European learned readers as the most wise man of the time.

Besides More's *Utopia* and Plato's the *Republic* both have common similarities. First of all in both the books the narrators are using dialogue form. Both the narrators of these two texts have raised a problem and the rest part of the narrative has been used as an attempt to find an answer or remedy to the problem. In case of Thomas More and Plato the nature of the problem and its solutions are obviously different. In Book I of *Utopia* More finds a problem and at the same time he acknowledges that the immediate solution to the problem is difficult to find out. Just like Plato who in his opening section of the *Republic* raises the question what is Justice? And in the subsequent chapters of the text he tries to find a solution to the question what is justice? And how does it work? The two authors, Plato and More both have raised two problems: in Plato's case in his examination of the origin of a state as the place to discover what justice is; in More's case, to the island of Utopia he tries to discover what the ideal commonwealth should be. Eminent critic Surtz observes that, "the interlocutors in both the *Republic* and the *Utopia* retire to a private residence after a religious ceremony in a seaport."

UNIT 12 (a): CRITICAL RECEPTIONS

Content Structure:

UNIT 12 (a): Critical Receptions

References

Assignments

More's satirical intentions and his use of irony are evident in *Utopia*. More himself wants his learned readers to derive meanings from his work which are associated with the position of man in the sixteenth century Europe. Besides, More wants his work to be treated as a kind of political theory. The personal and intellectual contexts in *Utopia* are highly connotative. They mean various things. More uses anachronism in his work where he praises men like Bude for establishing the context of the past more authoritatively. He castigates men like Tyndale. Jackson Boswell's study of citations of More in *Short Title Catalogue* has established the fact that the sixteenth century European readers derive from the text a wide variety of meanings. The book has achieved a sense of ambiguity. More's playful handling of the subject matter, his use of irony, satire, and anachronism – all of them enhance the aspect of ambiguity in *Utopia*. The book is an imaginative and satiric treatment of the human condition. There are significant similarities between the themes of *Utopia* and of More's career. His decision to become the king's servant in the year 1517 is followed by the publication of his book *Utopia*. The subject matter of *Utopia*, its allusiveness, and very clear relationship to classic texts associate the text with political philosophy. It is indeed a Renaissance text. Here the humanist cult of Renaissance, its growing emphasis on human dignity, and value of an anthropocentric world are prioritized.

The theme of community is an important aspect of *Utopia*. The system of community in *Utopia* with its attendant features like communal living, common dining, plain dress, and familial confession are not appeals to the responsible self but correctives against misconduct and noncompliance. There are punishments for infractions. There are rewards for demonstrable virtue. A woman will nurse other mothers' children. The utopians set up statues of "distinguished men" in the marketplace "to preserve the memory of their good deeds and to spur on citizens to emulate the glory of their ancestors". There are conditioning pressures to virtue. There are similar social pressures against vice and even against such minor signs of individualism as eating at home rather than in the dining hall. Dominie Baker Smith observes that there is no room for the will there and no privacy on which to exercise it. From Raphael's account we do not learn the names of the utopians. What the readers get to know is the name of the founder king Utopus. Time is also absent in *Utopia*. The insistence on

the communal ownership of property in *Utopia* is a stepping stone to the move towards Marxist thought.

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ASSIGNMENTS

1. Write a note on the significance of the letters which have been exchanged between Thomas More and his friend Peter Giles
2. Write a note on Raphael Hythloday.
3. Write a note on the problematic generic identity of *Utopia*.
4. Briefly summarize the theme of *Utopia*.
5. Write a note on the marriage custom of *Utopia*.
6. What are the religious beliefs of the utopians?
7. Write a note on the statement that “Book I and Book II in *Utopia* are basically complementary to each other”.
8. Describe the houses in *Utopia*.
9. What is Renaissance Humanism? Do you consider *Utopia* adheres to the thoughts of Renaissance Humanism? Elucidate.
10. How does Thomas More co-mingle the elements of fact and fiction in *Utopia*?
11. Mention briefly about the other literary texts which can be considered as sources for *Utopia*.
12. What are the similarities between Raphael Hythloday and Socrates?

BLOCK IV
UNIT 13
BACON'S 'ESSAYS'

Content Structure :

UNIT 13(a): Objectives

UNIT 13(b): Bacon's Life and Works

UNIT 13(c): Bacon's Works other than three 'Essays'

UNIT 13 (a): OBJECTIVES

The present study material on Bacon's 'Essays' intends to acquaint the students with Bacon, his life, his works and more particularly, with the 'Essays' he wrote. There are, however, only three essays, prescribed in ODL syllabus in English. But the essays 'Of Truth', 'Of Death', 'Of Love' are representative in the sense that they give the readers a fair idea about the different aspects of Bacon's literary art — his style of writing and his pragmatic outlook on life. The study materials will provide specific guidelines to the students as to how to read and appreciate Bacon's 'Essays'.

UNIT 13(b): BACON'S LIFE AND WORKS

The full name of Bacon was Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon was at the same time a statesman, a philosopher and an essayist. As a thinker who contemplates on life morally and philosophically, Bacon remains one of the most formative minds in European thought for more than four hundred years; as a statesman he reached the highest political and judicial office (The Lord Chancellorship) from which, however, he was dismissed for accepting bribes in 1621. The combination of greatness of thought with mediocrity of conduct provoked Alexander Pope's description of him, a century later, as 'the wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind.'

This book is Distinctive for its modernity of approach to the pursuit of knowledge and to the obstacles to it arising from mistaken uses of mind.

His strictly philosophical works comprised notably three books : *An Advancement of Learning* (1605); an expansion of the Advancement, *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623); *Novam Organum* (1620). Apart from the *Advancement*, Bacon wrote his philosophy in Latin because of his belief that it would remain indefinitely the language of international learning. Bacon's famous works in English are his *History of Henry VII* (1622); *New Atlantis* (1626), a work that Bacon could not complete. Before I write anything on his 'Essays' in a generalized way, I would like to draw your attention to Bacon's other works.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write a brief note on Bacon's life and work ?
2. How did Alexander Pope describe Bacon ?

UNIT 13 (c): BACON'S WORKS OTHER THAN THE 'ESSAYS'

The Advancement of Learning : It is a philosophical treatise, published in 1605 in English; Bacon later expanded it in his Latin work *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623). The book, addressed to King James I, suggests ways in which the prestige of the pursuit of knowledge can be enhanced and its methods improved. It is divided into two parts : Book I treats first those characteristics that contribute to the dignity of the life of learning. Book II is a survey of the branches of learning, and of the mental faculties. *The Advancement* is distinctive for the modernity of its approach to the pursuit of knowledge and to the obstacles to it arising from mistaken uses of the mind. As a work of

"The New Instrument": Describes a method of gaining power over nature through a complete and correctly founded system of knowledge. The obstacles to knowledge are the idols of tribe, of cave, of Market and of theatre.

literature, it is distinguished for the terseness and lucidity of Bacon's prose. *Novum Organum* (1620) : The title bears the meaning of 'The New Instrument'.

The work is written in Latin. Bacon's aim is to describe a method of gaining power over nature through a complete and correctly founded system of knowledge. Knowledge must be acquired by experience and experiment, that is, inductively. The obstacles to true knowledge are false assumption which Bacon calls 'idols'. These are of four kinds. The Idols of the Tribe are common human weaknesses such as allowing the emotion to interfere with the reason; the Idols of the Cave are individual weaknesses arising from individual upbringing; Idols of the Market - place arise from erroneous uses of language, such as using names for non-existent things, or for concepts which have been inadequately defined; Idols of the theatre are caused by false philosophical principles and by incorrect reasoning.

The object of speculative science must be to discover the true forms of things, beginning with the forms of 'simple natures', i.e. the true manifestations of the most elemental phenomena such as heat and light. *New Atlantis* (1626) : In the tradition of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, it is a philosophical tale. The book had its posthumous publication, since it was left

unfinished at Bacon's death. The title alludes to the mythical island, described by Plato in his dialogue *Timaeus*. Bacon calls his island Bensalem, coined after the name of Holy City of Jerusalem, and the chief glory of this place is its university, called 'Solomon's

A philosophical tale of a fancied island, Bensalem, where there is a University, called "Solomon's House," Devoted to scientific research.

House'. Unlike the Universities of Bacon's time, this is devoted to scientific research. Some important lines may be quoted from the text to substantiate Bacon's intention : "The knowledge of causes, and secret motion of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible."

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write, in brief, the themes of the three essays.

UNIT 14: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THREE ‘ESSAYS’

Content Structure :

UNIT 14 (a): ‘OF TRUTH’ with Notes and References

UNIT 14(b): ‘OF DEATH’ with Notes and References

UNIT 14(c): ‘OF LOVE’ with Notes and References

The Essays by Bacon may be thematically categorized into several groups. There are discourses on human relationship (‘Of Parents and Children’, ‘Of Marriage and Single Life’, ‘Of Friendship’, ‘Of Followers and Friends’) on philosophical and ethical matters (‘Of Truth’, ‘Of Death’, ‘Of Envy’, ‘Of Ambition’, ‘Of Beauty’); on the matters and principles of diplomacy and politics (‘Of Nobility’, ‘Of Empire’, ‘Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates; Of Faction’); on the practical matters of everyday life (‘Of Building’, ‘Of Gardens’). The variety of subjects of Bacon’s ‘Essays’ indisputably proves that Bacon retained encyclopedic interests in life. A pragmatic philosopher, he felt fascinated to multiple aspects of human life and experience, resembling perhaps Wordsworth’s vision of a wise man who stands “true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home”. As a philosopher and thinker, he succeeds in the interfusion of the abstract with the concrete, the esoteric with the mundane. The three ‘Essays’ in our syllabus—‘Of Truth’, of Death ‘Of Love’—adequately substantiate and illustrate the above written arguments. A summary of the Essays are given below.

UNIT 14 (a): A SUMMARY OF ‘OF TRUTH’

Bacon begins the essay by referring to jesting Pilate’s confusing interrogation ‘What is Truth?’ The similar question is posed by the essayist to his readers. But unlike Pilate, Bacon does not stay back to offer answer to this philosophic query. He speaks about men who delight in the constant

Truth, which is unchanging, wants the charm of variety and a touch of falsehood adds variety to truth. Bacon relates Truth to the creativity of God. First he deals with “theological and philosophical truth”, then he concentrates on the “truth of civil business”.

change of opinions and consider it a bondage of mind to fix a belief and call it truth. Bacon argues that in ancient Greece there were different schools of skeptical philosophers, and now-a-days they are replaced by ‘discoursing wits’, that is, argumentative intellectuals. As opposed to truth, there are lies, loved and liked by ordinary men for the sake of lies themselves.

By echoing Plato, Bacon says that the free indulgence in his on part of the poet is meant for pleasure giving, but in case of the trading class, it is intended for earning profit. With the help of two metaphoric statements (“Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that sheweth best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle that sheweth best in varied lights”) Bacon wants to suggest that truth, which is unchanging,

wants the charm of variety. That is why Bacon further comments : “A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure.” According to Bacon, Truth by itself is dull, flat and genuine. That is why a touch of falsehood adds variety to Truth. In order to substantiate his arguments on Truth Bacon speaks about “inquiry of truth”, “the knowledge of truth” and “the belief of truth”. In his attempt to discover the true source and origin of Truth, Bacon relates it to the creativity of God. By referring to Lucretius’s philosophical writing *De Rarum Natura* Bacon says that the greatest blessing of human life is to love the truth and dwell in it. Man’s preoccupation with Truth removes from his mind all confusions, misunderstandings and false convictions.

The discourse on Truth is divided into two broad sections. In the opening paragraph he dwells an “theological and philosophical truth”, while in the concluding paragraph, he concentrates on “the truth of civil business”. Bacon admonishes the resort to falsehood and perfidious practices in the civil life of man. Bacon expresses the idea in a sentence where the metaphor is drawn from metallurgy;” and that mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it embaseth it.” Bacon relates the violation of truth to satanic practices. But these ideas according to Bacon, are conventional. The opposite view about the relation between falsehood and truth is stated by Montaigne in the second chapter of his essays; “For a lie faces God, and shrinks from man.”

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. How would you characterize Bacon’s idea of truth ?

Notes and References

1. Pilate : The Roman Governor of Judaea before whom Christ was tried and condemned to death. He is introduced simply as a type of the skeptical.
2. Sects : Reference to the various skeptical schools of philosophers in ancient Greece.
3. The wine of devils : The phrase is possibly a fusion of Augustine’s reference to *poetry as the wine of error* and the saying of Hieronymus that it is *the food of demons*.
4. His Sabbath work : his occupation during the leisure (Sabbath) which he has enjoyed since the work of creation was finished. The reference in his connection may also be given to the essay ‘Of Great Place’ where similar such idea recurs.
5. The poet : Alludes to Lucretius, the Roman philosopher - poet-who in his book “De Rarum Natura” (“On the nature of things”) explained and defended the atomistic philosophy. He was born about B.C. 95.
6. Clear and round : honest and straight forward.
7. Embaseth : deteriorates.

8. The Serpent : Satan, it is described in the Bible, tempted Eve to taste the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge under the disguise of a serpent. Therefore the derivative meaning is associated with craftiness, deceit and falsehood.

9. Montaigne : The sixteenth-century French essayist. He is generally looked upon as the pioneer of personal familiar type of essay.

10. When Christ cometh : The reference is to the final judgment of mankind. The Biblical allusion is to the Gospel of St. Luke, xviii, 8 : “I tell you, He will cause justice to be done to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the son of man arrives, will he really find the faith on the earth ?”

UNIT 14 (b): A SUMMARY OF ‘OF DEATH’

The essay begins with an aphoristic statement which has nearly assumed a proverbial importance : “Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark.” The fear of death is ingrained in the mind of man for several reasons: There are, first of all, various associations of pains and agonies, clinging to our idea of death. Bacon describes in this context; “Groans and convulsions, and a discoloured face, and friends weeping and blacks and obsequies, and the like, shew death terrible.” But, although death appears to be terrifying, the fear of death can easily be overcome by different moods and feelings. Bacon states his idea in a sentence which is characteristic of him —a long, elaborate sentence, consisting of several short units, having the self-contained (?) or independent meanings of their own :

The fear of death is ingrained in the mind of man for several reasons e.g. various associations of pains and agonies. But it can be overcome by different moods and feelings.

“Revenge triumphs over death; Love slights it; However aspireth to it; Grief flieth to it; Fear preoccupaeth it.” “Bacon thus wants to suggest that man is hardly afraid of death. After Otho. the Roman Emperor killed himself, pity and compassion for their leader induced many of his subjects to embrace death. In this connection Bacon also remembers how some of the eminent personalities of the classical past responded to death. The response were various and variable, stoical and good, humoured. I may quote from Bacon’s essay to draw your attention to these variable responses to death : (a) “Augustus Caesar died in a compliment”; (b) “Tiberins in dissimulation”; (c) “Vespasian in a jest; sitting upon the stool”; (d) “Galba with a sentence, holding forth his neck”; (e) “Septimius Severns in dispatch.” Bacon also cites one line from Juvenul’s Satire, that denotes that “The end of life” is nothing but “one of the boons of nature.” Bacon concludes his essay with the following observations : (a) Death is part and parcel of human life, and therefore unavoidable (b) An individual who is good and honest is never afraid of death. (c) Death removes all ill feelings for / towards an individual when he is dead and makes others feel better about him. The essay significantly ends wit

another nearly aphoristic / proverbial statement, “Death has this also; that it openeth the gate to good fame, and extinguisheth envy.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What according to Bacon, are the ways of overcoming the fear of death ?
2. Enlist the various responses to death that we find in Bacon’s essays.

UNIT 14 (c): SUMMARY OF BACON’S ‘OF LOVE’

It is an essay on human nature. Like the previous essay, the present one also begins with an aphoristic statement, precise, simple, but loaded with meaning : “The stage is more beholding to Love, than the life of man.” After having made this statement Bacon goes on elaborating the idea

“The stage is more beholding to Love, than the life of man.” Bacon examines the qualitative aspects of love — love as a motif is much more befitting for a comedy than a tragedy; it is simultaneously dangerous and destructive, and all conquering

with some illustrations, mainly historical. He continues to examine the qualitative aspects / features of love. He considers it as one of the important and meaningful feelings of human heart. Bacon states that love as a ‘motif’ is much more befitting for a comedy than for a tragedy. Love is simultaneously mischief making, dangerous and destructive. He writes that love is “sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury”. Love conquers everybody’s heart, including the spirited and the honest. Love imprisons not only Marcus Antonius, a characteristically voluptuous man but also Appians Claudius, “an austere and wise man.” Love can find an easy entry into an open and frank mind; but it can also steal into “a well fortified heart”.

According to Bacon, love which is moderated may be a happy and congenial feeling; but the excess of this passion is dangerous because it completely destroys “the nature and value”. of all living things. Love and wisdom are generally alien to each other. By echoing Shakespeare Bacon claims that loves and lunatics belong to the same category. Bacon idealizes love as a noble feeling and, for this reason, he writes : “That he that preferred Helena, quitted the gifts of Juno and Pallas”, and further, “for whosoever esteemeth too much of amorous, affection Guitteth both riches and wisdom.” By the word ‘love’ Bacon not only means the reciprocal attraction between two opposite genders but something else also. For example, there may be universal love, directed towards one’s neighbours and common humanity. It is this that transforms men into “human and charitable”. This is particularly true about the friars and clergymen. Love, different and various, performs different functions. Bacon therefore concludes the essay with three memorable and quotable sentences :

“Nuptial love maketh mankind friendly love perfecteth it; but wanton love corrupteth and embaseth it.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. How does Bacon characterizes 'Love' ?

Notes and References

1. Beholding : indebted
2. Like a siren etc. sometimes responsible for self-indulgence, sometimes leading to passion. The sirens were women who by the sweetness of their melodic voices enticed the sailors who passed by their island to destruction.
3. The decemvir : the designation of a member of the Council of Ten to whom the government of Rome was entrusted.
4. It hath been well said : the quotation is from Plutarch.
5. He that preferred Helena : The story of Paris to whom three goddesses — Juno, Minerva, and Venus. Paris offers the apple of discord to Venus. Consequently Paris was rewarded with Helena; the most beautiful women under the sun.

UNIT 15

BACON AS A PRAGMATIC THINKER AND PHILOSOPHER

Content Structure:

UNIT 15: Bacon as a Pragmatic Thinker and Philosopher

The fame of Bacon as a creative writer, philosophic and pragmatic thinker rests mainly on his ‘Essays’, written on diverse and different matters. Before I say somethings on the ‘Essays’ written by Bacon, it may be perhaps desirable to write something on ‘Essay’ as a literary form. The term is derived from the French word ‘essai’, meaning ‘experiment’, ‘attempt’. As a literary term it enjoys comprehensibility in its application, since it covers an enormous range of composition from schoolboy exercises to thorough scientific and philosophical works, the only quality in common being the implied desire of the writer to reserve to himself some freedom of treatment. But the essay is also a recognized literary form in a more defined sense : it is understood to be a fairly short prose composition, in style often familiarly conversational and in subject either self-revelatory or illustrative of social manners and types. The originator of the form was the great French writer Montaigne, whose essays were published in a completed form in 1595, and translated by John Florio into English in 1603. Montaigne’s essays were personal because they are characterized by a spirit of self-enquiry, and his self-oriented response to facts, ideas and experiences in relation to his own personal life and environs of the society to which he belonged.

In 1597, Francis Bacon, the first great English essayist, published his first collection of essays. The questions that continue to disturb the readers whether these essays bear any similarity with those of Montaigne. The answer to this question is not much difficult to give because the essays, written by Bacon, are distinctively different from those of Montaigne. When the sixteenth century French essayist candidly declares, “I speak into my papers as unto the first man I meet on the earth”, Bacon may possibly claim that his ‘discourses’ have nothing to do with his own self. There is nothing like self-exploration or self-analysis in these essays because Bacon’s professed aim as an essayist is to focus his attention on

‘Essay’ is derived from the French ‘essai’, meaning ‘experiment’, ‘attempt’. It is defined as a fairly short composition, in style often familiarly conversational and in subject either self-revelatory or illustrative of social manners and types. It enjoys comprehensibility in its application. It is originated by French writer Montaigne.

Unlike Montaigne, there is no self-exploration or self-analysis in Bacon’s essays since he focused on external matters e.g. which are related to the norms and values of politics. Diplomacy, common human feelings and experiences, ethics and aesthetics. Firstly, a student of mathematics and science, and secondly, a product of the age of the Reformation and the Revival of Learning, Bacon was naturally inclined to rationalism and logic.

matters which are external, and which are directly related to the norms and values of politics, diplomacy, common human feelings and experiences, ethics and aesthetics. In ‘The Epistle Dedicatory’ to the Duke of Buckingham his Grace, Lord High Admiral of England, Bacon declares/announces : “I do now publish my Essays; which, of all my other works, have been most current; for that, as it seems, they come home to men’s business and bosoms. The statement “they (essays) come home to men’s business and bosoms” adequately explain the qualitative nature and thematic contexts of these discourses. Bacon intends to deal with the matters which are concerned with the day-to-day life of man—the proceedings of his everyday life. Therefore, his essays are to be differentiated either from Montaigne’s writings, or from the romance oriented fictional, pastoral prose writings of Lyly and Sidney. On the contrary, The Essays bear the distinctive mark of Bacon’s individuality— The specific manner of Bacon’s attitude to life and his habit of analysing various problems and issues of human life and experience on the basis of rational, logical and scientific principles. The question why Bacon insisted on the rationalisation of problems and why he situated the problems and issues within the framework of logic may easily be asked by the readers and students of Bacon’s essays. The first important reason has something to do with Bacon’s characteristic temper and attitude. Fundamentally a student of mathematics and science, he had been naturally inclined to rationalisation and scientification of ideas. The second reason is, however, more important and more deeply rooted in the spirit of the age. In this connection, I may quote some relevant statements of F.G. Selby in his famous ‘Introduction’ to *Bacon’s Essays* (Macmillan, London, 1965) : “There are certain periods in the world’s history which have a special attraction for any student of the intellectual and moral development of mankind. Such a period in the age of Socrates and the Sophists in Greece, an age when the belief in an old mythology was being shattered, and tradition, authority, and custom were no longer accepted as adequate sanctions for moral rules and political institutions. In a word, a spirit of rational inquiry and criticism was supervening upon an age of childlike faith. Such a period again in the sixteenth century, the age of the Reformation and the Revival of Learning, marked by a similar revolt of reason against authority, in this case the authority of the Church.” Bacon who was unmistakably the product of the age of the Reformation and the Revival of Learning believed in the policy of asserting reasons against authority, the independence of mind and thought against orthodoxy and conservative belief. Indeed, the free and liberal thinking that inspired and characterised the Renaissance mind may be perceived in all the writings of Bacon, including his ‘Essays’.

Bacon may be described as a Renaissance humanist in the light of Raymond Williams’s definition of ‘humanist’. His interest in man and in human Renaissance humanist in the light of Raymond Williams’s definition of ‘humanist’. His interest in man and in human his essays. In his essays, Bacon gives the impression that his personality is multi- dimensional. They reflect Bacon’s experience of men and the world.

Bacon's name is, however, frequently associated with 'Humanism'— a term which had different connotations during the Renaissance and the Age of Reformation. Raymond Williams defines the term 'Humanist' a derivative of 'Humanism' in the following manner : "Humanist was probably taken directly from *umanista* which from early sixteenth century had been a significant Renaissance word. It had late sixteenth century senses equivalent both to classicist and to the student of human as distinct from divine matters. This is a real complexity, related on the one hand to surviving distinctions between 'Pagan' and 'Christian' learning, and on the other hand to distinctions between the 'learned' (defined as in classical languages) and others. There is also an ultimate relation to the double quality of the Renaissance; the 'rebirth' of classical learning; the new kinds of interest in *man* and in human activities. It is not surprising, given this complex, to find an early seventeenth century use of *humanist* to describe someone interested in state affairs and history. The use of *Humanist* to describe one of the group of scholars prominent in the Renaissance and the Revival of Learning seems to come later in seventeenth century, but has since been common." (*Keywords*, p. 150). Bacon may be described as a Renaissance humanist in the light of Raymond Williams's description and definition of the term 'humanist'. His interest in man and in human activities" is illustrated in the essays like 'Of Parents and Children', 'Of Marriage and Single Life', 'Of Envy', 'Of Love', 'Of Travel', 'Of Nature in Men', just as his interest in state affairs and history is manifest in the essays like 'Of Nobility', 'Of Seditious and Troubles', 'Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates', 'Of Judicature'. In fact, in the 'Essays' Bacon gives the impression that his personality is multi-dimensional, as he is simultaneously a moralist, a statesman and a man of the world. The range and intensity of his scholarly pursuit is really amazing. He delighted in the writings of moralist like Seneca, Lucian and Montaigne; of critics of character, like Tacitus, Plutarch and Suetonius and of critics of affairs, like Cicero and Machiavelli. All these readings, show Bacon's adequacy as a classical scholar — a typical representative of the Age of the Revival of Learning.

Bacon's 'Essays', Selby declares are the fruits of his observation of life. They reflect his experience of men and of the world. The most curious are those which treat of cunning of suitors, of wisdom for a man's self, of simulation and dissimulation, and other subjects of the kind. They reveal a habit of thought and action which is naturally generated under despotic rule." The tone that Bacon assumes in the 'Essays' is that of an instructor of humanity. The 'Essays' are undoubtedly the products of that wisdom which originates from the universal insight into the affairs of the world.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What is an essay?
2. What are the distinct features of Bacon's essays?
3. Consider Bacon as a pragmatic thinker and philosopher.

UNIT 16

BACON'S ESSAYS

Content Structure :

UNIT 16: Bacon's Prose Style

Suggested Readings

Assignments

Prof. Selby has pointed out that one of the reasons why we still read Bacon's 'Essays' is as much for the variety of their themes as also for their style. Although Bacon had no great respect for the English language, holding that "these modern languages will at one time play the bankrupt with books", yet no man individually did more to give strength and simplicity to the English language than he. Before I concentrate specifically on different aspects of Bacon's prose style, it is perhaps desirable to note down briefly the peculiarities in the style of writing of the prose writers and essayists who were the near contemporaries of Bacon. The English prose style in the time of Bacon generally moved between two extremes. On the one hand, there was the rhetorical, ornamental prose style which was embedded in diffuseness; and, on the other there was the circuitous prose style, saturated with extreme sentimentality. Thus on the one hand there was the needless elaboration of Euphemism, as in the following excerpt from Lyly's *Eupheus*.

"I have read that the bull being tied to big-tree loseth his strength, that the whole herd of deer stand at the gaze if they smell a sweet apple, that the dolphin by the sound of music is brought to the shore. And that no marvel it is that if the fierce bull be tamed with the fig-tree, that women, being as weak as sleep, be overcome with a fig; if the wild deer be caught with an apple, that the tame domosel is won with a blossom"; and on the other, there is a touch of artificiality in the circuitous, long-drawn sentences, as in the following few lines from Sidney's."

Arcadia :

"Kneeling down, even where she stood, she thus said, 'O, All seeing Light, and eternal life of all things to whom nothing is either so great that it may resist or so small that it is condemned; look upon my misery with thine own eye of mercy, and let thy infinite power vouchsafe to limit out some proportion of deliverance into me, as to thee shall seem most convenient.

Bacon's prose style signifies a remarkable departure from two models. He would never like to lose himself in the poetic diffuseness/diffusiveness of Lyly, or the over elaborated, sententious expressions of the Arcadian model. His sentences are generally clear and intelligible on account of two basic factors. First, Bacon's prose is the talker's

We read Bacon's essays as much for the variety of their themes as also for their style. Bacon gave much strength and simplicity to the English language. His prose style signifies a remarkable departure from both the two contemporary models – (i) the rhetorical, ornamental prose style (e.g. Lyly's Eupheus), and (ii) the circuitous prose style embedded in diffuseness (as in Arcadia).

prose; and secondly Bacon himself being a student of science introduced in the English prose of his time the spirit of rationality, common sense and lucidity. Indeed, as a prose writer Bacon gives the impression that he is addressing a select group of audience who are listening to him with rapt attention. A few excerpts from the *Essays* may qualify the statement.

(a) “You shall read in some of the friars’ books of mortification that a man should think with himself what the pain is if he have but his finger’s end pressed or tortured, and thereby imagine what the pains of death are, when the whole body is corrupted and dissolved.” (‘Of Death’).

(b) “After these two noble fruits of friendship. followeth the last fruit; which is like the pomegranate, full of many Kernels; I mean aid and bearing a part in all action and occasions.” (‘Of Friendship’).

(c) “Some books are to be tasted, other to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.” (‘Of studies’).

The scientific precision of modern-day prose was anticipated by Bacon in his *Essays*. He would hardly pass into unnecessary digression, or discursive, loose deliberations on any given topic. His statements and discussions are always too precise, and pointed. Anything superfluous, irrelevant has been carefully avoided by him. Whenever he takes up a topic, he continues to offer his observations on it in a systematic manner, as though his entire task is to argue well convincingly with his readers/audiences he is addressing. Thus in an essay like ‘Of Love’, he initiates his deliberation with an aphoristic statement : ‘The stage is more beholding to Love, than the life of man’. Thereafter he focuses his attention on the qualitative features/aspects of love. This is followed by several allusions, drawn from history and myth, to suggest the influence love exerts upon different individuals. The essay ends with broad references to different kinds of love—nuptial love, friendly love and wanton love. [**Please see the summary of the ‘Essay’.] There is a system in the discussion— a suggestion of graded arguments and there is very little loose and incoherent in the article. It is in this quality of compactness which has distinguished Bacon’s prose from that of Montaigne, or Lyly or Sidney. One does not find in his essays either anything subjective or anything delicate and tender. It is, as Selby has suggested, “masculine” prose because it is strong and vigorous tenseness happens to be one of the basic qualities of Bacon’s prose style, and the effect of tenseness is achieved with the help of aphoristic, statements. For example, (a) “Revenge in a kind, of wild justice”. (‘Of Revenge’) (b) Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark.” (‘Of Death’), (c) “Men create oppositions which are not” (‘Of Unity in Religion’).

The interesting thing about Bacon’s style is that the sentences in his essays combine in themselves the quality of picturesqueness with weight. His imagination, flamboyant and luxuriant, enlivens every page of his writing. It is Bacon who can state any abstract idea in term of the concrete, as in the following:

(a) “Truth may perhaps come to the price of a pearl, that sheweth best by day; but it will not rise to the price of a diamond or carbuncle, that sheweth best in varied lights.” (‘Of Truth’).

(b) “Groans and convulsions, and a discoloured face, and friends weeping, and blacks, and obsequies and the like, shew death terrible.” (‘Of Death’).

(c) “Virtue is a like a rich stone, best plain set; and surely virtue is best in a body that is comely, though not of delicate features.” (‘Of Beauty’).

The charm of Bacon’s style lies also in his long sentences which are made of short, self-dependent units, leading themselves upto a final climatic effect, as in the following :

(a) “Revenge triumphs over death; Love slights it; Honour aspireth to it; Grief flieth to it; Fear pre-occupateth it.” (‘Of Death’).

(b) “Nuptial love maketh mankind; friendly love perfecteth it; but wanton love corrupteth and embaseth it.” (‘Of Love’).

(c) “Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.” (‘Of Studies’).

A comparison of Bacon with some of his contemporaries proves his well - defined superiority to others. A close analysis of his prose style shows how widely he departs from the prolix method of Hooker, Sidney, Lyly and Asclam. In rhetorical power, musical cadence, he is equalled by many of his contemporaries but, a clear, terse and easy writing he has no rival, and even today his essays are models of succinct, lucid prose. He blends dignity with familiarity in that pleased and attractive manner which in the secret of power of all great English essayist.

I may end my discussion on Bacon and on his achievement as an essayist by quoting from Prof. Sukanta Chaudhuri’s ‘Introduction’ to *Bacon’s Essays : A Selection* (OUP, India, 1977); “The essays are slight in form, and apparently occasional in spirit; but Bacon took them seriously.

.... Properly analysed, the text of these 58 short pieces, and the evolution of their style and structure, may be found to reflect in miniature the most serious concerns of one of the noblest intellects of the Renaissance.”

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write a critical note on Bacon’s prose style with ref. to the essays, prescribed in your syllabus.

‘OF TRUTH’

The following lines from the essays prescribed in the syllabus may be important for short questions :

(a) “A mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure” (‘Of Truth)

(b) “..... The knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth, which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature”. (DO)

(c) “Certainly, it is heaven upon earth to have a man’s mind move in charity, rest in providence, and turn upon the poles of truth.” (DO)

(d) "... and that mixture of falsehood is like alloy in coin of gold and silver, which may make the metal work the better, but it embaseth it." (DO)

'OF DEATH'

(a) "Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark."

(b) "Revenge triumphs over death; Love slights it; Honour aspireth to it; grief flieth to it; Fear pre-occupaleth it'.

(c) "Death has this also; that it openeth the gate to good fame, and extinguisheth envy."

(d) "It is worthy the observing that there is no passion in the mind of man so weak, but it mates and masters fear of death.

'OF LOVE'

(a) "The stage is more beholding to Love, than the life of man."

(b) "...but in life it doth much mischief; sometimes like a siren, sometimes like a fury. (c) ".....and therefore it is well said, *That it is impossible and to be wise.*"

(d) "That he that preferred Helena, quitted the gifts of Juno and Pallas."

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. F.G.Selby (ed.): *Bacon's Essays* (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London).
2. Prof. Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.)—*Bacon's Essays : A Selection* (OUP, India).
3. F.H. Anderson : *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon*.
4. Basil Willey : *The Seventeenth Century Background*.
5. L.C.Knights : *Explorations*, 'Bacon and the Seventeenth Century Dissociation of Sensibility'.

ASSIGNMENTS

6. Write an essay on the distinctive features of Bacon's prose style.
 7. What does Bacon write on love? Is love, according to him, a 'universal human feeling' ?
 8. How does Bacon philosophise on Truth ?
 9. Break up the allusions in the essays 'Of Death', 'Of Love'.
 10. Locate and annotate : "Men fear death, as children fear to go in the dark".
 11. Locate and annotate : "That he that preferred Helena, quitted the gifts of Junot Pallas.
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POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME (CBCS)

in

E N G L I S H

SEMESTER – I

COR – 103

**Restoration to the Age of Sensibility
Poetry and Drama (1660-1788)**

Self-Learning Material



DIRECTORATE OF OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING

UNIVERSITY OF KALYANI

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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 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 PGBOS (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

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SEMESTER – I

Restoration to the Age of Sensibility: Poetry and Drama(1660-1788)

BLOCK-I

***Absalom and Achitophel* by John Dryden**

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OBJECTIVES

Dryden wrote only three major satires – *Mac Flecknoe*, *The Medal* and *Absalom and Achitophel*.

Nevertheless, it is as a satirist that he is known to many modern readers. Some of his other poems, such as *Absalom and Achitophel* Part II and *The Hind and the Panther*, contain incidental satire, but *Absalom and Achitophel* is, by common consent, his best. This is a complex poem rooted in the politics of Dryden's time and making use of biblical story for polemical ends. In this module, therefore, we shall have to discuss the historical background, take a look at the Biblical story that Dryden has used for satiric purposes and then make a critical study of the poem.

Unit 1 (a): HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: THE POPISSH PLOT AND THE EXCLUSION BILL

It is impossible to fully appreciate the poem without some knowledge of the political issues involved, and since religion and politics were then almost inseparable - as they often unfortunately

The Earl of Shaftesbury was imprisoned for his role in leading the political opponents of Charles II's rule. The opposition to the king mainly manifested itself through two significant events in seventeenth century British politics — the Poppish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis. And the poem was timed to influence Shaftesbury's trial.

are even today - we must also try to understand the religious conflicts. In fact, the main political issue, as we shall see, turned on a religious question. *Absalom and Achitophel* was published in November 1681 when a leading political figure of the time, the Earl of Shaftesbury, was imprisoned in the Tower of London and awaiting trial. In his *Augustan Satire*, Ian Jack states categorically that the poem was "timed to influence Shaftesbury's trial." But a more recent commentator, James Anderson Winn, maintains that by the time Dryden's poem appeared, on or about

17 November, Shaftesbury's release was inevitable. During the preceding months, new publications for or against Shaftesbury appeared about every week, while during the same period Dryden was polishing his poem. Shaftesbury was a Whig and the Grand Jury, whose verdict would be crucial, consisted largely of Whigs. On 18 October, a Whig named Rouse had in fact been exonerated by the Grand Jury from the politically motivated charges brought against him. Moreover, Dryden's poem was published just a week before the beginning of Shaftesbury's trial.

Shaftesbury was imprisoned for his role in leading the political opponents of Charles II's rule. The opposition to the king mainly manifested itself through two significant events in seventeenth century British politics - the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis. When Charles II was invited from his exile in France and the monarchy of England was restored to him, there was national rejoicing in that country. The 'Restoration' occurred in 1660 in the midst of widespread resentment against the strict Puritan rule of the last fourteen years, and Charles, whose father Charles I had been executed by the Puritan revolutionaries in 1649, took full advantage of the anti-Puritan and anti-Republican mood to launch repressive measures against Protestant dissenters, most of whom were Puritan. But the unpopularity of the Puritans did not mean that England, which adopted Protestantism as its official religion during the rule of Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, would welcome Roman Catholicism. There were Roman Catholics in England of course, but they were in a minority. Besides, Protestant England had always regarded Catholics as politically dangerous. The suspicion of Catholics at home was intensified by distrust of the political designs of Catholic countries like Spain and France. There was great national jubilation as well as the sense of a mission accomplished when Protestant England under the leadership of Queen Elizabeth defeated the numerically superior Spanish forces in a famous naval battle at Cadiz in 1587. So far as English Catholics were concerned, there was a continuous ideological campaign against them by Protestant clergymen and theologians; the political campaign against the Catholics intensified with the discovery of the Gunpowder plot in 1605. The motive behind the plot was to blow up Parliament House with King James I, his Queen and many others inside the building. The leaders of the conspiracy were alleged to be Catholics. During the reign of James's grandson, Charles II, an equally sinister plot was supposedly hatched by Catholics to accomplish their religious and political objectives. This conspiracy came to be called the Popish Plot, after the Pope, head of the Catholic Church, and for Protestants, the symbol of false religion and sinister designs. England's powerful Catholic neighbour, France, which had now taken the place of Spain as the target of Protestant English nationalism, was also suspected to have instigated the plot. In *Absalom and Achitophel* the Popish plot is described as the "wished occasion" eagerly seized by the King's opponents, the Whigs. In fact, Shaftesbury, the leader of the Whigs, is said to have remarked on the Plot :

"I will not say who started the game but I am sure I had the full hunting of it". The game was actually started by Titus Oates, a disreputable Catholic who had fled to the Continent in 1675 to escape a charge of perjury. Oates returned to England in 1678 and declared that he had evidence of a Catholic plot to murder Charles II and overthrow the Protestant religion in England by French and Irish armies. Oates's revelations were almost wholly fictitious; but Parliament, dominated by the Whigs, adopted a resolution to the effect that "there has been and still is a damnable and hellish plot, contrived and carried on by Popish recusants [those who refused to attend services of the Church of England], for the assassinating and murdering the king, and for subverting the government and

destroying the Protestant religion". Between, December 1678 and July 1681 more than thirty people were condemned for being involved in the plot. Coleman, the Duchess of York's secretary, was arrested on the charge of possessing treasonable material, and since Charles's brother, the Duke of York, James, was a Catholic, he too was implicated in the plot. One incident in particular gives a fairly good idea of the political and religious hysteria generated by the discovery of the so-called plot. Edmund Berry Godfrey, the magistrate before whom Oates had made his depositions, was murdered. Though the Catholics blamed Oates for the murder, the Protestants regarded the murder as the prelude to widespread disturbances and uprising planned by the Catholics. There was widespread panic, many citizens went about armed, while Godfrey's death as treated was a tragic reminder of Catholic designs. Catholics were excluded from sitting in Parliament and officially ordered not to come within ten miles of London. Hundreds were arrested on Oates's false evidence. The Whigs exploited the newly intensified anti-Catholic mood, while Charles II shrewdly remarked that Shaftesbury and his party had "set on Oates, and instructed him".

The Whigs could exploit the anti-Catholic sentiment for political purposes because of the fact that the man who was to succeed Charles II as monarch of England was a Catholic. This man was

The Whigs chose the Duke of Monmouth, Charles II's illegitimate son as their leader not only because of his popularity but also because of the fact that the catholic James' legitimate heir had married William of Orange, a foreigner.

James, Duke of York, who was legally Charles's heir to the throne. Charles, notorious for his promiscuity, had a number of illegitimate children, but no legitimate issue. The law of England would not allow a bastard to inherit his father's title or property. The most famous of these illegitimate children was the Duke of Monmouth, who was also the King's favourite and whose attractive appearance and manners had already made him a

popular figure. He had also gained a considerable reputation as a soldier. The Whigs spread rumours that Charles had actually married Monmouth's mother, Lucy Walter. But Charles stubbornly denied such rumours and was moreover adamant that Monmouth, on whom he conferred several honours, could not be the next King of England. The Whigs chose Monmouth as their leader not only because of his popularity but also because of the fact that the Catholic James's legitimate heir, his daughter Mary, had married William of Orange. This meant that in the event of James's death, a foreign monarch would effectively rule England. Shaftesbury also took into account the fact that Monmouth's disputed claim to the throne of England would make the young man dependent on his political support and would also effectively weaken the monarchy. Charles was requested to declare that Lucy Walter was his legally wedded wife, a request which he flatly turned down. So far as the succession issue was concerned, therefore, England had to choose

Page 8, a - Charles refused to yield the ground on the succession issue of Monmouth, since he himself harboured Catholic belief, but only to strengthen the Whig cause. The Whigs, enjoying a huge majority in Parliament, introduced the Exclusion Bill in No. 79. But the passage of the Bill was prevented by Charles's dissolution of Parliament.

between the Catholic James and the illegitimate Monmouth. Charles's sympathies were wholly with his brother, because Charles himself harboured Catholic beliefs. He was in fact secretly negotiating a treaty with the French Emperor, Louis XIV, by which he would join Louis in destroying the Protestant stronghold of Holland, declare his conversion to Catholicism, overthrow Protestantism in England and make it a Catholic country. To achieve these aims, Louis would assist Charles with French troops and a huge annual grant. Charles, therefore, refused to yield ground on the succession issue and in the process only strengthened the Whig cause. The Whigs claimed that they were protecting the King against Catholic conspiracies and Monmouth asserted that it was his love for his father which prompted him to oppose his uncle. The Whigs, enjoying a huge majority in Parliament, introduced the Exclusions Bill in 1679. As its very name indicates, the Bill sought to exclude James from kingship. But the passage of the Bill was prevented by Charles's dissolution of Parliament. The second Whig Parliament, elected in September, 1679, was prorogued by Charles. When Parliament reassembled in November, the Exclusion Bill was passed through the Commons, but its passage was blocked in the Lords mainly because of the determined opposition of the Earl of Halifax, who had been a supporter of Shaftesbury but whose belief in the principle of hereditary succession according to English law led him to oppose the Whigs. Parliament was again dissolved, but once again the Whigs were elected with a large majority and were this time more determined to turn the Bill into Law. They thought that Charles would capitulate because the Exchequer was exhausted and the King needed parliamentary approval for his budget. But Charles, shrewd as ever, summoned Parliament at Oxford, away from the stronghold of Whig power and popularity, the city of London. He then dissolved Parliament instead of submitting to Whig demands and could afford to do so because Louis XIV had secretly promised to pay him an enormous amount of money. Defeated in their constitutional battle, the Whigs began to adopt militant postures, but the King and his followers mobilised public opinion against the Whigs by arousing fear of civil war. The suspicion of a Catholic conspiracy also receded gradually and many of those who had earlier tried to implicate prominent Catholics in various plots began to confess that they had been instigated by their employers to give false evidence. Though Shaftesbury was acquitted by a jury of his own sympathizers in 1681, the political tide turned with the election of Tory sheriffs in London in 1682.

Shaftesbury went into exile in Holland in 1683 and died soon afterwards. Monmouth was arrested in 1682, later released on bail and went to live in Holland. But at the beginning of James's reign he led a rebellion against the king and was defeated and executed. Titus Oates was arrested on the charge of perjury and sentenced to imprisonment and torture. But he was released a few years later and after the Revolution of 1688, was even given a pension. Dryden's poem however, is not concerned with the ultimate fate of the principal figures; its main focus is the civil-war-like situation building in Charles II's England and the prominent personalities involved in the political conflict.

Summing Up

Absalom and Achitophel must be placed first in its specific historical context. The central issues in the poem are the Popish plot, in which Catholics were widely thought to be implicated, and the question of succession to the English throne. The Whigs exploited the so-called Popish plot to create an anti-Catholic mood among the people. Led by Shaftesbury, the Whigs also sought to ensure, through the Exclusion Bill, that King Charles II's Catholic brother, James, would not succeed his brother as King of England. Charles's illegitimate son, the handsome and popular Monmouth, was projected as the next King by the Whigs.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Write a note on the historical background of Dryden's poem "Absalom and Achitophel".

Unit 1 (b) : CHARLES'S PROMISCUITY

Charles II's licentiousness aggravated the political conflict. The King's promiscuity was an important issue in contemporary politics and Dryden's poem opens with the poet's own witty version of Charles's sex life; it was also an important issue in the Bible story used by Dryden. Charles was widely regarded as an adulterer who would have to pay for his sexual excesses. A schoolmate of Dryden's, Creighton, in fact went to the length of holding Charles's lechery responsible for the naval disasters suffered by England in a war with the Dutch in 1667. Creighton was a clergyman and based his sermon against the King on the very chapters of II Samuel which provided Dryden with the Biblical parallel for his narrative. Several other contemporaries of Dryden advanced political arguments in support of the prevalent view about the need to separate the King as man from the King as King. The chief political argument was that the King was a "public person" who could, in "his private capacity", only eat and drink, and perform "some other acts of nature". For any champion of the King, therefore, the most embarrassing and awkward aspect of Charles's character was his unbridled sexuality. But instead of brushing this fact aside, Dryden faces the issue squarely in the opening lines of the poem. First, he compares Charles's adultery with that of the Biblical David, thereby placing it in the context of "pious times". Secondly, he suggests that polygamy began to be considered sinful only after "priestcraft" disapproved of it. Dryden attacks the clergy because devout Churchmen consistently criticised Charles's unconcealed womanising. Thirdly, Dryden cleverly equates Charles's sexual vigour with his authority as a King, implying that the way Charles scattered "his Maker's image" (10) throughout the land was a defining part of his kingship. Finally, the lines eulogizing Charles's manly vigour so skilfully use the poetic resources of alliteration, stress, rhythm and word order that poetic fecundity becomes the equivalent of Charles's capacity to multiply. We shall see, however, that Dryden's praise of Charles is not without a hint of mockery directed against Charles's excesses.

Unit 1 (c): THE BIBLICAL SOURCE: ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL AS AN ALLEGORY

The standard justification of the use of allegory in a political composition is, as Ian Jack points out, to be found in the French author Barclay's Argenis, which was known to Dryden. Barclay declares in his Argenis: "I will compile some stately fable, in manner of a history." The fashion for allegory became so widespread in France in the seventeenth century that a political significance was sought in every work of fiction. The use of political allegory became common in England too after the Civil War (1642-1646) and the political controversies generated by it. Charles II and his courtiers also brought from France a taste for this kind of writing. Jack mentions two allegorical poems in English which exerted some influence on Dryden's Absalom and Achitophel.

One of these poems was Naboth's Vineyard; or, the Innocent Traytor. This poem was produced anonymously, but attributed to a rather obscure writer called John Caryl. Like Dryden's poem, Naboth's Vineyard is written in heroic couplets and describes contemporary events in terms of an Old Testament allegory. Another poem, whose relevance to Absalom and Achitophel is less often recognized, is The Progress of Honesty by D'Urfey. The political conflict described in this poem is the same one that Dryden allegorises - that between the King and his supporters, on the one hand and the Whigs led by Shaftesbury on the other. While the loyal followers of Charles II are given classical or Italianate names several followers of Shaftesbury are given names from the Old Testament. Shaftesbury is even called Achitophel and "chief Advocate for Hell" in that poem. Scholars have shown that sermons written as early as 1627 present Achitophel as the type of a wicked politician and that the names of David, Absalom and Achitophel were often used allegorically in a contemporary context concerning disloyal advisors. In her essay, "Absalom and Achitophel", Ruth Nevo points out that biblical analogy became more and more prevalent, largely in the hands of republicans and Whigs, as the shadow of the accession crisis darkened. In 1680 the Duke of Monmouth was finally identified as Absalom and Shaftesbury as Achitophel in Absalom's conspiracy, or The Tragedy of Treason.

Biblical allegorizing thus was frequent at the time of the Popish plot, though it was not steadily pursued. Dryden's distinction lay in the fact that in his hands the allegory was total, not merely confined to giving biblical names to one or two contemporary political figures. The parallel between seventeenth century England and pre-Christian Israel is sustained by Dryden throughout the poem. This parallel is indeed "the very root and heart of Absalom's success"; moreover "Dryden has chosen to pay the enemy in his very own coin" (Nevo). Biblical parallels were mostly cited by Puritans, most of whom were republicans as well, while the court culture displayed "classicizing, strongly Epicurean tendencies". Dryden thus adopts the strategy of subverting the position of the

republicans in terms of the very text which they considered sacred. Moreover, since reading the Bible was a much more widespread practice then than it is today, Dryden had the further advantage of conducting a political debate in a language available to all. But before considering the various advantages derived by Dryden from the biblical allegory, we must know what the Old Testament story is.

The story of Absalom's rebellion had already been applied to the Duke of Monmouth. At first sight the dangers of the story must have appeared to Dryden more considerable than its advantages.

In II Samuel of the Old Testament we find a story of sexual excess and the rebellion it leads to. A writer supporting the King had to recognize the fact that the parallel between Charles and David

A writer supporting the King had to recognize the fact that the parallel between Charles and David works both ways : on the one hand, it confers on Charles a godlike, prophet-like stature ; on the other, the parallel makes explicit Charles's resemblance with David in respect of sexual licence. But the emergence of Absalom as David's sexual rival is of no importance in Dryden's retelling of the tale. A more problematic aspect of the biblical story for Dryden was the fact that the David — Absalom conflict ended in tragedy.

works both ways : on the one hand , it confers on Charles a godlike, prophet-like stature; on the other hand, the parallel makes explicit Charles's resemblance with David in respect of sexual licence. As we saw, Dryden uses all the resources of his wit and poetic powers to overcome this potential weakness in the political cause he supports. In II Samuel, David, King of Israel, commits adultery with the beautiful Bathsheba and has her husband killed. As a direct consequence of these two acts of adultery and murder, David has a confrontation with his rebellious son Absalom, who compels his father to leave the capital city and treats his father's concubines as his own "in the sight of all Israel". But the emergence of Absalom as David's sexual rival, so crucial an issue in the Bible story, is of no

importance in Dryden's retelling of the tale. A more problematic aspect of the Bible story for Dryden was the fact that the David–Absalom conflict ended in tragedy. In II Samuel, the loyal Israelites flock to David and Absalom runs away from the battlefield. Despite David's strict instruction that nobody should hurt his favourite son, an over-enthusiastic soldier, Joab, pursues Absalom to the point where the latter's long hair is caught in the branches of an oak tree. Absalom is immediately killed by Joab and when the news reaches David, he is overwhelmed with grief for his son. David's lament for his son was frequently sung in English cathedrals. Dryden's preface to the poem unequivocally declares that he has omitted the tragic ending of the Bible story. It is clear from both preface and poem that Absalom should be treated with kindness and generosity. Dryden explains that he did not pursue the story to its tragic and "because, I could not obtain from myself, to show Absalom unfortunate". The frame of the picture therefore had to be cut not. Not all the names in Dryden's poem are taken from II Samuel; some of the more prominent political figures of the period are given names from other parts of the Bible. The Duke of Buckingham is called Zimri and Dryden probably had in mind two biblical Zimris : one was killed for adultery (Numbers XXV) and the other

killed King Elah, after making himself drunk, reigned for seven days and then committed suicide (1 Kings XVI). Slingsby Bethel, elected sheriff of London in 1680, is unflatteringly equated with Shimei, who cursed David and who does feature in II Samuel, as does Achitophel; but Corah, a figure with whom the disreputable Titus Oates is identified, is to be found as Korah in Numbers XVI. As for the other main biblical parallels, England is "Israel, London Jerusalem, Hebron Scotland, and France Egypt. The Protestants are referred to as Jews, the Roman Catholics as Jebusites and the Anglican clergy are called Jewish Rabbins. But it is not the particular places or individuals which make the allegory so effective; the power of the allegory derives mostly from the total, detailed and consistent analogy between England and Israel.

Summing Up

The idea of a political allegory on the contemporary political conflict between King Charles II and the Republicans or Whigs did not originate with Dryden; nor was Dryden the first writer to cast this allegory in the form of the biblical story of David, Absalom and Achitophel. What distinguishes Dryden, however, is the fact that his allegory is more consistent, more sustained and much more detailed than that of any other writer of the time.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Consider "Absalom and Achitophel" as an allegory.

Unit 1 (d) : THE ADVANTAGES OF USING THE BIBLICAL STORY

It should be clear by now that by using the biblical parallel Dryden gives a mythic quality to the political conflict which his poem narrates. We may in fact identify several major ways in which Dryden uses the Bible story to extend the appeal and significance of his narrative. Of course, we must always bear in mind the fact that for Dryden's original readership, the Old Testament story was well known. First, the Bible story gives him some archetypes which he can use selectively and manipulate for his own purposes. In other words, the story gives him a useful technical licence. Secondly by using the Old Testament story Dryden has been able to gain objectivity, or rather an illusion of objectivity, because he admits his own partisanship in his address 'To the Reader': "he who draws his pen for one party, must expect to make enemies of the other" (3-4). But he also believes that "if a poem have a genius, it will force its own reception in the world" (13-14). Absalom and Achitophel has forced its own reception by projecting a partisan political account as a neutral set of circumstances. The result is that his readers do not always feel deeply involved in the fates of the characters or in their political views. They may enjoy the story and the characters as fictional, as a fable, or as a drama that belongs to a remote past at the same time as it casts a great deal of light

on the present. Thirdly the Biblical names by themselves were capable of suggesting many personal moral and political traits to Dryden's readers most of whom were thoroughly versed in the Bible and for most of whom the characters had become types - Achitophel the type of the crooked counsellor, Zinnith the type of the fickle politician, David the all-powerful king rather too fond of women, Absalom the ambitious and vulnerable young man, liable to be tempted. Contemporary figures were then made to fit these types many of whom are seen to recur through history : for example, Achitophel is "A name to all succeeding ages curst" (151). Even before the readers find it appropriate that Shaftesbury is in fact like Achitophel they will concede that to Christians at least Achitophel is an already established type of evil counsellor. When the two-way process is complete, when in other words, Achitophel is recognized both as a biblical type and as a particular individual, the reader will still wonder how the historical individual could be visualised by Dryden as a name cursed to all later ages. It is as if the poet-narrator is guaranteeing a sort of immortality to a contemporary politician. Dryden reinforces this effect of immortality by achieving another effect, which has been called three-dimensional. This effect occurs because the narrative, by constantly switching back and forth between the mythic past and the actual present, suggests that all this happened before, is happening now and may happen again. Finally Dryden also uses throughout the poem Biblical metaphors which have great suggestive power, metaphors like a "second Moses", a "cloudy pillar" and a "guardian fire". Well-known biblical phrases and sentences and ideas are comically distorted to emphasize the meanness and corruption of contemporary politicians : Shimei "never broke the Sabbath but for gain (588)"; he "loved his wicked neighbour as himself" (600).

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What advantages did Dryden enjoy by using the biblical story in his poem ?

Unit 2 (a) : DRYDEN'S VIEWS ON SATIRE

Dryden is not only known primarily as a satirist, as “the father of Augustan satire”, but also as a shrewd commentator on the history and art of satire. His long essay on satire, “A Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire”, is usually regarded as the best essay in English on the nature of satire.

Dryden considers Latin etymology of ‘satire’ from ‘satura’, which means “filled with food” or “sated” as the most appropriate. His comparison of Horace and Juvenal in the “Discourse” shows his admiration for both, but also makes it clear that Horatian satire comes closer to his ideal of satiric art.

Dryden says in his “Discourse” that the English word “satire” derives from the Greek word *satyra* and the Latin *satura*. The first is undoubtedly associated with the *satyrs*, creatures in Greek mythology, who are mainly of human form but with some bestial aspect, such as a horse’s tail or the legs of a goat. This association suggests that originally in ancient Greek literature

satire was a crude form of curse directed at evils like drought, worms, parasites and the forces of sterility; the curse was balanced, however, with praise of the sun and the rain, and the forces of fertility. Dryden considers the Latin etymology from *satura* as the more appropriate. The Latin word means “filled with food” or “sated”, and recall *satura lanx*, a festival platter filled to overflowing with finely chopped meats. Dryden refers to the Roman rhetorician Quintilian’s comment that satire is wholly Roman. Dryden admires most the Roman satirists Horace and Juvenal whose satires were mixtures of various subjects and examples, usually bound together by a single unifying theme. Dryden’s Discourse was in fact the preface for his translation of the satires of Juvenal and another Roman satirist, Persius. Dryden never wrote the primitive *satyra*

based on the curse and the medical and penal metaphors of cure and punishment, scourging and pillorying- the satire practised by Oldham in his Juvenal in the Discourse shows his admiration for both, but also makes it clear that Horatian satire comes closer to his ideal of satiric art. Indeed, the most famous passage of the “Discourse” conveys the essence of the satiric art of Horace, who “writ according to the politeness of Rome,

Dryden builds all his satires and panegyrics on the basic unit of the portrait or “character”. Dryden bases many of his satirical portraits on the epic catalogues of heroes and on Milton’s parody of these in his portraits of the rebel angels in Book I of “Paradise Lost”.

under the reign of Augustus Caesar”. Dryden observes, “How easy it is to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms! .there is still a vast difference betwixt the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place. A man may be capable, as Jack Ketch’s wife said of his servant, of a plain piece of work, a bare hanging; but to make a malefactor die sweetly, was only belonging to her husband”. Jack Ketch was an executioner, and we may apply the difference drawn between Ketch and his assistant to the difference between Dryden and some of his predecessors: an earlier satirist like John Oldham is the

slovenly butcher, while Dryden is the expert executioner. “I wish I could apply it to myself”, says Dryden, thinking of “the fineness of a stroke” that beheads, and yet leaves the head standing on the shoulders. Dryden then cites the portrait of Zimri (the Duke of Buckingham) in *Absalom and Achitophel*: it is “worth the whole poem; ’tis not bloody, but ’tis ridiculous enough. And he for whom it was intended was too witty to resent it as an injury”. Here is Dryden’s ideal: it is “fine raillery”, so well executed that it appears almost to be a backhanded compliment to the victim.

Satires upon the Jesuits, which appeared in 1680, shortly before *Absalom and Achitophel*. By using the example of the executioner Jack Ketch, Dryden suggests the punishment metaphor, but the beheading is done so sweetly that the victim is not immediately aware that he has been beheaded. This would also imply that Dryden prefers the politeness, the moderation and “the golden mean” which avoids extremes of every kind—qualities that characterize Horatian satire. Moreover, Dryden began as a poet of praise, whether of Oliver Cromwell or of Charles II. It had been argued earlier by William Davenant (in the 1650s) that the panegyric was a hallmark of the greatest of genres, the epic. While Dryden deliberately employs some epic devices in *Absalom and Achitophel*, as we

Dryden classifies his satire as varronian i.e. satirizing the follies of men in a serio-comic style, using a mixture of prose and verse. Though ‘Absalom and Achitophel’ does not mix prose and verse, it may be called varronian because of its use of a variety of narrative, satire, panegyric, epic and dramatic.

shall see, the panegyric gives him scope in the poem for contrasting portraits, such as those of David, Barzillai and the other “loyalists” set against the malcontents Achitophel, Zimri, Corah and their followers. Dryden builds all his satires and panegyrics on the basic unit of the portrait or “character”. The ancient Greek philosopher and writer, Theophrastus, was the first to introduce the type of writing known as “character” which offers a succinct summing up of a personality. Theophrastus’s *Characters* was a collection of thirty descriptive sketches of various types of character. Each illustrates some deviation from the proper norm of behaviour, exhibiting some failing, followed by examples of this failing. Dryden’s contemporaries like Halifax, Burnet and Clarendon followed Theophrastus’s characters as well as the portraits of historical personalities drawn by Plutarch, Greek philosopher, historian and biographer (c. AD 46 - c. 120). In *Absalom and Achitophel* the satirical portraits are to some extent like these “characters”, but Dryden bases many of these portraits on the epic catalogues of heroes and on Milton’s parody of these in his portraits of the rebel angels in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. Yet another epic quality of *Absalom* lies in its juxtaposition of the present and the past. Dryden learnt from Virgil’s *Aeneid* how in an epic the past can be used as an analogue to the present, with the emphasis more on the placing of contemporary society by the side of that of the past than on the story. By using the biblical story of David and Absalom Dryden also elevates the contemporary event.

In the *Discourse* Dryden classifies his own satires, *MacFlecknoe* and *Absalom and Achitophel*, as Varronian. Varro (116-27 Bc) wrote satires on the model of the Greek writer Menippus of the

third century BC. Menippus satirized the follies of men in a serio-comic style, using a mixture of prose and verse. Varro's satires were also in a mixture of prose and verse, some of them using dialogue or a semi-dramatic form. They had a wide range of characters and scenes, which were described in a vigorous and earthy language. Neither *MacFlecknoe* nor *Absalom* mixes prose and verse, though *Absalom* has a wide range of characters. It may be called Varronian also because of its use of a variety of narrative, satire, panegyric, epic and dramatic. Another prominent characteristic of Varronian satire is imitation or parody- the juxtaposition of ancient and modern texts. Varro often quoted lines from Homer and the great Greek tragic playwrights, turning their serious meaning into something ludicrous. *Absalom* combines biblical parody with seventeenth century English history and juxtaposes different characters and voices. It also often alludes to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and sometimes adapts lines from that epic to a different context. *Absalom*, like Varronian satire, is not formally satiric; in fact, Dryden calls it "A Poem". As for the verse, Dryden thinks that the decasyllabic couplet is the most suitable for satire of an elevated kind. The decasyllabic couplet, introduced into English poetry by Chaucer, came to be called the "heroic couplet" in the seventeenth century because of the frequent use of such couplets in "heroic", that is, epic poems. This verse form consists of iambic pentameter lines which rhyme with each other. Dryden found this verse form. On the contrary he criticized Samuel Butler for having used in his *Hudibras* the octosyllabic couplet. According to Dryden, this kind of couplet often produces the effect of doggerel and "turns earnest too much to jest".

Summing Up

Dryden's own views on satire expressed in his *Discourse* throw a great deal of light on *Absalom and Achitophel*, especially on its Varronian features, its juxtaposition of the past and the present, its epic quality, its Horatian characteristics and its "fine raillery". Dryden also justifies the use of the heroic couplet as the most suitable verse form for a majestic kind of satire.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Discuss "Absalom and Achitophel" as a satire.

Unit 2 (b) : ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL AS A HEROIC POEM

And the turn of heroic poetry". Alexander Pope praised the "long majestic march, and energy divine" of Dryden's poetry, and the verse of *Absalom* for the most part has these qualities. Dryden himself considered the heroic couplet much more dignified than the octosyllabic couplet employed by satirists like Butler. Then again, Dryden chose his words for their music as well as their meaning. To increase the harmony of his verse he adopted from the classical languages words having a sonorous quality, often approaching the musical quality of Virgil's poetry. The result was a brilliant heroic

idiom illustrated by lines like the following : “Or that his conscious destiny made way/ By manly beauty to imperial sway (21-22)”. The conscious heightening of style is most evident when the narrator introduces a speech, often in lines reminiscent of the classical poets and their modern followers, like Milton. As an example Jack cites the lines introducing Achitophel’s first speech to

Absalom and Achitophel possess a number of qualities that belong to a heroic poem — the aim is to present “Nature wrought up to a higher pitch.” ; the verse is marked by “the smoothness, the numbers, and the turn of heroic poetry.” ; presence of Miltonic echoes and so on.

Absalom : “Him he attempts with studied arts to please / And sheds his venom in such words as these(228-29)”. The Miltonic echoes in many of the lines, including inversions of the normal word-order of English, also mark the style as heroic. Yet another heroic quality of the poetic style has been described by Ian Jack in Dryden’s *sonnets*. In the preface to his long narrative poem, *Annus Mirabilis*, Dryden says that the proper wit of a heroic poem lies in “some lively and apt description, dressed in such colours of speech, that it sets before your eyes the absent object, as perfectly, and more delightfully than nature”. *Absalom* contains relatively few similes and metaphors; but Dryden uses elaborate and striking images to “amplify” the poetic effect, as when he uses a long simile to emphasize the effects of the Popish plot (134-41).

The heroic character of *Absalom* is particularly evident in the poem’s five speeches - two by Achitophel, two by Absalom and one by David. These speeches are modelled on the speeches in classical epic poetry and in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Ruth Nevo points out the Virgilian allusions in the panegyric passages which evoke the characteristics of the man of honour - magnanimity and the liberal profession of arts and arms. These qualities are most marked in the portrait of one of the King’s followers, Barzillai (James Butler), whose wealth was large and heart larger (826-28). The elegy upon his son (831-47) is “closely Virgilian and diametrically opposed to any mood of biblical elegiac in such a way as to place the maximum distance between the two ancient worlds so subtly employed by Dryden to focus and evaluate contemporary affairs”.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Consider “Absalom and Achitophel” as a heroic poem.

**Unit 2 (c): MILTONIC ECHOES: INTERTEXTUALITY IN
*ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL***

To be evident from the moment he tries to seduce Monmouth “with studied arts”, shedding his “venom” in appropriately chosen words. As David Hopkins has pointed out, here we are intended to remember Satan’s temptation of Eve in Book IV of *Paradise Lost* : Satan squats “like a toad, close at the ear of Eve”, “inspiring venom”. We find a similar allusion in the unmistakably Miltonic flavour of the lines introducing Shaftesbury’s second speech aimed at seducing Monmouth. The

latter has not been entirely convinced by the first speech, and has expressed his reluctance to rebel against his father. At this point the narrator observes, “Him staggering so when Hell’s dire agent found, / While fainting virtue scarce maintain’d her ground, / He pours fresh forces in ...”. The lines are Miltonic, first, because of the inversion which places the object rather than the subject at the beginning of the sentence, as Milton’s “Latinisms” often do; secondly, because of the phrase “Hell’s dire agent” which not only equates Shaftesbury with Satan but is also reminiscent of several very similar phrases used by Milton about Satan; and thirdly, because of the way the narrator’s comment guides our perception of Shaftesbury’s true nature and prevents us from being swayed by his speech, something that the narrative voice in *Paradise Lost* Book I does before each of Satan’s powerful speeches begins. That Dryden conceived of Shaftesbury’s influence on Monmouth in terms of the Miltonic theme of temptation and Fall is evident in the words used by him in his address “To the Reader”; “ ’tis no more a wonder that he withstood not the temptation’s of Achitophel, than it was for Adam, not to have resisted the two devils, the Serpent, and the Woman”. Another Miltonic analogy has been pointed out by Ronald Paulson. Describing Achitophel’s conception of his son, which is like the conception of rebellion (71-72), the narrator alludes to Satan’s “conception” of rebellion which shows him producing his daughter, Sin. Achitophel is typologically Satan because he tempts Absalom by telling him that he is the “Son”, Christ. (Typology is the doctrine or study of events and figures as types or prefigurative symbols, especially in the Bible; thus the Old Testament hero Samson is a “type” of Christ.) Paulson also suggests that the satiric fiction of *Absalom and Achitophel* derives from *Paradise Lost*: Achitophel is Satan, Absalom is Adam, and the crowd of unreliable Israelites or Englishmen are like the fallen angels. Indeed, the followers of Shaftesbury-Achitophel are explicitly compared with the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*: “Some had in courts been great and thrown from thence / Like Fiends were harden’d in Impenitence (144-45)”. As already noted, Dryden sees the political crisis as a story of temptation and Fall, based on a lie, that is, the so-called Popish plot. The result of all this is chaos, an image which recurs through *Absalom* and which is reminiscent of Milton’s Chaos.

Thus *Absalom* frequently and deliberately alludes to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, widening the poem’s heroic associations. The design of the poem, as Dryden himself points out, follows to a large extent the temptation theme of *Paradise Lost*, while Shaftesbury-Achitophel is obviously presented as a Satanic figure.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. How does Dryden allude to Milton’s “Paradise Lost” in his poem and for what purpose?

Unit 2 (d): DRYDEN'S USE OF THE HEROIC COUPLET

As we saw earlier, Dryden considered the decasyllabic or heroic couplet the most suitable poetic medium for majestic satire. One important reason for this was the fact that this kind of couplet was already associated with heroic or epic poetry and heroic tragedy, which Dryden considered a descendant of the epic. Besides, the couplet can achieve certain effects more easily than other

Dryden used heroic couplet for serving several purposes — it can acquire a concentration which makes it apt for aphorisms ; a couplet is the most suitable verse form for a forceful antithesis ; the conciseness of the couplet accounts for various features of Dryden's verse style like syllepsis, juxtaposition, puns and so on.

verse-forms can. It can acquire a concentration which makes it apt for aphorisms, as in the following lines : “So easy still it proves in factious times, / With public zeal to cancel private crimes (180-81).” Secondly, a couplet is perhaps the most suitable verse-form for a forceful antithesis. This antithesis can be found in the two halves of a single line of the couplet as here : “In friendship false, implacable in hate (173).” The entire couplet is often structured in the form of antithesis, as in these lines, each of which is antithetical: “Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong; / Was everything by starts, and nothing long (547-48).” Antithesis becomes a subtle instrument in the confines of a couplet, as when it is used to expose Shimei's hypocrisy : “And never broke the Sabbath, but for gain (588).” Sometimes the antithesis lies in only two words opposite in meaning : “He had his *jest*, and they had his *estate* (562).” More strikingly, the form of the couplet enables Dryden to use antithesis which combine all these characteristics : “Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong; / Was everything by starts, and nothing long (547-48).” As these examples show, the couplet expresses a characteristic way of thinking. W. Graham has shown that conciseness of the couplet accounts for three other features of Dryden's verse style in the poem. The first of these features is syllepsis, that is, the use of a word to govern two other words, one literally, the other figuratively : “As served it once for worship and for food (121).” Here the word “served” governs “worship” literally and “food” figuratively. The second feature is juxtaposition, or placing side by side words whose positioning in the sentence creates an effect of incongruity: “Was chemist, fiddle, statesman, and buffoon (550).” The same effect is achieved by Alexander Pope's more famous line in *The Rape of the Lock* : “Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billet-doux.” The concise nature of the couplet also makes it hospitable to puns : “His neck was *loaded* with a chain of gold (596).” Finally, the couplet's discipline and its demand for precision lead to some memorable combinations of adjectives and nouns: “necessary gold”, “wished occasion”, “all-atoning name”.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What advantages did Dryden enjoy by using heroic couplet in his poem “Absalom and Achitophel” ?

Unit 2 (e): DRYDEN'S USE OF TRIPLETS

The heroic couplet is universally recognized as both Dryden's favoured verse-form and as eminently characteristic of his poetic style. But his use of triplets has not been as often commented upon. As Christopher Ricks says in his brilliant essay, 'Dryden's Triplets', the "heroic triplet" is "neither a term that is in use nor an accomplishment that is much appreciated". Ricks, whose discussion of the triplet we shall closely follow now, refers to the definitions of both "couplet" and "triplet" in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. A couplet is there defined as "A pair of successive lines of verse, esp. when rhyming together and of the same length"; this meaning was already there in the English language in 1580. The triplet is defined as "Three successive lines of verse, esp. when rhyming together and of the same length"; this meaning did not exist before 1656. From this it is apparent that the development of the triplet marked another stage in the progress of poetry. An earlier critic Mark Van Doren, comparing Dryden's triplets with those of Pope, concluded that Dryden's were less organically related to the poems in which they occurred than in fact they were often "excrescences". But as we are going to see, this is a complete misreading of the triplets.

The first triplet in *Absalom and Achitophel* comes after seventy seven consecutive couplets and occurs in the portrait of Achitophel-Shaftesbury. Achitophel's boundless energy is contrasted with his frail, small physique: "A fiery soul, which working out its way, / Fretted the pigmy body to decay: / And o'er informed the Tenement of Clay (156-58)". Just as the soul of Achitophel overflows the limits of his body, so does this triplet overflow the body of the couplet, over-informing the tenement (room for living in) that is the couplet-form itself. The triplet here, effecting an irruption or disruption, "is a powerful reminder of one form that power may take". The narrator finds in Achitophel the power which can break the social bonds of tradition or convention, as well as the fierce energy that can overcome physical weakness. Achitophel is not being ridiculed for his "pigmy body"; the point is rather that the body is a small thing compared with the vastness of the soul. Like Milton's Satan, Achitophel cannot be slighted; he has to be resisted; something that Absalom fails to do. The over-informed verse-form, the eruptive triplet, is thus organic. In fact, none of the eight triplets in *Absalom and Achitophel* is an excrescence; all of them are organic "in their relation both to the tissue of the verse and to the issue of the poem". Dryden's attack on Achitophel widens from the latter's body to the greater body politic, larger than England. This will be clear if we examine another triplet, the one that refers to the Triple Alliance between England, Holland and Sweden against France in 1668. The triplet not only celebrates the Triple Alliance but blames Achitophel for wrecking it. Achitophel was "Resolved to ruin or to rule the State", and "To compass

Dryden's occasional use of the triplet is deliberate and part of his artistic design, for the triplets always serve an important purpose and are organically related to the poem. e.g. in line 156, 157 and 158, Achitophel's boundless energy is contrasted with his frail, small physique. Here the triplet, effecting an irruption or disruption, "is a powerful reminder of one form that power may take".

this the Triple Bond he broke; /The pillars of the public safety shook: /And fitted Israel for a foreign yoke (175-77)". "The triplet enacts the triplicity of which it speaks. It expands the lines' compass, being fitted to a different yoke from that of the couplet, a yoke foreign to the usual public safety...that is a covenanted verse-movement, the heroic couplet." At the same time this triplet is a tribute to a triple bond, rhyme being by its very nature a bond. Ricks then draws an illuminating comparison between the verse-form employed by Milton in *Paradise Lost* and that used by Dryden in his most Miltonic poem, *Absalom and Achitophel*. For Milton the choice of blank verse in his epic constituted a political and social achievement as well as an artistic one. As Milton himself says in "The Verse", a note before the beginning of *Paradise Lost*: "This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming". For Dryden it was the heroic couplet that represented an ancient liberty recovered to the latest form which the heroic poem might take, the form of the mock-heroic. One other example of the triplet will be enough for our purposes here. This triplet occurs during Achitophel's first speech to Absalom, trying to persuade the latter to rebel against the King. One of the arguments used by Achitophel is that the King's popularity has declined substantially. At the Restoration, which took place twenty years ago, the joy of the people of England at having a King, after an interval of almost twenty years, knew no bounds. This overflowing joy apparently cannot be conveyed through a couplet, and the verse-form is expanded into a triplet: "He is not now, as when on Jordan's sand / The joyful people throng'd to see him land, / Cov'ring the beach, and black'ning all the strand (270-72)". "Over and above the call of duty had been the people's joy, and therefore over and above anything that the dutiful couplet could accommodate. The 'full' in 'joyful' proceeds to fill the couplet so that it has to spillover". As these three examples show, the triplet is more than a convenience for Dryden, more than a mechanical extension of the couplet by one line, and certainly more than a mere excrescence.

Thus Dryden employed the heroic couplet in *Absalom and Achitophel* because he considered it the most suitable verse-form for satire of an elevated kind. His occasional use of the triplet is deliberate and part of his artistic design, for the triplets always serve an important purpose and are organically related to the poem.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Cite some examples of Dryden's use of triplets in the poem "Absalom and Achitophel". For what purpose have they been used ?

Unit 3 (a): ABSALOM AND ACHITOPHEL: ITS POLITICAL PURPOSE AND CREED

Absalom and Achitophel is oftendescribed as the greatest political satire in the English language. The adjective “political” is apt for several reasons. First of all, writing the satire was itself a political exercise, for far from using his satire as a means to correct the follies of individuals or his society, Dryden had a clearly polemical intention. Dryden’s ostensible motive was to apply the sovereign remedy of reason to a “Hot distempers State”. But his more important intention was to denigrate the politicians who were locked with King Charles II in a fierce struggle for power. Secondly, Dryden does not even pretend to be objective or impartial. As he admits in his address ‘To the Reader’, “he who draws his pen for one party, must expect to make enemies of the other”. Thirdly, as Winn has shown, Dryden’s poem seeks to interpret the political drama in terms of a complex debate about justice and mercy, and the political wisdom and effectiveness of each of these two qualities. Finally, the poem upholds not only a particular political formation, but a political creed which is propounded as the unquestionably right and rational view.

Unit 3 (b): THE POLITICAL INTENTION

Absalom and Achitophel is Dryden’s contribution to the pamphlet war which accompanied the “Exclusion Crisis”. The exclusionists came to be known as Whigs and we saw earlier how their political campaign received fresh impetus from the alleged discovery of the so-called Popish plot. The Exclusion Bill was passed twice by Parliament, in 1679 and 1680, but on both occasions the King dissolved Parliament. After calling time. The King sought to justify his action in a Declaration which was ordered to be read from all the pulpits in England. When the Whigs sharply criticized the Declaration Dryden defended the King’s action in a prose pamphlet, *His Majesty’s Declaration Defended*. In July 1681, Shaftesbury was arrested on a charge of treason. There is reason to believe that Dryden was commissioned by King Charles himself to write the poem, though the intention definitely was not to influence Shaftesbury’s trial. (We saw earlier why it could not have been so.) Dryden’s real motive was to contribute to the propaganda war about the Exclusion question. He wanted to emphasize Charles’s justice, his compassion as well as his firmness during this political crisis. He also wished to underline the seditious and anarchic tendencies of Shaftesbury and his followers. Dryden presents the Whigs as pretenders to power. The succession issue was not, for Dryden and people of his political faith, simply a question of one ruler being followed by another; it had much wider economic and political implications. In *The Medall* Dryden characterizes the succession issue as a conflict between “Property and Sovereign Sway”. As Ruth Nevo shows, for Dryden the sway of property is anarchic and the Whigs represent the “Almighty crowd”, to use a phrase from *The Medall*. A further significance of the Miltonic allusions in *Absalom and Achitophel*

is political. Just as Milton's Satan is invested with royal splendour and presented as a royal tyrant who wants to wield sovereign power, Dryden's Satanic figure, Achitophel, stands for republicanism. The arguments he employs to influence Absalom are republican. Thus, the political conflict is presented by Dryden as a clash between two ideologies — conservatism and republicanism. It is in March 1681 at Oxford, Charles dissolved Parliament for the third and final

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What was Dryden's real political motive behind the writing of the poem?

Unit 3 (c): THE ROYALIST BIAS: DRYDEN'S PARTISANSHIP

The Whigs published a number of answers to the *Declaration*, including *A Letter from a Person of Quality*, a pamphlet which reiterated the fears of Popish plots and the arguments for Exclusion. The Tories, determined to put forward their side of the argument, published an anonymous pamphlet, *His Majesty's Declaration Defended*. James Anderson Winn treats this pamphlet as the work of Dryden. In the pamphlet Dryden speaks of the "many examples of moderation" in Charles's reign and emphasizes the "temperate and wholesome Constitution" of the English monarchy." Any impartial observer of the English political scene of the time would find many of Charles's actions against his political opponents bitterly vindictive. In *Absalom and Achitophel* one of the main problems faced by Dryden is how to reconcile the political necessity of vengeance with the Christian ideal of moderation. The assumptions of the poem are almost as partisan as those of the pamphlet. Both pamphlet and poem also strongly suggest Dryden's personal identification with King Charles, so that his defence of the king was a kind of self-defence too. Moreover, Dryden had often exercised the right to defend himself and even referred to himself in the *Discourse on Satire* as "naturally vindictive". He could therefore easily equate his many defences of his literary actions with Charles's recent defence of his political actions. Dryden's identification with Charles also leads him to present the conflict between Charles and Monmouth as one between age and youth. When Achitophel interprets David's mercy as the lethargy of old age and exalts the youthful vigour of Absalom, Dryden expects his readers to recognize the appeal of the argument but to reject it as misleading. Again, like many Tories, Dryden believed that the whole system by which property was passed down from generation to generation was threatened by the Exclusion Crisis.

As a firstborn son, he had very good reasons to want the system to prevail. Dryden perceived that the continuation of primogeniture, to which he owed his own privileges like the benefit of a University education, was inseparably linked with the laws of monarchical succession. Dryden's weakness for Absalom, leading him to present the young man as a victim of cunning manipulation, also derives from his identification with Charles, this time as father; as he says in the preface to the

poem, “David himself could not be more tender of the young man’s life, than I would be of his reputation.” Finally, Dryden’s partisanship is most evident in his treatment of the Whig leader, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, the first English politician to realize that the basis of power in a democracy is political organization rather than factionalism and mob violence. The genuineness of his political beliefs is proved by his association with John Locke, who wrote the unfinished *Essay concerning Toleration* in close association with Ashley. Dryden, however, presents him as a crooked counsellor, a cunning manipulator and a Satanic tempter of youth. Though his accomplishments as a judge are magnificently praised, as a politician he is presented as unreliable, deceitful, ambitious, with anarchic tendencies.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Dryden’s defence of the King was a kind of self-defence too. — Substantiate.

Unit 3 (d): THE DEBATE ABOUT JUSTICE AND MERCY

Dryden’s partisan confidence in the royalist cause was based upon the increasing setbacks to the Whig position. Shaftesbury was imprisoned and possessed a document calling upon Protestants to take up arms to prevent a Catholic succession. But since the document was unsigned and not in Shaftesbury’s handwriting, it could not be used against the Whig leader. Another prominent political figure of the opposition, Stephen College, was put on trial but acquitted by a London jury handpicked by Whig sheriffs. But the King shifted the trial of College to Oxford, where a more cooperative jury sentenced College to death by hanging. Titus Oates, who testified on behalf of College, was thrown out of his comfortable house and his financial allowance was withdrawn. Charles was revealing his vindictive tendencies and Shaftesbury feared that he might be another victim of the King’s political vengeance. But Dryden says in the preface that he deliberately omitted from his poem the tragic ending of the Bible story: “The conclusion of the story, I purposely forbore to prosecute; because, I could not obtain from myself, to show Absalom unfortunate.” Dryden had thus stopped short of the “conclusion” and his declaration to this effect must have attracted attention in the context of the relentless and successful prosecution of Stephen College, and immediately before the unsuccessful attempt to prosecute Shaftesbury. The poem has abundant evidence of Charles’s fondness for Monmouth, and Dryden too appears as a father-figure reluctant to show Absalom “unfortunate”. Again we perceive an analogy between the poet and his monarch, an analogy which raises questions about the wisdom of a policy of mercy. Winn has rightly found in the poem a complex internal debate on the respective merits of justice and mercy. In the third edition of *Absalom and Achitophel*, published by the end of December, Dryden added to David’s final speech four extra lines expressing his readiness to

Dryden deliberately omitted the tragic ending of the Biblical story from his poem. since, he, like Charles himself had a fondness for Monmouth.

pardon Absalom. This was a surprising addition, because Monmouth had meanwhile done something fresh to provoke Charles's anger—he had offered to stand bail for Shaftesbury. Dryden is aware that Charles was more vindictive than him and therefore says in the preface that the position adopted by him will not “please the violent, on both sides”, referring to his own mercy as a fault: “The fault, on the right hand, is to extenuate, palliate, and indulge; and, to confess freely, I have endeavoured to commit it.”

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Justice and mercy to everything in the poem “Absalom and Achitophel”—substantiate.

Unit 3 (e): DRYDEN'S POLITICAL CREED

In his *Life of Dryden*, Dr. Johnson observes that “If it [*Absalom and Achitophel*] be considered as a poem political and controversial it will be found to comprise all the excellences of which the subject is susceptible.” Johnson's remark indicates how keenly the contemporary readers enjoyed Dryden's satire for its treatment of urgent matters and recognizable figures of topical relevance. Some more recent critics consider the poem's chief achievement to lie in its creation of a coherent and unified “conservative myth”: Dryden has used all the resources of his poetic art to convince the reader of the rightness of the royal cause. But David Hopkins has pointed out a fundamental weakness in Dryden's presentation of the royalist position. Dryden's linking of contemporary and biblical events at times appears to be “more ingenious than inevitable.” This is most evident in the portraits of the “short file” of King Charles's loyal supporters which precede Charles's final speech. The portrait of Barzillai, or James Butler, is flawed by a monotony of movement and inertness of metaphor. “A sceptical reader might feel that some of the allegorical parallelism which is so central to the poem's main design only has the desired effect if the allegory is being decoded by someone who already fundamentally shares the poet's assumptions”. Hopkins identifies another basic weakness in Dryden's poetic design as the vehicle of his political strategy. The assumptions and principles on which Dryden bases his allegory were not exclusive to the party of which he was the spokesman. Essentially the same allegorical scheme and political arguments were employed in Elkanah Settle's *Absalom Senior*, a Whig reply to Dryden's poem. In Settle's poem it is the Tories who are seen as motivated by self-interest. The poem also presents parliament as a divinely appointed check on tyrannical kings - a point of view exactly the reverse of that of Dryden. Dryden is not of course advocating absolute power for the king; but he is in favour of putting the king in overall control of the state. In *Absalom and Achitophel* he applies a three-part scheme to political policy, when he offers the king a third option for dealing with his enemies. Since large-scale amnesty would lead to weakness, and absolutist vengeance might provoke a civil war, Dryden advocates a policy of firm punishment

for those who challenge such fundamental laws as the law of succession, but a general policy of moderation and tolerance, and a propaganda campaign to remove fears of absolutism and win support for Charles.

Dryden's exact political creed emerges when, in a sudden departure from the narrative of the progress of Absalom's conspiracy, he addresses England in a prophetic voice as "foolish Israel!" (753). He asserts that any interference with the line of succession will leave the people vulnerable and exposed to the sword of every "arbitrary Lord". In 761-62 he offers a spirited refutation of the ideas of contractual monarchy then being developed by Shaftesbury's secretary, Locke. The whole speech (753-810) is in fact a great contribution to the continuing political argument regarding the king's rights. To express the view that innovation is "the blow of fate" Dryden uses an architectural metaphor. If and when ancient buildings become weak and endangered, the best course is not to change the foundations, but to strengthen the wall and patch the flaws. The political innovator who attempts to change the foundations becomes a rebel. The full horror of the innovator's attempt is brought out by using the metaphor of the Ark. (The Ark of the Covenant was a chest or box representing the Deity, carried by the Israelites in their wanderings in the desert after the Exodus. The Ark was the holy of holies, symbolizing God's merciful promises to his people.) When the Ark was restored to Israel by a dancing David, a man who was trying to steady it in the oxcart was struck dead on the spot for touching it. That story, as Winn suggests, is intended by Dryden to provide a precise commentary on Whig ideas about government. Uzzah, the man struck dead, intended no harm or sacrilege, and yet "God smote him for his error" (II Samuel). Dryden means that even those Whigs, who have no quarrel with the institution of monarchy, become rebels when they wish to tamper with the succession. On the other hand, Dryden believes that arbitrary power is as dangerous as "lawless anarchy" is, though it is with the second danger that he is more fully concerned. In fact, the apparent impartiality of the lines on the dangers of absolute rule is offset by the poem's earlier assertion that David cannot be regarded as an arbitrary ruler. It is true that "Laws are vain, by which we right enjoy / If kings unquestioned. Can those laws destroy (763-64)"; but the "laws" have already been identified with the king's cause and therefore it is clearly implied that the warning does not apply to Charles's rule. The argument is further weighted against republican rule by the frequent association of the "public" with "lunacy" and by the reference to "Nature's state".

Dryden's exact political creed emerges when, he addresses England as "foolish Israel !" He uses an archetypal metaphor, i.e. that of the Ark. If and when ancient buildings become weak and endangered, the best course is not to change the foundations, but to strengthen the wall and patch the flaws.

This image is most lucidly explained by D.R. Elloway. Dryden refers first to the original contract by which people instituted government by giving away their "native sway", a phrase which recalls Dryden's contemporary Thomas Hobbes's "Right of Nature" that had to be surrendered in the interest of settled rule. Dryden recognizes the danger that it might lead to tyranny, but maintains, like

Hobbes, that the contract is binding on successive generations. Dryden also maintains that the original terms of the contract cannot be changed, though he makes it clear that he does not support absolute rule by monarchs. His justification of royal authority is based, not on theoretical principles, but on the danger posed by an unruly crowd and the necessity of a central power to protect individual rights. Dryden also uses Hobbes's argument, repeating the political theorist's very words, that if the king's prerogative to rule is seized by the people, both kings and "Government itself" will fall to "Nature's state". If people usurp the king's power, total chaos will reign: "For whatsoever their sufferings were before, / That change they covet makes them suffer more (797-98)".

Summing Up

Absalom and Achitophel is intensely political and makes no bones about its partisan views. It supports the king's cause as against that of the republican Whigs whose views are rejected and whose leaders are included. It is also political in the sense that it contains an internal debate about the political wisdom of justice and mercy. Since Dryden treats Monmouth with a fatherly indulgence, more than even his natural father did, Monmouth's rebellion is presented as the result of Shaftesbury's instigation. Dryden shows that his poem, unlike one of his pamphlets which it strongly resembles, is not merely polemical but results from a genuinely held and for him rationally valid political ideology—that of conservatism.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. For what purpose does Dryden use the metaphor of the Ark in this poem?

Unit 4 (a) DRYDEN'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION: THE PORTRAITS

We have already seen that Dryden was to a large extent influenced by the type of writing known as "character" and that his satires are all built on the basic unit of the portrait or character. Since belief in Dryden's political creed is limited and since interest in the particular case of the struggle for power which prompted the poem is not universal, it is possible to suggest that *Absalom and Achitophel* retains a constant readership because of the poem's artistic qualities. Chief among these qualities is its art of satirical portraiture. The history of the critical reception of the poem shows that after its topical interest had worn off, Dryden's poem was usually remembered, not as a whole design, but for the excellence of its parts, especially its memorable portraits. Dryden himself seems to have thought that the chief appeal of the poem lay in its portraits, or at least one of its portraits. He said that "the character of Zimri in my *Absalom* is, in my opinion, worth the whole poem". The only reason why we may not agree with his view is that there are other portraits in the poem which are equally brilliant and memorable. We shall now look at some of these portraits.

Unit 4 (b): THE PORTRAIT OF DAVID-CHARLES

This is the shortest of the poem's many portraits, but may also be called the most lively. The poem begins with a witty depiction of the king and his infamous lechery. We have already seen that the creative fecundity displayed in drawing this portrait matches Charles-David's fertility. We shall now turn to some other aspects of the portrait. Traditionally a satirist has been seen as a demolition expert successfully carrying out the moral and polemical aims with which he begins his work. By exposing the follies and vices of his victims, the satirist traditionally wins our assent to his own moral, political or aesthetic values. Such a traditional view of the satirist's objectives would lead us to expect that Dryden would justify the king's every action and seek to prove the divinely sanctioned role of the Stuart monarchs. The satirist would also be expected to spare no pains to convince his readers of the complete villainy of the king's political opponents. Some of the portraits in the poem fulfil such expectations. But the more complex of the portraits, such as David, Achitophel and Zimri, cannot be seen in such black-and-white colours. Some recent theorists of satire have questioned the traditional assumptions about the satirist's intentions and practice. They detect in much great satire two contradictory strains existing simultaneously. There are, on the one hand, the satirist's corrective and reformist intentions; at the same time, often equally unmistakably, there is clear evidence that the victims partly arouse the satirist's sympathy and fascination. According to T.S. Eliot, both Dryden and Pope have the ability

Traditionally satirist, by exposing the follies and vices of his victims, wins our assent to his own moral, political, or aesthetic values. But all the portraits of characters do not fulfil our expectation that Dryden would justify the king's every action.

to transform their real-life targets into fictive creations, so that the victims become merely the pretext for the poetry. While satire is generally destructive, Dryden's satire, says Eliot, creates the object it sets out to destroy. Dryden can do this because he has the supreme gift of "a certain divine levity". Dustin Griffin has shown that the satirist can be both repelled and attracted by the world of folly. The satirist not only seeks to persuade us, or denounce his targets, but provokes us to raise and consider questions about the subjects of satire, questions which seem to challenge the tone of approval or disapproval that appears to be dominant.

Some consider that by using ironies, Dryden is at the very beginning getting out of the way of the matters of Charles's lechery and Monmouth's illegitimacy, so that he can concentrate on the more

The confusion regarding the question of polygamy is the inevitable result of the inconsistency between the flippant opening lines about Charles's lechery and the solemn closing elevating Charles to a godlike stature. But some other critics think that the unity of "Absalom and Achitophel" lies in its acceptance of disunity.

important political issues in the rest of the poem. Others think that Dryden, in this way, sought to emulate his king by having at least one actress-mistress of his own. Our interpretation of the David-Charles portrait is to a very large extent determined by the ironies operating in the relevant lines (1 - 16), ironies which continually raised doubts about the narrator's attitude. Those who read the lines as a clear indication of the narrator's approval of the king's polygamy point out that by adopting this clever strategy Dryden is at the very beginning getting out of the way the

inconvenient matters of Charles's lechery and Monmouth's illegitimacy, so that he can concentrate on the more important political issues in the rest of the poem. Some others have suggested that the opening lines of the poem express the narrator's unmistakable approval of Charles's conduct and contain a plea for understanding. Those who endorse this interpretation point out how monogamy is disparaged in a cynical, man-of-the-world spirit, especially in the line: "E'r one to one was, cursedly, confined (4)". In this connection it is sometimes mentioned that Dryden himself sought to emulate his king by having at least one actress-mistress of his own. Another approach to the portrait is through the traditional belief according to which the king had two bodies, the one public, sacred and eternal, the other private, frail and mortal; the second is foregrounded in the opening lines, while the first occupies the centre-stage in the poem's action, especially its conclusion. This reading of the lines insists that Dryden is presenting Charles's promiscuity at the very beginning as an attractively virile sexuality, that the manifestly ironical tone of some of the lines does not have the effect of damaging Charles's authority and credibility, and that the underlying suggestion is that if, like the biblical David, Charles is susceptible to excessive sexuality, like the biblical prototype again, he is also God's representative on earth, as can be seen at the end when Charles's voice is reinforced by divine intervention: "He said. The' Almighty, nodding, gave consent (1026)". But one cannot ignore the many questions which the opening passage raises. Is the narrator seriously endorsing the notion of an ideal paradise in which unchecked sexuality was the rule rather than an exception? Does the

word “priestcraft” in the opening line suggest that priests are the villains of the piece because they put an end to polygamy and that the narrator reveals here an anticlericalism which distinguished the Whig politicians? (The word “priestcraft” suggests “deceitful priestly cunning”.) Does the narrator seriously believe that Charles’s promiscuity is “after Heaven’s own heart”? What would such a belief indicate about the nature of the Christian God? (Jeremy Collier asked the same question and came to the conclusion that Dryden was being blasphemous. As he wrote in 1698: “This is downright defiance of the Living God. Here you have the very essence and spirit of blasphemy”). Since the narrator refers to a time when polygamy was not a sin, does it follow that like Milton, Dryden had no inherent objection to the practice of polygamy? There are also some potentially subversive suggestions in the passage: that the divine right enjoyed by the king is the right to be lecherous; that sexual activity unsupported by law and morality is “natural”; that priests have nothing to do with piety; and that the confinement imposed by monogamy is a curse. Instead of taking these suggestions as teasing hints, some critics see them as unmistakable signs of ideological confusion on the poet’s part. The confusion is the inevitable result, according to such critics, of the inconsistency between the flippant opening lines about Charles’s lechery and the solemn closing lines elevating Charles to a godlike stature, an inconsistency due to the contradiction between a secular view of nature and society and a belief in the outmoded notion of a sacred monarchical order. But there are also critics not at all troubled by the poem’s transition from subversive humour at Charles’s expense to a solemn assertion of his divine authority. The unity of *Absalom and Achitophel*, according to this view, lies in its acceptance of disunity.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the portraiture of David.

Unit 4 (c): THE PORTRAIT OF ACHITOPHEL-SHAFTESBURY

We find the same kind of complexity and ambivalence in the portrait of Shaftesbury-Achitophel, though here the tone is never flippant or even humorous. For Ian Jack, the description of Achitophel is a reminder that satire can exist without humour and without ridicule. But just as in the portrait of Charles-David a tone of approval is often overlaid by ironical questioning, Achitophel is not presented simply as a villain. With some of the king’s enemies Dryden displays a tendency to paint them in the blackest colours; their motives are uniformly despicable and they are treated with contempt or scorn. But in drawing the portrait of Achitophel Dryden often suggests a tone of genuine wonder,

The description of Achitophel is a reminder that satire can exist without humour and without ridicule. Dryden often suggests in describing him a tone of genuine wonder caused by the man’s boundless energy and ambition which almost overwhelm his pigmy body. Here dislike or distrust is modified by a recognition of true wit.

The wonder is caused by the man's boundless energy and ambition which almost overwhelm his pigmy body. Achitophel is a phenomenon who prompts the satirist to raise some fundamental questions about a type of human personality (165-68). As the questions indicate, Achitophel's restlessness is almost inexplicable in terms of commonly perceived motives such as malice, hatred, self-interest or envy. The motives which drive him arise from deeper "psycho-somatic regions". Shaftsbury had undergone an operation on a cyst of the liver, but the wound had not completely.

We saw in the portrait of Charles that approval is often modified, or even offset, by critical hints. In the portrait of Shaftesbury we see the reverse of this satiric strategy: here dislike or distrust is modified by a recognition of true merit. Shaftesbury's greatness as a judge dispensing justice without fear or favour is freely acknowledged, as are his zeal to redress the grievances of the poor, his speedy execution of his duties, his accessibility and incorruptibility. It is true that Achitophel is introduced as the leader of the king's enemies, the "Fiends" who are "harden'd in impenitence" because of "their Monarch's fatal mercy". Winn believes that the reference is to the Act of Oblivion of 1660, by which Charles forgave such offences as Shaftesbury's service on Cromwell's Privy Council. But the advocacy of vengeance is not the driving force behind the portrait. Like Milton's Satan, whose resemblance with Achitophel has been pointed out in detail earlier in the module, the King's chief adversary has fallen from greatness. He is "Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit" (153), "A fiery soul (154)", whose clean hands and discerning eyes are explicitly praised. Dryden even mentions the possibility that Shaftesbury's considerable talents might have been better employed. Thus in the portrait of Achitophel we detect a note of loss or regret caused by the recognition of exceptional talents dedicated to wrong ends.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the portraiture of Achitophel.

Unit 4 (d): THE PORTRAIT OF ZIMRI-BUCKINGHAM

Dryden's characterization of Zimri, frequently referred to earlier in the module, is remarkable for other reasons, though here too we detect the curious mixture of fascination and condemnation that marks the portraits of David and Achitophel. It is different from the Achitophel portrait in being general rather than particular, while Achitophel is primarily a picture of an individual. The Zimri portrait has been called by Ian Jack as first of all "a humourous character of the Inconstant Man". It also differs from the satire on Shaftesbury in that it relies on humour and avoids the sombre tone of the Achitophel portrait. Dryden's reference in the *Dicourse* to the fact that the Duke of Buckingham, the original of the portrait, was amused rather than offended by the portrait, shows that he did not wish to provoke the Duke. The enmity between Dryden and the Duke was literary as well as

political. In his *Rehearsal* (1671), a parody of Restoration heroic tragedy, Buckingham had ridiculed the typical love-honour conflicts in Dryden's heroic plays. Buckingham in fact attacked Dryden for political as well as aesthetic reasons, provoking the latter to respond in kind. By presenting Zimri-Buckingham as a fickle person Dryden is suggesting that those who support the Whig cause are totally irresponsible. Since Buckingham was a much lesser political threat than Shaftesbury, Dryden adopts a tone of light banter in the portrait. Apart from the Zimris in the Bible, another original for Dryden's Zimri can be found in classical poetry. In his Third Satire the Roman satirist draws the portrait of a Greek who is an opportunist to the core. Hopkins quotes from Dryden's own translation of Juvenal's lines to demonstrate the similarity. The striking similarity between some of the most brilliant lines in the Zimri portrait and Juvenal's lines as translated by Dryden will be evident from just two examples from the latter: "Who bears a nation in a single man?" and "All things the hungry Greek exactly knows". Similarly, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, is "everything by starts, and nothing long". He is chemist, fiddler, statesman, buffoon, womanizer, painter, poet and "ten thousand" other things. Dryden is of course exaggerating, as the hyperbole ("ten thousand") shows; but historians have cited contemporary accounts of Buckingham's profligacy. In the Zimri portrait Dryden's principal satiric aim seems to be to single out the type of fickle and unscrupulous person who is a threat to the stability of a society. But as in the ambivalent portraits of David and Achitophel, in the Zimri portrait too we find traits which cannot be taken as straightforward condemnation. Hopkins has found an unexpected resonance in two of the most celebrated lines in the portrait: "A man so various, that he seemed to be/Not one, but all mankind's epitome". Juvenal's Greek shyster contains in his single personality an entire nation, but Zimri's comprehensiveness is much more impressive: he is the epitome of all mankind. In his magnificent tribute to Shakespeare's genius Dryden says in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* that "he was the man who of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul". There seems to be only a thin dividing-line between the description of Zimri's comprehensiveness and the large and comprehensive soul of Shakespeare. Special attention should be paid to the adjective "various" in the lines from the Zimri portrait: the adjective usually qualifies plural nouns, but here a single man is said to be so various that he can be taken as all mankind in miniature. Another comment on Zimri similarly wavers between condemnation and something akin to approbation: "Blest madman, who could every hour employ, / With something new to wish, or to enjoy! (553-54)". As Hopkins says, "it is difficult to be quite sure whether Dryden's tone is closer to condemnatory scorn or delighted wonder". The tone of wavering, of wonder, is nicely conveyed by the jerky antitheses in the portrait, for example: "Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;/Was everything by starts, and nothing long (547-48)". Zimri has a chameleon-like personality, capable of assuming different characters in quick succession. As Dryden describes these different characters or shapes, the verse has a tumbling quality (550-51). Not only do such lines indicate the satirist's huge delight in contemplating this "blest madman", but they are also a

comment on the “delightful absurdity of human perverseness rather than a polemical denunciation of a political enemy. They have an imaginative freedom that transcends their strategic purpose (Hopkins).”

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the portrait of Zimri.

Unit 4 (e): THE PORTRAIT OF SHIMEI-BETHEL

The portraits of the two remaining figures of the political opposition, Shimei and Corah, are very different in tone and strategy. For both, the satirist adopts an attitude of contemptuous scorn, more evident in the Corah portrait. Jack has also detected in these portraits an indirectness of approach involving some degree of humour which makes them very different from the unsmiling indictment of Achitophel. Jack's explanation is that since commoners cannot be as dangerous politically as noblemen, Dryden can afford to treat Shimei and Corah with the kind of contemptuous humour which is totally absent from the Achitophel and Zimri portraits. Jack is right, since Dryden's class discrimination is evident in the way he ridicules Corah for his “base” birth. The “character” of Shimei begins with lines which employ unambiguously pejorative words: “worse”, “wretch”. The contemporary politician behind the biblical name is Slingsby Bethel, who represents, in the words of D.R. Elway, “that fusion of austere Puritan Nonconformity and tight-fisted commercial individualism that made the City an anti-Royalist stronghold... His name became proverbial for meanness”. He was elected one of London's two Whig sheriffs in 1680. In II Samuel Shimei cursed David, a fact recalled in the portrait by Shimei's readiness to join any group “gathered to declaim/Against the Monarch of Jerusalem (601-02).” The biblical Shimei is the archetype of hypocrisy and disrespect to the divinity that is supposed to be embodied by the king, and these are the keynotes of Dryden's portrait of Bethel. Bethel had written a book called *The Interests of Princes and States* in which he spoke about the ideal conditions for trade. The portrait therefore emphasizes the crass commercialism of the man, symbolized by the facts that “His neck was loaded with a chain of gold (596)” and that all his energy was spent in “heaping wealth.” His political bias was evident in the way he packed “a jury of dissenting Jews” whenever any of his “factious friends” was on trial. Dryden makes telling use of anti-climaxes to expose the real nature of the man behind his public appearance. Thus Shimei showed early promise of “Zeal to God,” but also of hatred to his king (from Dryden's royalist point of view the two are irreconcilable). Shimei never “broke the Sabbath”, but if he ever did, it was only for personal gain. He respected Moses's Laws, but only because they were the product of long fasting which appealed to his miserly habits. Thus even his refusal to indulge his appetites is presented as a flaw, an example of his parsimony. The devastating satire at the expense of Bethel is sometimes a result of cleverly placing a single word, as in the line: “Yet loved his wicked neighbour as himself

(600)". The noble biblical ideal of loving one's neighbour as oneself is grossly parodied in the single adjective "wicked". In fact, the entire portrait is intended as a travesty of the Christian ideal.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the portraiture of Shimei.

Unit 4 (f): THE PORTRAIT OF CORAH-OATES

In the portrait of Shimei, but more so in that of Corah, we have come a long way from the fine raillery of the Zimri portrait or the ambivalence in the characterization of Achitophel. The Corah portrait is denunciatory satire at its sharpest. Dryden's scorn for this shady figure is vividly expressed in the lines directly addressed to the man and in the employment of the derogatory "thou" (632-33). The original of the portrait was Titus Oates, who has been already described earlier in the module. Since Oates was the son of a weaver, Dryden mocks his low birth. Graham has pointed out the close similarity between Oates and the biblical figure of Korah in Numbers, xvi. Like Oates, Korah created an atmosphere of doubt and suspicion when he "rose up before Moses with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Yet take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, everyone of them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves before the congregation of the Lord?" Just as Oates's false evidence was responsible for a number of people dying, getting injured and losing their reputation, so innocent people "died about the matter of Korah". As in the portrait of Shimei, there is in the Corah portrait too skillful use of biblical allusion to denigrate the victim. The biblical Korah was a Levite, a member of the tribe entrusted with the care of the Tabernacle and therefore allowed some privileges. Oates also enjoyed privileges from the Whigs because of his "discovery" of the Popish plot. There is more biblical allusion in the lines: "Erect thyself thou Monumental Brass:/ High as the Serpent of thy Metal made (633-34)". Here the reference is to Moses's brazen serpent which saved the Israelites from the plague of fiery serpents. (Numbers, xxi). Oates likewise claimed that his testimony would save the English from Catholic conspiracy. Kinsley has pointed out that Dryden may also be recalling the Old Testament application of "brass" to a people hardened by sin. That Oates completely devalued the word "witness" is indicated by further biblical allusions: to the false witness who testified against the martyr St. Stephen and to other false witnesses mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew. Thus by the time Dryden has finished with the word "witness", it is thoroughly discredited along with the perjurer Oates. Another distinctive aspect of the Corah portrait is its delineation of an upstart who threatens to assume the proportions of a great political player. Oates's low birth is said to be responsible for his desire to seek fame, or notoriety. Dryden scornfully dismisses the ambition of the "weaver's issue" to become a "Prince's son".

Ruth Nevo sees the portrait of Corah as the crowning achievement of *Absalom and Achitophel*. She finds in the poem “two great rival systems of evaluation”, the classical and the biblical. (Zimri is both a biblical figure and modelled on one of Juvenal’s satiric targets). These two rival strains are simultaneously present in the exposure of this arch-hypocrite. “Classical monumental fame, Mosaic redemption, perjury and prophecy all combine to articulate the inimitable, densely packed scorn” of the lines describing Corah-Oates.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the portraiture of Corah — Oates.

THE FOLLOWERS OF CHARLES

The portraits of the Royalists are of course not a part of Dryden’s satiric design and it will be entirely wrong to expect in them the ironies, sarcasm, denunciation and even ambivalence which mark the characterization of the Whig politicians. For the loyalists Dryden uses panegyric. This panegyric style is by no means undistinguished, however. In fact, Ruth Nevo has argued that the values against which the ironies in the satirical portraits have been set are also invoked in the portraits of the Royalists. These values can be generally labelled as Augustan and divided under the heads Church, King, and classical culture. However, it is classical culture which is most clearly woven into the texture of the verse. “In the panegyric passages, though these are kept within the framework of biblical reference, the Virgilian allusions are most marked, and the values evoked are significantly the familiar attributes of the life of the man of honour—magnanimity and the liberal profession of arts and arms”. These values are most strikingly present in the portrait of Barzillai. The biblical Barzillai sustained David during Absalom’s rebellion; the contemporary figure behind the biblical name is James Butler who served Charles faithfully. Dryden takes special care to mention the fact that the king’s supporters were few; for him their real distinction lies in the smallness of the group, because already he has associated numerical majority with madness. The contrast is emphasized by means of an antithesis: “Friends he has few, so high the madness grows;/Who dare be such, must be the people’s foes (813-14).” The portrait of Barzillai’s son emphasizes the latter’s filial loyalty and reliability, and is thus a contrast to the portrait of Absalom. Zadoc, who was the high priest of Israel during Absalom’s rebellion, in II Samuel, is Dryden’s name for William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury. Sagan of Jerusalem was the high priest Zadoc’s deputy in the Bible; behind the allegorical name is Henry Compton, Bishop of London. Adriel, a name that has not been traced in the Bible, stands for John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave and “the author of much unreadable verse” (Eloway). These are the main figures in the group of Charles’s loyal followers. It is undeniable that Dryden’s presentation of this group lacks the liveliness and comprehensiveness of the portraits of the king’s political opponents. Two explanations of this difference have been suggested. First, Dryden intends

a contrast between the Whigs' misuse of their own talents in pursuing unworthy ends and the Royalists' proper use of their abilities in the king's cause. As a result, the second group of portraits depends for its effect on its relationship with the first. Secondly, Dryden wants to emphasize the connection between numerical superiority and political irresponsibility and therefore he can afford to name only a few of the loyalists to suggest their political worth and good sense.

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The author of the module gratefully acknowledges his substantial debt to the books and articles mentioned above.

ASSIGNMENTS

Short-answer type:

1. Why was king Charles II's sexuality an issue in contemporary politics?
2. What was the British convention regarding succession to the throne?
3. From which book of the Bible is the story of Dryden's poem derived?
4. Explain one advantage of using the Bible story in *Absalom and Achitophel*.
5. Who was Titus Oates? Why did he become famous/notorious?

6. What is the Popish Plot? What was its political impact?
7. What is the Exclusion Crisis? Briefly comment on its political importance.
8. How would you define a couplet and a triplet?
9. What is Dryden's attitude to Absalom? Why did he adopt such an attitude?
10. Mention some of the real people and places as well as the biblical names given to them by Dryden.
11. Who is Barzillai? Why is he important?
12. Who is Adriel?

Broad Questions:

1. Explain the topical issues of history and politics that lie behind Absalom and Achitophel.
2. Comment on Dryden's use of the Bible for allegorical purposes in Absalom and Achitophel.
3. What are the advantages of using a biblical story in Absalom and Achitophel?
4. Examine Dryden's views on satire with special reference to Absalom and Achitophel.
5. Why is Absalom and Achitophel called a heroic poem? Substantiate your answer.
6. What do you mean by "intertextuality"? Discuss the intertextuality in Absalom and Achitophel.
7. Trace the Miltonic echoes in Absalom and Achitophel and comment on their significance.
8. Comment on Dryden's use of the heroic couplet. Why does he sometimes use triplets? Give suitable examples.
9. Why is Absalom and Achitophel called a political satire? What was its political objective?
10. Is Dryden objective or partisan in his treatment of political issues? Discuss with reference to the text.
11. Expound Dryden's own political creed as you find it in Absalom and Achitophel.
12. Why is there a debate on justice and mercy in Absalom and Achitophel? How is the debate conducted?
13. Comment on Dryden's art of satiric characterization with special reference to any one of the portraits.
14. Comment on the portraits of the following figures as they are presented in Absalom and Achitophel:
 - (a) Charles-David
 - (b) Achitophel-Shaftesbury
 - (c) Zimri-Buckingham
 - (d) Shimei-Bethel
 - (e) Corah-Oates.

BLOCK-II

Alexander Pope: *An Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* Oliver Goldsmith: *The Deserted Village*

CONTENT STRUCTURE

Unit 5 (a): Alexander Pope: A General Introduction

Unit 5 (b): Alexander Pope and his Time

Unit 5 (c): A critical analysis of the Poem

Unit 6 (a): Analysis of Different Character Portraits

i. The Portrait of Atticus

ii. The Portrait of Sporus

iii. The Portrait of Bufo

Unit 6 (b): *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* as an Autobiography

Unit 6 (c): A Note on Satire

Unit 7(a): Oliver Goldsmith's Life and Works

Unit 7(b): Historical Background of *The Deserted Village*

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Unit 7(d): Dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds

Unit 8(a): Theme of the Poem

Unit 8(b): The Pastoral

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Unit 8(d): Critical Analysis of the Poem

Unit 8(e): Criticism

Annotations

The Poem

Suggested Reading

Assignment

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this block is first to give students an overview of Alexander Pope's life and literary works. Secondly, to initiate a detail discussion of *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnut*. The entire block is a comprehensive student friendly analysis of the text *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnut*. Along with the detail discussion of the text the block is focussing on critical understandings of the text in order to give students a comprehensive understanding of the text *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnut*.

Unit 5(a): ALEXANDER POPE - A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Alexander Pope was born in May 1688 in London to an affluent linen trader and a Roman Catholic in religion. During the accession of William and Mary to the British throne, Roman Catholics were compelled to live outside London; several prohibitions were imposed upon them as a consequence of which the senior Pope had to leave London to settle in the tranquil environment of Windsor Forest. Being a Roman Catholic, Pope was deprived of an university education. Besides, a deadly tubercular disease in the spine made Pope a cripple. He was constantly in pain which he

refers to as “this long disease, my life” in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*. Though confined to the bed, Pope acquired a great knowledge of the classics. By and large a self-educated person, Pope started

Though confined to the bed, Pope acquired a great knowledge of the classics. By the time, Pope was twenty-five, his name as a great poet was already established in the literary world. His earlier works include “Pastorals”, “An Essay on Criticism” etc. But his literary genius lay in satires and mock-epics like “The Rape of the Lock”, “The Dunciad”, “An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot” and so on.

showing his literary talent at a very early age which he mentions in the poem: “As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame, / I lisp’d in numbers, for the numbers came” (ll. 128-129). And by the time Pope was twenty five, his name as a great poet was already established in the literary world. His acquaintance with the Greek and Latin literature produced his first published work *Pastorals* in 1709. Two years later he published *An Essay on Criticism* which is an attempt to develop an aesthetics of poetry and criticism. In this poem Pope has used the heroic couplet almost to perfection. *Windsor Forest* extols the magnificent beauty of the landscape of the royal forest and the poet’s vision of a Utopian era of calm and peace. In 1714 Pope undertook an ambitious project of translating Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The subscription of this project made Pope financially independent. In 1725 his publication of the edition of Shakespeare saw him quarrelling with Lewis Theobald just as his translation of Homer soured his relationship with Joseph Addison.

But Pope’s genius lay in satires and mock-epics, the two dominant genres that represented the prevalent literary taste of 18th century England. In 1714, the enlarged version of *The Rape of the Lock* was brought out and immediately acknowledged as a masterpiece of mock-epic poetry, a delightful satire on the world of fashionable men and women. In this year of success, Pope co-founded with Swift, Gay, Joseph Spence and Dr. Arbuthnot the ‘Scriblerus Club’ and established a lasting friendship with these men of letters. Its aim was to ridicule all literary pretension, bad taste and corruption rampant in social life. *The Dunciad* is another specimen of the mock-heroic with Lewis Theobald as its hero. The poem is an invective, a merciless sizing down of literary giants into dwarfs or a bunch of ‘dunces’. The poem is a war against pretentiousness and pseudo scholarship. *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, published in 1735, is again a disparaging campaign against false criticism, evils of patronage and poverty-stricken scribblers as well as a defence of himself, his parents and friends, and his poetic career. The didactic note continues in *An Essay on Man* and it is taken up earnestly in the *Moral Essays* and *Imitations of Horace* (published in 1738). The *Imitations* is a modern adaptation of the Latin poet to contemporary situation. Pope’s poetic career came to a close with the publication of the revised version of *The Dunciad* in 1743 replacing Lewis Theobald with Colley Cibber as its hero. The satire reaches solemn heights and at times attains Miltonic grandeur. *The New Dunciad* was Pope’s last completed work.

After the publication of *The New Dunciad* Pope’s health deteriorated. The man who valued friendship more than anything else died surrounded by his ever-trusting friends on 30 May 1744, literally summing up Macbeth’s description of dead Duncan: “After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well”.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Name some representative literary pieces of Pope.

Unit 5(b): ALEXANDER POPE AND HIS TIME

Alexander Pope's life-span covered two different periods of English social, political and literary history, the end of the Restoration period and the beginning of the Augustan age. He was born in 1688, the year in which William of Orange and Mary acceded to the throne of England after King James II, a Roman Catholic had to flee to France because of his religious beliefs. In religion, the country was widely divided into two camps: Catholics and Protestants; Whigs and Tories in politics. The Parliament with royal support passed the Bill of Rights that curbed the royal power and barred Roman Catholics from being monarchs. The power of the monarch was no longer held to be sacred as divine power, The Toleration Act in 1689 made some provision for freedom of worship for Dissenters but the restrictions imposed on the Catholics were not waived. They were forced to live ten miles away from London. University education was denied to the Catholics. They could not enjoy civic rights and choose public offices. Pope and his family, being Catholics, were subjected to these restrictions. In spite of these severe restrictions and minority status, the Roman Catholics formed a prosperous, rich section of the population.

In 1701 Queen Anne succeeded William III and Mary who died childless. The reign of Queen Anne was marked by political turmoil inside the country and foreign invasions. But the reign of three successive Hanoverian kings, George I, George II and George III was comparatively peaceful. The two Jacobite uprisings in 1715 and 1745 were successfully thwarted by the Protestant monarchy of England. Another important event of the period concerned Robert Walpole's rise to power in the Court of George I and George II.

The political condition of England, the rivalry between the Whigs and the Tories, the Jacobite uprising had a definite impact on the literature of the period. Dryden, Pope, Swift, Addison, Steele were directly or indirectly involved in politics, though Pope was never a political man like Dryden. His sympathies were evidently with the Tories while Addison and Steele championed the cause of the Whigs. Though a Tory, Pope had many friends among the Whigs, a disposition he describes in 'The First Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated': "While Tories call me Whig, and Whigs a Tory" (1.68). He could not conceal his dislike for Robert Walpole and his policies in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* and *The Imitations of Horace*. Though not a member of the party, Pope registers his political antipathy for the monarchy supported by Whigs.

Alexander Pope represents the ideals and literary principles of the English Augustan age also called the Age of Enlightenment. The Neo-classical principles of 'correctness', perfection and

decorum were the ‘rules’ of literary composition. The Age of Enlightenment strives to identify man’s proper place in the scheme of the universe, his relationship with God and the nature of things. Man is essentially an imperfect being created by God and placed in the centre of the ‘Great Chain of being’. He is superior to birds and beasts, the vegetable world and the geological world by virtue of his rationality. Man may be the supreme creation of the Universe, but he is given to “chaos of thought and passion, all confused” (Epistle II, An Essay on Man). The poetry of Pope endorses and embodies all the intellectual and ideological developments of the age. The insistence on refinement in style, on ‘correctness’ as advocated by the Neoclassical period is registered by Pope in his *An Essay on Criticism, An Essay on Man, Moral Essays and Imitations of Horace*.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What was the political condition of England like during Pope’s time ?
2. What are the salient features of Pope’s poetry ?

Unit 5(c): A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot is Pope’s *Apologia pro sua satira*, a defence of his satires against the malicious attacks of his detractors. The poem a mosaic of several verses written on several occasions, may be divided into three sections. Lines 1-124 give an account of the poet’s disgust with the vain literary aspirants and hack writers who pester him on all occasions and at every place seeking his favour. The poem has an abrupt, dramatic beginning with the poet-speaker ordering John Serle, his manservant, to shut the door to save him from these men. He is not spared even on Sundays or at church or at dinner time.

Muses from Parnassus have been let loose to “rave, recite, and madden round the world” (L.4).

Poetry and insanity are brilliantly juxtaposed in the reference to ‘Sirius’, the Dog-star, ‘Bedlam, and ‘Parnassus. Sirius appears in late summer, the oppressive heat of which is supposed to cause insanity and again, the season was sacred to the Romans of ancient times for poetry reading session. Whereas for Pope poetry is “a sane diversion”, for the poetasters it is “a mad obsession”. The favour-seekers include a parson, a madlin poetess, a rhyming peer, a clerk, all pretenders to poetry.

The poet wonders why he is held responsible for every offence committed by others. If a person like James Moore Smythe is found guilty of violating the laws of the country or if a frantic wife like Lady Walpole deserts her husband, the reason is attributed to Pope: “And curses Wit, and poetry and Pope” (L. 26). Exasperated with all this, Pope seeks some remedy from Dr. Arbuthnot, though he knows it is absolutely impossible to destroy the “flimsy lines” of the “cobweb” spun by the

scribblers. The comparison between poetasters and spiders is worked out brilliantly in lines 89-94. Pope states his personal opinion clearly: he is innocent and guiltless, frank and friendly, more a victim than an aggressor, never willing to hurt anyone. Yet, when Arbuthnot tries to dissuade him from naming anyone rich and famous, the exhortation seems to fa

Writing poetry was quite natural to him and it gave him pleasure to sustain him “thro’ this long disease, my life,” a tender reference to his life long disease, that made him a cripple. “But why then publish?” He promptly answers that he published his works because of the support and encouragement of his friends like Granville, William Walsh, Samuel Garth, William Congreve, Swift, Rochester, Henry St. John, Talbot, Somers, Sheffield and Bolingbroke. When he had so many friends at his side, he did not care for the “Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks”:

“Happy my studies, when by these approv’d Happier their author, when by these belov’d
From these the world will judge of men and books” (143-145) Any critic who has “spirit, taste and sense” need not be afraid of his “modest satire;” it only aims at the dull, textual critics who are more concerned with “commas and points”, spelling and meter rather than with the spirit of a work.

The aggressive onslaught on critics and plagiarists culminates in the Atticus and Sporus passage. While acknowledging the genius of Addison, Pope accuses him of jealousy and rivalry and likens him to a Turk who cannot bear any rival. The portrait of Bufo is a scathing-satire on self-flattering patrons. The poet refuses to depend on any patron for favours. He is happy to pursue his poetic vocation. This is followed by a searing portrayal of Sporus, namely, Lord Hervey. The ferocity changes into a tone of tenderness in lines 381-419.

In these lines Pope pays a touching tribute to his parents and Dr. Arbuthnot. Pope presents his father as an honest, wise and balanced person. A stranger to hypocrisy, he never “dar’d an oath, nor hazarded a lye” in order to enter public life. He was by no means a crafty person:

“Unlearn’d, knew no schoolman’s subtle art/No Language, but the Language of the Heart” (II. 398-399). Pope also paints a happy picture of domestic bliss of his parents. The rest of the poem sees Pope in a role-reversal situation: he bestows blessings

on his dying mother and dying friend. Imaginatively he becomes a caring parent to his ailing mother. A mother is supposed to rock the cradle of her baby.

Here the role is reversed – the son wishes to “rock the cradle of reposing age”. Imaginatively Pope replaces himself with Dr. Arbuthnot who treated him and longs to “preserve him social, cheerful and serene.” With this blessing of a son and a friend, the vexed and savage tone of the satirist merges into a note of exquisite tenderness not expressed elsewhere in Pope’s poetry, a restoration of calm of mind, all passions spent.

In the Atticus and Sporus passage, The aggressive onslaught on critics and plagiarists culminates. But at the end with the blessing of a son and of a friend, the vexed and savage tone of the satirist merges into a note of exquisite tenderness not expressed elsewhere in Pope’s poetry.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Attempt a critical analysis of the poem "An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot".

Unit 6 (a): Analysis of Different Character Portraits

6(a) i: THE CHARACTER OF ATTICUS

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot is celebrated for its verse portraits, notably those of Atticus, Sporus and Bufo. Lines 193-214 contain the portrait of Joseph Addison as Atticus. This passage

The Atticus passage contains satirical treatment of Addison. He wittily points to Addison's hating of a literary rival and to his fall as a critic. This passage is a masterly work of portraiture which strikes a perfect balance between appreciation and condemnation.

was written in 1715 and published in 1722. Later on it was incorporated into the Epistle after some alterations. Once friends, Pope and Addison soon turned into rivals over the latter's preference for Tickell's version of Homer to Pope's. This was enough to enrage Pope and his wounded pride finds an outlet in the Atticus passage. The Atticus passage begins with a praise of the 'English Atticus'. The original Atticus was born a Roman, but he was called "Atticus" because of his long stay in Athens and his profound knowledge in the Greek language and its literature. He was a close friend of Cicero with whom he exchanged many letters. But soon the panegyric moves into a sharp attack. Addison cannot tolerate any literary rival, a usual characteristic of a Turkish Sultan who hates to see a rise in power. The startling paradox "Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer" wittily points to his failing as a critic. He can never praise a rival's work wholeheartedly; it is clear that his civility is a cover for his envious displeasure. Though he is never contemptuous, he encourages others to sneer. Though he is willing to wound, he lacks the moral courage to openly strike an opponent. He is extremely cautious in his condemnation. For Pope, it is really unworthy of a man like Addison to be fearful even of fools and be surrounded by flatterers. He pretends to be obliging without ever obliging anyone. The portrait in this way bristles with extensive use of analogies and antithesis that adds a sharpness to the portraiture. The comparison with Cato is sarcastic and witty. Addison is shown to preside over a small group of sycophants, his 'little senate'. After making him an object of ridicule Pope asks,

"Who but must laugh, if such a man there be? Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?" [213-214]

Thus, when if a person like Atticus stoops to folly, it is not simply unfortunate but tragic.

The Atticus passage is a masterly work of portraiture. It strikes a perfect balance between appreciation and condemnation. However, one may ask if Addison deserves such an attack from Pope. For it was Addison who first appreciated Pope's literary gifts. The latter also genuinely admired

Addison. Buttherift betweenthetwowasmoreliterarythanpersonal. Consideredfromanobjective

point of view, the portrait remains a witty piece of work, an argument against hypocrisy and a vindication of impartiality in criticism.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the portraiture of Atticus.

Unit 6(a) ii: THE CHARACTER OF SPORUS

Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu conspired jointly to publish *Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First satire of the Second Book of Horace* in which they mercilessly attacked Pope's physical deformity and obscure birth. Pope retaliated with a fury and savagery quite absent in the Atticus passage. Arbuthnot tries to restrain him as Sporus is a vile, filthy, contemptible creature, a thing of silk, a white curd of a fass's milk, a butterfly and, therefore, Pope ought not waste his time on such a thing. But his friend's advice serves to intensify his anger. To him Lord Hervey is a gilded bug that stinks and stings, a well-trained spaniel that lacks the courage to bite its prey, an ugly toad and a serpent. Through a quick succession of animal imagery Pope savagely hits at Lord Hervey's effeminate features, his bisexuality and manner of speech. Sporus was a favourite eunuch of Emperor Nero of Rome whom he later married in a lavish ceremony. Like Satan, the tempter of Eve, Sporus is a manipulator. A sycophant in the court of Queen Caroline and a spokesperson of Robert Walpole, Lord Hervey spews venom in the ears of Queen Caroline. He is 'one vile Antithesis' of what is honest and graceful, an 'Amphibious thing' who acts in different roles: "Sporus is puppet and puppeteer, controlled and controller, deceived and deceiver":

In this passage, Pope retaliated against Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who mercilessly attacked Pope's physical deformity and obscure birth, with fury and savagery quite absent in the Atticus passage. This portraiture is the most derisive of all Pope's character sketches.

His wit all see – saw between that and this,
Now high, now low, now Master up, now Miss.
Fop at the Toilet, Flatt'rer at the Board.

Now trips a Lady, and now struts a Lord" (II. 323-325) these lines present Sporus in the most reviling colour. In his case face is not the index of mind. Externally, Sporus may have, a "Cherub's face", but the rest of his body is that of a serpent. The final blow is dealt in the expression 'pride that licks the dust'.

The portrait of Lord Hervey as Sporus is the most derisive of all Pope's character sketches. Dr. Johnson concludes: "The meanest passage is the satire on Sporus". The devastating condemnation of Lord Hervey done through a series of successive animal images may raise the question whether

Pope was entirely fair in his depiction. But we need not go beyond what the text tells us. Personal animus may have motivated the Portrait of Lord Hervey as Sporus. But it is less about a contemporary than about an enemy with whom the satirist is always at war. The Sporus lines sum up, in the words of Maynard Mack, “in an *exemplum* the fundamental attributes of the invader in every garden: his specious attractiveness – as a butterfly, a painted child, a dimpling stream; his nastiness – as a bug, a creature generated in dirt, a thing that stinks and stings, a toad spitting froth and venom; his essential impotence – as a numbling spaniel, a shallow stream, a puppet, a hermaphrodite; and yet his perpetual menace as the tempter, powerless himself but always lurking ‘at the ear of Eve’, as Pope puts it, to usurp the powers of good and pervert them”. It is a war involving “the strong antipathy of Good to Bad”. Sporus has become a classic exemplar, a prototype of cringing obedience and vulgar sycophancy. Pope has “given Hervey a kind of immortality he never dreamt of”.

Unit 6(c) iii: THE CHARACTER OF BUFO

The portrait of Bufo is not as destructive as that of Sporus. ‘Bufo’ in Latin means ‘Toad’. In the *Epistle* he stands for a proud literary patron who bestows his charity to unworthy and undistinguished poets. Bufo is a blend of Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax and George Bubb Dodington, a Whig politician. Pope describes him as a pretender with claims to taste and learning. He is as proud as Apollo to whom the poets in ancient time used to dedicate their poems. Similarly, his modern counterpart is “fed with soft dedication all day long”. His library is stuffed with busts and books of dead poets which he has hardly ever read. A stranger to literary acumen, Bufo doles out his charity among flatterers and pretenders to knowledge. But at times he can be miserly. Dryden was allowed to die in poverty, but he was given a lavish funeral, thanks to Bufo’s so-called generosity. The poet’s hatred for such an undiscerning patron culminates in the brilliant antithesis: “He help’d to bury whom he help’d to starve” [L. 248]. Pope thanks himself for not having such a patron. He is happy to have John Gay, his friend and inspirer. Bufo or the Earl of Halifax thus becomes an archetype of pretenders to poetry and taste, of flattery and partisanship.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the portraiture of Sporus and of Bufo.

Unit 6(b): AN EPISTLE TO DR. ARBUTHNOT AS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Alexander Pope was born in an age in which the literary atmosphere was vitiated by battles waged between writers. The life of an author or a political person was no longer a private affair; public curiosity would dig up every secret of their personal life. Dryden, Swift, Gay and Pope had to

put up with such public intrusions, blatant lies and distortion of facts regarding their careers and relationships. Pope felt compelled at a certain point of his career to reply to all the allegations and present himself in a favourable light. *Imitations of Horace* gave him the much-required medium of self-expression. The *Satires* and *Epistles* are largely autobiographical: “The whole man pulsates in them – his intense nervous responses to nature and to man, his exquisite sensibility and lovely feeling for the music of the word and phrase, his generosity, his implacable enmity, his humour, his hatred, his warm friendship, and his deeply stirred patriotism.” An *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* is the most of all his poems, an *anapologia* for his personal life, literary career, friends and parents. They are a composite self-portrait of the man: George Fraser has observed that Pope is “always warm where he speaks with moral approval or gratitude; bitterly and excessively sharp to his foes when he thinks them, like Lord Hervey and Lady Mary, malignant; blandly severe, but balanced and just to a dead man like Addison, who was not a true friend or an open enemy, but whose gifts as well as his faults deserved recognition”.

“The whole man pulsates in them— his intense nervous responses to nature and to man, his exquisite sensibility and lovely feeling for the music of the word and phrase, his generosity, his implacable enmity, his humour, his hatred, his warm friendship, and his deeply stirred patriotism.”

The Advertisement frankly admits that the poet intends to launch a counterattack on those “Persons of Rank and Fortune” who had reviled his ‘person, Morals and Family’. He has clearly mentioned the names of these ‘persons of Rank and fortune’ Lord Hervey, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and a host of others. Throughout the poem, Pope places himself in a lofty position from which he throws his shafts against his antagonists. The abrupt opening of the poem with an exhortation to his own manservant, John Serle, establishes the personality of a vexed autobiographical narrator desperately in need of relief from the pestering hack writers and flatterers. The personal note becomes all the more prominent from line 125 which establishes him as a paragon of virtue:

Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
Dipp’d me in ink, my parents’, or my own?
As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
I lisp’d in numbers, for the numbers came. (125-128)

He claims to have been “lisp-ing in numbers” since his childhood for poetry came to him spontaneously. He served poetry not to please any woman but to please himself, to help him “through this long disease, my life.” Poetic vocation was a great diversion in his miserable life. No poet, perhaps, has ever so poignantly expressed the story of a life dwarfed by an incurable disease of the spine within so few words. The question “But why then publish” is followed by a list of Pope’s lifelong friends whom he recalls affectionately and gratefully. They receive the new poet with ‘open arms’, inspire and encourage him; it is for them that world is a glorious place to live in:

“Happy studies, when by these approv’d!

Happier their author, when by these below’d.”

The portraits of Atticus, Sporus and Bufo are evidently motivated by deep personal rancour.

The autobiographical part of the poem takes away the spleen and spite of these passages. It demonstrates a compliment to his own virtues as contrasted with the vices of his enemies.

The poet’s righteous indignation against Addison, Lord Hervey and Earl of Halifax resonates through lines 193-248 and again in lines 305-333. The intervening lines are a projection of the self: “Poor guiltless I!” The autobiographical part of the poem takes away the spleen and spite of these passages. It demonstrates a compliment to his own virtues as contrasted with the vices of his enemies. He pictures himself as a man of humble desires :

“Oh let me live my own! and die so too!

(“To live and die is all I have to do”)

Maintain a poet’s Dignity and Ease” (U. 261-263)

Preoccupied, thus, with books and friends and humble affairs of life the poet is least interested in the great affairs of public life. Power does not attract him : “I was not born for courts”, he declares. He pays his debts regularly, says his prayers like any devout Christian and sleeps undisturbed never bothering about his next work or about critics like Dennis. The poem registers his unflinching devotion to his friends who are worthy and virtuous; but at the same time his poetry is like a scourge to those who pretend to be what they are not in reality :

A lash like mine no honest man shall dread,

But all such babbling blockheads in his stead. [303-304]

It is immediately followed by the severe ‘lashing’ (of Lord Hervey in the Sporus passage. The ferocity of the attack on Sporus subsides to a gentle tone in the subsequent stanza which describes the poet as a man of integrity and virtue in an age of intrigues and moral vices. This time the first person voice shifts into third person; the poet is “Not Fortune’s Worshipper, nor Fashion’s Fool. / Not Lucre’s Madman, nor Ambition’s Tool” (L. 335). He does not wander long in ‘Fancy’s Maze’.

The intimate tone of an autobiographical speaker is unmistakable throughout the poem, but all his claims about and barbs at some persons are not justified. But it is important to recognize that it is a dramatic projection as much as a construct.

He ‘Stoop’d to truth, and moralized his song.” A tolerant man, Pope endures all abuses, libels against his name, his physical infirmities and his friends. He suffers much but never deviates from the path of virtue for which he is ever ready to die: “For thee, Fair Virtue! welcome ev’n the last!” (359)

This moral part of the poem soongives way to the most moving and tender passage recapitulating the virtues of his parents and the poet’s filial devotion towards them. His father wise, honest, homely. He is a “stranger to Civil and Religious Rage”. In other words, political and religious intrigues never interest him. A very

simple man, he knows no intricacies of the heart. He dies peacefully without any pain and the son prays “O grant me, thus to live, and thus to die”. Ironically enough, the son lives a life of prolonged suffering till death releases him in 1744. Pope protests his love for his mother; he wants to take care of her, to “smooth the Bed of Death”. In fact, she dies a few weeks after this poem is completed. The poem which begins with the voice of a vexed first person speaker rounds off with the same voice, but this time calm, restored to peace, with a final warm tribute to his dying friend, Dr. Arbuthnot.

The intimate tone of an autobiographical speaker is unmistakable throughout *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*. The person projects himself in a position far superior to corrupt scribblers and flatterers.

However, in all fairness to Pope, it can be said that all his claims about and barbs at some persons are not justified. Critics like Theobald, Bentley, Addison were scholars and worthy men. The Earl of Halifax was a generous patron. His contemptuous jibe at the poverty of some poet-aspirants is unfortunate. In *The Dunciad* too, Pope severely condemns hack writers and makes fun of their poverty. Pope does not believe that he is mocking the ill-fortune of those who do not have the comfort

The ferocity of the attack on Sporus subsides to a gentle tone. Pope endures all abuses. He suffers much but never deviates from the path of virtue. This moral part soon gives way to the most moving and tender passage recapitulating the virtues of his parents and the poet's filial devotion towards them.

and solvency of his own life. On the contrary, he considered himself a defender of cultural and literary values which he felt were on the wane. To him, Swift, Gay and Arbuthnot were epitomes of literary as well as moral virtues. It is, however, important to remember that the poem must be read as it is and what it stands for. It upholds the virtues of genuine criticism, need for privacy in personal life and above all, good poetry. In it Pope has waged a war against inferior criticism and the tendency to malign one's reputation. Thus I.R.F. Gordon concludes,

“The poem's most interesting dramatic creation, however, is that of Pope himself. The besieged poet who speaks in the poem, and vigorously defends his life and art, is clearly, on one level, the voice of the actual, living poet, Alexander Pope. But the poet speaker comes to us through a series of filters. He is after all, only one of the poem's voices. Pope, the author, embraces the ‘Pope’ who speaks in it, as well as the ‘Dr. Arbuthnot’ with whom he speaks. The Pope who speaks in the poem is Pope as he would like the public to think of him; Pope without warts... The voice of the poet who speaks in *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* comes as close as any in Pope's poetry to being an authentically autobiographical one, but it is important to recognize that it is a dramatic projection; just as much a construct, in one way, as that of Dr. Arbuthnot is in another.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the autobiographical element in the poem.

Unit 6(c): A NOTE ON SATIRE

The term 'satire' is derived from the Latin *satura*, meaning 'medley', a dish of mixed food items. Juvenal called it 'ollapodrida' meaning 'mish-mash', 'Satire' as a poetic genre developed, not in Greece but in Rome. Critics often confuse the Greek satyr plays with satires. It was in 1605 that the etymological confusion was cleared by the French scholar Isaac Casaubon. Satire as the Romans understood it is an artistic composition to hold up human vices, follies, moral failings for ridicule thereby striving to correct and reform them. According to Dryden, the aim of satire is the amendment of vices. Swift claims that satire 'is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own.' For Alexander Pope, satire is "a sacred weapon", "sole dread of Folly. Vice, and Insolence" (*Epilogue to the Satires*). Satire, in the English literary context, owes its origin and inspiration to Horace and Juvenal who established the genre of formal verse satire. Their approach to the genre, however, was quite different. This led Dryden to identify the satires of Horace as 'comic' satire while those of Juvenal as 'tragic'. Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles* have the design of a 'medley', of *sermo* or conversation between persons covering a wide range of subjects. Pope found his affinity more with Horace than with Juvenal. However, while his *Moral Essays* and *Imitations of Horace* follow the Horatian example, *The Dunciad* imbibes the spirit of Juvenal.

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot is modelled on Horace's use of *sermo* or chat and poetic autobiography. Like Horace, Pope has given a dramatized account of his self as a man and as a poet. The poem dramatizes the tension the poet feels being "cabin'd and cribb'd" on all sides by scribblers, unjust critics and people like Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in a conversation between Pope and Arbuthnot. It is notable for the dramatic cuts, swift surprises, interruptions and exclamations. The conversational design of the poem which begins with an address to the servant allows space enough to another participant. Thus what appears to be a dramatic monologue, a genre Browning would perfect later on, changes into a dialogue. The poem posits a thesis by launching an attack on vice and folly and an antithesis demonstrating the value of rationality and of the life of a good, well-meaning human being, as it has been explained by Maynard Mack. The readers do not fail to recognize the basically good-natured, tolerant, friendly man forced to write this *apologia*: "Difficile est saturam non scribere: "It is difficult not to write satire."

CONCLUSION

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot incorporates satire, biography, a critique on the contemporary literary world, the evil influence of patronage and partisanship provoked by political differences. Pope is profoundly moral and didactic in this poem as he is in all his poems. But the poem does not read like a heavily-loaded didactic sermon because of its varying mood shifting from passionate

rage through a wistful and lingering gaze at the poet's past life to an affectionate musing on his parents and friends, the poem involves the use of precise and apt antithetical and epigrammatic verse, sharp and witty banter, and a pervasive use of animal imagery. As Jack Lynch observes *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* offers a study of Pope's "satirical principles – or, at least, how he'd like them to be interpreted".

ANNOTATIONS

Nequesermonibus Vulgidederis... tamen.

Taken from *De Republic*, VI, 23 by Cicero [Marcus Tullius Cicero, more popularly known as "Tully", and it means "You will not any longer attend to the vulgar mob's gossip nor put your trust in human rewards for your deeds; virtue, through her own charms, should lead you to true glory. Let what others say about you be their concern; whatever it is, they'll say it anyway."

ADVERTISEMENT

Persons of Rank and Fortune : A reference to Lord Hervey and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, friends-turned-foes, who jointly brought out the scurrilous *Verses to the Imitator or Horace*. Lord Hervey wrote *An Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court* to which Pope sharply reacted with his prose reply called *A Letter to a Noble Lord*.

The learned and candid 'Friend' to whom it is inscribed refers to John Arbuthnot (1667-1735), a Scottish mathematician, physician to Queen Anne; an author and a co-founder of the famous Scriblerus Club with Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift and John Gay. He was a friend of Pope to whom the poet dedicated the *Epistle*.

THE POEM

Good John: John Serle, Pope's manservant.

Knocker : The doorknocker was usually muffled if someone in the house was sick or haddied recently.

Dog-Star : Sirius, the dog-star, appears in late August. Its associations are with oppressive heat of the late summer supposed to cause madness and poetry-reading sessions in ancient Rome.

Bedlam or Parnassus : 'Bedlam' is corrupted from Bethlehem. It was originally called the hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, located in Bishopgate, London. Later on it became an asylum for the lunatics. Parnassus is a mountain in Greece, sacred to Apollo, god of poetry and therefore sacred to the muses.

- L.8 Grot : The underground grotto built by Pope in the garden of his villa at Twickenham. L.9
Charge : attack
- L.10 Chariot : a four-wheeled horse drawn vehicle.
- L.10 Barge : Pope's house at Twickenham was close to the River Thames and very often he would travel from here to London by water.
- Sabbath; A day of religious observance and rest, kept by the Jews on Saturdays and Christians on Sundays.
- Mint: A sanctuary for debtors. They were allowed to appear on Sundays without the threat of being arrested.
- L.15 Parson : a pun on the name Laurence Eusden who became poet laureate in 1718 and held the laureateship until his death in 1730. He was an object of Pope's scurrilous attack.
- bemused: Slightly puzzled.
- Maudlin: Sentimental, talking in a self-pitying manner especially when drunk. L. 18 Engross: Prepare legal documents.
- L. 21 TWI'NAM : Pope's home at Twickenham.
- L. 23 Arthur : Author Moore was a businessman and an M.P. His son James Moore Smythe was a minor poet and dramatist. He inserted some verses of Pope in his comedy *The Rival Ladies* and when the latter withdrew his permission to include them, he refused to do so.
- L. 25 Cornus : Derived from Latin *cornu*. meaning 'horn' the word refers to a cuckold. Cuckolds were traditionally imagined to wear horns. This may have reference to Lady Walpole who left her husband in 1734.
- L. 27 Friend to my life : John Arbuthnot, the poet's friend.
- L. 29 Drop or Nostrum : medicines.
- L. 40 "Keep your piece nine years" A reference to Horace's advice to aspiring poets in *Ars Poetica* to keep their manuscripts for nine years before publishing them.
- L. 41 Drury Lane : The name of a theatre district in London; the surrounding area was a notorious haunt for prostitutes and people of doubtful character. The speaker dwells in a garret here. That the poet lives in an attic with broken windows is suggestive of the 'high' life that he lives.
- Lull'd by soft zephyr : Induced to sleep by soft, gentle breezes.
- Termends : A legal term meaning the regular sessions of law court which often coincides with the publishing season.

L.49 Pitholeon : Pope's Note runs thus : "The name taken from a foolish poet of Rhodes, who pretended much to Greek." Pope may be referring both to Leonard Welsted, translator of the works of Longinus and to Thomas Cooke who translated several Greek poems. Both were Pope's bitter enemies.

Curll : Edmund Curll was a disreputable publisher guilty of publishing seditious and obscene literature. He was also accused of pirating Pope's works. He has been satirized in *The Dunciad*.

"He'll write a journal, or he'll turn Divine " : He will become a hackwriter in politics or religion. It may also allude to slanderous attacks on Pope in *The London Journal* and to Welsted's theological treatises.

L.61 Lintot : Bernard Lintot; published many of Pope's works.

L.65 go snacks : To share the profits.

L.69 Midas' ears : In ancient mythology, Midas, the king of Phrygia, was given ass's ears by Apollo after he awarded Pan the prize in a music competition between Apollo and Pan, thereby incurring the wrath of the former. In shame, Midas hid the ears under a headress. However, the secret was revealed by his minister, then by his barber and his queen who bursting with the secret, whispered it into a hole in the ground. Here Pope alluded to King George II, Queen Caroline and Robert Walpole.

L.74 coxcomb : A vain and conceited person.

L.74 Perksthem: flaunts them impudently.

L.79 Dunciad : A mock-heroic-poem by Pope satirising 'dulness' in general, but particularly an attack on Lewis Theobald who had criticised Pope's edition of Shakespeare in *Shakespeare Restored* (1726)

L.85 Codrus : A conventional name for a bad poet mocked by Virgil and Juvenal. L.87 Pit, box, and gallery : Different parts of a theatre.

Colley : Colley Cibber, playwright and poet laureate. Pope savagely attacks him in the final version of *The Dunciad*.

Free-masons Moore : James Moore Smythe was a member of the society of free Masons.

L.98 Bavius : A bad Roman Poet who attacked Horace and Virgil.

Bishop Philips : Ambrose Philips a pastoral poet, became secretary to the Bishop of Armagh. Pope and Ambrose Philips quarrelled over the relative merits of pastoral poetry. He was called "Namby-Pamby" by Pope, giving rise to the term.

Sappho : A seventh-century B.C. Poet from Lesbos in Greece. Here Sappho is the name of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, once a friend of Pope, later a bitter enemy.

L.103 Twice as tall : A reference to Pope's short figure. He was only 4'6" tall. L. 111 Grubstreet : The traditional haunt for hack writers.

L.113 My Letters: Edmund Curll brought out a pirated edition of Pope's letters. L.117 Ammon's great son : Alexander the great.

L.118 Ovid's nose : Ovid's name was Publius Ovidius Naso; "nose" is derived from Latin *naso*.

L.122 Maro : Publius Vergilius Maro, familiarly known as Virgil. He wrote *The Aeneid*.

L.124 Homer : The Greek blind poet, author of the two great epics. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

L.128 Lisp'd in numbers : Pope claims that he has been speaking poetry from childhood.

L.132 This long disease : A reference to Pope's lifelong suffering from deformity caused by tuberculosis of the spine.

Granville : George Granville, Lord Lansdowne, a friend of Pope. He dedicated his *Windsor Forest* to Granville.

Walsh: William Walsh, an early friend of Pope.

Garth: Sir Samuel Garth, a poet and physician. He was the author of *The Dispensary*, the earliest specimen of mock-heroic poetry.

Congreve : William Congreve, chief exponent of the Restoration comedy of Manners.

Talbot : Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury.

L.139 Somers : John, Baron, Somers, Whig statesman and Lord Treasurer. He inspired Pope to write his pastorals.

Sheffield : John Sheffield, poet and politician. He was the Earl of Mulgrave.

Rochester : Francis Atterbury (1662-1732), the Bishop of Rochester and Dean of Westminster. He was a Jacobite and sent to exile in 1723.

St. John : Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, an important Tory statesman. As a friend, he was very close to Pope.

L.146 Burnets : Pope refers to them as "Authors of secret and scandalous History." All of them attacked Pope. Sir Thomas Burnet was a follower of Addison; he criticised Pope's on his translation of Homeric epics. John Oldmixon was a Whig politician and historian. He was accused of pirating Pope's poems in *Court Poems*. Thomas Cooke was a poet, translator and pamphleteer. He offended Pope and when he apologized, Pope refused to oblige.

L.149 Fanny: Lord Hervey, ridiculed as Sporus in the poem.

L.151 Gildon: Charles Gildon a poet and critic who attacked Pope's use of supernatural machinery in *The Rape of the Lock*.

- L.153 Dennis : John Dennis, a Whig critic and dramatist. He felt humiliated by Pope's comment in his *An Essay on Criticism*. Dennis' response created a bitter feud between the two.
- L.164 From slashing Bentley down to piddling Tibalds : Richard Bentley was a classical scholar and one of Pope's enemies. 'Tibald's' refers to Lewis Theobald, an editor and critic, became the object of Pope's savage attack in *The Dunciad* for his criticism of Pope's edition of Shakespeare.
- L.177 Casting-weight : Counterbalance.
The Bard : Ambrose Philips
Persian tale : Ambrose Philips, as Pope mentioned in his note, translated a book of Persian Tales for which he was given half-a-crown for each section; it also means the fee of a prostitute.
- L.187 Fustian: a high-flown, inflated language.
- L.190 Tate : Nahum Tate (1651-14715), a poet, dramatist and poet laureate. He produced *King Lear* with a happy ending. He also translated psalms. Pope has satirised him in *The Dunciad*.
- L.192 Addison : Joseph Addison, co-author of *The Spectator*, one of Pope's former friends, turned into an enemy for differences in literary and political issues. He has been satirised in the 'Atticus' passage of the poem.
- L.198 Turk : Addison accused Pope of literary jealousy and compared him to an Eastern monarch who could not stand rivalry. Here Pope responds to Addison's comparison by likening him to a Turk.
- L.209 Cato : The Roman Senator. Addison wrote a tragedy called *Cato* to which Pope, still a friend of Addison, contributed the verse prologue. Addison presided over a company of admirers at Button's coffee-house.
- L.211 Templars : Students of law at the Inner or Middle Temple.
- L.215-216 Rubric and claps : Booksellers advertised the title pages of books by pasting them like posters, known as 'claps', 'Rubric' means 'in red', a colour very often used on title pages.
- L. 222 Great George, a birth day song : George II, King of England. 'Birth day song' refers to the practice of writing poems in honour of the king's birthday. Pope here suggests that George II was contemptuous of such effusive odes.
- L. 230 Bufo : In Latin the word means a toad, here caricature of a literary patron. 'Bufo' is, modelled partly on Charles Montagu, Earl of Halifax and George Bubb Doddington.
- L. 231 Forked hill : The twin peaks of Parnassus.
- L. 236 Pindar stood without a head : Pindar was a distinguished Greek poet of 5th century B.C., notable for his odes. Pope here mocks at the fashion of collecting headless antiquaries.

- L. 245 He help'd to bury whom he help'd to starve : The meaning is that the patron hardly did anything for Dryden as long as he lived. But after his death, Earl of Halifax proposed to build monument in his honour.
- L. 246 Bavius : name for a bad poet.
- L. 256-260 Gay : John Gay, a close friend of Pope, the author of *The Beggar's Opera*. He was a co-founder of Scriblerus Club. His patron was the Duke of Queensberry who paid for the construction of his monument in Westminster Abbey. Pope wrote the epitaph.
- L. 276 Balbus : The name of a Roman lawyer. Here it refers to George Hay, 7th Earl of Kinnoull, a former friend of Pope.
- L. 280 Sir Will or Bubo : 'Sir Will' is Sir William Yonge, a Whig politician, supporter of Robert Walpole, hated for his corrupt practices. 'Bubo' refers to George Bubb Doddington, notorious for his bad taste. In Latin 'Bubo' means 'owl' with a suggestion of 'booby' meaning a stupid, silly person. Both these men were Pope's political enemies.
- L. 299-300 Cannons : A reference to estate of Duke of Chandos. In his 'Epistle to Burlington' Pope has satirized 'Timon's villa for its ostentatious looks and lack of taste. 'Dean and silver bell' refer to the chapel in the Timon's villa. Pope's detractors identified this estate with Cannons, the estate of the Duke of Chandos, one of Pope's well-wishers. Pope denied the charge.
- Sporus : The name of a Roman eunuch, a victim of Emperor Nero's lust. Here 'Sporus' refers to Lord Hervey, a political adversary of Pope, noted for his effeminate features. He was known to be a bisexual and to have a passionate relationship with Stephen Fox, the young Lord Ilchester. He was a confidant of Queen Caroline.
- Ass's milk : It was used as a prescribed tonic for the frail and the delicate. Lord Hervey often drank it.
- L. 319 At the ear of Eve : In *Paradise Lost*, BK. IV Satan is described as squatting "like a toad, close at the ear of Eve". Here Eve stands for Queen Caroline.
- Rabbins : Rabbis; Jewish priests.
- Cherub's face : A reference to Hervey's feminine appearance and to the portrayal of the serpent with a beautiful human face.
- L. 335 Lucre: money.
- L. 353 Pictur'd shape : A reference to the cartoons drawn on Pope's deformed body, showing him as a hunchbacked ape with a human face.
- Japhet : Japhet Crook, a notorious forger. His ears were cut off as a punishment for his crime.
- Hireling : One who serves for money.

- Knight of the post : A person who is paid to give false evidence in court. L.369 Bit : duped or deceived.
- L.371 Friend to his distress : Pope contributed to a benefit performance held in 1733 to aid John Dennis.
- L.375 Welsted's lie : Leonard Welsted, a poet and translator. Welsted had hinted that Pope's poetry had caused the death of a lady and that he had libelled the Duke of Chandos.
- L.378 Budgel : Eustace Budgell was a cousin of Joseph Addison and a minor writer. Budgell was accused of forging a will in his favour. He held Pope responsible for this revelation in *Grub Street Journal*.
- L.380 Two Curlls : Edmund Curll, the publisher and Lord Hervey, the second Curll. Both of them were Pope's long-standing enemies.
- L.391 Bestia : Full name-Lucius Calpurnius Bestia, a corrupt Roman consul who took bribes to arrange a dishonourable peace treaty. Here Pope is perhaps referring to the Duke of Marlborough.
- L.397 Nor dar'd an oath, nor hazarded a lie : Pope alludes to the restrictions imposed on the catholics during the 18th century. Pope was born of Roman catholic parents and it was a compulsion for the catholic parents and it was a compulsion for the catholics to take oaths before entering public life or profession. In order to enjoy the civil rights, many catholics took oaths and lied. Pope and his father never evaded the restrictions because of their honesty.
- L.410 Mother's breath: Edith Pope, the poet's mother, died eighteen months before the *Epistle* was published.
- L. 415-417 My friend... Queen : Dr. John Arbuthnot, Pope's friend and associate, to whom the poem was dedicated. 'Queen' refers to Queen Anne whom he served as long as she lived as a court physician. After her death, however, Arbuthnot lost his position as he was a Tory. Nevertheless, his income from the court of king George who succeeded Queen Anne did not stop.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Basil Willey, – **The Eighteenth Century Background**, Chatto & Windus.
2. Bonamy Dobree, **Alexander Pope**, Greenwood Press, New York.
3. Wain, John (ed.) – **Lives of the Poets**. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
4. Ian Jack, **Augustan Satire: Intention and Idiom in English Poetry 1660-1750**, Oxford University Press.

5. Peter Dixon, **The World of Pope's Satires** : An Introduction to the Epistles and Imitations of Horace, Methuen.
6. I.R.F. Gordon, **A Preface to Pope**, Longman.
7. Judith O'Neill(ed.), **Critics on Pope**.
8. Eighteenth Century Poetry. :An Annotated Anthology, ed. David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, Blackwell Annotated Anthologies.
9. **An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot**, ed. & annotated by Jack Lynch.
10. The Norton Anthology of Poetry, W.W. Norton Company. New York & London.

ASSIGNMENTS

11. Consider **An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot** as Pope's **apologia**.
12. Analyse **An Epistle** as an autobiographical poem.
13. Comment on the portrait of Atticus. Do you think that Pope is absolutely fair in his portrayal of Atticus?
14. Critically evaluate the sports passage.
15. Assess **An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot** as a Horatian satire.
16. How far can **An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot** be read as a critique of contemporary literary scene.

BLOCK-II

Oliver Goldsmith: *The Deserted Village*

CONTENT STRUCTURE

Unit 7(a): Oliver Goldsmith's Life and Works

Unit 7(b): Historical Background of *The Deserted Village*

Unit 7(c): *The Deserted Village* : Background of the Poem

Unit 7(d): Dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds

Unit 8(a): Theme of the Poem

Unit 8(b): The Pastoral

Unit 8(c): Pastoral Features in *The Deserted Village*

Unit 8(d): Critical Analysis of the Poem

Unit 8(e): Criticism

Suggested Reading

Assignments

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this block is to assess the contribution of Oliver Goldsmith in the temporal span of the eighteenth century. Besides, this block is focussing on the historical background of the eighteenth century against the backdrop of which Goldsmith's text *The Deserted Village* is based on. Besides this block concentrates on the minute discussion of the text *The Deserted Village*. The text has been analyzed critically in order to make the discussion of the text student friendly.

Unit 7(a): LIFE AND WORKS

Oliver Goldsmith was born on 10 November 1728, either at Pallas, County Longford, or Elphin, Roscommon, in Ireland, in a family of clergyman-farmers. His father, the Reverend Charles Goldsmith, was a clergyman of the Established Church. He had five sons and three daughters, of whom Oliver was the fifth child. In 1730, the family moved to a hamlet named Lissoy, in the county of Westmeath, where Oliver spent much of his childhood.

Goldsmith's education was varied. His first teacher was a relative called Elizabeth Dewlap, who was followed by the village schoolmaster, Thomas Byrne, who had earlier been a soldier and fought

against Spain. He was then admitted to school at Elphin, then to Althone and finally to

School life for Goldsmith was uncongenial, as his face was deeply scarred from an attack of small pox. When he joined Trinity College, Dublin, he was obliged to perform menial tasks in order to avail of his expensive education. In February, 1749, he received the B.A. degree. His desperate endeavour to obtain a profession was varied and chequered. His first poem was "The Traveller". Other works include "An Enquiry into the Present State of Learning in Europe", periodical essays like "The Bee", "The Citizen of the World".

Edgworthstown. But school life for him was uncongenial, as his face was deeply scarred from an attack of small-pox at the age of eight, which made him enormously self-conscious, and gave rise to the misconception that he was stupid, so that his companions at school harassed him unbearably.

At the age of seventeen, he joined Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar or pocholar, where again he was made conspicuous by the special dress he was obliged to wear as well as the menial tasks he had to perform in order to avail of his expensive education. His tutor, Dr. Theaker Wilder, protracted his humiliation and distress. When, in May 1747, his father died, leaving a pittance, his circumstances became further straitened.

In February 1749, he received the B. A. degree and left the university.

Goldsmith now tried desperately to obtain a profession, but was repeatedly unsuccessful. His various attempts at a career in the church, the medical profession and the law, or his idea of emigrating to America, did not materialize. On one occasion he gambled away his money, on another, he rambled through Germany, Switzerland and Italy, playing on the flute to substantiate his income. Each time the funds provided by his considerate uncle Contarine saw him through, During this time, he sent his brother in Ireland a rough draft of *The Traveller*, the first poem he would write.

Among his other temporary pursuits, he now began a career as reader and corrector of the press to the famous novelist, Samuel Richardson, and also served as an usher at Peckham's Academy. Here he came under the observation of a bookseller, Griffiths, the proprietor of the *Monthly Review*, who invited him to try his hand at criticism. Even this, however, lasted a mere five months.

It was probably in 1759 that Goldsmith wrote his first important work, *An Enquiry into the Present State of Learning in Europe*, which increased his reputation, though not his financial circumstances. He was still a Grub Street hack, eking out a meagre living and staying at lodgings at 12 Green Arbor Court, Old Bailey. At this time he wrote his periodical essays, entitled *The Bee*, and was commissioned by Smollett to contribute to his new serial *The British Magazine* as well as by John Newberry for *The Public Ledger*, where he wrote the essays that constitute *The Citizen of the World*. This helped to relieve his economic problems to a great extent, and enabled him to shift his accommodation to Fleet Street, where Dr. Johnson visited him and became one of his closest friends.

Goldsmith now engaged himself in writing further works, as widely ranging as history, biography, novel, poetry, essays and reviews and even natural history, which kept him occupied throughout his

life. *The History of Mecklenburg*, Plutarch's *Lives* (abridged), *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *History of England*, *History of the Earth & Animated Nature*, biographies of Parnell and Bolingbroke, *The Good-Natured Man*, *The Traveller*-all these works, and others, followed in quick succession. His finances constantly vacillated, as he was inclined to spend the large sums of money he received for his writing in investing in newer and more lavishly decorated residences. But despite the financial problems constantly besetting him, which he warded off by further writing, he enjoyed life, partied and junketed at the clubs he now frequented, and also attended literary gatherings.

The writing of periodical essays in different magazines relieved Goldsmith's economic problems to a great extent. He then engaged himself in writing further works ranging as history, biography, novel, poetry, essays, reviews and even natural history

— *“The History of Mecklenburg”, Plutarch's “Lives”, “The Vicar of Wakefield”, “The Good-Natured Man” and so on.*

In 1768, the death of his brother Henry reawakened in him nostalgic memories of his childhood, and inspired the poignant reminiscence of *The Deserted Village*. He dedicated it to his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was the President of the Royal Academy. It was published on 26 May 1770 and proved an unqualified success.

In 1772 Goldsmith wrote his last work, *She Stoops to Conquer*, or *The Mistakes of a Night* which time has proved to have been one of the most hilarious and popular plays ever staged.

In March 1774, the constant toil and stress of his work-laden life took its toll upon him, and brought on a nervous fever, of which he died on 4 April. He was only 46.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Name some of Goldsmith's periodical essays.
2. Name some of Goldsmith's works ranging as history, biography, novel, poetry and essays.

Unit 7(b): HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Oliver Goldsmith lived at a time when Augustan poetry had almost exhausted its possibilities, and Romanticism was yet to be born. He, together with other such poets such as Gray, Collins, Thomson, Smart and Cowper have been termed the Pre-Romantic poets, because their poetry, though influenced by the prevailing neo-classical spirit, bears distinctive marks of breaking away from the same and exploring other themes, using language more imaginatively, manifesting a sense of wonder at the creative and prophetic powers of the poet, and introducing a love of nature and religious fervour and a humanitarian consciousness that existed much before the French Revolution-features that were to be the hallmarks of Romantic poetry.

Augustan features can yet be traced in Goldsmith's poetry, in the epic similes, character-sketches, the use of the pastoral form, which is a classical convention, as well as the use of rhymed couplets, but Romantic traits are also subtly prefigured.

In *The Deserted Village*, Goldsmith speaks out against the injustice meted out to the peasants, as Gray retaliates against the tyrannical monarch in *The Bard*, Crabbe against the despotic methods of those in power, and Blake in *Songs of Innocence & Experience* distinguishes between these binary oppositions. Goldsmith's intrusion into the poem at the end to mourn the departure of Poetry equates poetry with liberty. The poem also prefigures the type of poetry, like Wordsworth's that is rooted in rural values which a commercial society renders vulnerable.

In the prefatory dedication, Goldsmith refers to "the poet's imagination," a concept that was to become the dominating concern of Romantic Poetry.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the historical background of Goldsmith's poetry.

Unit 7(c): THE DESERTED VILLAGE

BACKGROUND OF THE POEM

The poem articulates a serious concern with the after-effects of the Industrial Revolution, and, in particular, with the Enclosure Acts, which had been implemented in order to "enclose" or take away arable land from the hands of small proprietors and sanction the formation of extensive private parks or vast farmlands. This occasioned the displacement or evacuation of large numbers of yeoman-farmers or cottiers, who had been employed on this common land for generations. Their only alternative was to seek employment in the city or else emigrate to the distant, unknown territory of America.

The village of Lissoy, where Goldsmith had spent the happy years of his childhood, had been purchased by General Napper (or Napier or Naper), thus compelling the families which had so long dwelt there to seek rehabilitation elsewhere.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What do you know about the background of poem "The Deserted Village"?

Unit 7(d): DEDICATION TO SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS

"I know you will object (and indeed several of our best and wisest friends concur in the opinion) that the depopulation it deplors is nowhere to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be

found in the poet's imagination. To this I can scarcely make any other answer than I sincerely believe what I have written; that I have taken all possible pains, in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege, and that all my views and enquiries have led me to believe those miseries real, which I have attempted to display”.

Unit 8(a): THEME OF THE POEM

The Deserted Village depicts the picturesque and idealized life that existed in Auburn (the name by which Goldsmith refers to Lissoy) in the years preceding the Enclosure Acts, and compares it with the barren and unkempt condition of the village when the poet revisits it, as well as the imagined tragic and exacting conditions in which the villagers exist at present. The pastoral, idyllic beauty of the village is encapsulated in the first 34 lines, before it is brought to an abrupt halt. Thereafter, the poem vacillates between both extremes, expatiating on the charms of Auburn—its natural beauty and prosperity, the simplicity and artlessness of its inhabitants, with their innocent diversions and enduring human values, and singles out two characters—the schoolmaster and priest—for detailed illustration. The poet deplors the change and inveighs against the *degenerate times* with its attendant pursuit of luxury and commercial enterprise. He gives a graphic portrayal of the fears and constraints that now overwhelm the displaced villagers, and apostrophizes Poetry, which, like the rural virtues symbolized by the erstwhile populace, is leaving, as it is unable to withstand the indifference towards it that the remaining population manifests.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What is the keynote of the poem?

Unit 8(b): THE PASTORAL

The pastoral (derived from the Latin word *pastoralis* meaning “concerning shepherds”) is a genre that was introduced in the 3rd century B.C. by Theocritus (316-260 B.C.), a native of Syracuse in Sicily, in his *Idyls* (in Greek, a little figure or picture), poems which described incidents in the lives of shepherds and shepherdesses, such as rural activities and contests, and their loves and sorrows. His poem on the death of a shepherd called Daphnis provided the prototype for a variation of the pastoral, called the pastoral elegy. He was succeeded, after his death, by Bion (c. 100 B.C.) and Moschus (c. 150 B.C.) and subsequently, by the Roman poet Virgil (70-19 B.C.) who used these features in his *Eclogues* (a collection of pastoral poems) as an artificial convention to evoke a prelapsarian golden age. In the late Middle Ages, the impact of Christianity laid its impress on the genre, with its equation of pastor with shepherd, and the concept of Christ as the shepherd looking after his flock, as exemplified in the 23rd psalm, *The Lord is My Shepherd, I shall not want*.

The Italian renaissance, with its renewed interest in the classics, evinced a flowering of the pastoral, diversifying its range and scope and producing hybrid genres such as the prose pastoral, as for instance, in Boccaccio's *Ameto*, which inspired Sannazaro, the creator of the modern pastoral, to write *Arcadia*, a pastoral romance. There was also pastoral drama such as Tasso's *Aminta* (1581) and Guarini's *II Pastor Fido* (1585). The pastoral traits were extended to include satire and personal comment, as in Petrarch's *Eclogues* and Mantuan's Latin pastorals.

In England, the chief exponents of the pastoral were Sidney, (*Arcadia*), Spenser (*The Shepherd's Calendar*) and Milton, who blended this genre with the ode (*L'allegro & Il Penseroso*), the drama (*Comus*), and the elegy (*Lycidas*). In the 18th century, it was popular as a beginner's feat in classical imitation, as in Pope's *Pastorals* or as burlesque "town-eclogues" as in Gay and Swift. By the 19th century, it was no longer a traditional form of poetry, and its range had reduced to include a handful of poems, such as Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* and *Michael*, Thomson's *The Seasons*, Shelley's *Adonais* and Arnold's *Thyrsis*. The 20th century witnessed a further decline, but there were some notable poems by Pound, Auden, MacNiece and in particular, R.S. Thomas.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What does "pastoral" mean? Write a note on the evolution of pastoral poetry?

Unit 8(c): PASTORAL FEATURES IN THE DESERTED VILLAGE

Oliver Goldsmith's poem *The Deserted Village* has distinct pastoral features, in that it deals with the idyllic life of the countryside, with its attendant joys and sorrows, its innocent and tranquil existence and its agricultural prosperity.

The opening lines of the poem abound in myriad picturesque description. *Sweet Auburn* is the *loveliest village of the plain*, and consequently *smiling Spring* is reluctant to depart from it. Every charm is etched on the poet's memory:

*The sheltered nook, the cultivated farm. The
never-failing brook, the busy busy mill,
The decent church that topped the neighbouring
hill, The hawthorn bush.*

The innocence and ease that characterizes the simple villagers contributes to their life of *humble happiness*, where pleasures are shared; the elderly watch while the young participate in sports on holidays; on workdays, after their tasks are over, the men seek entertainment and companionship over glasses of ale at the inn. Romance blooms covertly despite the strict chaperones keeping

watch; couples dance beneath the *spreading tree* that encompasses them, and happy, spontaneous laughter reverberates all over the place.

Two characters subtly dominate the scene. It is the village schoolmaster who guides the mischievous boys in the academic path, impressing them with his towering knowledge and skills, whose stern exterior conceals a kind and concerned heart. But it is the village preacher whom they find more endearing and approachable, as persons ranging from vagrant beggars to disbanded soldiers, irreverent fools to dying men, are uniformly consoled by his words. He is their spiritual guide, reminiscent of Chaucer's Parson, who "watched and wept, he prayed and felt, for all."

"The Deserted Village", though not a conventional pastoral, is a pastoral in its setting and character and concerns the trials and tribulations of rustic life. It blends romance with reality, idealization with blatant truth.

But *The Deserted Village* is a pastoral with a difference. It does not merely enumerate the pleasures of country life, it simultaneously recounts the tragedy of the villagers' later existence, and paints the desolation of Auburn in subsequent years. The tyrant's hand has effaced all the beauty and charm of Auburn, its people and sports, leaving the entire stretch desolate and barren.

The book, once never-failing and glassy, is now choked with sedge; instead of the carolling of the birds of spring, the bittern's ominous notes echo across the untenanted plain; the *footway* is *grass-grown* and difficult to traverse; the preacher's cottage is no longer identified as a place where the *garden smiled* but by the encompassing torn shrubs. There are *no cheerful murmurs* and *no busy steps* any longer; everything is bleak and sepulchral.

Those who have left for the city, hoping for a betterment of their position, have been faced with the glaring truth of the degradation which threatens to engulf them. They are soon reduced to penury, and starve at the gates of rich men who take advantage of their innocent and trustful natures. The plight of one such girl is described, a sweet and modest girl, who has been betrayed, and *with heavy heart deploras that luckless hour*. But those who have been exiled to *new-found worlds* have not fared any better. They have had to face *torrid tracts* and *blazing suns* and accost the *vengeful snake* and *crouching tiger* and numerous other unexpected hazards.

The Deserted Village is also not a conventional pastoral in the sense that it lacks some of the characteristics present, for instance, in Milton's *Lycidas* or Shelley's *Adonais*. The poet does not invoke the Muses at the beginning of the poem for inspiration. Nor are there nymphs or their equivalent, who are asked to account for their negligence. Nature does not mourn for the people concerned, nor is there a procession of mourners. Finally and most significantly, there is no abrupt change of tone towards the end of the poem, no transition from despair to hope.

And yet *The Deserted Village* is a pastoral in its setting and character, and concerns the trials and tribulations of rustic life. It blends romance with reality, idealization with blatant truth. The poet

is the solitary mourner, apart from the *wretched matron* who has no other recourse except to eke her solitary existence.

Goldsmith also introduces a characteristic of the later pastoral, namely, social criticism and personal comment. The poem is replete with such instances. The most incisive criticism is brought out through the contrast between Auburn and the city, which is echoed in the binary opposition between natural/artificial. *Simplicity, innocence, charm, happiness, and joy* are pitted against *luxury, profusion, pomp, splendour, prosperity* against *plenty, nature* against *nurture*.

In the manner of Wordsworth's *Michael*, which it anticipates, Goldsmith's poem does not mourn a death per se, but the destruction of values.

The didactic nature of the later pastoral is also evident in the apostrophe to Poetry, which is personified as a *Dear, charming nymph*, who is *neglected and decried* by the insensitive, mercenary, city-dwellers, and hence is faced with no other option but to exile herself from this uncongenial environment.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Consider *The Deserted Village* as a pastoral poem.

Unit 8(d): CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

The poem begins with an apostrophe to Auburn, the *loveliest village* the speaker has seen. He then proceeds to expatiate on her charms. Physical well-being and mental content, (*health and plenty*) keep the villagers cheerful and even Spring and Summer

The poem begins with an apostrophe to Auburn, the 'Loveliest village'. But the aftermath of the departure of villagers is portrayed with a suddenness that parallels the abruptness of the villagers' evaluation. His hope to return to the paradisiacal spot after all the tired and anguished experiences of his life is tinged with nostalgia.

show a definite predilection towards her, in the protraction of their stay. The speaker, whose youth has been spent here, points out each sheltered nook (*bowers of innocence and ease*) and each landmark (*the cultivated farm, the busy mill, the decent church, the hawthorn bush*) which contributes to her charm. On Sundays the entire populace congregates around the *spreading tree*, the young to participate and the aged to leisurely observe their pursuits from the vantage point of their seats.

Innocent activities, such as competitions and dances prevail, and young lovers take advantage of the occasion to pursue their amorous dalliance. To them, even their daily labour is not a drudgery but a pleasant occupation.

With a suddenness that parallels the abruptness of the villagers' evacuation, the aftermath of their departure is portrayed. The *tyrant* has rendered the entire plain desolate. The speaker's grief compels him to insert a few personal observations here. *Princes and lords* and their successes are

but transitory, but such a *bold peasantry*, once evicted, can never be replaced. However, the growth of tradesmen has altered human perceptions on what the prosperity of a country entails. Opulent merchants, with their *unwieldy wealth* and *cumbrous pomp* have usurped the land from the *hapless wain*, not recognizing in their folly and ignorance, the enormity of the wrong they have done.

As the speaker glances around the altered sights of Auburn, the *glades forlorn*, the *tangling walks* and *ruined grounds*, he recalls with nostalgia how he had hoped to return to this paradisiacal spot after all the tired and anguished experiences of his life. He had not only cherished it as a place of rest and solace, but also desired to regale the simple villagers with his experiences and impress them with his erudition or *book-learned* skill. In a Homeric simile, he compares himself to a hare, pursued by hounds, which eventually returns to the place from where it began its flight. The speaker had similarly wished to return home after his wanderings and die here. He believes that this would have given him a foretaste of heaven.

In the lonely, barren surroundings through which he now traverses, the speaker is reminded of the myriad sounds he had earlier heard here as evening drew to a close. The mingled harmony of the maid's song, the lowing herd, the gaggle of the geese, the children whooping with joy as school gave over, the baying of the watchdog, and the full-throated laughter of the happy villagers was wafted out to him in the intermittent pauses between the melodious notes of the nightingale.

The speaker now gives detailed portrayals of two of the most remarkable characters in Auburn, in the manner of the classical character-portrayals of Theophrastus, which he has done in earlier works (e.g. *The Man in Black* and *Beau Tibbs* in *The Citizen of the World*). The first is that of the village preacher, whose character was either derived from his father, the Reverend Charles Goldsmith, his brother Henry or his uncle Contarine, or a fusion of these characters. A true preacher and an *honest rustic*, in the manner of Chaucer's Parson, he was loved and held in great esteem by his congregation, as he prioritized preaching and giving the villagers spiritual sustenance, and was indifferent equally to ambition as to monetary concerns.

Those who gathered at his house included vagrants, beggars, *ruined spendthrifts* and battered soldiers, whom he would both chide and relieve of their problems, often talking late into the night, commiserating with their sorrow to such an extent that he would often forget their faults. His concern extended to all his flock, to whom he would minister comfort and ease, particularly to those on their deathbed, whose *despair and anguish* he would do his best to alleviate.

At church, his sermons proved so sincere and affecting that even unbelievers were moved to pray, and after the service, the villagers would gather around him, their children plucking at his robe,

Goldsmith gives detailed portrayals of the village preacher and the village schoolmaster in the manner of the classical character portrayals of Theophrastus.

to show their affection and esteem. He was always ready with a smile, as he held their cares and griefs very close to his heart, although his serious thoughts were turned to heaven. In a Homeric simile, Goldsmith compares him to a *tall cliff* which is surrounded by storm-clouds at the centre, whereas its peak is open to the sunshine. These clouds embody his worldly worries, whereas the *eternal sunshine* signifies his sublime absorption with the divine.

The other character in the village whom Goldsmith singles out for attention is the schoolmaster, whose original is undoubtedly Thomas Byrne, who had taught him in his childhood. He had been the quartermaster in Queen Anne's wars at Spain, and often regaled his student with these adventures. Here he is portrayed as a man of stern appearance and strict behaviour, though this severity is attributed to his excessive love for learning. The students have learnt to fathom his mood from a scrutiny of his face, and affect a pleasure at his jokes which they do not feel, in order to keep him in a good mood, as his frowns forebode ill for them.

The village schoolmaster was an extremely erudite man, and impressed the rustics with the vast extent of his learning. Not only could he write and cipher, he could also measure lands and presage the times when rents were due and even calculate the fluid content of vessels. But what awed them most was his ability to argue, using *words of learned length and thundering sound* and continuing even after he had been overcome. It was incredible to them that *one small head could carry all he knew*.

The speaker now passes a hawthorn tree, on whose branches hung a signpost, in happier times, bearing the name and picture of the village alehouse. Here *greybeard Mirth* once associated with

He gives graphic and romantic description of the Lawthorn tree, the village alehouse and so on. He justifies his preference for the simple pleasures and "spontaneous joys" over "all the gloss of art".

smiling Toil and discussed village matters in serious tones. The speaker fondly recalls the interior of the alehouse, with its *sanded floor* and *whitewashed walls*, the *varnished clock* and chest of drawers, the pictures of the twelve good rules and the broken teacups placed over the chimney. He mourns, with the knell-like anaphoric iteration *No more*, the passing away of their simple pleasures, such as the farmer communicating the news of his harvest, the woodman singing a ballad, the smith listening to them in silence and the innkeeper busy keeping the ale in circulation, after it had first been kissed by the barmaid, as was the custom.

The speaker now justifies his preference for these simple pleasures and *spontaneous joys* over *all the gloss of art*. The villagers' *simple blessings* are prompted by nature and innocent of evil, but the pleasures stimulated by art are showy and affected, like the *long pomp* and *midnight masquerades*, which are a blatant display of *wanton wealth*, and instead of making a person content, aggravates his desires further. Indeed, the speaker questions whether this emotion can truly be described as *joy*.

Agitated by the trend of his thoughts, the speaker now addresses the politicians, asking them to differentiate between a *splendid* and a *happy land*. He repeats an idea he has expressed in *The Citizen of the World*, that “*Too much commerce may injure a nation as well as too little.. and there is a wide difference between a conquering and a flourishing empire.*” He feels that prosperity should not be exalted at the expense of the future of the poor peasants; one man should not enjoy a vast estate alone if it deprives so many of their daily wages.

At this point the speaker indulges in another impassioned epic simile to drive home his point. The land, arrayed in *nature’s simplest charms*, is compared to a young girl, who possesses a youth and natural attractiveness that is becoming. When older, she loses this beauty, and resorts to artificial aids to enhance her appeal. Similarly, the land, which does not need any artificial embellishment, appears garish when palaces and lofty towers are built upon it, and its pristine beauty is spoilt. Therefore, considering the prosperity of the country without reflecting upon the well-being of its peasantry is tantamount to making it *a garden, and a grave*.

The speaker next ponders on the alternatives present to the villagers. Some opt for the city, but here they encounter a luxury from which they are exempted. The people who live here pamper themselves with profusion at the expense of these honest labourers. The contrast is glaring; the courtier *glitters in brocade* while the *pale artist plies his sickly trade*; and the ostentatious *long-drawn poms* of the wealthy are set against the formidable but familiar sight of the gibbet, because for the poor, the penalties are so stringent that many offences such as forgery, horse-theft and shop-lifting are punishable by death, and hence the gibbet is a familiar sight of the 18th century scene.

The land, arrayed in nature’s simplest charms, is compared to a young girl, who possesses a natural attractiveness that is becoming, and when older, she loses this beauty, and resorts to artificial aids to enhance her appeal. Then the speaker reverts to the day of their departure.

As he muses on the *richly decked* city dwellers in their chariots in the *blazing square*, the speaker comments, with scathing irony, *Sure, these denote one universal joy!*

The plight of one such maiden is then highlighted: a sweet, modest village belle who has aspired for a better life in the city, and since duplicity is foreign to her, has not hesitated to put her trust in a city-dweller. He however, has exploited this implicit trust and betrayed her, compelling her to a life of starvation or beggary, or even prostitution. If these villagers have been reduced to penury or worse, those who have chosen to emigrate have not fared much better.

The speaker imagines them venturing through *torrid tracts* under *blazing suns* with hesitant steps, as this is so different from the life to which they are accustomed. They pass through wild forests and *matted woods* which are frequented by snakes and tigers and also murderous savages; they experience tornados which turn the whole area into a *ravaged landscape*.

The speaker now reverts to the day of their departure. The *poor exiles* cast lingering looks at their cottages, hoping to resume their lives in a similar environment in the west, but loth to face the unknown country, they dissolve into tears. The *goodold sire* eventually summons courage for the sake of his family, and is the first to leave. His lovely daughter accompanies him, leaving her lover to his destiny. Her mother is the last to depart, crying and kissing her babies as she too bids goodbye to this beloved home for ever.

At this point the speaker intrudes again, apostrophizing luxury, and cursing it as it contravenes the age-old doctrine of plain living and high thinking. Kingdoms which thrive on luxury expand to a *sickly greatness* and resemble a *bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe*. Their strength is finally sapped and destruction follows. As the speaker stands amidst the ruins of Auburn, he can envisage *the rural virtues leave the land*. He pictures the *melancholy band* of villagers boarding the ship that will transport them away from their homeland forever, and with them all the virtues they represent, *contented toil, hospitable care, kind, connubial tenderness*, and above all, the sterling qualities of piety, loyalty and love. With them departs Poetry, as she is not cherished in this land any more, and leaves in search of a more hospitable environment. Being a poet, the speaker pays tribute to her as she encourages the *nobler arts*. She is the *source of all my bliss and all my woe*, since society is generally indifferent to poetry and does not requite the poet properly for his efforts, so the pleasure of composing poetry is its sole recompense. He bids Poetry farewell and reminds her that she also has a didactic purpose, not only an aesthetic one. Wherever she goes, to *Torno's cliffs* in Sweden or to the other hemisphere, to *Pambamarca's side* in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, her voice should speak out against the wrongs that are perpetrated and *teach erring man* to prioritize human values and not wealth. The poem ends with another simile which seeks to emphasize that an empire which has been built through commercial enterprise can one day be destroyed, just as the ocean can sweep away a breakwater which has been constructed with great labour. But those who depend on their own talent and ability can withstand the scourge of time, just as the rocks on the seashore are powerful enough to resist the constant pounding of the waves.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Attempt a critical analysis of the poem "The Deserted Village".

Unit 8(e): CRITICISM

Lord Macaulay; "It is made up of incongruous parts. The village in its happy days is a true English village. The village in its decay is an Irish village. The felicity and the misery which Goldsmith has brought close together belong to two different countries and to two different stages in the progress of society. He had assuredly never seen in his native island such a rural paradise, such a seat of

plenty, content and tranquillity such as his “Auburn.” He had assuredly never seen in England all the inhabitants of such a paradise turned out of their homes in one day and forced to emigrate in a body to America. The hamlet he had probably seen in Kent, the ejection he had probably seen in Munster, but by joining the two, he has produced something which never was and never will be seen in any other part of the world.”

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Basil Willey : *The Eighteenth Century Background*
2. Boris Ford : *Pelican Guide to English Literature Vol-4*
3. John Butt : *English Literature in the mid-Eighteenth Century*
4. G.S. Rousseau : *Goldsmith: The Critical Heritage*
5. J. R. Watson (ed. : *Pre-Romanticism in English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century* (Casebook series)
6. James Sutherland : *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry*
7. R. Trickett : *The Honest Muse; A Study in Augustan Verse*
8. Raymond Williams : *The Country & the City*

ASSIGNMENTS

1. What is the role of Goldsmith’s “poetic self” in his poem *The Deserted Village*? Does it add to the tragic effect?
2. Comment on the blend of lyrical and dramatic elements in Goldsmith’s poem *The Deserted Village*.
3. Analyze *The Deserted Village* as a pastoral poem with a difference.
4. Discuss the theme of “Dispossession and exile” in Goldsmith’s poem *The Deserted Village*.
5. It has been observed that Goldsmith’s poem *The Deserted Village* is “Classic in form, Romantic in content.” Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
6. Critically comment on Goldsmith’s art of character-portrayal in *The Deserted Village*.
7. Discuss Goldsmith as Pre-Romantic poet with reference to *The Deserted Village*.

BLOCK-III

***The Way of the World* – William Congreve**

CONTENT STRUCTURE

Unit 9(a): Introduction

Unit 9(b): Objectives

Unit 9(c): William Congreve: Life and Works

Unit 10(a): Congreve - the Comic Playwright

Unit 10(b): The Epigraph of the 1700 Edition

Unit 10(c): Relevance and Appropriateness of the Title

Unit 11(a): *The Way of the World*: Plot Synopsis

Unit 11(b): Congreve's Art of Character-drawing

Unit 11(c): *The Way of the World* — as a comedy of manners

Unit 12(a): *The Way of the World* — as a comedy of wit

Unit 12(b): *The Way of the World* — as a comedy of social criticism

Unit 12(c): Significance of the Proviso Scene

Select Bibliography

Suggested Readings

Assignments

Unit 9(a): INTRODUCTION

This module introduces you to *The Way of the World*, the finest speedmen of the Restoration Comedy of Manners. Even after the passage of three centuries the appeal of the sparking wit, brilliant repartee and elegant prose of this comedy is undimmed. You need only to read the play for yourselves to be aware of its enduring charm. This module will assume that you are acquainted with the text.

Unit 9(b): OBJECTIVES

After acquainting you with the main facts of William Congreve's life and giving you an idea of Congreve's unique qualities as a comic playwright, the module discusses the play in detail. There is a synopsis of the plot, an account of the main characters and the way they are made memorable in one way or another, as well as, a detailed analysis of the play's most famous scene. The major aspects of the play such as the significance, of the little, its representation of Restoration manners, the nature of its wit, and its criticism of prevalent social conventions, are comprehensively discussed. You must now supplement the discussion with a sensitive reading of the text.

Unit 9(c): WILLIAM CONGREVE: LIFE AND WORK

The greatest exponent of the Restoration comedy of manners, William Congreve was born at Bardsey, near Leeds, on 24 January 1670, but spent his youth in Ireland, where his father served as a lieutenant in the English garrisons at Youghal and Carrickfergus. When Congreve was twelve years old, his father was transferred to Kilkenny, where he joined the Duke of Ormond's regiment. In April 1686 Congreve left Kilkenny College which gave him a secure grounding in classical languages and literatures and went to Trinity College, Dublin, to continue his studies. Jonathan Swift was one of his fellow-students in Trinity College, which was then at the zenith of intellectual excellence, but because of the political turmoil of the day, consequent upon the accession to the throne of the Catholic King James II, the College closed for a span in 1689. Congreve probably arrived in London about the middle of the year and entered the Middle Temple as a law student in March

Enthusiastically interested in a literary career, Congreve abandoned law and evinced a keen interest in two leading theatres—the Theatre Royal and the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. He took up writing before long and published his four comedies within a period of only seven years. His works include 'Incognita', 'The Old Bachelor', 'The Double Dealer', 'Love for Love', 'The Mourning Bride', 'The Way of the World' and so on.

1691. He had, however, little or no interest in legal studies ; what he learned from his visits to Dublin's Smoke Alley Theatre proved to be of greater interest than the dry-as-dust letters of the law. Enthusiastically interested in a literary career, he soon gained the attention of the sixty-year-old John Dryden, lately poet Laureate, who still championed the cause of the emancipated socio-cultural ethos of the Restoration.

Congreve abandoned law for literature and evinced a keen interest in two leading theatres, the Theatre Royal and the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. He took up writing before long and published his four comedies within a period of only seven years. In 1691 he published a short prose romance, *Incognita*, under the name of *Cleophil*, which he had written in Trinity College some two or three years ago. His first comedy, *The Old Bachelor*, was staged at the Theatre Royal in 1693 with brilliant success. The warm recommendations of Dryden and Southerne and the superb skills of Thomas Betterton and Anne Bracegirdle went a long way to establish the young comedy-maker (who was then only twenty-three) as an irrefutable master of comic dialogue, verbal wit, rhythm and movement of limpid spontaneity. That he was also a deep-searching analyst of feminine psychology was proved beyond

any shadow of doubt. Congreve followed his first comedy in 1694 with another comedy, *The Double-Dealer*, and in 1695 with *Love for Love*, produced by and starring again, Thomas Betterton and Anne Bracegirdle, which immediately won for him the highest accolades of the English theatre - world. Two years later, he had an almost equal popular success with his verse tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*, which was first performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields in February 1697. Unfortunately his next and best play, *The Way of the World* (1700), was not well received, partly because of the allegations of immorality and licentiousness brought against Restoration comedy by Jeremy Collier. Indeed, the best comedy proved to be the worst failure on the stage.

At the age of thirty Congreve retired to live the life of a non-political, non-interfering gentleman—a claim which irritated Voltaire when he visited him in 1726. His creative inspiration certainly flagged, but it did not altogether fail. Aside from the afore-mentioned works, Congreve wrote his masque, *The Judgment of Paris* (1701), his opera libretto, *Semele* (1710), his *Odes to St Cecilia's Day* (1701), his long poem, *Epistle to Lord Cobham* (written in 1728, but published posthumously), and his poetical tributes to the brother and father-in-law of Henrietta Godolphin, who had been his firm and sincere friend since the cessation of his attachment to Anne Bracegirdle around 1702 to 1703. During the last few years of his life Congreve became financially and materially successful because of his association with the Kit-Cat Club at the house of the publisher, Jacob Tonson. He obtained a new political host with effect from 1705 when he became Commissioner for wines at an annual salary of £200. But fortune really smiled on him with the establishment of the Whig government following the accession of George I in 1714. He was made Secretary to the Island of Jamaica at an annual salary of £700. His health was however, declining fast. Alone, suffering from gout and cataract, he could only undertake a sad trip down the memory lane, although Henrietta was with him to the last. Congreve died at his Surrey street lodgings on 19 January 1729.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Name the chief works of Congreve.

Unit 10(a) CONGREVE - THE COMIC PLAYWRIGHT

When Congreve started writing his comedies in the last decade of the seventeenth century, during the reign of William III, after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Bacchanalian orgy that broke out with the returning monarchy had already yielded place to weariness and even disillusion. There was hardly any comic playwright who could continue the tradition of the comedy of manners with vigour and singleness of purpose; Dryden's laurels were yet to be bequeathed. It was but natural that when Anne Bracegirdle appeared before the Drury Lane audience to speak the Prologue to *The Old Bachelor* (1693), she actually held a brief for the 'young author' whom she described as

civil and bashful, entreating the favour of his judges. The judges were all fascinated because the new

Congreve derived elements from various sources, both foreign and native, from Terence, Moliere, Jonson, Middleton, Marston, Fletcher and Beumont in particular, and forged a new comedic genre which would celebrate the grace and polish of an essentially urban civilisation. All that is best in the Restoration continuance of Elizabethan dramatic conventions may be illustrated in Congreve's plays.

venture brought the diverse elements of seventeenth-century English comedy into a delightful unity and offered a banquet of delicious, often epigrammatic, wit, while unfolding the pageant of a sophisticated society made ridiculous with the flourish of modish affectation. Indeed, Congreve became the darling not merely of the playgoers but also of Dryden who introduced his second comedy, *The Double Dealer* (1694), placing on record a tribute of ecstatic fervour: 'In him all beauties, of this age we see'—Etherege's 'courtship', Southerne's 'spurity' and 'the satire, wit and strength of Manly Wycherley.'

Dryden was certainly right, but we should also add that Congreve's alliance was not with Restoration comedy alone; that he derived from various sources, both foreign and native, from Terence, Moliere, Jonson, Middleton, Marston, Fletcher and Brome in particular, and forged a new comedic genre which would celebrate the grace and polish of an essentially urban civilization. In complex romantic intrigues and subtleties of dialogue and characterization he was indebted to Terence who reworked and developed the Greek comedy of Menander; Moliere was another influence of great magnitude, as has been shown by Dudley Howe Miles in his *The Influence of Moliere on Restoration Comedy*; and apropos of the influence of Jonson, or for that matter, of the whole of Elizabethan/Jacobean comic tradition on his work, we have authoritative corroboration from Bonamy Dobree, Kathleen Lynch and Ian Donaldson. Lynch has specifically averred that the most fundamental conspicuous influence in Congreve's comedy was the influence of the Elizabethan tradition. According to her, most writers of Restoration comedy fell back at times, with a sense of relief, upon Elizabethan plots and humours, but Congreve was, in this respect, the most conservative of them all. "All that is best in the Restoration continuance of Elizabethan dramatic conventions may be illustrated in Congreve's plays". (*The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy*).

The Old Bachelor with the 'humorous' excesses of Heartwell, Fondlewife and Captain Bluffe proved a resounding success, but *The Double Dealer* failed probably because Congreve tried to register in it a new idiom of moral seriousness and to satirize the shameless hypocrisy of his age in the persons of Lady Touchwood, Lady Froth and Lady Plyant who have no hesitation in cuckolding their husbands without, of course, ruffling the placid appearances of social decorum. Maskwell in the play is a villain bent on destroying the happiness of Mellefont and Cynthia, and he has been depicted, not

"Love for Love gave Congreve an opportunity to make a really impressive display of his gift for gay and witty comedy without rancour. Mild satire is sometimes perceptible in Congreve's routine hits at the usual and obvious targets, the pretending astrologer, the half-witted beau, the awkward country girl, but these hits are not sufficiently powerful to situate the play within the tradition of the realistic satirical in English comedy."

comically, but as a manifestation of calculating evil and a miracle of atrocious ingratitude. He is, in some sense, a descendant of Moliere's Tartuffe, but his love intrigue with Lady Touchwood does not compare with that of Tartuffe with Elmire: Lady Touchwood lacks dignity and elegance, where Elmire has a fineness of disposition, a reticent composure and a prudent understanding of things as they are. For once in his short dramatic career Congreve attempted a manifestly vigorous satire, but it was absolutely dissonant with the audience temper of his time. We must remember that Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* was staged in 1696, just two years and a few months after the production of *The Double-Dealer*. English people were thirsting for their cups of weeping comedy.

Congreve's third comedy, *Love for Love* (1695), however, hit the jackpot, so to speak. It was a triumphant success. It gave Congreve an opportunity to make a really impressive display of his gift

In "The Way of the World", Congreve, while envisioning some of the basic qualities of Shakespeare, Jonson, Massingar, Fletcher, Dryden, and Etherege, made an eclectic impression, part romantic, part critical, but above all, marked by intellectual acuity and emotional depth.

for a gay and witty comedy without rancour or recrimination. There is not much of Moliere's influence in Congreve's plot pattern or art of characterization; the romantic plot resembles that of Fletcher's **The Elder Brother** and the 'humourous' characters, particularly those of Foresight and Ben have a direct ancestry in Jonson, while Valentine is a surprising variation on Shakespeare's Hamlet. Mild satire is sometimes perceptible in Congreve's routine hits at the usual and obvious targets, the pretending astrologer the half-witted beau, the awkward country girl but these hits are not sufficiently powerful to situate the play within the tradition of the realistic-satirical in English comedy. Some critics have, however, found in it elements of sentimentalism, especially in Valentine's self-fulfilment that originates in his knowledge of moral goodness and spiritual freedom. Norman Halland, for example, says, in **The First Modern Comedies**, that the action of **Love for love** perfectly exemplifies the last phase of restoration comedy. The hero who rehearses from the social world of deception and illusion to a personal haven of emotional security 'discovers the heart behind the mask.' We wonder whether the popular appeal of the play resides in its interpretation as a comedy of almost transcendental affirmation or in its representation of rollicking zest that enlivens a romantic plot.

Congreve's last and best comedy, *The Way of the World* (1700), written in the immediate aftermath of Jeremy Collier's searing criticism in *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), did not prove a success when it was first produced. It revealed his social realism and ethical consciousness; it affirmed his intellectual resourcefulness and 'purity of style'; it reflected his ability to enrich the comedy of manners with a delicate poise and a creative idealism; and yet the theatre-audience found the play impossible to appreciate. The reason perhaps was that Congreve tried a fresh comedic genre which, while envisioning some of the basic qualities of Shakespeare, Jonson, Massingar, Fletcher, Dryden and Etherege, made an eclectic impression, part romantic, part critical, but, above all, marked by intellectual acuity and emotional depth. *The*

Way of the World has often been regarded as a comedy of wit; and the whole of the proviso-scene in Act IV as the supreme triumph of Congreve's intellectual dexterity. It bears witness to Congreve's passion for falling upon fine phrases like a lover, his 'command of dancing words' and his power to regale us with his 'streams of conceited metaphors and the bewildering flights of his fancy' (Allardyce Nicoll). The play has also been considered as a comedy of social criticism in which attack has been made not only on affected forms of wit or artificial modes of politeness but also on the decadent social order, represented by Lady Wishfort suffering from an 'indigestion of widow-hood' that requires to be replaced by a new social order symbolized through the love of Mirabella and Millamant, the young, enlightened hero and heroine.

It is true that Congreve's power lay, not in the fashioning of dramatic incident, but in his mastery of intellect-dominated verbal wit and in his exploration/rendition of contemporary social ethos. Verbal wit and social realism are however, not the ultimate realities in Congreve's comedy which often draws on the intricate matrix of human experience. Sometimes like Bernard Shaw, Congreve gives vent to his suppressed emotions; sprightly wit and acute tragic sense enter into a curious artistic complex. Ann's cry for the father of the Superman and the litany at the end of *Saint Joan* produce a kind of music that palpitates into profound melancholy. Mrs Fainall, the cast mistress of Mirabella in *The Way of the World*, also leaves an impression of unmitigated pain. She has a passion for Mirabella, her former lover, and she is loyal to him in every possible way, but her heart aches at not being loved by her husband. On one occasion she says, 'He [Mr. Fainall] has a humour more prevailing than his curiosity, and will willingly dispense with the hearing of one scandalous story, to avoid an occasion to make another by being seen to walk with his wife.' The affectation of lightness in the remark only deepens the anguish and bitterness the way of the world is strewn with.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Consider Congreve as a comic playwright.

Unit 10(b): THE EPIGRAPH OF THE 1700 EDITION

The epigraph found on the title page of the 1700 edition of *The Way of the World* contains two Latin quotations from Horace's *Satires*. In their wider contexts they read in English:

"It is worthwhile, for those of you who wish adulterers no success, to hear how much misfortune they suffer, and how often their pleasure is marred by pain and, though rarely achieved, even then fraught with danger."

"I have no fear in her company that a husband may rush back from the country, the door burst open, the dog bark, the house shake with the din, the woman, deathly pale, leap from her bed, her complicit maid shriek, she fearing for her limbs, her guilty mistress for her dowry and I for myself." The

quotations offer a fore-warning of the chaos to ensue from both infidelity and deception. According to Brian Gibbons, the central theme or didactic intent of the play is indicated by the epigraph: the fate of adulterers and the fears of a guilty woman for the loss of her reputation.

Unit 10(c): RELEVANCE AND APPROPRIATENESS OF THE TITLE

Like other comedies in the history of world drama, *The Way of the World* deals with the theme of love, assimilating, in its fable-structure, an interplay of erotic instincts. There is much romance in the comedy, but this romance is controlled and rational rather than exuberant and disruptive of logical propriety. In the ultimate analysis, however, Congreve's comedy is not a romantic comedy, but a critical comedy that attests to Congreve's social solicitude and ethical consciousness. It belongs to the realistic-corrective tradition of English comedy and seeks to cure the existing society of its oddities and flaws, excesses and affectations. Congreve makes a satirical exposition of the social manners of his day - the 'way' in the title of his play refers to contemporary manners, habits or modes of patterned elegance, and the 'world' implies the society where these manners are represented or manipulated.

In choosing the title of his play, Congreve not merely presents or analyses the society of his age but also brings out the element of irony in this society's deceptive/affected code of conduct. Towards the end of the play Mirabell uses the phrase 'the way of the world', while mocking at Fainall's 'confusion' as the latter reads the parchment with the inscription: 'A deed of conveyance of the whole estate of Arabella, Languish, widow, in trust to Edward Mirabell'. Mirabell, in fact, turns the tables against Fainall and saves Lady Wishfort's prestige and Mrs Fainall's property; the last laugh is his; and what he emphasizes by referring to 'the way of the world' is obviously the triumph of Mrs Fainall over her husband who has always tried to play her false. This is the 'most unkindest cut' of irony in a society that is doubtless patriarchal. *The Way of the World* is an ironic title, despite Brian Gibbons's view that 'Mirabell imposes on the cynically realistic way of the world the more generous vision of the art of comedy.'

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. How far is the title of "The Way of the World" relevant and appropriate?

Unit 11(a): THE WAY OF THE WORLD: PLOT SYNOPSIS

Act I is set in a chocolate house where Mirabell and Fainall have just finished playing cards. A footman comes and tells Mirabell that Waitwell (Mirabell's male servant) and Foible (Lady Wishfort's female servant) were married that morning. Mirabell tells Fainall about his love of Millamant and is

encouraged to marry her. Witwoud and Petulant appear and Mirabell is informed that should Lady Wishfort marry, he will lose £6000 of Millamant's inheritance. He will only get this money if he can make Lady Wishfort consent to his and Millamant's marriage.

Act II is set in St. James's Park. Mrs Fainall and Mrs Marwood are discussing their hatred of men. Fainall appears and accuses Mrs Marwood (with whom he is having an affair) of loving Mirabell. Meanwhile, Mrs Fainall tells Mirabell that she hates her husband, and they begin to plot about tricking Lady Wishfort to give her consent to the marriage. Millamant appears in the park, and angry about the previous night (where Mirabell was confronted by Lady Wishfort) she lets him know her displeasure in Mirabell's plan, which she only has a vague idea about. After she leaves, the newly wed servants appear and Mirabell reminds them of their roles in the plan.

Act III, IV and V are all set in the home of Lady Wishfort. We are introduced to Lady Wishfort who is encouraged to marry 'Sir Rowland' - Mirabell's supposed uncle - by Foible so that Mirabell will lose his inheritance. Sir Rowland is, however, Waitwell in disguise, the plan being to arrange a marriage with Lady Wishfort, which cannot go ahead because it would be bigamy, and Mirabell will offer to help her out of the embarrassing situation if she consents to her marriage. Later, Mrs Fainall discusses this plan with Foible, but this is overheard by Mrs Marwood. She later tells the plan to Fainall, who decides that he will take his wife's money and go away with Mrs Marwood.

Mirabell proposes to Millamant and with Mrs Fainall's encouragement, Millamant accepts. Mirabell leaves as Lady Wishfort arrives, and she lets it be known that she wants Millamant to marry her nephew, Sir Wilful, who has just arrived from the countryside. Lady Wishfort later gets a letter telling her about the Sir Rowland's plot. Sir Rowland takes the letter and blames Mirabell of trying to sabotage their wedding. Lady Wishfort agrees to let Sir Rowland bring a marriage contract that night.

By Act V, Lady Wishfort has found out the plot, and Fainall has had Waitwell arrested. Mrs Fainall tells Foible that her previous affair with Mirabell is now public knowledge. Lady Wishfort appears with Mrs Marwood, whom she's thanking for unveiling the plot. Fainall then appears and uses the information of Mrs Fainall's previous affair with Mirabell and Millamant's contract to marry him to blackmail Lady Wishfort, telling her that she should never marry and that she is to transfer all the money over to him. Lady Wishfort tells Mirabell that she will offer consent to the marriage if he can save her fortune and honour. Mirabell calls on Waitwell who brings a contract from the time before the marriage of the Fainalls in which Mrs Fainall gives all her property to Millamant. This neutralises the blackmail attempts, after which Mirabell restores Mrs Fainall's property to her possession and then is free to marry Millamant with the full £6000 inheritance.

[Source : Wikipedia]

Unit 11(b): CONGREVE'S ART OF CHARACTER-DRAWING

The total impression that we receive from Congreve's world of comedy is one of a mingled pattern where individual eccentricities are coupled with fashionable affectations. The comic characters

Congreve's characters are individual eccentrics featuring fashionable affectations. They are brought into a clear focus as aspects of a single humanity and suggest telling dimensions in their association with, and absorption into, the social ethos. They belong mostly to the stock-types of the age—man and women amorously inclined despite their years, fops, would-be-wits and so on.

he depicts are brought into a clear focus as aspects of a single humanity and suggest telling dimensions in their association with, and absorption into, the social ethos. As Clifford Leech observes in his essay 'Congreve and the Century's End' (in *The Dramatist's Experience*):

His characters belong for the most part to the stock-types of the age—men and women of wit and fashion; harmless eccentrics like Foresight and Heartwell; men and women amorously inclined despite their years, like Sir Sampson Legend and Lady Wishfort; unpolished intruders into London society, like Ben and Sir Wilfull Witwoud; women of light virtue; fops and would-be wits— but he so contrives his plays that the characters are not isolated targets but are seen in relation to one another and to their society as a whole.

It is by presenting his dramatis personae against the backdrop of resplendent but artificial social conventions that Congreve lays out the design of his critical comedy.

The *Way of the World* accommodates, in its cast, an interesting variety of male characters - Witwoud (reminiscent of Jonson's Sir Politic Would-be), a would-be or would-have-been wit who, as Mirabell says, 'so passionately affects the reputation of understanding raillery, that he will construe an affront into a jest; and call downright rudeness and ill language, satire and fire', Petulant, whose name is indicative of his temperament, a choleric man who professes perpetual animosity and turns out to be an indecent quarellor, and Sir Wilfull Witwoud, a country bumpkin with his loam-footed honesty and endearing warmth, who manages to disgrace himself by

Mirabell, the most fully worked out of all Congreve's male characters, though somewhat devious, manipulative, even amoral is capable of balancing out 'enlightened self-interest with consideration for others'.

becoming embarrassingly drunk. The hero of Congreve's play, Mirabell (whose name derives from the Latin *mirabilis* meaning 'wonderful'), is of course, the most important male character admired by all the ladies around him. Indeed, the most fully worked out of all Congreve is male characters, Mirabell, though somewhat devious, manipulative, even amoral (having a prodigal past) is capable of balancing out 'enlightened self-interest with consideration for others' (David Thomas). The 'admirer of female beauty' has been contrasted from the very beginning with Fainall (who feigns all), the villain, the shamelessly self-seeking power-hungry fortune-hunter, who only repels or shocks us. An outsider in the true sense of the word, who has no sense of family responsibility or social obligation, Fainall embodies the odious cruelty of Hobbes's man in the raw state of nature.

Congreve excels in his delineation of female characters. The many-faceted Millamant (whose name derives from the French mille [thousand]+amant [love]-surrounded by a thousand lovers) apart, the other female characters are also, drawn no less insightfully. Bonamy Dobree regards Mrs Fainall as a figure of 'intense realism' - her husband has married her only for her wealth, but he is in love with Mrs Marwood, and she has accepted her loss and defeat with quiet dignity. Moreover, she herself is a victim of an almost Chekhovian sense of sadness (Cf *The Seagull*) because she still loves Mirabell, yet has to encourage Millamant and assume airs of generous approbation

Congreve excels in his delineation of female characters. Bonamy Dobree regards Mrs. Fainall as a figure of intense realism. Lady Wishfort is indeed a sort of wish of carnal appetite.

of her match with him. Arguably the most poignant character in *The Way of the World* is Lady Wishfort who is constantly deceived, abused and exploited by all those around her. She is on the wrong side of fifty - precisely fifty-five - but she seems to experience the passions of robust sexuality. She is indeed a sort of wish - of carnal appetite and in her conduct she is always dishonest. She may be styled a 'humorist', but her humour is not of one particular shade. She contains 'multitudes' in her humour: luxurious lust (of an Epicure Mammon), sullen anger (of a Morose), vituperative malevolence (of a Face) gross rancousness (of an Ursula) and, above all, the glaring pretension and hypocrisy, characteristic of all Restoration coquettes. Another female character is Mrs Marwood who is bent on marring the happiness of others. With her selfish lusting, after Mirabell - and her schemes and conspiracies - she challenges comparison with Fainall; both are motivated by appetite, greed and envy.

The most important female character in the play is doubtless its heroine Millamant, who combines wit and womanliness in equal proportion. From the very moment of her arrival in Act II, scene I - 'faith full sail, with her fans spread and her streamers out' - she is charming and lovable, an embodiment of the freshness of spring, 'the incarnation of happiness or at least of the desire for it.' (Bonamy Dobree) Millamant is a young girl of changing moods and fancies, sometimes a little impish, but she also upholds the principles of decorum and honour. She 'herself tends, a vestal virgin, the patrician

Millamant combines wit and womanliness. She is world-wise, yet romantic; practical yet passionate; far-sighted, yet emotional.

flame of Caroline honour', and by winning Mirabell back to the ways of Caroline honour, 'she makes their love no mere excrement of whim and chance, but the lasting affirmation of the traditional decencies; and the union of two minds within a shared culture.' (Donald Bruce, *Topics of Restoration Comedy*) She realizes the importance of controlled passion and organized logic in a man-woman relationship, as is evident in the proviso scene of the play. She is worldly-wise, yet romantic; practical yet passionate; far-sighted, yet emotional. She sets great store by the logicalities of life, but she possesses and dwells in a wonderland of airy vitality, hiding her feeling behind the only too necessary artifices of her sex. Once assured of her love, she divests herself of her armour and shows a perfect candour: 'If Mirabell does not make a good husband, I am a lost thing.'

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on Congreve's art of characterisation in the play "The Way of the World".

Unit 11(c):

THE WAY OF THE WORLD — AS A COMEDY OF MANNERS

The comedy of manners is the dominant and characteristic type of comedy in the history of world drama - from Aristophanes and Terence to Ibsen, Shaw and Brecht. It is the achievement of the sense of comedy of existence through a humour-slanted critical presentation of social life and patterns of human behaviour, an intellectual and rational discrimination of values. But, as Allardyce Nicoll rightly says in his *History of English Drama (1660-1900)* Vol. I, when we say that Congreve's comedy is a comedy of manners we are using the word in its Congrevian sense, betokening something brilliant about a man or a woman, not a humour, but a grace or a habit of refined culture, something that looks "a little je ne-sçay-quaysh" (to borrow the phrase from Lady Froth's speech in Act II, scene I of *The Double Dealer*). The manners in Congreve's comedy are, by no means, the behaviour of humanity in general but the affectitious and cultured veneer of a highly developed and self-conscious group towards the close of the seventeenth century. The society it represents is artificial - a powdered and rouged society; it is indeed artificiality which provides the unity of atmosphere for a narrow, comic world where 'the true voice of feeling' (to use a Keatsian phrase in a different context) has been stifled in the bantering levity of fanciful and aristocratic high-ups - the beaux and belles who only assume affectations.

Congreve's comedy of manners presents a gallery of entertaining comic characters with sundry whims and fancies in the boudoirs and coffee-houses, in the Hyde Park, the Piazza, or the Mall, and these characters are made to spin, as it were, to a gay tune with all the formal discipline of a ballet choreography. The dancing figures of Edgar Degas seem to come out of the delicate haze of impressionism and breathe in the modish trivialities of a highly sophisticated age. Congreve's comic characters owe their liveliness to the world of manners to which they belong, and sometimes we are made to see even the most fantastic excesses of the manners they assume - the wayward flutter of a fan in the hand of a moody heroine (Millamant) or the riding dress of a much-travelled boor (Sir Wilfull Witwoud). In his delineation of manners, whether elegant or absurd, Congreve acknowledges the mingled pattern of the individual and the social and seeks to continue the tradition of critical comedy by exploiting its traditional material, the oddities and affectations of individuals in society.

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The comedy of manners is also the comedy of wit; and it has been customary to cite *The Way of the World* as an illustration of the brightest variety of Congrevian wit. Comments like ‘friendship without freedom is as dull as love without enjoyment, or wine without toasting’, ‘A wit should no more be sincere, than a woman constant. One argues a decay of parts as t’other of beauty’, and ‘the falling out of wits is like the falling out of lovers - we agree in the main like treble and bass’ (all made by Witwoud, though a false wit) are too interesting to miss. Congreve’s ‘purity of style’ and ‘perfection of dialogue’ certainly remind us of a Frenchman, not, however, of Moliere, but of Gustave Flaubert, author of *Madame Bovary*. The proviso-scene in which Mirabell and Millamant put forward certain terms and conditions before they get married witnesses to the central values of urban civilization. Congreve deals with the exuberance of youthful love, but his comic vision is such as to acknowledge all that is morally significant in its representation in an upper-class society. The norms of love and marriage that Congreve formulates in his comedy vindicate his socio-ethical consciousness and attest to a lasting affirmation of the traditional decencies. Wit, the splendid glory and grace of urban civilization, the rare quality of mind that gives the right direction to a pragmatically free society, not only permeates the whole of the proviso-scene but also enriches the style of the whole play itself. Congreve’s style is such as to solidify the dramatic structure and to distinguish between one character and another on the basis of rhetorical rhythms and dictional singularities. It ranges from one peak to another from the stinging cynicism of Fainall to the dulcet melancholy of Mirabell, from the diaphanous charm of Millamant to the abusive rage (the Meredithian ‘boudoir Billingstate’) of Lady Wishfort from the fashionable affectation of Witwoud to the raucous boorishness of Sir Wilfull Witwoud.

“The Way of the World” is an illustration of the brightest variety of Congrevian wit. Congreve’s ‘purity of style’ and ‘perfection of dialogue’ certainly remind us of a Frenchman. Congreve deals with the exuberance of youthful love, but his comic vision is such as to acknowledge all that is morally significant in its representation in an upper-class society.

s, of course, polite and amiable, immune from rancour and indignation, and there are reasons to subscribe to the view that he anticipates Sheridan whose *The School for Scandal* continues and embellishes the tradition of the comedy of manners and invites comparison with his *The Way of the World*. Like the poet of the “Rope of the Lock”, he cannot be a devastating critic but he can think of certain values of traditional ethics which impose a pattern on the ridiculously absurd mode of living in the society of his age that aspired to be civilized in every respect. Yet ever since the non-jurying Anglican priest, Jeremy Collier, flung his fulminations into the stronghold of English drama, it has been the habit to regard Restoration Comedy as licentious, immoral, obscene and dissolute. The violation of moral decorum in Restoration comedy certainly strikes the attention of even a casual reader and makes him reflect on what the real function or purpose of literature ought to be. It may however be noted that the comic playwrights of the Restoration period, were eager to draw the picture of a society free from the conventions of feudalism and chivalry. They thought of launching a

move towards greater justice between man and woman. While presenting their love-relationship in a dramatic form, they drew a line of demarcation between passion and affection. Nevertheless, we are shocked when Lady Wishfort shouts at Foible, her maid-servant, and uses a language of unmatched foulness, or when Waitwell playing the role of Sir Rowland engages in an amorous interview with Lady Wishfort and pays handsome compliments to her 'adorable person'.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Consider "The Way of the World" as a comedy of manners.

Unit 12 (a): THE WAY OF THE WORLD - AS A COMEDY OF WIT

Restoration comedy is primarily organized on the basis of wit, which is obviously its most outstanding feature. Almost all the characters in *The Way of the World* engage in an exercise of wit thus testifying to the dazzling brilliance of Congreve's intellectual dynamics. Dr. Johnson styles Congreve's characters 'intellectual gladiators' who are made to produce an unceasing salvo of Verbal Wit. Leigh Hunt says that Congreve presents 'a set of heartless fine ladies and gentlemen, coming in and going out, saying witty things at each other and buzzing in some maze of intrigue'. Hazlitt describes how Restoration comedy, the 'Corinthian capital' of polished elegance spotlights the "conquest over dullness." Meredith expresses the view that Congreve 'hits the mean of a fine style and a natural in dialogue.' Dwelling on the seminal quality of Restoration comedy Whibley observes that in point of concision Congreve's style is still unmatched in the literature of England. The Verbal style of *The Way of the World* is obviously characterized by intellect-dominated Wit, but we are also fascinated by the technique that Congreve adopts to draw a line of demarcation between true Wits and false Wits. Thomas Fujimura in *The Restoration Comedy of Wit* speaks of the characteristics that mark the true wit off from the false Wits. The true wits are sensitive, imaginative and decorous, while the false wits thrive on the superficialities of urban civilization. The former sharpen their emotions upon their wits while the latter are affected and pretentious and capitalize on elegant absurdities.

Integrity of feeling and stability of faith - the rich beauties of unalloyed human emotions have been denied Fainall. Brian Gibbons, in his introduction to *The Way of the World*, speaks of the differences of degree among the false wits in the play. He observes a strict hierarchy from Fainall to Witwoud and thence to Petulant, and arrives at the conclusion that this hierarchy of false wits is indicated 'by the order in which characters appear in Act I, so that the audience has the opportunity to measure each in turn against Mirabell, the true wit, and to compare relative degrees of folly. Witwoud and Petulant are obviously false wits in the play. They are, in the words of Norman Holland in *The First Modern Comedies*, 'ridiculous, all manner and no substance, as empty as balloons, and blown by whatever random stimulus come their way and suggest preposterous idiosyncrasies on the plane of

social existence. Wit would churn out fashionable and extravagant similitudes and Mirabell describes him as 'a fool with a good memory, and some fine scraps of other folk's wit'. Pelulant is nearly all vapour and tends as a consequence to be highly explosive, thus betraying his Elizabethan lineage. Lady Wishfort who provides broad fun verging on the farcical is another false wit. Mirabell says that she 'publishes her detestation of mankind; and full of the vigour of, fifty-five, declares for a friend and *Ratafia*. What is however interesting to note is that some of the false wits sometimes make observations or pass remarks which are too full of wit to escape our attention. Wit would, for example, says about Pelulant on one occasion, 'His want of learning gives him the more opportunities to show his natural parts'. Even the maid-servant Foible is capable of resorting to wit. To Lady Wishfort she says, 'A little art once made your picture like you and now a little of the same art must make you like your picture. Your picture must sit for you madam.'

The best variety of Congrevian wit has however, been exemplified and illustrated in the wit-combats between Mirabell and Millamant, the true wits in the play. Mirabell's '... beauty is the lover's gift; 'tis he bestow your charms: your glass is all a cheat' is a comment which is not merely mellifluous in its sonic texture but also poetic in its power of evocation. The proviso scene in the play reveals the most scintillating aspects of Congrevian wit. Congreve's hero and heroine who are experts in the art of social survival desire a kind of marriage which must be compatible with the notion of wit and embody the most cherished values of urban civilization, those of finesse, grace and decorum, which form the nucleus of a consistent ethical code in world of appearances. In the proviso scene marked by organized reason and controlled passion, Mirabell and Millamant liberate themselves from the follies and affectations of the society they live in and base their romantic priorities both soberly and realistically upon the logicalities of life. John Barnard is perfectly right when he says: The proviso scene is not negative; it enfranchises the lovers and is the essential preparative to giving themselves to one another while reconciling the competing demands of wit (in the sense of judgement, and love it is a worldly attitude but neither despicable nor unrealistic.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Consider 'The Way of the World' as a comedy of wit.

**Unit 12(a): THE WAY OF THE WORLD: AS A COMEDY
OF SOCIAL CRITICISM**

'Documentary' critics of the Restoration comedy of manners express the view that comic playwrights like Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve present a faithful picture of contemporary social ethos. Indeed, close fidelity to actual life has been observed in their comedies. In *The Way of the World* Congreve provides us with a vivid and dependable picture of the national metropolis that

brims with pastimes and follies at it Jame's Park, the New Exchange and the World's End. Contemporary London comes to life with Will's Coffee-house, Pall-Mall and Covent Garden, Locket's Eating-house at the Charing Cross, Duke's Place, Rosamond's Pond, Bridewell, the house of Correction for vagabonds and loose women, and Ludgate, the debtors' prison, supposed to be crowded with the starving and diseased (as imagined by W.H. Van Voris in *The Cultivated Stance*). Congreve's world is a great deal too real, and what Macaulay says about the realism of Restoration comedy in general holds good for Congreve's comedy in particular: 'Here the garb, the manners, the topics of conversation are those of the real town and of the passing day.' (Critical and Historical Essays, Vol II) What Macaulay does not consider is that the realism itself of Restoration comedy (or, for that matter of Congreve's comedy) is largely a compound of art and artificiality and reveals a social structure which has no foundation in the authenticity and truthfulness of natural emotions. Congreve is deep-searching in the realm of refined intellect whose life becomes an art and art an aesthetic of artificiality. He is a faithful transcriber of the realism that comes full circle and is complete by being artificial. We may not agree with Charles Lamb when, in his essay on 'The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century', he postulates with ingenious sophistry that the Fainalls and Mirabells and Lady Touchwoods - all creatures of sportive fancy - figure in 'a speculative scene of things' and get but of 'the Christendom into the land... of cuckoldry - the Utopia of gallantry - where pleasure is duty, and the manners perfect freedom.' But there is no reason why we should not appreciate the significance of the word 'artificial' he has used in the title of his essay. The Restoration comedy of manners is indeed artificial in its avoidance of the promptings of nature and of the pressures of passion, but Congreve's comedy is artificial in the sense that it is a realistically vivid portrayal of an artificial society where only the aristocratic high-ups flaunt their intellectual resources, strike attitudes and vie with one another for posing in the social mirror. It is of this artificial society that Scandal says in Act III, scene III of *Love for Love*: 'I know no effective difference between continued affectation and reality.' In his *Comic Characters in Shakespeare*, John Palmer observes: 'In the comedies of Congreve ... we are no longer men; we are wits and a peruke. We are no longer women; we are ladies of the tea-table.' Palmer's observation is significant especially in the context of the social ethos, as portrayed in *The Way of the World*, where the surface is all suggesting the artificial/assumed norms of urban sophistication. It is only Mirabell and Millamant, the true wits in the play, who turn against the currents of the time and seek to control the society around them. Philip Roberts rightly says that in the proviso scene Mirabell and Millamant relinquish their current social positions while giving up what the fops would give them all for. Indeed, they go a stage further than other comic central figures and 'in so doing they unavoidably breakdown the incredibility essential to the artifice.' Congreve has of course ridiculed the artificial social set-up of the Restoration period. But as K.M.P. Buxton says in *Restoration Literature*, 'However much the individual dramatist protested in prologues and epilogues that he was castigating the vices and follies of the age there was a general

atmosphere of overlooking faults, and a confused moral attitude governing the structure of the play.' Congreve wields his sword of common sense to prune off the excesses of affectation in contemporary social conduct but he is at best mildly critical in his aims and objectives. Congreve is by no means a satirist as stern and fierce as Jonson but he is capable of giving us something more than mere amusement. Ian Donaldson, in *The World Upside-Down*, speaks of the values embodied in *The Way of the World* and points out that the play 'moves firmly to an endorsement of the forms and conventions of civilized society.' He believes that its 'values are, in all senses of that word, those of *urbanity*.' Congreve examines the values of a town society, 'the London *beau monde*, artificial in character, yet celebrating the norms of practical wisdom and controlled logic and presents them in a subtle way by' means of his well-poised thematic explication. What is really interesting is that the 'affected' characters in his comedy highlight the genuineness of these values by turning them upside down or by exaggerating them to the point of the most fantastic kind of caricature. The courtship of Lady Wishfort and Waitwell masquerading as Sir Rowland in Act IV, scene XII in *The Way of the World* is a laughing crusade against the absurdity and extravagance of a decadent social culture. Lady Wishfort's affectations, her use of rhetorical language as she awaits or meets the disguised Waitwell when seen in a critical perspective,' may offer a clue to a saner human relationship and suggest a way out of the spurious mode of living. Congreve's purpose is not to flay vices or persecute follies, but his focus is on a social ethos purged of all manner of illogical and ridiculous excesses.

Congreve is a stern and fierce satirist, but he is also capable of giving us something more than mere amusement. His play 'moves firmly to an endorsement of the forms and conventions of civilised society.'

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Consider "The Way of the World" as a comedy of social criticism.

Unit 12(c): SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROVISIO SCENE

The proviso scene had been invented by Honore D'Arfe (*L'Astree*) and Congreve borrows verbally from Dryden's *Secret Love* for his own proviso scene in Act IV, scene I of *The Way of the World*. There are other echoes of Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode* and *The Wild Gallant*, and there is a general debt in structure and technique to Etherege's *The Man of Mode*. But Congreve's proviso scene attests to the rare acuity and strength of his critical perception. His satirical barbs are aimed at the absurd excesses of manners in contemporary society and the ethical norms he envisions and formulates refer to the traditional

Congreve's proviso scene attests to the rare acuity and strength of his critical perception. His satirical barbs are aimed at the absurd excesses of manners and the ethical norms he envisions and formulates refer to the traditional decencies associated with the ideal of love and marriage.

decencies associated with the ideal of love and marriage. Mirabell and Millamant seek to strike a bargain before their marriage, putting forward certain terms and conditions, because they want to extricate themselves from the follies and affectations of their society and retain their composure and wit, their measure of control and sense of decorum. The diverse demands of logic and passion have been reconciled in the view of marriage they propose. Congreve seems to suggest that in the cynical, profligate and deceitful ways of the world it is only love that can act as a saving grace, but this love, which finds fulfilment in marriage, must be perfect, integrated and prudent.

The proviso scene begins as Mirabell completes the couplet from Edmund Waller's 'The Story of Phoebus and Daphne, Applied'. Millamant recites the first line of the couplet, 'Like Phoebus sung the no less am'rous boy,' and Mirabell completes the couplet by reciting its second line 'Like

Congreve's hero and heroine who are experts in the art of social survival, 'manage to control the society around them'. The proviso scene reconciles the competing demands of wit and love and 'enfranchise's them, revealing the union of two minds in the sophisticated content of urban culture.

Daphne she, as lovely and as coy'. Mirabell desires that 'the chase must end, and my pursuit be crowned', but Millamant does not desire a state of inglorious ease, where she runs the risk of being 'freed from the agreeable fatigues of solicitation.' She hates the lover 'that can dare to think he draws a moment's air independent on the bounty of his mistress'. 'There is not so in prudent a thing in nature as the saucy look of an assured man, confident of success,' she says. The apprehension of disillusion after marriage is so pervasive in the prevalent social ethos that Millamant declares, 'I'll be solicited to the very last, nay, and afterwards', meaning that she must be wooed even after her marriage although she is deeply in love with Mirabell. Indeed Millamant in the proviso scene resembles Shakespeare's Rosalind whose affection 'hath an unknown bottom, like the Bay of Portugal'. (As you Like It, Act IV, scene I), but she indulges in a deliberate exaggeration of her caprices and declares her 'will and pleasure'. She cannot bid farewell to her 'dear liberty', 'faithful solitude' and 'darling contemplation'. She does not want to be called names like wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cart in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar'. She tells Mirabell, 'Let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while and as well-bred as if we were not married at all.'

To this brilliant gambit Mirabell retorts with a number of stipulations, showing his concern for his reputation as a husband and for the health/figure of his future son. He will not allow Millamant to use masks and cosmetics (made of 'hogs' bones, hare's gall, pig-water, and the marrow of a roasted cat'), drink filthy, strong waters, toast follows, entertain bawds and courtesans, or to wear any tight-fitting garments at the time of her pregnancy. The proviso scene comes to an end with acceptance of the basis of social survival by the gay couple, attesting, incidentally to an amalgam of passion and logic in their loving relationship. Indeed, Congreve's hero and heroine who are experts in the art of social survival, 'manage to control the society around them' (Harriett Hawkins, *Likenesses of*

Truth in Elizabethan and Restoration Drama). The proviso scene reconciles the competing demands of wit (in the sense of judgement) and love and ‘enfranchises’ them, revealing the union of two minds in the sophisticated context of urban culture. As regards Mirabella and Millamant, Donald Bruce says, ‘Enlarged and Baroque they cleave the blue air side by side like immortals on a polychrome ceiling at Hampton Court, bound not for an illusory Cythera but for a sky where Honour is the sun.’ ‘Baroque’ cannot be the most appropriate word to describe Mirabella and Millamant who are at once refined and sincere, inventive and practical. Throughout the play they do not ignore good sense or good manners; each discovers the way to a pragmatically free society.

Congreve in the proviso scene of *The Way of the World*, certainly breaks new ground by making Mirabella and Millamant, who are exquisitely well matched, stand on a sure footing of equality in what still appears to be a largely patriarchal society. Both of them have astute foresight and are extremely intelligent and well-read. The hero is somewhat sententious, the heroine deliberately provocative but both are keen that they should obtain the remainder of Millamant’s fortune in Lady Wishfort’s possession to ward off the financial hazards of city life. For Millamant, however, personal liberty is more important than financial security within a framework of marital commitment, and Congreve seems to have envisaged a stable future life for the gay couple, disengaged from the moorings of feudal conservatism. David Thomas is guilty of no exaggeration when he says, ‘In assenting to Millamant’s provisos, Mirabella has actually agreed to renounce most of the accepted signs of patriarchal control over his wife.’

Mirabella and Millamant stand on a sure footing of equality in what still appears to be a largely patriarchal society. ‘In assenting to Millamant’s provisos, Mirabella has actually agreed to renounce most of the accepted signs of patriarchal control over his wife.’

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Discuss the significance of the proviso scene.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works

1. *Comedies by William Congreve*, ed. Bonamy Dobrée
2. *The Way of the World*, ed. Brian Gibbons

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Bruce, Donald, *Topics of Restoration Comedy*
2. Dobree, Bonamy, *Restoration Comedy*
3. Fujmuga, Thomas, *The Restoration Comedy of Wit*
4. Holland, Norman, *The First Modern Comedies*
5. Loftis, John (ed.), *Restoration Drama*
6. Lynch, K.M., *The Social Mode of Restoration Comedy*
7. Muir, Kenneth, *The Comedy of Manners*
8. Morris, Brian (ed.), *William Congreve*
9. Miner, E. (ed.), *Restoration Dramatists*
10. Nicoll, Allardyce, *A History of Restoration Drama*
11. Palmer, John, *The Comedy of Manners*
12. Thomas, David, *William Congreve*

ASSIGNMENTS

13. Discuss *The Way of the World* as a perfect example of the Restoration comedy of manners.
14. Assess *The Way of the World* as a comedy of social criticism.
15. Write a critical note on *The Way of the World* as a comedy of wit.
16. Bring out the significance of the proviso scene in *The Way of the World*.
17. Comment on Congreve's presentation of Millamant in *The Way of the World*.
18. Examine Congreve's art of plot structure in *The Way of the World*.
19. Indicate the importance of *The Way of the World* in the history of English comedy.
20. Show how Congreve makes a satiric exposition of '*The Way of the World*' in a morally loose and artificially fashionable society.
21. Compare and contrast the characters of Mirabell and Millamant in *The Way of the World*.
22. Comment on the appropriateness of the title of Congreve's play, *The Way of the World*.

Block – IV
***The Misanthrope* – Molière**

CONTENT STRUCTURE

Unit 13(a): Objective

Unit 13(b): Introduction

Unit 14(a): Brief Note on the Playwright

Unit 14(b): Brief Note on the Play

Unit 14(c): Outline of the Story

Unit 15(a): Aspects of the Play

Unit 15(b): Characters

Unit 16(a): Comedy of Manners

Unit 16(b): Reflection of Contemporary French Society

Suggested Reading

Assignments

Unit 13(a): OBJECTIVE

In this module we shall study one of the best plays written by one of the most celebrated French playwrights. We shall learn about the type of comedies written in France in the seventeenth century and about how this playwright managed to write a play that not only amused but also criticized contemporary French aristocracy. We shall try to understand why the playwright needed to write such a play and what this play means to us today. There will also be a list of books and websites you could consult to acquire more information about the playwright, his work, and his times. You could try answering some short and some essay-type questions to see if you have properly understood the play.

Unit 13(b): INTRODUCTION

Molière's *The Misanthrope* is one of the best plays written by the actor-playwright and is one of the most frequently performed. After its first performance on 4th June 1666 it became a big both

in the court and in literary circles success. European critics and writers of great importance, such as Boileau, Lessing and Goethe considered this play to be the best among Molière's which and his comedies are regarded as his highest achievement.

Unit 14(a): BRIEF NOTE ON THE PLAYWRIGHT

Molière (pronounced "Maw-li-air") was born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (pronounced "Jon Bahpteest Poklan") on 15 January 1622. His father was one of eight men who were responsible for

Jean — Baptiste, going against his family will, decided that theatre would be his livelihood and also decided to change his name to Molière, perhaps to spare his father of the embarrassment. He formed a theatre group "l' Illustre Théâtre" and started writing plays, opposed to the plays of Racine and Corneille.... they performed "The Love - Sick Doctor" in the royal court of king Louis XIV and it was a success. They were accepted by the court and were given their own theatre house.....

Moliere's plays include "The Pretentious Ladies", "The School for Husbands", "The School for Wives", "Tartuffe" etc. In 1660 the King gave Moliere the theatre of the Royal Palace.

King Louis XIV's furniture and upholstery. So, young Jean-Baptiste had a very comfortable childhood. He was educated at Claremont College where he was taught the classics. This is where he became acquainted with classical theatre, that theatre on which Aristotle based the theory of his *Poetics*.

However, his father had always meant for him to eventually join the business of upholstery and continue the family trade. The son, however, had already developed another interest - that of theatre! His father's shop was very close to two theatre halls and young Jean-Baptiste was often found at either of the two theatres watching plays. Although his father tried his best to get the young man to join the family business, Jean-Baptiste decided in 1643 that theatre would be his means of livelihood. His decision was due to the fact that he had fallen in love with an actress and had decided to form a theatre group with her and her brother, her sister and some others. He also decided to

change his name to Molière, perhaps to spare his father the embarrassment of having a son who is an actor. He named the group l' Illustre Théâtre or The Illustrious Theatre. They hired a tennis court in Paris and converted it into a theatre. But their plays were not a success. So, the troupe decided to go on a tour of the provinces.

Molière started to write his own plays as opposed to the plays of such classical tragedians as Racine and Corneille which the troupe had been performing so long. In 1658, they learnt that the brother of King Louis XIV - Duc d' Anjou (or Duke of Anjou) - was looking for a theatre group to patronize. The members of the Illustrious Theatre tried their luck in the presence of the King on 24 October. They made the mistake of performing a poor tragedy by Corneille (*Nicomède*). The royal court was not impressed. Realizing their mistake they asked for permission to perform another play. They performed *The Love-Sick Doctor*. It was a success. They were accepted by the Court and given their own theatre house.

The first play Molière wrote, after getting his own theatre, was *The Pretentious Ladies* and it immediately plunged him into trouble. In the play he makes fun of one Madame de Rambouillet, a member of the royal court who had appointed herself as the final arbiter in matters of taste. But when the influential lady tried to make the young playwright leave the city, in 1660 the King gave Molière the theatre of the Royal Palace. His troubles continued. His 1662 play *The School for Wives* - written a year after he wrote *The School for Husbands* (which is referred to in *The Misanthrope*) - turned out to be controversial, with him being accused of impiety and incest! Two years later *Tartuffe* (one of his best known plays now) was banned and would not be performed till 5 February 1669. In 1665, his company was re-named “Troupe du Roy” (The King’s Players). In 1666, Molière wrote *Le Misanthrope* amid failing health and difficulties in his marriage of four years to Armande. Their marriage ended two years later, but Armande continued to be a part of Molière’s troupe. During the next few years although Molière continued to write plays, he was dogged by accusations of plagiarism and by scurrilous accounts of the reasons behind the failure of his marriage. As for the accusations of plagiarism, it needs to be mentioned that he did borrow plotlines from sources as diverse as Plautus and Boccaccio. He continued to invite animosity for his satires against particular sections of French society. There was hardly a section that escaped the barbs from his pen. Be it physicians, astrologers, pedants, or society ladies.

In 1665, Moliere renamed his company “Troupe du Roy” In his later life Moliere was dogged by accusations of playiarism. He borrowed plot liness from sources as diverse as Plantus and Boccacio. He suffered From the bereavements of his sister-in-law and of his own son. After his death, he was buried at the cemetery of St. Joseph on the 21st February of 1672.

On 10 February 1673 his new play *The Imaginary Invalid* was first performed. Molière was doing very poorly at the time. He had suffered two bereavements - one of his sister-in-law Madeleine in February 1672 and the other of his son in October. However, he continued to play the lead role in the new play, inspite of other members of the troupe begging him not to. On 17 February, after playing the part of someone who was pretending to be ill, Molière, who was severely ill, broke into a bad cough and burst a blood vessel. He died soon after. There was big controversy about what was to be done to his body because in those days actors were not regarded as respectable people and could not be given the dignity of a proper funeral or a marked grave. It was only after the King insisted that Molière’s body was buried at the cemetery of St. Joseph on the 21st that same year.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Why did Moliere decide that theatre would be his means of livelihood ? What was the name of his theatre group ?
2. Name the plays written by Moliere.
3. Discuss how Moliere was accepted by the court of King Louis XIV ?
4. Why was Moliere accused of plagiarism ?

Unit 14(b): BRIEF NOTE ON THE PLAY

The *Misanthrope* was first licensed under the full name of *Le Misanthrope ou L'Atrabilaire Amoureux* (*The Misanthrope or The Angry Lover*). The play was performed not at the court but at the theatre of the Royal Palace on 4 June 1666 because the royal family was still mourning the death of the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria. Although the play was not a success with the public, it was a success with the critics. Some referred to it as “a new style of comedy.” There are reasons why they would say so. Although it borrows from the traditional farce, from the Italian style of *commedia dell'arte* and from courtly life, it manages to transcend the narrow definition of a comedy and becomes something more serious and thought-provoking. It comes close to tragedy but is rescued from a tragic outcome at the very last moment. The audience reaction Molière clearly seeks is not one of loud laughter (though there are some moments that always make the audience guffaw) but what Donneau de Visé calls “rire dans l'âme” or rather “inner laughter.” Nicholas Boileau (1636-1711), poet, dramatist and critic, who translated Longinus's “On the sublime” and wrote *The Art of Poetry* in 1674 and who had great influence on Addison and Pope, thought the play to be among Molière's best. Unlike in comedies of that time and indeed comedy in general, the characters in this play are not all types or flat in nature. Some confront conflicts and experience a certain complexity which lifts the play above the level of mere farce. The laughter is sometimes so bitter that Robert J. Nelson calls the play, “Molière's supreme achievement in the satiric mode.”

Unit 14(c): OUTLINE OF THE STORY

In Act One, Alceste (pronounced “Alsest”), a nobleman, is visiting the house of a young widow named Célimène (pronounced “Selimen”) with whom he is in love. Alceste prides himself on his honesty and deplors the hypocrisy and dishonesty all around him. When the play begins he is upset with Philinte (pronounced “Philant”), who is his friend. He is upset because Philinte has just been very cordial to some gentleman, but cannot tell Alceste the gentleman's name when asked, because he hardly knew the man! Oronte (pronounced “O-ront”), a nobleman enters and after praising Alceste lavishly asks him to give his judgement on a poem the former has written. On hearing the poem, Alceste tries to be polite and criticises Oronte indirectly, talking about other people who write bad poetry, but when pressed, becomes blunt and angers the nobleman, who leaves.

In Act Two Alceste and Célimène meet and he expresses his displeasure at her indulgence towards all nobleman. When she tells him that she has to be nice to them because they can be of practical help to him, he protests. We see the entry of two noblemen, Clitandre (pronounced “Klee-tawndr”) and Acaste (pronounced “Acast”) who regularly supply Célimène with all the court gossip. In this Act, we also get to see Célimène's cousin Éliante (pronounced “Ay-lee-awnt”), who Philinte

thinks is a better match for Alceste than Célimène. The Act ends when Alceste is summoned to appear before the Marshals of France (the court of law) because Oronte has complained against Alceste because of the latter's blunt criticism of the former's poetry.

Act Three opens with Acaste and Clitandre alone, trying to find out an amicable way to solve the problem of their both courting the same woman - Célimène. They agree that if one of them can produce proof of her preference for him, the other will stop courting her. In this act we have the introduction of a new character: Arsinoé, a lady past her prime but without a lover and therefore envious of Célimène. She is visiting Célimène ostensibly to inform her about the criticism she has been hearing about the young widow. Célimène sees through her and replies that there are people doubting Arsinoé's piety, thinking her instead to be a prudish hypocrite. Before tempers rise any further, Célimène decides to go away to write some urgent letter, leaving Arsinoé in the company of Alceste who has just come in again. Finding him alone Arsinoé now tries to sow seeds of suspicion against Célimène in Alceste's heart by telling him that he is being cheated. He says that he will only believe this if he is given the proof which promises to provide.

In Act Four Philinte, who has secretly been in love with Éliante, declares his affections to her. When she says that she has decided to give her hand to Alceste if he is eventually rejected by Célimène, Philinte says he will wait for her to reciprocate his emotions should Alceste and Célimène decide to get married. Alceste storms into the stage, in his pocket a letter that supposedly proves that Célimène has indeed been disloyal to Alceste. In a fit of anger he proposes to Éliante, who advises calm and does not accept his proposal. At this moment Célimène walks in and Alceste unleashes his anger at her, calling her a traitress, even though the letter that he produces is unsigned. She threatens to be truly unfaithful and thus give him something real to complain about. The quarrel is abruptly stopped by Du Bois (pronounced "Doo Bwa"), Alceste's manservant, who asks his master to leave the place, because he is about to be arrested in connection with a lawsuit.

The Fifth and final act finds Alceste telling Philinte that he has decided to withdraw from all contact with society. We learn that his decision stems from the fact that a case he was fighting has now been decided against him. He has lost the case. When Philinte asks him to appeal against the judgement Alceste says that he accepts the verdict because the case will go down in history as proof of the wickedness of contemporary French society. While Philinte goes in search of Éliante, Célimène enters, followed by Oronte. The nobleman insists that she chooses between him and Alceste as her lover. Soon Clitandra, Acaste, Oronte and Arsinoé also gather there. Clitandre and Acaste each have a letter supposedly written to the other by Célimène. In the letters, she seems to ridicule all the men present on stage. Cornered thus, Célimène admits that the letters are indeed written by her. She turns to Alceste and says that he is fully justified in hating her. Alceste says he still loves her and asks her to cut off all contact with society and go away with him to a place far away from civilisation. She

refuses to, but offers her hand in marriage, which Alceste refuses. He now offers himself to Éliante again. She turns him down but instead offers her hand to Philinte, who gladly accepts. Alceste leaves the stage ready to go to a place where he can live in honour and honesty. Philinte runs after him, hoping to make him change his mind.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Narrate the story of 'Misanthrope' in brief.

Unit 15(a): CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

Alceste:

There is enough evidence to prove that Molière had written the part of Alceste for himself. Boileau is known to have often regaled his friends by showing how the actor-playwright used to enjoy playing Alceste particularly towards the end of Act Two of the play. The influence of the Italian style of theatre known as *commedia dell'arte* is evident in Alceste. His name, as pointed out by the critic Gustave Lanson, is conventional, abstract, moral. According to Lanson, Alceste is like a mask of humanity, like the masks that were used in the *commedia dell'arte* form. There is nothing particularized about the name and the type of character Alceste is in the play. But, as Alfred Simon notes, "Alceste has set out to tear off all the masks in the world, believing that everyone has chosen the mask which would permit him to dodge himself and others. He does not understand that in the end the face itself, assuming all the tics of the soul, stiffens, hardens, and becomes in turn a mask. Touching and ridiculous, his maniacal passion creates the mask of truth for him."

Alceste means what he says. As Will G. Moore points out, when Alceste uses the clichés of his day, he does not use them for what they are. Instead he makes them actually meaningful. It is his seriousness and sincerity that makes his use of clichés comical, because everybody else uses them meaninglessly.

The influence of the Italian commedia dell'arte form is evident in Alceste. He has set out to tear off all the masks in the world not knowing that the face itself assuming all the tics of the soul, stiffens, hardens, and becomes in turn a mask. It is his seriousness and sincerity that makes his use of clichés comical. He is otherwise a tragic character, save that he never undergoes the Aristotelian process of 'anagnorisis'. He effectively condones hypocrisy and encourages Célimène to put up an appearance of fidelity if not to be actually faithful. The parallels between Alceste and Molière work at both levels : personal and professional.

Although Molière gives Alceste some moments of comedy and plenty of scope to indulge in exaggerated physical gestures to provoke laughter in the audience, the fact remains that he could almost be a tragic character, particularly, in his isolation and in his loneliness. The reason why he does not become a tragic character is that he never undergoes the Aristotelian process of 'anagnorisis' or the recognition of the foolhardy nature of his rigidity. If he is rigid and stubborn in the beginning,

his rigidity intensifies, if anything, at the end. He becomes even more of a mask than he is when the play starts. According to Alfred Simon, “Alceste’s misfortunes multiply to a tempo of burlesque that mocks his seriousness.” His rigidity intensifies to the point of becoming ridiculous. Alfred Simon believes that Alceste’s “inability to remain impassive and unconcerned is the root of his trouble.” What however makes Alceste rise above the level of the usual mask-character is to the conflicts and complexity that the playwright puts into his character. Alceste is torn apart by his zeal for honesty and his love for Célimène. It is indeed even more interesting that his love is not selfless, but is there only because he thinks that it is reciprocated. Moreover, it should be noticed that he does not acknowledge the fact that Célimène is not a dishonest, hypocritical prude like Arsinoé and therefore is basically honest. And yet, Alceste breaks off his relationship with her. So, we may say that their relationship ends not because of anything she may have done but because her behaviour is an affront to Alceste’s extremely sensitive ego. It is a problem that he pleads with Célimène to understand, “Try to appear faithful, and I will try to believe that you are.” So, he effectively condones hypocrisy and encourages her to put up an appearance of fidelity if not to be actually faithful. Because he makes an exception, and that too for someone who he loves because he believes he is loved in return, Alceste’s character becomes more complex than what one would expect from a mask character, which is what he was obviously conceived as.

There are a lot of reasons to suppose that Alceste may have been written to serve as the dramatist’s mask. The parallels between Alceste and Molière work at both levels: personal and professional. On the personal, the end of Alceste’s relationship with Célimène may be seen as a reflection of the troubles the playwright himself was having in his own marriage with Armande. The way Alceste is plagued by a mysterious law suit, may be a composite of all the troubles Molière had with the various members of the royal court.

In spite of the temptation to read Alceste as the mouthpiece of the dramatist, one should be cautious because there are enough reasons for us to say that Molière puts sufficient distance between himself and his character.

Philinte:

Philinte is a foil to Alceste. His “lucid acceptance of reality” (Alfred Simon) is meant to throw Alceste’s attitude to reality into sharper focus. He accepts that fact that society’s concern for appearances has falsified every word and gesture. Commenting on Philinte and Éliante, Robert J. Nelson says that they are “but relatively innocent, set apart by the ‘virtue’ of their tolerance from the rigid Alceste.” The speeches of Philinte contrast to those of Alceste in that the former’s words always advise moderation, calm and tact whereas the latter’s speak of all that is contrary to moderation, calm and tact. While some critics argue that Philinte represents the ideal to which Molière aspired, he does not have sufficient complexity to ever emerge as a credible character, he also ultimately remains a type. Even for him, three words can suffice as a description: man of moderation.

Éliante:

Lionel Gossman cites her as an example of that kind of character that preserves their innocence “through an enigmatic absence or abnegation of desire which places them outside the world.” She and Philinte occupy the calm centre of the play while all the other characters supply all the excitement and drama and, indeed, even the histrionics. Therefore, when the play ends with Éliante and Philinte becoming a couple, it looks like the conventional happy ending. However, it would be unwise to see Éliante’s acceptance of Philinte’s proposal as a happy ending, because as far as she is concerned Philinte will always be the second best, she had set her heart on Alceste.

Célimène:

About Célimène, Robert J. Nelson says, “She is an artificial character. . . she plays a role, but . . . she plays it everywhere.” François Mauriac calls her the “brilliant insect that destroys a man’s life.” According to Alfred Simon, although she is bored and bewildered, signs of her inner vacuity, she, at least never pretends. “She is exactly what she appears to be. . . . She is devoid of fatuousness and has no illusions. The only one to fall into her trap is someone who willingly covers his eyes and plays blindman’s buff.” We also sympathise with her when she refuses to accompany Alceste into self-imposed exile by saying that solitude does not suit the soul of a twenty-year old. There will, however, always be those who will regard her as a thoughtless flirt and others who will regard her a wise young woman who knows that for her to function in society, without the support of a husband, requires her to indulge men so that her position of eminence remains intact and she can depend on the men to be of practical help to her when such a need arises, as with settling of legal disputes.

Les Fâcheux:

Les Fâcheux (pronounced “Lay Fah-sho”) may be translated as “The Annoyances.” In the play the annoyances are Oronte, Acaste, Clitandre and Arsinoé. They are so called because they provide the annoying element in the play. They are type characters, one virtually from the other. Each can be described in one or two words. They are either a failed poet, a gossip or an envious lady. Their presence in the play is crucial, however, because it is primarily through them that the playwright criticises contemporary French society.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. Comment on the characters of
(i) Alceste, (ii) Philinte, (iii) Célimène, (iv) Les Facheun

UNIT 16(a): THE PLAY AS COMEDY OF MANNERS

The Comedy of Manners is a style of comedy that developed in the latter half of the seventeenth century in Europe. Plays written as comedies of manners have some distinguishing features. They are mostly set in the town, in the city and never in the country. The plot consists mostly of romantic intrigue and petty conspiracies. The dialogue is marked by an abundance of wit and repartee. The characters tend to be uni-dimensional or flat, mask-like. The Comedy of Manners was being written in France at a time when theatre-going and amusements in general had achieved huge popularity and royal patronage. So, it was only to be expected that the nobility would want to see flattering reflections of itself on stage, and that if there is any criticism it would be palliated by the notion that the character in question is not representative of the nobility in general but is an anomaly, an exception, an oddity. That is how *Alceste* gets away with criticising the nobility. He is shown to be an oddity.

Let Us Check Our Progress

1. What do you know about the comedy of manners? Consider Moliere's 'The Misanthrope' as a comedy of manners.

UNIT 16(b): CONTEMPORARY FRENCH SOCIETY

Molière lived in France at time when the country was ruled by an absolute monarch - King Louis XIV. Not only was he the longest ruling European monarch of that time - seventy-two years - but he had more powers than any other monarch ruling in any other country at that time. He is famous for having once said, "L'état, c'est moi" or "I am the state." He was also known as Le Roi Soleil or the Sun King because he had once played the role of the sun in a court ballet. He came to the throne aged five in 1643, began to rule in his own right from the age of twenty-four and died in 1715. He ran a court of extreme splendour and was a great patron of the arts. He commissioned extravagant extensions to grand palaces such as the palace of Versailles (pronounced "Vairsae"), bestowed his patronage on Jean-Baptiste Lully (pronounced "Loollee"), the great composer of Italian origin who, as court composer, also provided music for Moliere's plays and even composed an opera called *Alceste* (1674) although that was based on a play by Euripides!

However, since the King was a generous patron of the arts, the members of his court started to appoint themselves as art critics as well. There was, for instance, the practice of some members of the nobility sitting on the stage itself, during a performance. Their laughter or jeers dictated the way the others in the audience below were to react. Molière was always annoyed by the fact that people who were sitting in judgement on his work had neither his education, nor his experience, nor his talent to do so. He uses *Alceste* to voice some of his complaints about the royal court, continuing an

exercise he started in *The Pretentious Ladies* where he notoriously aimed thinly disguised barbs of criticism towards Madame de Rambouillet. In *The Misanthrope* he creates characters such as Oronte to show that the nobility should not dabble in matters it does not have any knowledge of. It is a testimony of Molière's ability to walk the tightrope that the nobility enjoyed the play and found little to object in it.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *Le Misanthrope*, ed. Gustave Rudler (Oxford: Blackwell, 1947)
2. *The Misanthrope*, trans. Richard Wilbur (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955)
3. *The Misanthrope and Other Plays*, trans. John Wood (Penguin Books, 1959)
4. *Men and Masks: A Study of Molière*, Lionel Gossman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1963)
5. *Molière and the Comedy of Intellect*, Judd D. Hubert (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962)
6. *Molière: A New Criticism*, Will G. Moore (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949)
7. *Molière: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Jacques Guicharnaud (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964)
8. *From Gesture to Idea*, Nathan Gross (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)
9. *The Happy End of Comedy: Shakespeare, Jonson, Moliere*, Zvi Jagendorf (Delaware: Univ of Delaware, 1984)
10. *Intruders in the Play World: The Dynamics of Gender in Molière's Comedies*, Roxanne Decker Lalande (Fairleigh Dickinson Univ P, 1996)
11. *Molière (Twayne's World Authors Series, No 176)*, Hallam Walker (Twayne Pub: 1990)
12. *Molière and Plurality: Decomposition of the Classicist Self (Sociocriticism: Literature, Society and History, Vol. 1)*, Larry W. Riggs (Peter Lang Publishing: 1990)
13. *Molière (Modern Critical Views)*, ed. Harold Bloom (Chelsea House Pub, 2001)

In addition to books, there are many websites that you might want to go to for more information about Molière. Some of them are:

<http://www.2020site.org/moliere/>

<http://www.bibliomania.com/0/6/4/frameset.html>

<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc35.html>

http://www.theatredatabase.com/17th_century/moliere_001.html

<http://www.discoverfrance.net/France/Theatre/Moliere/moliere.shtml>

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/french/moliere003.html>
http://www.theatrelinks.com/plays_playwrights/moliere.htm
<http://www.boomerangtheatre.org/archives/misanthrope.html>
<http://honors.montana.edu/~oelks/TC/MoliereBio.html>

ASSIGNMENTS

Essay-type

1. Discuss *The Misanthrope* as a Comedy of Manners.
2. Would you say that Alceste is the mouthpiece of Molière? Why?
3. How would you read the play as a critique of contemporary French society?
4. Discuss the character of Philinte.
5. Analyse the character of Célimène.

Short-Answer type

1. Why is Alceste angry at the beginning of the play?
2. What kind of gossip do the men and women coming to Célimène's house indulge in?
3. How do we know that Arsinoé is envious of Célimène?
4. What role do letters play in unmasking Célimène?
5. Why does Alceste refuse to appeal against the court's verdict?

POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME (CBCS)

in

E N G L I S H

SEMESTER – I

COR – 104

**Restoration to the Age of Sensibility (1660-1788)
– Fiction and Non-fictional Prose**

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 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 PGBOS (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 - 104

Restoration to the Age of Sensibility (1660-1788): Fiction & Non-Fictional Prose

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Block I: *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe

Unit 1(a): Introduction-Daniel Defoe: Life and Times

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Unit 4: Textual Analysis

Unit 1(a): Introduction-Daniel Defoe: Life and Times

The world into which Daniel Defoe was born was one on a much smaller scale. It was a preindustrial world. There were no machines, no daily newspapers, and no rapid means of communication. It was a localized world, in which the dominant means of transport was horseback. It is, therefore, difficult for us to-day in this twenty-first century world, living in a sophisticated technology dominated age, to make the imaginative leap necessary to contemplate this localized world with its obvious limitations and a much slower pace.

Of course, it should not be concluded from this that the seventeenth century world was a static one. Strife was commonplace in England and on the continent of Europe. The period between 1642 and 1649, witnessed a civil war between Puritans (supporters of parliamentary government) and Royalists (supporters of the monarchy and the divine right of kings) in England. The two civil wars were followed by Cromwell's protectorate and long period of political instability. Rural parties and factions were engaged in fierce arguments, since the English were divided bitterly over a range of political and religious issues. Fundamental to these disagreements was the argument over what should be the relationship between the Crown and the Parliament. This debate was raging intermittently throughout Defoe's early life and was not resolved until the 'Glorious Revolution of 1688 when Defoe was 28. These decades of conflict in which England was divided against itself, help to explain the polemical nature of much of his early writing and the restlessness which is so characteristic of his work.

Daniel Defoe was born in London probably in the autumn of 1660. His exact date of birth remains unknown since there is no written record of his birth or baptism. He was the son of James and Alice Foe of parish of St. Giles Cripplegate, lying just beyond the wall on the northern edge of the city of London. James Foe was a tallow chandler - a dealer in candles and soap - and later became a merchant of some substance, extending his activities into overseas trade. Little or nothing is known of Alice Foe - not even her maiden surname is recorded. There is no evidence of any literary or creative background in Defoe's ancestry, though the values inculcated in his childhood home were those he remembered all his life. Defoe had two older sisters, Mary (born in 1657) and Elizabeth (born in 1659), but the latter died in infancy. His boyhood home was situated in Swan Alley in the parish of St. Stephen, Coleman Street, within a walking distance of St. Paul's Cathedral and the Royal Exchange. The atmosphere of the house was quiet and respectable, but just beyond the courtyard lay the bustle of the city and the narrow festering alleys leading down to the Thames.

Defoe was brought up in a world in which the predominant values were orderliness, discipline, self-sufficiency and respectability. To improve one's lot through one's own industry was the prevailing ethic. As a boy, Defoe must have been familiar with such terms as 'merchant', 'trade' and 'commerce'. He must have been impressed by the knowledge that his father had attained a position of modest prosperity as a result of hard work and initiative. The earnestness of

his childhood background is reflected in his writing out in longhand the whole of the first five books of the Old Testament.

When Defoe was only a small boy, his life was torn violently by two events, which haunted his imagination in future : the Plague and the Fire of London. The Plague left the streets deserted - streets that had once been populous, of grass growing among the cobblestones, of the crying of the bereaved. The sight had deep impression on the tender mind of Daniel. He weaved his memory of the terrible epidemic into his masterly *Journal of the Plague Year* later. London had barely recovered from the plague, when it was gutted by the Great Fire, which raged for four days and nights, destroying St. Paul's and 87 parish churches, including St. Stephens, and 13,000 houses. Many of the familiar landmarks Defoe had seen as a boy were destroyed by the Fire. It included the Royal Exchange, the Customs House and the Guildhall. He never forgot the impression this disaster made upon him. Though the Foe household and shop escaped destruction in the fire, many of James Foe's friends and business associates were directly affected by it. Daniel could not forget the sight of the sky glowing at night, the smoking ruins of the city, and the homeless camping on the grass.

Defoe does not record any reminiscences of his school, though he retained affectionate memories of Dorking and its surrounding scenery. When he was 11, he was sent to a boarding school by his father. This school was at Dorking in Surrey. These were highly impressionable years when he took a lively interest in politics from an early age. He must have been aware of the national and international events that were happening around him and talked about at home and at school : the freezing of the assets of the Lombard Street banks by Charles II (which caused the ruin of many businessman), the uneasy truce between the crown and the Dissenters, the rise to fame of the young William of Orange. He stayed for five years at Dorking. The school was kept by the Reverend James Fisher, an elderly nonconformist clergyman and a former Cambridge scholar. Fisher instilled a passionate faith in the virtues of a classical education and a knowledge of Greek and Latin into his students' minds. In fact, Defoe's fondness for Latin books, (which were included in his library) had a great impact on his pamphlets and essays.

Soon after his sixteenth birthday in 1676, his father sent him to the dissenting academy kept by Reverend Charles Morton at Newington Green, Stoke Newington. James Foe wanted his son to be in the ministry and he therefore, thought a three-year training at Morton Academy would be very helpful for Daniel. Daniel received an excellent opportunity and guidance at Morton's Academy and studied Logic, Politics, English, Philosophy and Mathematics. He was indebted to Morton because under his supervision Defoe also read widely outside the curriculum, including travel, history, poetry (especially Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*) and devotional literature. He derived an inquiring attitude of mind for science and English language. Morton's influence helped him to develop an ability to write in a persuasive, flexible style that followed the natural rhythms of conversation. Though Morton Academy was a remarkable school, Defoe never entered the ministry, and therefore disappointed his father. He felt that he would be a misfit as a clergyman and hence tried for other means of livelihood. However, the training at Morton's helped Defoe in so many ways for becoming what he became in future.

Morton encouraged his pupils to think for themselves and indulge in individual reading and enquiry. Defoe, eagerly read Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* as soon as it was published in 1678. He also admired the poetry of Andrew Marvell, the Earl of Rochester and John Milton. Inspired by his readings Daniel tried his hand in composing a volume of poetry, *Meditations*, though the volume lacked literary promise.

The 1680's were a promising time for an energetic young man to establish himself as a

tradesman. Though it was still a pre-industrial society, the outline of the modern business world were already obvious. These years saw the advent of the penny post in 1680, and this made possible several postal deliveries in the London area each day. There was a rapid expansion in the number of joint stock companies, company promoters and dealers in stocks and shares. Banking and insurance systems were becoming well-established. There was considerable growth of overseas trade. It was a period of optimism and self-confidence for the youth of the country. Defoe engaged himself as a London merchant, trading in hosiery, wines and spirits, tobacco and other commodities. It was a conventional custom of that time that in order to establish one self as a businessman, one had to be apprenticed for seven years before setting up one's own. Defoe ignored this convention by establishing himself as a dealer and whole-seller at the age of twenty. He did this with the financial aid provided by his father. This probably created a resentment among his fellow businessmen, who had to establish themselves by learning 'the hard way'. Defoe had no doubt, great enthusiasm, though he lacked practical experience. His energy carried him forward for some years but his inexperience proved to be his undoing in the long run.

Defoe began to travel widely, in the course of his business, journeying on horse-back to many parts of England and Scotland, and developing a taste for solitary travel, which remained with him throughout his life. On January 1, 1684, he married Mary Tuffley, the only daughter of a rich merchant. She brought her a dowry of £ 3700, a very large sum for those days. She proved to be a loyal and patient wife, bearing him eight children (of whom two died in infancy) and holding the family together through all the odds and Defoe's frequent absence from home. Shortly after the marriage Defoe established himself in quite a high-class area in Freeman's Yard, on the north side of Cornhill, a locality which was newly rebuilt after the fire.

In 1688, an event of national importance occurred in England. On the 5th of November, the forces of William of Orange landed at Torbay. The invasion was promptly followed by the collapse of James II and his regime. This significant event is known in history as 'The Glorious Revolution' - the end of the divine rights of Kings and at the same time, the establishment, once and for all, of the supremacy of the Parliament. Defoe was a great supporter of the Revolution and all its ideals, the assertion of the fundamental rights of the Parliament; the limitation of the royal prerogative and legal toleration for protestant dissenters.

The English Revolution was not a social revolution like the French Revolution. It former was a political revolution since it inaugurated the sovereignty of the people and the permanence of the Parliament.

For a few years, Defoe really did well in his trade, applying all his energy and enthusiasm. He dealt with shipbuilding, marine insurance, land deals and civet cat, (bred for a secretion used in the making of perfume). A combination of over-confidence, inexperience and sheer bad luck ultimately led to this failure in his laboriously and enthusiastically built up empire of business. Later in his *The Complete English Tradesman*, he referred to the miserable, anxious and perplexed lifewhich the poor tradesman has to go through, before he is finally crushed; how harassed and oppressed he is for money, to what he is driven to for supporting himself.

Yet Defoe never lost his interest in trade. His experiences as a tradesman shaped him as a writer - with his store of knowledge of subjects and topics of varied fields and his extensive interest in human character. His fictional narratives have temporary setting instead of a fabulous past or a mythical past.

Towards the end of the century, he was referred to as 'Daniel de Foe,' and he started this

style while signing his name. Probably, the prefix 'De' sounded rather aristocratic to him. Anyway, it was possibly an easy transition from D(Daniel) Foe to 'Defoe' - his usual signature. He definitely liked the sound of the prefix, otherwise he would not have adopted it.

From the end of the century, he was gradually preoccupied with literary work in the form of pamphlets, broadsheets and essays. *An Essay upon Projects* was published in 1698. though out of print to-day, the *Essay upon Projects* is an important indication of the modernity of Defoe's thinking, his fascination with sociology and economics.

The late 17th century and the early 18th century was a period of partnership on social, political and religious issues and at the same, a period of acrimonious journalism. Newspapers and journals bristled with controversy on the leading issues of the day, conformity or dissent, Whig or Tory, Stuart or Hanover, isolation or involvement in Europe, toleration of minorities or persecution. Defoe could not resist himself from taking the opportunity of bursting into print on any one of these issues. In 1702, his taste for polemical argument landed him into hot water. In December, 1702, he published an anonymous pamphlet *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. It was quite ironical in its expression, for his object was to expose the intolerance and bigotry of those favouring persecution, but the pamphlet misfired. The Fanatics applauded it for saying what they had long felt in private, whereas the dissenters condemned it for its outspokenness. When its true authorship was known, Defoe was arrested in May 1703, accused of having written and published a seditious libel. He was fined, condemned to stand in the pillory, and sent to Newgate Prison 'during the Queen's pleasure'. When he was released in November 1703, he found that his factory had come to grief and he was bankrupt for a second time. Now at the age of 43, he had to start his life afresh.

At this point, he was approached by Robert Harley, the Speaker of the House of Commons and an influential figure in the Government. Unlike Defoe, he was a whig, but a man of moderation. He invited Defoe to serve as a confidential agent (as we refer to-day as a 'secret agent'. He was supposed to travel throughout the country and report to Harley, the political temper of the countries and help pave the way for the union between England and Scotland, which became a reality in 1707. Defoe served for this purpose from 1703 to 1714. he was temperamentally well-suited to this work and he performed his duties quite seriously. Many years later, he used his experiences for this period in his *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*.

The political scene was transformed in 1714, with the death of Queen Anne and the accession of George I. The Tory Government was replaced by the Whig government. Defoe adjusted himself to the new scenario and continued until 1730 to serve successive the Whigs through his journalistic activities. In addition to all these activities, he started writing a manual of moral and religious instruction, published in two volumes between 1715 and 1718, under the title *The Family Instructor*. In writing these two volumes, he gained a lot of experience in handling conversation and, since each dialogue is linked with passages of narrative and comment, he learned to master many techniques which would be of service to him as a novelist. He mastered the art of conversing with the reader in an intimate and familiar way, of creating credible characters, of writing sequences of convincing dialogue and argument, of writing stories designed with a didactic intention. The book earned a reputation for Defoe. At that time there was a demand for well-written criticism, history, travel and fact, presented in a lively and readable form. Defoe, with his background of journalism and experience, was ready to meet this demand.

In February, 1704, he published the first number of his periodical - *The Review*. Theoretically, Defoe was its editor, but in practice, he was the sole contributor, writing commentary and discussion on various issues, - trade, religion, politics and international affairs. The periodical was a very important one in the sense, that the future author of **ROBINSON CRUSOE** became acquainted with writing scenes and conversations, in which he assumed an imaginary persona. *The Review* was the workshop in which he perfected his style as a man of reason with an ear for the speech of ordinary people.

In 1719, he published *Robinson Crusoe*, a book which has been described as the first long piece of prose fiction that had the primary purpose of giving the illusion of reality. Defoe did not have a background of literature, rather he did have a background of trade. Though he had had considerable writing experience, it was popular journalism and not literary writing. In this sense, he was the antithesis of Pope and Swift and was regarded by them with suspicion and disapproval. Though *Robinson Crusoe* was published at the price of five shillings, it sold very well. His writing reached a new reading public, eager to read his stories of travel and adventure, written in a fluent, conversational style. Though ignored by scholars and book collectors, it was widely read by newly literate artisans and workmen who were looking for convincingly written narratives. The growth of literacy, improvements in printing techniques and the increase of popular journalism, combined together to create a favourable atmosphere for the kind of narratives which Defoe was writing. The new readers could identify with the characters featured in these novels. All these factors helped to give birth to the modern novel.

After 1724, he stopped writing fiction. The reasons behind this decision is, of course, not very clear. Perhaps he felt that he had 'written himself out'. Perhaps he was tired of writing narratives of this kind and wished to return to non-fiction. For the rest of his life, he remained engaged in the composition of works of edification, a genre for which he had a great fascination. First came his massive work of topography, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, a summary of the impressions he had formed from many years of journeying through England, Scotland and Wales. He next published *The Complete English Tradesman*, an interesting handbook on the complexities of running a business ; *A System of Magic* and *An Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions*, with its attention on the supernatural was a subject which held for him a lifelong fascination. In these writings, he showed his awareness of the popular interest in ghosts and demons. In 1728, when he was sixty eight, came his last major work on trade, *A Plan of the English Commerce*. Though he was now often in considerable pain from gout, he was still capable of writing fluently and lucidly. To the end, he continued to write manuals, pamphlets, essays and summaries revealing his gift for presenting large masses of information in an easily digestible form. The last years of his life were spent in writing and revising *The Complete English Gentleman* with anecdotes and homilies. This book intended to be a guide to a life of culture and respectability.

For some years he had been living quietly and comfortably at Stoke Newington, not far from his old school. Here he built a library of his own where he spent time in reading and writing. In spite of his leading a life in genteel surroundings, death came to him on April 26, 1731, at a lodging house in Ropemakers Alley, London, where he had been, for some months, apparently absconding from one of his creditors. He was buried in Bunhill Fields, Finsbury, in the same cemetery as John Bunyan and William Blake. In 1870, the plain stone that marked his grave was replaced by a marble pillar erected from the subscription of 1700 children in gratitude to the author of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Had Defoe died before writing *Robinson Crusoe*, it is doubtful whether he would be remembered

to-day as a prominent name in the field of writing a novel - a novel that won the heart of both young and old. He was certainly not conscious at the time that in writing *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders*, he was creating the first novels in English and paving the way for a host of successors, including those of Samuel Richardson, Joseph Fielding and Jobias Smollett. The paradox is that, by writing these 'non-serious' works, he has earned for himself a permanent place in literary history.

The whole lot of immense output of essays, handbooks and pamphlets is completely forgotten today, but his novels are still alive and widely popular. These novels will continue to be read, enjoyed and appreciated and will carry his name into the future.

Unit 1(b) *Robinson Crusoe*: Source in Travel-Writing

The prototype of Robinson Crusoe was a stubborn sailor, Alexander Selkirk (1676 - 1721), who on a voyage with William Dampier, quarrelled with his captain and had himself put ashore in 1704 on the uninhabited island of Juan Fernandez off the east coast of south America. After some initial difficulties, Selkirk managed to survive on this island and live there for a little less than four and a half years. When he was rescued in January, 1709 by Captain Woodes Rogers, he was found to be in good health and quite satisfied with his island life. *Robinson Crusoe* like most of Defoe's later fiction, has a firm basis in actuality; while his fiction is basically fiction, it often starts from and sometimes stays very close to a fact, or a series of facts.

Defoe got the Selkirk story from several sources. Accounts of his life on the island was published in 1712 in Edward Roger's *Cruising Voyage Round the World* and by Edward Cooke's *A Voyage to the South Sea and Round the World* (1712). Moreover, on December 3, 1713, Richard Steele, the essayist devoted a whole issue of *The Englishman* to the Selkirk story. It is obvious that Defoe had read these accounts; and though he had not featured Selkirk in the pages of his own *Review* (1704 - 1713) there is every possibility of Defoe having sought out Selkirk to hear his story from his own lips.

There are some obvious similarities between Selkirk's experiences and those of Defoe's hero such as :

- (a) the basic situation of the marooned mariner ;
- (b) Selkirk, like Crusoe, had been invaded by cats and had tamed goats ;
- (c) Selkirk had been supplied with bedding and provisions, while Defoe rescued his own from the shipwreck.
- (d) *Crusoe*, like Selkirk had lived on turtles initially.
- (e) Steele's interview with Selkirk also mentions that like Crusoe in the novel the former had gone through a period of deep depression. Then gradually, "by the force of reason and frequent reading of the scriptures, he grew thoroughly reconciled to his condition." Selkirk's development from dejection to reconciliation, is paralleled by that of Crusoe, but Defoe could have invented this without having known Selkirk's similar predicament.
- (f) Apart from these few details, the rest of *Robinson Crusoe* is Defoe's own invention. For whereas Selkirk had spent only four-and-a-half years, *Robinson Crusoe* lived for twenty eight years on the island off the Eastern Coast of South America near the mouth of the river Orinoco.

Defoe, in fact, could have drawn these details from several accounts, real or fictitious, of shipwrecked sailors namely : William Dampier's, *A New Voyage Round the World* (1703), Robert Knox's *Historical Relation of Ceylon* (1681) and Maxmillian Missions fictitious *Voyage of Francois Legaut* (1707). In his book Knox relates his twenty - year imprisonment in Ceylon

which is very different from *Crusoe's* shipwreck, in character and personality, Knox, rather than Selkirk, comes closer to Crusoe.

In spite of its close relation with historical facts, Defoe's story is entirely fiction. He had collated his details from various sources and also from his wide personal experience. Defoe was actively involved in trade and business throughout his life and through this was associated with later travel, stories of adventure and maritime gossip. He bought and sold ships and his brother was a shipbuilder and, therefore, he had a thorough knowledge of ships and navigation.

However, what is significant in this link between *Robinson Crusoe* and contemporary travel literature is the assumption that the novel is also a travel account or at least, belongs to the tradition of travel literature.

In the seventeenth century travel books, in spite of their sub-literary status, acquired a great deal of popularity. The reason for this was by growth of maritime exploration and the consequent increase and expansion of trade in which England and several European nations were involved during this time. This commercial and later colonial expansion gave rise to and later was supported by factual and fictitious accounts of travel and exploration such as those by Mission and other such writers.

These travel books had certain common characteristics :

- (a) The basic formula was the chronological movement from place to place; there was much geographical detail about the place and its inhabitants ; thus, the emphasis was on information and factual details rather than events.
- (b) The typical narrative begins with the author's credentials ; the nature and purpose of the current voyage; the details of the ship its size and number; important crew members are introduced; details of the log-book at sea; masses of nautical and navigational details (wind, currents, routes, detours); certain unusual events (storms, pirate encounters, crew changes) — though these are digressive and minor anecdotes — ; topical descriptions of places and people are given greater space; events are therefore, either ignored or subordinated to these topical details.
- (c) Even when an unusual happening is related, the tone and style is calm and dispassionate ; a thorough "objectivity", characterizes the style of this type of writing.
- (d) An important aspect of this objectivity is the total absence of a central theme or an informing idea which is used to link or structure the chronology of visits; at the most, chronology is sometimes replaced by topicality when the narrative is interrupted to give details about a particular place; yet, this is by far, the only organizing principle - thematic considerations being foreign to this convention.
- (e) Thus, what is obvious is that these travel books lack thematic unity or ideological focus by becoming more an enumeration of voyages and topical details.
- (f) A.W. Seccord emphasises the links *Robinson Crusoe* has with the typical travel book and states that "*Robinson Crusoe*, finally, is not so much a fictitious autobiography, as it is a fictitious book of travel ". Seccord points out that *in this novel there are* "a series of things well known in the literature of travel " — storm, shipwreck, captivity, life on a desert island ; description of these events and the details of the sea journey (position at sea, winds, direction, speed) and of the island (flora, fauna, animals, climate, sailing conditions around it). *Robinson Crusoe* also has that objective matter-of- fact style typical of this writing.

However, as J. Paul Hunter points out, in spite of these similarities "*Robinson Crusoe* makes no attempt to follow the conventional pattern of the travel tradition." The similarities, he

adds, are merely superficial; Defoe's emphasis is totally different or, at least, there is a different use of conventional material.

- (a) In *Robinson Crusoe*, the facts about several places are never presented as mere information. Each fact emerges out of the experience of the hero and often functions as a narrative situation which contributes to the development of the hero's character or that of the novel. For, instance, Crusoe describes lions and leopards and, later, savage natives as possible dangers to himself and Xury. In another incident, he kills a leopard in return for the kindness of the natives.
- (b) The description of the island is given as the narrative develops and this description is integral to Crusoe's experiences and the development of his character.
- (c) There is no attempt to provide a list of topical details of the island. In fact, a complete description of the island is not given and neither is there any other detail regarding Brazil except those related to Crusoe's life in that country. Thus, information is subordinated to character and event.
- (d) In *Robinson Crusoe* chronology is used as a conscious device to dramatize the growth and development of the hero. Therefore, the novel has a dramatic structure which uses events to suggest mental and emotional conditions of the protagonist.
- (e) Chronology, therefore, is not simply a device used to give the novel a unity of structure but it also contributes a thematic focus involving the character of the hero. Each event thus marks a development of Crusoe's character from his rebellion against parental authority and rejection of their advice regarding his 'station' in life — his 'Original sin'. This leads to this shipwreck which he later sees as a punishment for this transgression. On the island he goes through a series of experiences which finally makes him accept responsibility for his sin and his appeal to God to redeem him and thereby reconcile him to Christian faith marks his achievement of a social and moral education which the novel tries to emphasize.
- (f) *Robinson Crusoe*, therefore, has a specific thematic coherence and an ideological emphasis which distinguishes it from the typical travel book or, for that matter, the contemporary adventure tales, the picaresque and the romance.

Unit 2(a): *Robinson Crusoe* and the Theme of Economic Individualism

Realist fiction generally uses two basic narrative methods :-

The Historical - mimetic method and the autobiographical - memoir narrative method. The first generally corresponds to the method of omniscient third-person narration in which the novelist is outside the text relating the events and actions objectively. While the second method uses a first - person narrative technique where the narrator recounts his experiences.

Robinson Crusoe uses the autobiographical - memoir method. This is evident the formal structure of the plot in which there is, as Ian Watt points out, a total subordination of plot to the pattern of the memoir - (this is one important contrast to the structure of the travel book). There is, therefore, the obvious use of the simple journal or diary form. But this method is not consistently used throughout the novel - there are departures often into soliloquy and the dramatic method narration.

More important is the fact that the novel emphasises the "primacy of individual experience" (Watt). In of the novel there are, therefore, a variety of scenes and events of an exotic and spectacular nature but all these are subordinated to the character participating in these events. Thus, quite evidently these scenes and events are used to express or externalize character or personality.

For instance, when Crusoe makes his escape from the captivity of the moor it illustrates his practical sense in devising and executing the scheme- thus the manner in which he is able to manage events.

Then, while Crusoe and Xury travel along the African shore, exotic and spectacular and dangerous scenes are depicted. Crusoe's basic sense of self preservation is suggested in the way he deals with the native and returns the help he receives from them by saving them from ferocious beasts. What is significant is that he is now in a position to establish control over events. This pattern of managing events to controlling them is repeated during his exile on the island. Events, thus dramatize consciousness and become the index of character development.

By emphasizing the importance of the individual, *Robinson Crusoe* expresses one of the basic postulates of the novel, which as a new genre, represented truth as subjective, private and individualistic. Moreover, the realism which characterizes the novel is evident not simply because it depicts the details of contemporary life. This realism also lies in the fact that the novel involves a definition of the self as a medium for a representation of reality. This definition of the self involves social and ideological terms. Thus, the individuality of character is shaped by his society and its values.

Circumstantial realism is thus a basic aspect of the novel, which aspires to reflect the contemporary world. However, personal experience is the basic category, the ultimate material for this reflection of the world.

RC, therefore, begins with the usual sociological definition of Crusoe's character. He is the third son of an immigrant family, whose father, a merchant, has "got a good estate", but he has not been bred to any trade and thus has a propensity for "rambling thoughts". "Something fatal in that propension of nature" makes him

choose a life of sea adventure against his parents' advice to settle "to business." Thus the very first sociological details indicate the direction in which Crusoe's character and career is going to develop.

What is significant about *Crusoe's* wanting to go to sea is his reluctance to remain fixed in the economic and social position defined by his father, "the middle state or what might be called the upperstation of low life". Thus, his "fatal propension of nature" is actually his desire for social and economic mobility, which he states categorically at the end of chapter one, where *Crusoe* calls it the "undigested notion of raising my fortune." This desire for social mobility is, according to Ian Watt, the very basis of the spirit of capitalism which was growing in the eighteenth century. Thus, Watt defines the novel as an illustration of the fundamental social and ideological impulse of the age - namely economic individualism. For Watt, all Defoe's heroes pursue money which, in his *Review* Defoe called "the general denominating article in the world". Crusoe's next voyage, the one he calls "the only voyage which I may say was successful" had a purely economic motive. In fact, he travels purely as a gentleman merchant on a trip to Guinea where he makes a significant fortune. Similarly, the voyage from Brazil had the specific motive of slave trade which was then the most lucrative.

A necessary corollary of this economic individualism is — the devaluation of traditional forms of group relationship such as the family, the village, nation and even comradeship. Crusoe thus sells Xury, who had helped him in his escape from the Moors, for sixty pieces of eight (though he acquires a promise that the boy would be released in ten years if he became a Christian) ; on the island, however, he severely regrets this but here too he thinks of Xury as a servant who could have assisted him in his labours on the island in his labour. Crusoe's relations with Friday is also seen in utilitarian terms.

Romantic love and sex, therefore, play little part in Crusoe's life or in the novel. On the island when his isolation plagues him, he desires a male slave and with Friday he settles into a life of joyous contentment. Women are, therefore, treated as economic commodities. On the island. In Part II, of the novel, the colonists draw lots to choose their wives. The first to choose gets the "homeliest and oldest," of the five women but Defoe writes, she "proved the best wife in the parcel." Thus, the language of commerce qualifies personal and the marital relationship. Similarly, Crusoe gets married only after being financially secure and marriage is described in one of the most impersonal phrases in all literature as an experience "not either to my disadvantage or dissatisfaction". And soon after his wife dies, he abandons his family for another voyage.

Crusoe's experiences on the desert island can be divided into two broad phases. The first phase deals with his efforts at instinctive self preservation and the second phase is the period when he has mastered his environment, established control over his circumstances, nature and established his supremacy as colonizer and even ruler. The two phases can be divided by the central climax involving his encounter with the savages and his rescue of Friday, thereby ending his physical and even spiritual isolation.

The first phase is dominated by the basic impulses of economic individualism. Crusoe's control over nature and his circumstances gives him the spiritual and moral justification for his role as colonizer in the second phase which extends this control in economic and political terms.

The basic existential drive that dominates Crusoe after the shipwreck and his marooning is his instinctive sense of self preservation. This impulse is determined by the forces of necessity. In his *General History of Trade*, Defoe re-phrased the common proverb as "Necessity, which is the Mother, and Convenience, which is the Handmaid of Invention, first directed Mankind to contrive, supplies and support of life". In *Robinson Crusoe*, the initial attempts of the hero to acquire support, life is qualified by this phrase. Crusoe's return to the shipwreck, after his initial period of desperation and despondency, is influenced by the desire to find the necessities which would make life possible. Defoe's statement is actually an echo of similar statements made by contemporary thinkers like Locke, William Temple and John Asgil, who observed that inventions were increased by the force of necessity to secure a living. Thus Defoe in his *Essay upon Projects*, expanded this idea suggesting that necessity destroyed sloth and fostered society through the creation of labour.

However, Crusoe's work, like rescuing resources from the wreck, his building of his tent and cave, his making of pots, taming goats, growing corn and baking bread- are all determined by their obvious utility value. This emphasis on the utility value of things is illustrated best in Crusoe's ironic panygeric on the gold and money he finds in the wrecked ship. The same sentiment qualifies Crusoe's agricultural activities later and also in his later realization that by owning the island he had much much more than his needs. Maxmillian Novak thus points out that *Robinson Crusoe elaborates the utility theory of value* basic to capitalism as treated by several economists. Defoe, Novak admits, was influenced following by the contemporary philosopher Locke, whose *Two Treatises on Civil Government*, explored this idea.

Just as Crusoe's demands and his produce are proportionate to his necessity and utility, it naturally implies that his labour is also proportionate to his needs. This, in fact, makes the *novel also an elaboration of the capitalist theory of labour*. Again Defoe took these ideas from John Locke's *Two Treatises* where Locke pointed out that value was not inherent in nature, but was created by human labour. This idea as also basic to the Puritan ethic which dignified labour with

the implicit suggestion that honest labour in the pursuit of wealth was a form of the imitation of Christ.

Yet, what is significant about the first phase of Crusoe's life on the island is the fact that it presents the primal conditions of man's labour relations with his product. In other words, *Robinson Crusoe*, in spite of its elaboration of capitalism and the *implicit division of labour*, presents a state in which man is in direct and proportionate relation with his labour and its produce. This, in fact, made Karl Marx use the novel as an Utopian example of the primary and natural conditions of man. Crusoe's labour is thus not differentiated and does not suffer the division of labour, which characterizes the economic individualism or economic specialization of capitalism.

He achieves a sense of completeness by the very needs of his natural circumstances which forces him to make his own baskets and pots and also bake his own bread. It is in these two aspects that *Robinson Crusoe* acquires an ambiguous implication. Thus, while elaborating the tenets of capitalism in its theory of utility and theory of labour, it simultaneously opposes and transcends these impulses by presenting a primary, natural and autonomous condition of man. Thus, in spite of the historical determination evident in Crusoe's novel, Defoe at the same time, presents Crusoe as a freer individual, who can transcend these tendencies in a pattern of action, which gives him absolute economic, social and intellectual freedom. It is in this significant sense, that acquires the characteristics of myth. He exemplifies the bourgeois myth of individualism and at the same time, becomes a symbol of natural man, Adam.

Unit 2(b): Robinson Crusoe: Spiritual Autobiography

The narrative structure of *Robinson Crusoe* can be divided into two broad strands of experience:-

(a) Crusoe's economic aspiration: his experiences on the island begin with his instinctual will to survive and ultimately lead to the accomplishment of mastery over nature, and the establishment of power and control over his circumstances.

(b) Complementing this development is Crusoe's religious conversion; this is a simultaneous process involving an acknowledgement of sin, repentance and acceptance of God's control and grace ; this constitutes his renewal into faith and acceptance of God's will and a divine pattern.

These two aspects are complementary parts of the controlling reality which is presented through the narrative. Both express dominant ideological impulses : the first, the ideology of growing capitalism, the second, the ideology of Puritanism. John Richetti describes Crusoe as a converter, turning an ideology to the uses of survival and autonomy by using what it gives and neutralizing its possessive effects.

What Defoe does in *Robinson Crusoe*, is to create situations and contexts in which the hero's experiences dramatise the basic ideological impulses of the age. In reality, what the narrative establishes is a situation in which Crusoe first survives disaster by sheer practical sense and a will to control and then to escape the destructive effects of isolation, that is for psychological survival he recognizes that he is part of a providential design and accepts divine control.

The autobiographical memoir narrative technique is historically suited to record this process

of spiritual conflict and renewal. The autobiographical mode not only records the objective, socio - historical and personal experiences of a protagonist but is also a record of his psychological, emotional and spiritual growth and development. From St. Augustine's *Confessions* through Rousseau's *Confessions* and Pascal's *Pensees* to modern-day diaries and

autobiographies this is the general concern and focus. Defoe's memoir-narrative falls into the tradition of the confessional tradition which records therefore, Crusoe's psychological and spiritual conflicts and ends in the resolution of these conflicts.

The first significant illustration of the confessional nature of Defoe's memoir technique is seen when Crusoe tries to take stock of his condition after his marooning on the island. (It has to be noted that this comes after he has made initial arrangements for his security and survival). Thus, using the typical convention of economic individualism, he draws up in a book-keeping fashion, the exact nature of his situation on the island :

I new began to consider seriously my condition, and the circumstance I was reduced to, and I drew up the state of Affairs in writing, not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me, for I was like to have but few Heirs, as to deliver my thought's from daily pouring upon them, and afflicting my mind; and as my Reason began now to master my Despondency, I began to comfort myself as well as I could, and to set the good against the Evil, that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse, and I stated it very impartially, like Debtor and Creditor, the comforts I enjoy'd and the miseries I suffer'd, Thus, this stock-taking thus dramatizes Crusoe's total and desperate isolation. This, in fact, becomes a metaphor for his desperate emotional and psychologically insecurity and helplessness. Implicitly, therefore, Crusoe's turning towards God is a result of his solitary state.

The first significant event which seems to determine Crusoe's conversion comes early in his journal when he discovers ten or twelve ears of barley growing beside his cave and takes this to be a miracle. ".....that God had miraculously caused this grain to grow without any help of seed sown, and that it was directed purely for my sustenance on that wild miserable place."

Later, however, this initial grateful

euphoria is reduced when Crusoe remembers that he had shaken a bag of chicken feed - "this was nothing but what was common." The mature Crusoe is still able to acknowledge the "work of Providence" and thank God that these "grains of corn" had remained "unspoiled" and also "that I should throw it out in that particular place, where, it being in the shade of a high rock, it sprang up immediately; whereas, if I had thrown it any where else at that time, it had been burnt up and destroyed.

"Thus just as Crusoe survives physically by a pragmatic co-operation with natural forces he survives on the psycho-spiritual level by learning to see God's presence in material and physical events and details. This event seems to mark the beginning for his active search for faith in a superior power. This marks a transition both in the narrative and the character, from a life of action to one of contemplation. Defoe, however, brings about Crusoe's conversion a little later when he is severely sick. This conversion is preceded by a nightmare.

The nightmare, however, does not precipitate Crusoe's religious crisis - in fact, it is simply a symptom of his bodily and spiritual confusion Crusoe himself admits that he is unable to understand the meaning of this dream. This naivete is a condition of autobiographical narrative where the hero is unlike the cunning and mature picaro. This is a necessary precondition for spiritual conflict and regeneration. The dream enables Crusoe to objectively by study his actions from his first transgression of parental advice and the series of later deviations which at least brings him to acknowledge guilt and, therefore, see his isolation as retribution. This is the second precondition of spiritual regeneration.

The event, which actually brings about the conversion is Defoe's search for tobacco and, thereby, finding the Bible (pgs. - 93 - 94) In this section of the novel, Crusoe's sickness is used functionally and dramatically for his achievement of self-knowledge.

Sickness, therefore, becomes a means for distancing himself from his physical and psychological self. Thus, by seeing himself as a character who has participated in a chain of events and circumstances, he is able to define his status and function in this chain. In other words, Crusoe, who had before been living an entirely self-contained existence is able to find a pattern and continuity in his experiences from his first act of "Original Sin" and thereby see himself as fulfilling a divine plan : (see pp - 92 - 94). Thus, while reading the Bible, the next day, he submits himself to God. Crusoe is thus converted to a petitioner. Thus, from an enterprising, pragmatic engineer of his circumstances, he becomes a supplicant.

What is significant is that it is only after his conversion that Crusoe is able to achieve a greater degree of control and a sense of completeness. It is after this that Crusoe turns from mere survival toward exploring and domesticating the island - converting it from a prison into a garden. (see pp. 100 - 102; 152, 153)

He discovers the more pastoral and luxuriant side of the island - his Garden of Eden. This, in fact, becomes a symbol of his new condition. This new condition is characterized by a synthesis of activity and passivity. He builds a villa in his garden to balance his fortress. He tames wild things, he controls his agricultural activity and devotes time to Bible reading and contemplation. Thus, having reconciled contradictions in himself, he sets about resolving contradictions thereby converting chaos into cosmos, establishing God in his creation.

This sense of completeness is also reflected in the formal aspects of the narrative:

(a) the journal/diary peters out and is finally abandoned for a more coherent narrative style. Previously, he had only secured fragmentary flashes of his past, regretting this or that. Now he is able to review his life, explain the causes of his wandering and fit his experiences into a pattern of repentance and renewal through God's mercy. Thus, his new psycho-spiritual control gives him an access to the Puritan world view with its allegorical symbols, emblems and metaphors (see pp - 132 - 133).

(b) Even the style and rhetoric becomes relaxed and leisurely. The description of his family of animals, his basket and pot-making of bread is noteworthy. There is a direct relationship between Crusoe's thoughts and actions ; Defoe uses a objective narrative method which comes close to the epic narrative style.

(c) The discovery of the footprint initially subverts Crusoe's equanimity and control. He reverts to the conditions of fear and siege. Gradually, however, he is able to adopt a more objective state of mind and recognize the irony of the situation. (see pp. - 156) It is to be noted, that just after the incident, Crusoe discovers the dead body of a boy from a shipwreck and laments grievously for his lack of human company and his isolation. Crusoe's final decision is to do nothing to leave it all to God, to obey the impulse and logic of circumstances, in his own words, to follow, "a secret hint a strange impression upon the mind, from we know not what springs."

The other incident which helps in this process is another dream (pp. 198 - 199). The dream expresses Crusoe's deepest desires - namely, freedom from his circumstances. (This he dramatized consciously earlier in his attempts at making a boat and his undertaking an unsuccessful trip around island. The dream also dramatizes his understanding that he has a divine purpose, namely to rescue a savage and thereby end his isolation.

(d) The actual rescue of Friday does not equal Crusoe's dream but the experience shows the synthesis of action and circumstances, which is the guiding pattern of the narrative of the novel. In the moment of Friday's deliverance, Crusoe is like the deity who delivered him : suddenly visible and mysteriously powerful. Moreover, he acquires at this moment a sense of divine purpose. Thus, in Friday's subsequent conversion to Christianity he re-enacts his own conversion

and with Friday's help, acquires real political power by defeating the cannibals rescuing the Spaniards and later saving the English Captain and achieving the means of freedom from the island after establishing a colony on the island.

Robinson Crusoe is, thus, an allegorical reworking of the Christian myth of sin, repentance and renewal. Through this theme, Defoe dramatizes the Puritan metaphysics of damnation and election. The enduring power of the narrative lies in the fact that this religious ideological impulse is grounded in the specific circumstances and events which the protagonist experiences. Moreover, through his experiences, Crusoe is able to adapt the religious elements to achieve a certain autonomy of action that gives his story the universal significance of myth.

Unit 3(a): *Robinson Crusoe* as Allegory

An ALLEGORY is a narrative in which ideas such as patience, purity and truth are symbolized by persons who are characters in the story. Neville Coghill says that allegory has an elaborate technique of interpretation and can be compared to a musical composition in which one or more themes are introduced by the different voices in turn and then repeated in a complex design. The theme pursued, simultaneously, on several levels of meaning:

- (a) *the literal sense of the story* - the theme is part of a narrative of incidents and experiences.
- (b) *Allegorical sense* - the theme is seen as a transference of our own lives and situations and passions in personified or typical terms.
- (c) *Moral sense* - the theme is illustrated in maxims of conduct illustrated by the narrative and relevant to our lives.

Robinson Crusoe follows the allegorical mode almost exactly:

- (a) There is the literal level of the story involving Crusoe's adventures, defeats and recoveries.
- (b) There is the allegorical meaning which involves his recognition of sin his repentance and redemption.
- (c) There is the moral statement illustrated not only Crusoe's career but also directly through Biblical references and moral observations.

Allegorically, the novel can be seen as a version of the parable of the Prodigal son, references to which are clearly stated or implied in the text : (pp. - 9, 11, 23). Crusoe here is the prodigal, who ignores his father's advice and leaves home ; ruins himself not by wild living but by a "fatal propension" to roam; he faces disaster and apparent desolation; repents and returns to his father (now in the form of God); is forgiven and rewarded - God kills the fatted calf blessing him with the abundance of the island and restores him to favour and lordship.

Most appropriately, the novel can be described in the more abstract theological scheme. Crusoe is Everyman incriminated by the Original Sin; thereby committing folly and crime and condemned into further sin through ignoring the repeated opportunities for correction granted by God; yet, he is one of the Elect, chosen by God to be finally saved through his acknowledgement of guilt therefore, and repentance, becoming an illustration of the ways of God to men.

In Robinson Crusoe, the allegorical mode is used to define Crusoe's character:- Crusoe epitomizes the dual tendencies of the Puritan character - the adventurous and the domestic ; In the beginning, Crusoe is dominated by the first impulse – the adventurous; however, as soon as this phase ends in disaster, the second tendency (domestic) is adopted - Crusoe's energies are directed towards making a home.

The irony is in the fact that - Crusoe chooses adventure when it is easy for him to be domestic and he is domestic when it would be normal for him to seek the help of chance and adventure.

The enduring richness of the novel is in Defoe's combining this opposition in the single character of Crusoe. It gives the novel its multiple perspectives – adventure and domesticity ; action and contemplation; material and abstract; primitive and civilized.

This multiplicity explains its modern appeal. Moreover, these multiple perspectives, help Crusoe achieve a transcendence from the effects of any one influence; thus, he acquires an autonomy of action - and emerges as a type of mythical hero having universal significance.

Unit 3(b): *Robinson Crusoe* and the theme of Colonialism

One of the central and most significant paradoxes of *Robinson Crusoe* is in the incident dealing with Crusoe's discovery of the footprint. (see pp - 153 - 54) (a) The central irony of the novel is immediately evident if these lines are placed with the earlier list of Evil and Good (pp. 65-67), that marks Crusoe's stock-taking of his initial condition on the island. The dominant situation emphasized in the column of evils is *solitude*; here Crusoe is terror-stricken by the first opportunity of resolving this evil; in fact, what is signified as evil in the stock-taking here becomes good and vice-versa. This paradox gives us the first textual situation for an exploration of the colonialist aspect of the novel.

Thus, Crusoe whose character is dominated by the controlling impulse of individualism, sees the footprint as an aggression against his self-contained personality : The footprint represents the metaphoric image of the 'other' and is seen a possible subversion of his inviolate self.

As we have observed, one of the basic characteristics of economic individualism is its reduction and even negation of personal and social ties: quite evident in the beginning and throughout the last section; this is the fundamental aspect which makes solitude the condition humane of the bourgeois capitalism.

Defoe himself was aware of solitude as the universal condition of man: in *Serious Reflections of RC* (1720), the first essay is called "On solitude" – this suggests Defoe's view as to the meaning of Crusoe's experiences.

(e) The problems of solitude seems to have been a personal reality and concern for Defoe he had very few friends, and hardly had any contact with contemporary literary figures. In 1706, Defoe complained in a pamphlet of "how I stand alone in the world, abandoned by those very people that own I have done them service; ... how with no helps but my own industry, I have forced misfortune, and reduced them how, in goals, in retreats, in all manner of extremities, I have supported myself without assistance of friends or relations." Defoe sees in *Robinson Crusoe* a similar meaning; in the Preface to the novel he summarizes the themes as "Here is invincible patience recommended under the worst of misery, indefatigable application and undaunted resolution under the greatest and most discouraging circumstances."

The central irony in *Robinson Crusoe* lies in the fact that what was considered as an evil in the beginning of the novel is seen later as a threat which makes solitude itself a metaphor of utopian idealism and the image of the inviolate individualism. Crusoe's reaction to the footprint dramatizes this instinctual rejection of an intervention into his inviolate utopia of solitude; he sees the footprint as an aggression and subversion of his individualist utopia, which is a major symbol of his will to control his will to power; the footprint, therefore, implies a threat to his power on the island. Thus, Crusoe's first reaction is to retreat into the symbol of his power and

security his fortress and cave. He takes up an embattled position of constant surveillance; even regrets not having produced extra corn for this crisis (note the utopian ideal of production according to necessity is immediately rejected); even this religious and spiritual balance is disturbed when his power is in possible danger (pp - 169 - 172). The footprint thus becomes a metaphor which constitutes a criticism of the associate and a historical nature of Crusoe's Island.

Unit 4: Textual Analysis

In what is considered to be the first important study of the colonial encounter, O Mannoni in his book *Prospero and Caliban*, calls *Robinson Crusoe* the first The Psychology of Colonization model of the colonial encounter. Referring to this paradox of solitude in the novel, Mannoni says that Crusoe's pathological terror expresses the "massive misanthropic neurosis", which characterizes the European mind and more specifically the colonialist attitude in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. According to Mannoni, "the personality of the colonial is made up, not of characteristics acquired during and through experience of the colonies but of traits ... already in existence in a latent and repressed form in the European psyche, - traits which the colonial experience has simply brought to the surface and made manifest".

Edward Said also confirms this. He points out that concept of the Orient is a European construct; that this is based on a whole tradition of literature dealing with the Orient including romance and fiction, history and scientific research and finally, the travelogue and, tourist literature which Said says has been "producing" the Orient. This production of the East, Said says, operates on two major impulses: (a) representing the Orient in order to confirm and justify Western superiority and progress and (b) therefore, to structure the orient within Western ideas and tendencies of power and control which is, in turn, justified by the ideology that European imperialism is ultimately a benefaction on the inferior colonised state. The colony, thus becomes "the white man's burden", where the white man performs his moral responsibilities with control and power, ultimately turning the colony into another version of the West.

Robinson Crusoe has most of the features of this colonial model. As we first pointed out, *Robinson Crusoe* does not belong to the tradition of travel literature which often is a sociological and demographic work on the colonies; in fact, the realism of the novel argues against its consideration as travelogue; there is very little information about the island or its inhabitants. Colonial literature does not give information about this. In reality, what the novel turns out to be - is an autobiographical record of the white man's existential and spiritual experiences. This, in turn, is a dramatization and re-enactment of the main ideological impulses of Europe : growing capitalism supplemented by the Protestant ethic ; in other words, as Mannoni says, Crusoe's island actually becomes a microcosm of Europe in the eighteenth century. The central metaphor of this economic and Puritan ideology is solitude - what Watt calls the "monitory image" of man. This is basic to economic individualism which is marked by an extreme solipsism - a pathological condition of being imprisoned within the self. Crusoe turns to God to escape this bondage within the self, but the controlling irony of his spiritual conversion lies in the fact that now Crusoe uses religion, to justify his self-containment, his solitude. Solitude, therefore, becomes the metaphoric condition suggesting self knowledge, self-control and thus an assertion of power. Thus, in actuality, what *Robinson Crusoe* explores are class and power relations. Crusoe's 'original sin' of running away which is past of the economic individualism, is actually his rejection of hierarchical class restrictions of Europe- considered limitations of the self. He also embodies the economic and social ambitions of the middle class. Defoe, therefore, is actually creating on the island a fictional space for the enactment of the basic facts of bourgeois

ideology and consequently re-stating the doctrines of control and power which is integral to it; thus, in spite of the utopian conditions of the island, the latent contradictions of this situation are dramatically foregrounded with the discovery of the footprint and with the introduction of Friday, the utopia dissolves into the typicality of the colonial, power situation of the master and the slave. The conversion of Crusoe from the dominated to one who dominates, is complete.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe dramatizes the colonial mind through the very psychological metaphors which are emphasized in the narrative. Thus, the dream in which Crusoe sees himself resulting a native typifies the basic colonialist attitude towards the native.

a) the dream radically situates the native in the position of the dominated by placing him in the context of danger. This, not only reduces the native to the stature of the inferior/rescued but emphatically ratifies the domination of the white man/Crusoe.

b) What is significant about this dream is the wish-fulfillment that it unconsciously dramatizes - that the native would be his "servant" and, therefore, act as his "pilot" to "venture to the mainland".

c) This unconscious desire is ratified in Crusoe's conscious "conclusion" where he actually determines to "get a savage in my *possession*". Human company which Crusoe so desperately desired to resolve his solitary confinement, is therefore, reduced to its utilitarian denomination like the other objects of Crusoe's castle by this term of conspicuous consumption and his desire that this "possession" be acquired in a context of "blackmail" - "and, if possible, it should be one of their prisoners whom they had condemned to be eaten and should bring hither to kill". This is the classic typology of power that is basic to the colonial situation.

d) With minor deviations, the dream is actuated in the real circumstances of Friday's rescue, but what is important is the divine justification that Crusoe adds to this. Thus, what Crusoe had earlier seen in utilitarian terms, is redefined in terms of Christian benevolence and altruism, - the savage, therefore, becomes the white man's burden, his moral responsibility : "It came now very warmly upon my thoughts, and indeed, irresistibly, that now was my time to get a servant, and perhaps a companion, or assistant, and that I was called plainly by Providence, to save this poor creature's life." This redefinition of the premises, which characterizes the native, - is basic to the colonialist discourse which Said says, involves a constant production of knowledge of the colonized for a "western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient."

e) This is further illustrated in Crusoe's description of Friday, which clearly has racist implications. Thus, Friday is given features which separates him from the other savages : "he had all the sweetness and softness of a European in his countenance his hair was long and black, not curled like wool; his forehead very high and large, and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny, and yet not of an ugly yellow nauseous tawny, as the Brazilians and Virginians, and other natives of America are but of a bright kind dunolive colour, that had in it something very agreeable, though not very easy to describe." (pp. - 205 - 206).

f) What this description actually marks is a specific representation of the native in agreeable terms. In other words, it involves a deliberate restructuring of the native by the simple use of a contrast. Thus, Friday is distinctive in the sense that though he is a native, his features denote that he is not the typical savage. And if he is not this type, he is nearer to the European. The contrast, therefore, yields a redefinition, - but this redefinition is encoded within the values and beliefs of Europe. Friday is thus produced as a Western version of the native. This representation marks an important colonialist intervention in the novel. By distinguishing Friday from the other natives what Defoe does is to categorize the native into the typical colonialist structures of the

cannibal/savage and the slave. This is fundamental to the literary tropes of colonial literature and has its beginnings in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in the characters of Caliban and Ariel and features regularly in later colonialist writing, particularly in Rudyard Kipling, who also categorizes the native into the "half devil, half child."

g) The logical conclusion of this strategy, therefore, is to convert the native to the values and beliefs of the European colonizer. Thus, Friday, whose name is arbitrarily imposed on him and who is taught the language of servitude – 'Yes Master, No Master' is made to engage himself in a Christian discourse with Crusoe, in a remarkably short time. (pp. 216-218). Friday's conversion to Christianity (which Crusoe obviously interprets as part of his divine purpose) thus, characteristically begins with a rejection and subversion of Friday's native religion:

"I endeavoured to clear up this fraud to my man Friday, and told him, that the pretence of their old men going up to the mountains to say 'O!' to their God Benamucke, was a cheat; and their bringing word from thence what he said, was much more so, that if they met with an answer, or spoke with anyone there, it must be with an evil spirit; and then I entered into a long discourse with him about the devil, the original of him, his rebellion against God, his enmity to man, the reason for it, his setting himself up in the dark parts of the world to be worshipped instead of God " (pp. - 217) The reason for quoting this passage is to show certain syntactical and *verbal connections*. Not only is Friday's God dismissed as a cheat, but he is also defined categorically as an evil spirit and finally equated with the devil. Edward Said says that this is typical of Western colonial subversion in which alien religions are not only characterized as Pagan, but also as versions of anti-Christ. This creation of the antithesis is a deliberate assertion of power which is encoded within the discourse of religion. Friday's conversion, therefore, is not simply a reenactment of Crusoe's own conversion earlier, but (a) reinstatement of Western ideas of psychic and civil order; (b) an affirmation of the superiority and civility of the colonizer and (c) the primary strategy for establishing control and power over the native.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, in the true tradition of colonial discourse, Friday is totally assimilated into the European model of civility and culture. This in reality, becomes a total *negation of his identity*, which is completely subsumed within the codes and values of Europe. Friday, therefore, becomes a "major symbol announcing the victory of the colonialist project and he is a production of Crusoe's civilized self, as a text, which reaffirms European superiority and order."

h) The irony, however, is in the fact, that it is not Friday, or the savages who constitute the real threat in Defoe's novel but the white man who is reduced to behaving like the savage. It is in the incident of the mutiny on the British ship that the novel is radically problematized as illustrated in the conversation between Friday and Crusoe when they observe the mutineers. "I was perfectly confounded at the sight, and knew not what the meaning of it should be; Friday called out to me, in English, as well as he could, 'Oh, Master ! you see English mans eat prisoners as well as savage mans.' "Why", said I, "Friday do you think they are going to eat them.?" "Yes" says Friday, "they will eat them." "No, no", said I, "Friday, I am afraid they will murder them indeed; but you may be sure they will not eat them." (pp. – 271 – 272).

i) Crusoe's rout of the mutineers and his rescue of the English captain is conducted on the dual strategies of observation and secret supervisions. Like Prospero in *The Tempest*, he projects himself as having magical powers, almost a *deus ex machina*, who ultimately reveals himself as the governor of the island.

j) This is symbolic in one sense of Crusoe's assumption of formal political power.

Crusoe's Eden, his capitalist utopia is thus politicized with all the formal hierarchies and contradictions of a European state. For, with the coming of the mutineers and later in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, with the arrival of the Spaniards, Crusoe's island acquires the character of a regular colonial settlement whose colonists owe him allegiance and whose laws and holdings he formulates and divides.

The colonialist analysis of *Robinson Crusoe* therefore, gives us a comprehensive reading of the novel for it dramatizes the economic and religious beliefs of Europe in the eighteenth century; that these actually dramatize the colonialist attitude and encounter by specifying certain precise representations of the colonizer and colonized in relationships of power, that this involves the central theme and purpose of the novel representation, therefore, is European ideas and values, which aggressively reaffirms European superiority and justifies colonialism.

Suggested Reading

1. J. R. Moore, *Daniel Defoe : Citizen of the Modern World* (1958).
2. David Blewett, *Defoe's Art of Fiction* (1979).
3. Harold Bloom, *Daniel Defoe : Modern Critical Views* (1987).
4. A.W. Seccord. *Daniel Defoe, his Art and mind* (1948).
5. Maxmillian Novat, *Economics and the Fiction of Daniel Defoe* (1962).
6. Maxmillian Novat, *Defoe and the Nature of Man* (1963)
7. John Richetti, *Defoe's Narratives* (1975).
8. John Richetti, *Daniel Defoe* (1987).
9. Max Byrd (ed) : *Daniel Defoe : A Collection of Critical Essays* (1976)
10. Frant H. Ellis (ed) *Twentieth Century Interpretation of Robinson Crusoe'*. (1969)
11. George A Starr, *Defoe and spiritual Autobiography* (1965).
12. Michael Shinagel (ed) *Robinson Crusoe. Norton Critical Edition* (1975) [All page references are given from the 1994 reprint of this edition].

Assignments

1. Write an essay on *Robinson Crusoe* as a travel book.
2. Discuss *Robinson Crusoe* as a reflection of the economic ideas of the eighteenth century.
3. Comment on *Robinson Crusoe* as a spiritual autobiography.
4. Analyse *Robinson Crusoe* as an allegory.
5. Examine *Robinson Crusoe* as a novel which justifies colonialism.

Block II: Oroonoko by Aphra Behn

Unit 5(a): Life of Aphra Behn

Unit 5(b): Literary Career of Aphra Behn

Unit 6(a):

(i) Publication History

(ii) Historical background

Unit 6(b): Plot Analysis

Unit 7: Themes

(i) Attitude to Slavery, Racism in *Oroonoko*

(ii) Gender Issues

(iii) *Oroonoko* as Romance

Unit 8(a) Genre

Unit 8(b) (i) Narrative Style and Structure

(ii) Characters

Introduction

I will here be discussing about a seventeenth century novella titled *Oroonoko; or The Royal Slave* written by the first woman to earn her living by writing, Mrs Aphra Behn. For the sake of convenience and also because that is how she is popularly known, I will henceforth in the module be mentioning the author by her name without the 'Mrs'. Also the title of the work will be mentioned only as *Oroonoko* in place of the full title. Since not much information is available on the author's life as also critical analysis of the text, my discussion will necessarily deal more textual reading based on the available critical material here. The sources of the critical material that I have made use of, will be given at the end. However some material had been gathered in an unorganized manner and I do not have the proper sources recorded. For such sources only a good guess is all that I can offer. However it is to be noted that it is expected that all candidates have a copy of the text when consulting the discussion of the text in this module.

Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* is said to have heralded many different trends in the novel tradition. It is credited with pioneering the anti-colonial theme and the realistic trend as also the use of minute details in narrative descriptions.

Unit 5(a): Life of Aphra Behn

Mrs Aphra Behn's (1640-1689) early life is shrouded in obscurity. It is assumed that she was probably born in 1640. It is also hypothesized that she was born to Bartholomew and Elizabeth Johnson of Kent. One of the most important figures of twentieth century literature, Virginia Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own* (1929), acknowledges Aphra Behn as being the first woman to write professionally. Information regarding Behn's education or how she got introduced to literary and theatrical circles remain little-known. She is said to have visited Surinam, then a British colony, with her family between 1663 and 1664. On her return to England the following year she married Behn, a city merchant probably of Dutch descent, who died within two years. Charles II employed her in 1666 to work as a spy in Antwerp in the Dutch War. This scandalous woman writer of the seventeenth century and a well-known royalist was nevertheless buried in Westminster Abbey, on her death on 16 April 1689.

Unit 5(b): Literary Career of Aphra Behn

She is regarded to be the second most prolific and popular playwright of the seventeenth century, preceded by none other than the very popular Restoration dramatist John Dryden. Her first play *The Forced Marriage* was performed in 1670 by the Duke's Company. She went on to write at least eighteen plays, as well as several volumes of poetry and numerous works of fiction that were in vogue for decades after her death. Her most successful play, *The Rover* was produced in two parts in 1677 and in 1681. Her novella *Oroonoko; Or, The Royal Slave* (1688) is the work for which she is recognized internationally and which has made her name survive through centuries.

Unit 6(a): Publication History and Historical background to *Oroonoko*

(i) Publication History of *Oroonoko*

Oroonoko; Or, The Royal Slave, the work that has given Aphra Behn international recognition and fame, was published in 1688. This was the first literary work in English that grappled with the issue of the global interactions in the modern world. It is necessary here to discuss the historical context of this global interaction and slave trade that is at the centre of this work.

(ii) Historical Background to *Oroonoko*

While narrating Oroonoko's journey from West Africa to the Caribbean, Aphra Behn describes the hero's travel from Africa to Suriname, a place in the north of South America. This journey also represents the interactions between the three continents of Britain, Africa and America. There is supposed to have been an economic, political, and cultural interaction between these lands based on "the triangular trade" that is said to have existed amongst them. There already existed a long history of British colonization of America and also of Europeans trading in African slaves. But what is interesting is that due to this "triangular trade", there was forced transportation of a labour population from one continent namely, Africa, to facilitate industry in another continent, that is, America, and the produce of this industry was for the consumption of another continent, namely Europe. The start of this triangular trade and the increased exploitation of African slave labour in the Caribbean necessarily followed from a particular development. This was the discovery by the English colonizers in the Caribbean in the mid-1640s that sugarcane could be successfully grown and processed rather than the unsuccessful cultivation of cotton and tobacco. This shift to sugarcane farming led to a crisis in labour supply that led to more and more African slaves being brought in from Africa. It is interesting that during the 1660s, the years depicted in *Oroonoko*, the African population in these islands was roughly equal to the entire white population and by 1690, that is around the time when *Oroonoko* was published, blacks in fact outnumbered whites by an approximation of three to one. This rampant increase in slavery was not so rapid in the North American colonies. This swift conversion to slave labour resulted in the Dutch take-over of Suriname, a colony on the coast of Guiana, and the place where the narrator meets Oroonoko when he lands there as a slave. This is the first work in English to depict this inter-continental trade and interaction that existed during this time and also to criticize the treatment of slaves in these lands. Further it needs to be noted that a woman writer achieved this and that too in the seventeenth century.

Unit 6(b): Plot Analysis

As the title of the novella suggests, the story is about an African prince named Oroonoko. The whole story is narrated in the form of a flashback. This is the story of Prince Oroonoko as told to the narrator who he met when he was a slave in Guiana. The old King of Coramantien, on the Gold Coast, had no son for all had died in the battlefield. The only surviving successor to this old King was a grandson, the son of one of the thirteen sons of the King. This old King had several black wives. However this sole surviving successor to the throne, Prince Oroonoko, was trained by one of the oldest generals of the King's army and by the time the Prince reached his seventeenth year, his name had spread far and wide "as one of the most expert captains and bravest soldiers". Very soon the Prince started to win battles for the King, with the old general by his side. On one such occasion, trying to save the Prince, the General is fatally wounded on the battlefield, and Prince Oroonoko is declared general in his place. On his return to his native land, Oroonoko decides to visit Imoinda, the only daughter of the slain general and his mentor. When "this gallant Moor" meets the "fair Queen of Night", Imoinda (this is how the author describes them both), they fall in love with each other and after several meetings both decide to take the other for a life partner, with the blessings of Prince Oroonoko's grandfather. On the other hand, having heard of this great beauty Imoinda, the old King who had many wives and many concubines in his *otan*, had his heart

set on this young beauty who had sparked a thousand tender thoughts in his old heart. Having received information of a probable relationship between this beauty and his own grandson, the King in a rage sends her the royal veil, that was an invitation that the King wanted her for his “use”, and an order that no one dared disobey Imoinda, however, has to be forcibly brought to court where she cries and begs the King to set her free but to no avail. The King uses his powers over the pleading girl and when Oroonoko gets to hear what has happened on his return from his expeditions it is too late. After a long period of silent suffering in agony Oroonoko decides to take the help of one of the old Queens who was now in charge of Imoinda, Onahal, and meet Imoinda just once. His loyal follower Aboan and Onahal thus arrange for a meeting between the estranged lovers. The King however gets to know of this meeting and arrives there just after Oroonoko's friends forcibly makes him escape. As a punishment, the furious King orders that both Onahal and Imoinda be sold as slaves and sent to a different land. With the passage of time Oroonoko forgives the King for what he had done to Imoinda, and gradually gets back to his normal life. However he promises never to take a woman for his wife ever again. The captain of an English ship, arrives on the shores of Coramantien, who knew Oroonoko, on one of his visits and stays with Oroonoko and enjoys his hospitality. It was Oroonoko's ability to converse in both French and English, due to his French tutor who had tutored Oroonoko not only in the languages but also the civilized ways of European life, that facilitated his friendships with such non-African people.

However, on the pretext of offering to return the hospitality shown to him, the captain of the English ship drugs Oroonoko and his men and then sails off to the far away lands on the coast of America with these youths bound in chains. All these young men are then sold off to various plantations as slaves. Oroonoko, the royal prince of an African land, is then sold off to a Cornish gentleman named Trefry, the overseer of the Parham plantation in Surinam. Once on the plantation, Oroonoko is given a new name - Caesar. Soon Oroonoko becomes friendly to Trefry and his 'noble mien' and ability to converse in English and French, results in him being treated differently from the other slaves. His friend Trefry once takes Oroonoko, now called Caesar, to meet a woman named Clemene, renowned for her beauty, who lived in absolute seclusion and was reputed to have rejected all men on the plantation. To Oroonoko's utter amazement Clemene is none other than Imoinda. On listening to their story, Trefry and the narrator, impressed by this gallant and beautiful prince soon become his friends and arrange the marriage of Oroonoko and Imoinda. The lovers separated in their own land by their own people are finally united in captivity and by their white masters. It is when Imoinda is pregnant that Oroonoko realizes how desperately he needed his freedom. He did not want his children to be born as slaves and he requests his friends on the plantation, Mr Trefry and the narrator, to arrange for their freedom. In spite of repeated requests that it would be arranged once the Governor arrived, they fail to attain their freedom. This is when, having befriended other slaves Oroonoko decides to rebel against the slave masters. They first run away to the forest to fight from there. However, the other slaves return to captivity fearing the defeat of the rebellion, and Oroonoko is left alone feeling dejected and betrayed. In mortal fear yet refusing to let his wife and child spend the rest of their lives as slaves, Oroonoko first kills Imoinda and then mortally wounds himself. He is then captured and brutally murdered to teach the other slaves on the plantation never to rise in revolt against their masters.

Imoinda and Oroonoko, the 'royal' slaves, thus die in captivity. Oroonoko's slaying his wife and unborn child is a way of protesting against the slave trade of the times.

Unit 7: Themes

(i) Attitude to Slavery, Racism in Oroonoko

Aphra Behn's seventeenth-century tale of an African prince's forced from a life of royalty to a life and his eventual death is, nevertheless, recognized of a slave as one of the earliest attempts in literature to comment against slavery. I will here first try to point out the various reasons for which this work might be cited as an anti-slavery document; for, in spite of such attempts to criticize the slave trade, Aphra Behn's own racist attitudes tend to seep through.

This will be dealt with in the last segment of this sub-section.

The statements made in the text that would count as anti-slavery comments are:

(a) In *Oroonoko*, Aphra Behn seemingly possesses a conflicting attitude toward the institution of slavery and of racism. While trying to point to the negative aspects of slavery on the one hand, she also cites certain racist viewpoints, on the other. The author reveals her deeply rooted cultural bias and racism in

fictionalizing and romanticizing the lives of slaves on the plantations and displays a rather non-committal attitude towards slavery.

(b) In her unusual choice of an African Prince for a heroic romance, she tries to beautify and valorise the Africans. She constantly uses epithets like “gallant Moor” and “fair Queen of Night”- when describing them, attempting to show that the “negroes”, as she calls them in the text, could be just as noble, virtuous, passionate, heroic and just as worthy of literary praise and human compassion. It is important to note here that never before in English literature had any attempt been made to portray Africans in such a favourable light.

(c) In various ways the author points to the white man’s flaws whether it is in his cruelty towards the slaves or in the treacherous way in which Oroonoko and his men are taken slaves. In fact, the author notes that according to come, the way in which the captain of the English ship drugs Oroonoko and his men on the pretext of extending hospitality, might be commended as an act of bravery. But the author strongly condemns it as an ignoble act of treachery and allows the reader to judge such an act. Through the sufferings of Oroonoko and Imoinda on the plantation in Surinam, Behn highlights the excessive cruelty of the colonial ruler while constantly referring to the sense of honour and the virtues’ of the lovers. Through the character portrayals of Oroonoko and Imoinda depicted in all their honesty, loyalty, virtuosity and strength, Aphra Behn allots these ‘slaves’ an almost immortal status.

(d) Alongside the portrayal of such ‘noble’ slaves is the character portrayal of white Christian villains like the captain of the English ship, whose deeds have already been discussed. The other group of such villains comprises the white men on the plantation who torture and torment Oroonoko as he is a slave and has dark-coloured skin.

(e) The most scathing anti-slavery comment is made when Oroonoko speaks to the other natives on the plantation and tries to rouse them in a rebellion against slavery, in an attempt to break free from the shackles of bondage. Oroonoko questions his fellow slaves “Shall we render obedience to such a degenerate race who have no one human virtue left to distinguish them from the vilest creatures?” Aphra Behn could not have made a stronger statement than allowing her slave hero a voice to speak against the establishment.

Even after such commendable efforts of Aphra Behn to take a stand against slavery, she constantly exposes her racial bias when referring to the African characters as “negroes” or as members of the “dark continent”.

(a) While describing the African characters, especially their physical beauty, the author never forgets to mention that there was “nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome” like these dark-skinned people except “their colour”.

(b) Among the other blacks, Oroonoko is an exception. His looks are not like the usual looks of the negroes. The prince had been “civilized in the most refined schools of humanity and learning” by his French tutor. As the prince was trained in the European ways of life and language, hence his appearance is different and more engaging than that of his countrymen. Moreover, Oroonoko’s education in European manners also make him acceptable to the English people evident in the number of English friends which includes the narrator.

(c) When Oroonoko chooses to rebel against his slave masters, even the narrator who has all along represented herself as a confidant and friend of Oroonoko’s, is scared. She feels her life too might be in danger exposing her inherent mistrust of anyone black. At that point Oroonoko becomes one with the other members of his race and all good things that have been said about him are instantly forgotten.

(d) Behn tends to romanticize slavery and life on the plantation rather than choose to confront most of its harshness. The struggles of Oroonoko and Imoinda are made to seem heroic and beautiful instead of being shown as the sorry plight of victims of a really harsh and cruel reality. Their valour and virtue are highlighted so that it helps in disguising not only the narrator’s prejudices but also the cruelties inflicted on the slaves.

(e) Such romanticizing serves Behn’s purpose which appears to entertain the Restoration aristocracy by rendering Oroonoko’s life the stature of tragedy and a heroic romance. The historical importance of the work lies in the fact that *Oroonoko* emphasizes those emotional experiences that were often suppressed or distorted in the historical descriptions, debates and documentary records of the period. Aphra Behn on the other hand exposes the conflicts and turmoil that other records buried.

(f) Behn the colonizer indirectly accuses the African King and Oroonoko’s own people for causing the separation of the lovers. The lovers, Oroonoko and Imoinda, are reunited on the plantation where both

are slaves, thus hinting that while their own people had separated them, the colonial rulers brought them together.

(g) The narrator also tries to justify slavery on the ground that it is an economic requirement. Neither is there any criticism of the way in which the slaves are treated nor is there any direct attack on the institution of slavery itself.

(h) Oroonoko, who as a character is supposed to act as the mouthpiece against slavery, is himself shown to be trading in slaves. When the slaves who had fled from the plantation with Oroonoko betray him and return to captivity, Oroonoko mentions that they were “by nature slaves...[who were] fit to be used as Christians’ tools”. Nevertheless, Behn’s *Oroonoko* is an early attempt at exposing the evils of slavery whether through the criticism of Western civilization or through the ennobling and humanizing of an African. And this brave endeavour by a woman writer in the seventeenth century is no mean effort and should be accorded its due commendation.

(ii)

Gender Issues in Oroonoko

Oroonoko is the story of the royal slave from the point of view of the middle-class mistress of a colonial power. Interestingly, the black, male protagonist can only find a voice through the white, female narrator. In the text women, both blacks and whites, have less power than the men. However the black female slaves have the least power of all. These women are never consulted but expected to do whatever their men-folk ask them to do or go wherever they are asked to go. Even the white women represented by the narrator, her mother and sister have some influence, but when important decisions are taken they are not consulted. For example we might cite the instance when the decision to punish Oroonoko is taken, the narrator is not only not consulted she is not even informed of the decision and the punishment is executed while she is away. The way in which Africans used women as commodities is highlighted by the number of Queens and concubines that the old King is said to have and also the way in which they are discarded once they grow old. The way in which Imoinda is forced to accept the old King’s proposal and entertain the King also throws light on this aspect. While pointing to this negative aspect in African culture, the author refrains from highlighting the almost similar treatment of women in her culture. In fact we hardly get to see too many of the women of the ruling class. Again the ‘beauty’ of the dark-skinned women is often contrasted with the beauty of the women of the European races.

(iii)

Oroonoko as a Romance

The second important theme in this novella is that of romance. Oroonoko is portrayed as a hero who is adept in the art of warfare, is often referred to as the “gallant Moor”, is honest, loyal, faithful. In fact not a single flaw in his nature is mentioned “except the color”. He is the perfect hero. The story is focussed on the love story between Oroonoko and Imoinda. At their first meeting after the death of Oroonoko’s mentor the old general who was also Imoinda’s father, both fall in love with each other. Though they decide to get married they wait to get the permission from the old King who is Oroonoko’s grandfather. During this period Imoinda, despite her protests and tears is forcibly taken away by the King to satisfy his lust. The love between the hero Oroonoko and the heroine Imoinda is put to test here. Whereas the furious Oroonoko would have rebelled against the King for his deed, his respect towards his grandfather and the monarch of the land stops him from taking any drastic step. But the love story has to reach its climax. So Oroonoko goes to meet Imoinda in the palace, spends the night with her, the knowledge of which enrages the King who then punishes Imoinda by ordering her sale as a slave carried to some far off land. To this same far off land, Surinam, Oroonoko is also brought as slave and the two lovers finally meet after years of separation and a lot of pain. It is probably hinted that actually the sympathetic colonial rulers and slave masters bring the two lovers together and get them married, while their own people had separated them. To make the love story a tragedy and thus immortalise it, both the lovers are killed. Even their killing is pathetically rendered. Thus the novella is given the status of a heroic romance as well as a tragedy.

Unit 8(a): Genre and Structure

Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* is a ‘novella’ which is a work of fiction that is shorter than a novel but longer than a short story. Certain critics claim the text to be a memoir and a travel narrative, since it is based on Aphra Behn’s visit to the colony of Surinam, later known as Dutch Guiana. It is also sometimes said to belong to the genre of a ‘biography’ since it is said that it is the biography of Oroonoko as told to the narrator, whom he met on the plantation where he spent the last few years of his life as a slave.

Unit 8(b): Narrative Style, Technique and Characters

Oroonoko has no chapter divisions. The text is in the form of an oral tale being told by the narrator therefore it is in a single framework. I will discuss here the narrative style and technique used in this novella.

Narrative Style and Technique

- (a) In her search for a prose form appropriate to stories with contemporary rather than purely heroic settings and themes, Behn wrote her fictional works in a conversational tone. *Oroonoko* is thus strewn with personal references like “I have already said” or “I forgot to ask how”, making the narrative resemble an ongoing conversation with her readers. This also lends her tales an ordinary tone than the formal tone that is usually evident in earlier prose forms.
- (b) In order to lend authenticity to the work, the narrator is made the witness and interpreter of the events in the story, thus also making her a part of the narrative as one of the ‘characters’. At the start itself the narrator mentions, I was myself an eye-witness to a great part of what you will find here set down; and what I could not be witness of, I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history, the hero himself, who gave us the whole transactions of his youth. While such authentication adds to the interest of the story, the role of the narrator as interpreter allows her to add the colonial aspect. The colonial attitudes to race could not have been those of *Oroonoko* or, for that matter, the black hero’s version, these were the narrator’s opinions and therefore the ‘authenticity’ of the hero’s version of the tale is anyway discredited. Also the various ways in which Behn tries to make her narrative authoritative is to credit her work with literary merit even though it comes from a “female-pen”, which was a major hurdle for this seventeenth-century woman writer.
- (c) Such authoritative presence of the narrator precedes the figure of the omniscient narrator in the fiction to follow like those of Henry Fielding, Jane Austen and George Eliot.
- (d) *Oroonoko* is regarded as one of the first realistic prose narratives in English literature. It contains a number of elements that are new: the conversational narrative style, the narrative authority who is recognizably female, and a plot that focusses on the love story of two black slaves. There is a shift in locale to the New World, and an analysis of slave trade in the British colony of Surinam.
- (e) By choosing a female narrator to narrate the story of the educated black African prince, Behn’s narrative privileges the authority of Western written discourse over African oral discourse.
- (f) Some critics point to the commodification of the Royal Slave’s story through Behn’s narrative, by the authoritative female narrator’s rendering of the story.
- (g) It is the narrative that exposes the Eurocentric bias, as discussed in the ‘theme’ section.
- (h) The authoritative narrative was necessary due to the patriarchal culture that Behn was forced to contend with in which female authorship was viewed as suspect. Therefore Behn’s narrative had to demonstrate complete command of the novel’s subject matter — *Oroonoko* and *Imoinda* and their lives.
- (i) Behn’s narrative strategies are representative of the ways in which the British imagined and represented the New World during the Restoration and early eighteenth century. The British were struggling to strengthen their presence in America during these years and simultaneously trying to make meaning of their experiences there. This results in the confused attitude as evident in the text--- the constant reinforcement of authority through the narrative, the imposition of colonial power over the black slaves which is nevertheless sympathetic and ‘friendly’.

Characters

The various characters in the story are:

- i) The first-person narrator who is the daughter of the Lieutenant-General of Surinam, who also would have been honoured with the responsibility of an additional thirty-six islands had he not died at sea. This narrator is the self-confessed author/narrator of the story.
- (ii) Prince *Oroonoko* is the hero of this tragedy, and also the one who apparently has supplied the narrator with the details of the story. *Oroonoko* is renamed as Caesar when he is a slave on the plantation.
- (iii) The King of Coramantien, the old King who is also *Oroonoko*’s grandfather.
- (iv) *Imoinda* is *Oroonoko*’s, beloved, a noble beauty and daughter of the old general who was *Oroonoko*’s mentor. *Imoinda* is renamed as *Clemene* on the plantation where she too is a slave.
- (v) *Oroonoko*’s followers include *Aboan*, *Jamoan*.

(vi) Onahal is the old discarded Queen of the King of Coramantien, in whose charge Imoinda is put, and who helps Oroonoko and Imoinda to meet in the palace as a punishment for which she is sold off as a slave.

(vii) Trefry is the friendly plantation overseer of the Parham plantation where Oroonoko arrives as a slave.

Suggested Reading

1. Aphra Behn *Oroonoko; Or The Royal Slave*
2. Janet Todd (ed.) *Aphra Behn*.
3. Dale Spender *Mothers of the Novel. 100 Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen*.
4. Angeline Goreau *Reconstructing Aphra. A Social Biography of Aphra Behn*.

Assignments

Essay Type Questions

1. Describe Aphra Behn's attitudes to race and slavery as expressed in her novella *Oroonoko*.
2. What role does race and gender play in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*?
3. Would you regard *Oroonoko* as an anti-slavery novel? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Comment on the importance of *Oroonoko* in the history of English literature.
5. Discuss the narrative style of *Oroonoko*.
6. Discuss *Oroonoko* as a romance.
7. Discuss the historical background against which *Oroonoko* was written.

SHORT TYPES

1. Who is the author who credited Aphra Behn for being the first professional woman writer?
2. Where did Virginia Woolf applaud Aphra Behn for being the first professional woman writer?
3. Give the new names that Oroonoko and Imoinda received on the plantation?
4. Name any two other famous works of Aphra Behn?
5. Who were the two characters who helped Oroonoko to meet Imoinda in the palace?
6. How and for what 'crime' were Imoinda and Onahal punished?
7. How was Oroonoko taken as a slave?
8. Where was he sold off as slave and to whom?

Block III: Eighteenth Century Periodical Literature

Unit 9: Growth and Development of Periodical Literature in Early 18th Century Britain

Unit 10 (a): Introduction to *The Spectator*

Unit 10(b): *The Spectator* No 2

Unit 10 (c): *The Spectator* No 10

Unit 11: Introduction to Samuel Johnson and *The Rambler* essays

Unit 12 (a): *The Rambler* No. 4

Unit 12 (b): *The Rambler* No. 60

Unit 9: Growth and Development of Periodical Literature in Early 18th Century Britain

In London between 1709 and 1714, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele published a series of fashionable and influential periodical papers, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. The earlier paper, *The Tatler*, was edited, and largely written, by Richard Steele, but included contributions from other authors, especially Addison, as well as correspondence from readers. *The Tatler* appeared on April 12, 1709. The first few numbers were distributed free of charge; after that, each issue cost one penny. Steele continued publishing *The Tatler* three times a week until Tuesday, January 2, 1711, when the last number appeared.

Printed in double columns on folio half-sheets of foolscap, with advertisements at the end, *The Tatler* took the standard form of the periodicals of the day. It stated as its explicit purpose the reformation of manners and morals. Steele outlines the goals of the paper in his dedication to Arthur Maynwaring, an important figure in the Whig political party, with whom both Steele and Addison were allied: "The general Purpose of this Paper, is to expose the false Arts of Life, to pull off the Disguises of Cunning, Vanity, and Affectation, and to recommend a general Simplicity in our Dress, our Discourse, and our Behaviour". And while, especially in its earlier numbers, *The Tatler* also includes more strictly news-oriented articles on current political, military, and financial events, the ethical and social focus of the paper is prominent from the start.

Although the last number of *The Tatler* appeared in January 1711, probably as a result of political pressures on Steele, this by no means marked the end of his — or Addison's — career in journalism. On March 1, 1711, the first number of *The Spectator* appeared. Whereas the editing and writing of *The Tatler* was done primarily by Steele, the production of *The Spectator* was more evenly split between the two men; this was to be a collaborative venture. Because of Addison's greater involvement, *The Spectator* came out six times a week, twice as often as *The Tatler*. The first series of *The Spectator* ran from March 1711 until December 1712 (Nos. 1-555). From June to December 1714, Addison, together with Eustace Budgell and Thomas Tickell, edited a second series, which appeared three times a week (Nos. 556-635).

Dropping those reports of current political, military, and financial news that had played a part, if an ever-diminishing one, in *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, largely consists of a series of self-contained, thematically unified essays. This format allows *The Spectator* more scope for the sociocultural and ethical criticism that proved the great strength and irresistible draw of *The Tatler*. The papers address a primarily urban audience made up of men and women in those midlevel economic and social positions that have come to be grouped under the rubric "the

middle class." Taking as their subject the polite conduct of life in all its arenas, public and private, domestic and professional, social and familial, these periodicals were crucial agents in the definition of the cultural, social, and ethical ideals of that class.

The task the papers set themselves is to reform the sensibilities — aesthetic, sartorial, social, and sexual — of each man and woman in the reading audience so that he or she, guided by the principles of good sense, decorum, and benevolence, would then do, say, like, and buy the right thing. *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* wanted to enter into the daily lives of their readers and reshape them. Revealing a very modern concern with how people spend their money and their leisure time, they do not preach against consumption and pleasure per se; rather, they seek to manage these human desires in ways they consider rational, progressive, and useful, both to the individual and to the society at large. At once educational and recreational, the papers are the precursors to today's life-style magazines. *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* serve as guides, leading readers through the vast array of moral, cultural, consumer, and social choices that accompanied their relationships with one another and themselves, with the financial and commercial markets of their day, and with contemporary entertainments and pastimes. Mediating between the day-to-day social and material lives of their readers and the more universal and permanent values of good sense, honesty, modesty, decorum, and good taste, the papers attempt to secure a fixed significance for the everyday.

The success of the project depended on making the papers attractive to readers and available to the largest possible audience. These criteria are at once satisfied and complicated by the papers' status as popular, prestigious, indeed, even fashionable commodities in the market of public opinion. *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* exist within modern conditions of commodification and commercialization, which not only mark their content (the Royal Exchange, lotteries, fashions, commercial entertainments) but define their nature and shape their approach. *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* ultimately seek to manage the world from a perspective at once in and out of the world. And to be sure, the papers, like Mr. Spectator himself, exist both inside and outside the world of commerce.

Writing at a time when cultural standards and codes of conduct were the object of much public attention, *The Tatler* and then *The Spectator* formulated signature critical styles marked by light irony and playfulness. The criticisms and prescriptions Steele and Addison advanced in each were mediated by a fictional, gently satiric persona. In *The Tatler*, Steele and Addison speak through one Isaac Bickerstaff, while *The Spectator* takes its name from Mr. Spectator, its central spokesman. Both Bickerstaff and Mr. Spectator are somewhat eccentric, self-mocking characters; their temperately satiric irony sets the witty, urbane tone. This distinctive approach can be usefully compared to that exemplified by the Society for the Reformation of Manners and Morals, one of the most active institutions for the correction of morality at the time. The Society looked mostly to the lower classes and concentrated on sexual transgressions and drunkenness. Though no less devoted to standards of moderation and probity, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* detect vice and folly in a greater range of activities and across a different spectrum of social classes. The scope of their reform is consequently broader and their attitude more worldly and liberal than that of the Society.

AUDIENCE: NEW MANNERS FOR NEW CLASSES

The eighteenth century witnessed the rise of the middle class in England. Social historians differ in their estimates of the size and constituency of this emergent middle class and in their assessment of its relation to other contemporary classes (titled nobility, gentry, wage laborer) and to the twentieth-century middle class. In his study of the origins of the English novel, Michael McKeon emphasizes the contradictory and mutating qualities of middle-class ideology and consciousness. The history of the middle class, writes McKeon, is marked by the presence of a simultaneous impulse "to imitate and become absorbed within the aristocracy, and to criticize and supplant not only aristocracy but status orientation itself." With, in McKeon's words, the "hindsight of modern scholarship," what we can identify as a specific middle-class orientation did not emerge as a consciously held class identity but was the result of an earlier series of attempts to reform aristocratic elite culture. Kathryn Shevelow argues that "we can use the notion of 'middle class' to designate a particular representation of cultural values, beliefs, and practices that existed prior to, or simply apart from, their eventual conceptual coalescence into a social category". Nor was the ideological work that went into the formation of what we see as "middle-class consciousness" conducted only in relation to aristocratic elite culture. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue, the middle ground of bourgeois standards of taste and culture was often carved out through negotiation with "high" elite culture and "low" popular culture. In their work on eighteenth-century authorship, they show that in bourgeois discourse these "high" and "low" cultural forms are often identified with one another and the excesses of each rejected. biggest portion of their audience came from Britain's growing professional bureaucracy and its commercial and financial classes; however, there is also evidence of aristocratic, and even working-class readership. But it may be safely put that middling and professional classes — clerks, commissioners, tradesmen, bankers, stock company directors, insurance financiers — begin to assume a dominant role in the nation's socio-cultural as well as eco-political life.

Coming at this very juncture, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* are concerned, then, not simply with championing the commercial classes but with advocating a more liberal and even "noble" use of wealth than that pursued by the typical avaricious "Cit." They formulate an identity for the businessman that combines the best features of the commercial and the noble classes. This involves polishing and refining the conduct of the middle classes and purging the elites of the habits of vice and folly. In the literature of the time, the possession of wealth is not viewed as an evil in itself, but as an advantage easily corrupted if not properly employed. The "use of riches" theme becomes a standard topic in social satire. Many men and women were ready to take these lessons to heart. Climbing up the ladder of prestige on the rungs of commerce, finance and politics, they were eager to acquire the social prestige and cultural polish that had traditionally been the province of the aristocracy. Thus, in the decades surrounding the turn of the eighteenth century, status based social prestige is being challenged by class-based claims, when the progeny of wealthy traders demand cultural capital and urbanity becomes one of the characteristic features of truly cultured gentlemen.

But this glittering beau monde of fans and fancy dress, of card games, gossip, masquerades, duels, and sexual intrigue was also discredited by those, usually outside the elite, who felt that it was morally deficient and thus no model on which to base new standards both fashionable *and* decent. The set of follies castigated by the papers — ostentation, vanity, snobbery, self-interest, insincerity, moral laxity, slavish devotion to fashion and to the modish world's empty forms- is most immediately traceable to the libertine court society of Charles II (1660-88). Preserved in

the drama of the Restoration stage, with its ceaselessly witty, often ruthlessly self-serving libertine

heroes and heroines, this court culture set the standard for fashionable society in the last decades of the seventeenth century. But as envisioned by Addison and Steele, genteel culture is inextricable from the fairly prosaic standards of moral virtue: modesty, benevolence, temperance, honesty, chastity before and within marriage. A fashionable society must also be a decent society. Within the flamboyant, high-style, sexually libertine culture that had carried the standard of fashion since the Restoration, these mundane, bourgeois virtues were antithetical and irrelevant.

COFFEEHOUSES, PERIODICALS, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

There was at this period a growing (though still tiny) literate public with enough cation, money, leisure, and interest to make reading a part of their daily lives. The success of popular journals like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, at once "improving" and entertaining, bears testimony to a public who not only could read but chose to read in their free time. The growing role of literature as a popular pastime is reflected in the rise of the modern novel and the blossoming of the periodical press.

By the early eighteenth century the writing and printing of books and periodicals were a well-established business. The older system of literary patronage, in which aristocratic supporters provided authors with financial and social backing, was giving way to a more purely commercial mode of operation. Addison and Steele take their rightful places within the emerging profession of commercial writers. But the lucrative popular press provoked considerable reaction from those who saw it as an agent of cultural corruption. This reaction typically took the form of the 'Grub-Street hacks', desperate, unskilled men who wrote to earn enough money simply to scrape by, with no thought of the value or quality of their work. But at the same time, considerable counterclaims were being made for the high quality and respectability of the popular press. Through the commercial culture industry that developed during this time, writing and printing themselves assume the status of middle-class professions.

An institution central to the organization of public life in early eighteenth-century London, the coffeehouse is closely affiliated with the authors, audience, aims, and accomplishments of popular periodicals like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. In its initial number, *The Tatler* confirms this connection by announcing its various departments:

"All Accounts of Gallantry, Pleasure, and Entertainment, shall be under the Article of White's Chocolate-house; Poetry, under that of Will's Coffee-house; Learning, under the Title of Graecian; Foreign and Domestick News, you will have from St. James's Coffee-house; and what else I have to offer on any other Subject, shall be dated from my own Apartment."

The Tatler's relationship to the coffeehouse is double-faceted: not only was it generated from these public resorts of business and talk, it was also largely read there. Papers like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* were written to be talked about. The essays enter a cultural debate that was highly oral and social rather than textual and academic, and coffeehouses were the chief sites of this debate. Some functioned as clearinghouses for the latest military, political, or economic news;

others, like Man's, were fashionable resorts where beaux met to pose and gossip; still others, like Will's, were oriented around literary culture and served as critical tribunals. Coffeehouses were crucial arenas for the formation and expression of public opinion about plays and poetry, politics and finance, dress and manners. An author's reception at Will's could make or break a reputation. The formulation of public opinion is the first object of the papers. So it is in the coffeehouse culture that *The Tatler* locates its origins, its aims, and its audience.

First established in London in the mid-seventeenth century, coffee-houses multiplied at a remarkable rate; by the end of the century there were more than two thousand of them in the city. The coffeehouse and the popular periodicals patrons read and discussed there are two institutions central to that arena of discourse and identification Jürgen Habermas calls the "bourgeois public sphere." Habermas's bourgeois public sphere is at once a symbolic space and a literal space for the production of that set of ideological and social ideals we have come to identify with the polite middle class. It encompasses both the public discursive spheres of the newspaper and the coffeehouse and the set of normative principles defined in these arenas. Ideally an open forum of rational discussion, the bourgeois public sphere emerging in early eighteenth-century England served a number of significant functions: it was an arena of social identification for individuals; it provided standards for interaction and public discussion; it established rationales for ever more secularized and commercialized modes of cultural production; and it stood as a place outside official state power from which criticism "against the state could be launched.

Through the networks of institutions like the press and the coffeehouse a new notion of the "public" arose, one that was composed of private individuals who came together to debate and negotiate matters of public concern, to formulate "public opinion." Represented to itself through the press, this new "public of the now emerging *public sphere of civil society*" becomes aware of itself as a source of authority and validation separate from, and even opposed to, state authority. Operating "as a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion," the public sphere had political uses.

Public opinion also developed around ethical, social, and aesthetic-cultural issues. The public sphere is first and foremost a critical arena where individuals take part in a debate about the principles, interests, aims, and standards that ought to govern their political, social, ethical, and aesthetic-cultural lives. Largely through publications like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, the public sphere becomes the "place" where the cultural and social norms of bourgeois modernity are instituted. By identifying themselves with these sets of norms, and so internalizing them, the bourgeoisie establishes its own social identity.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE, SOCIAL SPHERES, AND GENDERED IDENTITY

The Tatler and *The Spectator* are intent on cultivating an audience who will act in ways suitable to the genteel and rational exchange of the coffeehouse, but they are also concerned with conduct and employment in the more private sphere of the domestic household. Designed for consumption both in the male-oriented, public and social venues of the coffeehouse and club and at the tea tables presided over by the ladies of the house, these papers undertake the direction of both public and private life. As Shevelow explains, the popular periodical performed an important transaction between the public and private spheres. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the social geography was changing. As Ellen Pollak outlines in her

discussion of the eighteenth-century feminine ideal, upper- and middle-class women increasingly withdrew from the arenas of economic productivity into the domestic realm of consumption, partly in emulating their aristocratic superiors. Ensnared in the home, sequestered from the "corrupt" worlds of politics, finance, and commerce, women become "the embodiment of moral value" that infuses domestic space. Women star to take on the role of angels in the house, custodians of moral and spiritual life.

What emerges in the eighteenth century is an increasingly polarized separation of spheres: public/social/masculine versus private/familiar/feminine. The way this separation is naturalized depends on an early modern shift in the understanding of sexual difference, on the notion that the masculine and the feminine are themselves polar opposites and that this opposition is rooted in natural difference. Gender, the cultural marks of maleness and femaleness, is increasingly seen as biologically innate rather than socially secured.

Before the modern period, the dominant identity category was not gender but status. In the old aristocratic order, a person is first and foremost either a noble or a commoner. But as economic-oriented class differences begin to challenge the hold of status on social prestige, the system of cultural differences that define identity finds its fixed point in gender. This model of sexual difference, and its attendant anxieties and preoccupations, is fully at work in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. Female readers are addressed first "as women, with class associations more vaguely assumed in the rhetoric directed toward them" (Shevelov). This is yet another way the popular periodicals reached an audience that cut across class and status lines: their address to the "ladies" speaks to women in the commercial and professional classes, the gentry, and the aristocracy. According to the ideology of gender at work in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, women form a distinct social category defined solely by their innate female nature. This inherent and inalterable feminine nature could find its proper expression and direction only within the domestic, private sphere. The good female characters are those who cheerfully confine themselves to the concerns of their families. Excessively worldly women whose interests and occupations range beyond the private household represent a kind of "bad femininity," which the papers do their best to discourage. These badly feminine women think more of card games and masquerades than of household tasks; they are preoccupied with public social display rather than the well-being of their family circle; immodest, even exhibitionist, they strive after social power and pose the threat of sexual autonomy.

If their natural frailty makes them more vulnerable to such misguided affections, women's nurture and upbringing also does little to strengthen their character. Bickerstaff and Mr. Spectator object to conventional female education because, they claim, it promotes aspirations toward social status achieved through self-display. Advocates of female modesty and retirement from the public world, Addison and Steele promote a program of female education that cultivates attention to internal beauty and to a woman's strictly domestic, familial social obligations.

Female nature is innately frivolous and unstable. Since these qualities are understood as natural and inalterable, the schemes of female reform and education proposed in the papers encounter a problem. For even as they are being enlisted as symbols of the realm of domestic virtue, women are also understood to lack the native stability that would most effectively allow them to resist the sway of the world's temptations. Women seem naturally flawed in ways that threaten the

realization of what is being defined as their natural character. Jane Spencer remarks on this contradiction: "It seems that eighteenth century women needed a good deal of educating into their 'inborn,' 'natural' feminine qualities".

COMMERCE, TASTE, AND CULTURE

The critical stance of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* is largely determined by an increasingly commercialized British society. Colonial expansion, as well as financial, commercial, and technical innovation, was providing more things at better prices to greater numbers of people. The blueprint for the mass commercial exploitation and mass culture that were to develop more fully in the nineteenth century were laid down in the eighteenth century. Eighteenth-century cultural commentators remark again and again, with dismay, amusement, and scorn, on their contemporaries' obsession with getting and spending. *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* paint a picture of a society in which almost all social practices and institutions are colored and shaped by commercial, rather than more purely ethical, values. These papers are anxious to separate the faulty values that drive commerce — self-interest, novelty and impermanence, profit and loss — from their own stabilizing ethic of rational benevolence, community, and common sense. This ethic is promoted as an antidote to the selfishness, the superficiality, the ephemerality, the frippery, and the foolishness of modern life.

The Tatler and *The Spectator* are eager to establish a sphere of value and identification outside the commercial marketplace, where taste and culture are bought and sold with little regard to any standard higher than the latest fashion. As they conceptualize and represent this place, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* go far in articulating the modern realm of culture: an aesthetic and ethical arena for the improvement of human nature responsive to criteria other than status, wealth, and fashionability, which mark the commercial ethic. Leslie Stephen calls Addison the prophet of this what is now called Culture.

This promised land of "Culture" of which Addison is the "prophet" has most commonly been associated with his realm of the imagination. In *Spectator* Nos. 411-21 Addison provides a kind of blueprint for the operation of the mental and affective faculties associated with what we now call aesthetic pleasure (see pp. 387-96). These pleasures, like Mr. Spectator's own most characteristic faculty, are visual; the pleasures of the imagination are first the pleasures of looking, either literally or imaginatively. Addison's imaginative vision and its pleasures stand as a kind of superior alternative to the pleasures of material acquisition they so closely mirror. Thus, we can clearly see how the principles of access and privilege that govern the bourgeois public sphere overlap with those of the aesthetic realm of the imagination. Wealth and status are immaterial in truly rational and polite discourse. All one needs is a commitment to a shared standard of universal human reason. Similarly, the aesthetic pleasures are not only independent, they are superior to the satisfactions of material wealth and ownership.

The emergence of modern categories of culture and taste occurs alongside the commercial saturation of everyday London life. In relation to the development of ideas about the cultural aesthetic, the commercialization of literature (with its attendant commodification of knowledge) and of entertainment and leisure are the most relevant. The eighteenth-century man or woman about town could choose from a growing variety of public and commercial forms of entertainment and "culture": plays, operas, acrobatics, puppet shows, waxwork shows,

masquerades, pleasure gardens, collections of curious and novel things in museums, public houses, and retail shops. This is the age of the first great entrepreneurs of leisure. But if anything that sells gets published or staged, then how can a standard of taste be maintained? The answer lies in the power of choice exercised by those who buy. Clearly, this audience must be educated to choose what is tasteful and correct.

Unit 10 (a): Introduction to *The Spectator*

The Spectator was a periodical published in London by the essayists Sir Richard Steele and Joseph Addison from March 1, 1711, to Dec. 6, 1712 (appearing daily), and subsequently revived by Addison in 1714 (for 80 numbers). It succeeded *The Tatler*, which Steele had launched in 1709. In its aim to “enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality,” *The Spectator* adopted a fictional method of presentation through a “Spectator Club,” whose imaginary members extolled the authors’ own ideas about society. These “members” included representatives of commerce, the army, the town (respectively, Sir Andrew Freeport, Captain Sentry, and Will Honeycomb), and of the country gentry (Sir Roger de Coverley). The papers were ostensibly written by Mr. Spectator, an “observer” of the London scene. The conversations that *The Spectator* reported were often imagined to take place in coffeehouses, which was also where many copies of the publication were distributed and read.

Though Whiggish in tone, *The Spectator* generally avoided party-political controversy. An important aspect of its success was its notion that urbanity and taste were values that transcended political differences. Almost immediately it was hugely admired; Mr. Spectator had, observed the poet and dramatist John Gay, “come on like a Torrent and swept all before him.”

Because of its fictional framework, *The Spectator* is sometimes said to have heralded the rise of the English novel in the 18th century. This is perhaps an overstatement, since the fictional framework, once adopted, ceased to be of primary importance and served instead as a social microcosm within which a tone at once grave, good-humoured, and flexible could be sounded. The real authors of the essays were free to consider whatever topics they pleased, with reference to the fictional framework (as in Steele’s account of Sir Roger’s views on marriage, which appeared in issue no. 113) or without it (as in Addison’s critical papers on *Paradise Lost*, John Milton’s epic poem, which appeared in issues no. 267, 273, and others).

Given the success of *The Spectator* in promoting an ideal of polite sociability, the correspondence of its supposed readers was an important feature of the publication. These letters may or may not, on occasion, have been composed by the editors.

In addition to Addison and Steele themselves, contributors included Alexander Pope, Thomas Tickell, and Ambrose Philips. Addison’s reputation as an essayist has surpassed that of Steele, but their individual contributions to the success of *The Spectator* are less to the point than their collaborative efforts: Steele’s friendly tone was a perfect balance and support for the more dispassionate style of Addison. Their joint achievement was to lift serious discussion from the realms of religious and political partisanship and to make it instead a normal pastime of the leisured class. Together they set the pattern and established the vogue for the periodical throughout the rest of the century and helped to create a receptive public for the novelists, ensuring that the new kind of prose writing—however entertaining—should be essentially serious.

Brief Biographical Details of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele

Joseph Addison was born at Milston, Wiltshire, England in 1672. At the age of 14 he began attending the renowned Charterhouse School, whose alumni included the renowned John Wesley and the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray. It was here at Charterhouse that Addison acquainted Steele. From here Addison went on to Oxford where he completed his M.A. In 1695 he composed *A Poem to His Majesty*, addressed to William III. This composition earned him the attention of influential politicians who saw much potential in this young scholar. He was granted a pension of 300 Pounds, enabling him to travel on the Continent. On his return to London Addison fell in with the Kit Kat Club, an association of political and literary figures whose members included Richard Steele, playwright William Congreve, architect Sir John Vanbrugh and future Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole.

In 1708 Addison was elected to the Parliament. The same year he became the equivalent of Secretary of State for Irish Affairs. While in Ireland he began contributing to Steele's paper *The Tatler*. The last *Tatler* appeared on 2 January 1711, by which time Addison had authored 40 out of 271 issues. Two months later he and Steele launched *The Spectator*. Addison continued to write poetry and plays (including an acclaimed tragedy *Cato*). After marrying well (to the Dowager Countess of Warwick), Addison died at the age of 48 on 17 June 1719. He is interred at Westminster Abbey.

Sir Richard Steele was born at Dublin, Ireland in 1672. His father, who had been an attorney by profession, died when Richard Steele was only five years old. His uncle paid for his education, sending him to Charterhouse. From there he went to Oxford, but left without attaining his degree, to start a career in the army. He attained the rank of a captain before leaving the army in 1705. Steele's personality can best be summarized by the phrase "Good Time Charlie". He was convivial, generous to a fault and a lover of food and drink. His dissolute lifestyle led him into debt on several occasions. Partly due to this reason he chose to marry a wealthy widow. In 1714 he was made Governor of the Drury Lane Theater. He obtained Knighthood in the year 1715. Steele's health deteriorated due to his intemperate habits and he passed away in the year 1729.

The Roger de Coverley Papers

The Sir Roger de Coverley papers are often said to be the precursor of the modern English novel. And in a very real sense they are. There are, to be sure, crude specimens of prose fiction in the preceding century that may perhaps dispute this title, though most of them, like the long-winded romances that found place in the library of Sir Roger's lady friend, were of French origin or pattern. But these romances, while they supply [Pg 30] the element of plot and adventure most liberally, were deficient in genuine characters. There are no real men and women in them. Moreover, they made no attempt to depict contemporary life as it was. But Sir Roger de Coverley is no personage of romance. He is a hearty, red-blooded, Tory gentleman who lives in Worcestershire. He has no adventure more striking than might naturally befall a country squire who comes up to London for the season once a year. There were scores of just such men in every shire in England. His speech, his habits, his prejudices are all shown us with simple truth. And yet this is done with so much art and humour that Sir Roger is one of the most living persons in our literature. He is as immortal as Hamlet or Julius Cæsar. We know him as well as we know our nearest neighbour; and we like him quite as well as we like most of our neighbours.

Now this was something new in English literature. Sir Roger is the earliest person in English imaginative prose that is really still alive. There are men and women in our poetry before his day—in the drama there is, of course, a great host of them; but in prose literature Sir Roger is the first. Furthermore, the men and women of the drama, even in that comedy of manners which professed to reflect most accurately contemporary society, were almost always drawn with some romantic or satiric exaggeration; but there is no exaggeration in the character of Sir Roger. Here was the beginning of a healthy realism. It was only necessary for Richardson and Fielding, thirty years later, to bring together several such genuine characters into a group, and to show how the incidents of their lives naturally ran into plot or story—and we have a novel.

The original suggestion for the character of Sir Roger seems to have come from Steele, who wrote that account of the Spectator Club (*Spectator*, No. 2) in which the knight first appears. But it is to Addison's keener perception and nicer art that we owe most of those subtle and humorous touches of characterization which make the portrait so real and so human. There is more of movement and incident in Steele's papers, and there is more of sentiment. It is Steele, for example, who tells the story of the Journey to London, and recounts the adventures of the Coverley ancestry; it is Steele, too, who has most to say of the widow. But in the best papers by Addison, like the Visit to the Abbey or the Evening at the Theater, there is hardly a line that does not reveal, in speech, or manner, or notion, some peculiarity of the kindly gentleman we know and love so well. If Steele outlined the portrait, it was left for Addison to elaborate it. Moreover, a careful reading of the papers will show that Steele's conception of the character was slightly different from Addison's. Steele's Sir Roger is whimsical and sentimental, but a man of good sense; not only beloved but respected. Addison dwells rather upon the old knight's rusticity, his old-fashioned, patriarchal notions of society, his ignorance of the town, his obsolete but kindly prejudices. The truth is that in Addison's portrait there is always a trace of covert satire upon the narrow conservatism of the Tory country gentleman of his day. Addison's Sir Roger is amiable and humorous; but he does not represent the party of intelligence and progress—he is not a Whig.

Yet there are no real inconsistencies in the character of Sir Roger. His whimsical humor, his sentiment, his credulity, his benevolence, his amiable though obstinate temper, are all combined in a personality so convincing that we must always think of him as an actual contemporary of the men who created him. He is the typical conservative English country gentleman of the Queen Anne time, not taking kindly to new ideas, but sturdy, honest, order-loving, of large heart and simple manners. To such men as he England owes the permanence of much that is best in her institutions and her national life. As one walks through Westminster Abbey to-day, listening to the same chattering verger that conducted Sir Roger—he has been going his rounds ever since—one almost expects to see again the knight sitting down in the coronation chair, or leaning on Edward Third's sword while he tells the discomfited guide the whole story of the Black Prince out of Baker's Chronicle. If, indeed, we try in any way to bring back to imagination the life of that bygone age, Sir Roger is sure to come to mind at once, at the assizes, at Vauxhall, or, best of all, at home in the country. He is part of that life; as real to our thought as Swift or Marlborough, or as Steele or Addison themselves.

The second issue of *The Spectator* was published on Friday, March 2, 1711. This particular entry, like many others, begins with a quotation, originally written in Latin by Juvenal-“**Ast Alii sex/ Et plures uno conclamant ore**”. Translated in English, it reads: “The other six, however, unanimously cry out to the mouth of one”. This epigraph gives a hint of the subject matter to be broached in the essay. In this particular periodical essay by Richard Steele the members of the eponymous ‘Spectator Club’ are introduced to early 18th century readers. Notably, each of the characters represented a particular section of contemporary English society. But this introduction to the characters is not accomplished in a dramatic fashion. On the contrary, Steele gives a humorous description of each character revealing the quaintness of one or the idiosyncrasy of another. In this endeavour he makes use of the range and diversity of English rhetorical figures to the fullest.

The first in his list is Sir Roger de Coverley-a country gentleman of ‘ancient descent’. He is well known to all the residents of Worcestershire. They know the qualities inherent in him thoroughly. His primary quality is that of gentility, which rouses among readers the expectation of adherence to a set code of behavior, sanctioned by tradition. But in the same breath, Steele refers to the presence of certain ‘peculiarities’ that Sir Roger is possessed of. Notwithstanding these peculiarities in his behavior, nobody considers them as serious drawbacks, since his virtues outdo the peculiarities. In fact, the essayist is of the opinion that the aforementioned “singularities” in the behavior of Sir Roger are nothing but manifestations of his “good sense”. Sir Roger himself does not feel the urgency to rectify his behavior, since he considers the conventions of society, “the manner of the world” to be at fault. But whatever he does, is done with a purity of heart, unconfined by the conventions of the world. Therefore, his readiness to help fellow beings please all without exception. A country-gentleman, Sir Roger visits London from time to time, in keeping with the modes of 18th century life and manners. On these occasions, he takes up residence the fashionable Soho Square locality of London, which further proves his innate joviality of spirit. While the initial description of Sir Roger seems to be suffering from a hint of dullness, Steele enlivens his description by bringing in a purported history of failed romantic interest, in the past life of Sir Roger. Steele mentions that in his youth Sir Roger had been smitten by the beauty of a widow from a neighbouring county. But courting of the lady had come to naught. Steele claims with authority that it was this very incident which had shaken to the core the jovial young gentleman that Sir Roger in his youth had been, altering his habits and disposition forever. Steele recounts how the heartbreak took Sir Roger close to one and a half years to get over with. The permanent scar it left on his psyche manifests itself to this date in his curious sense of dress, as he continues to wear the outmoded coat-and-doublet which had been in fashion during the year he was wooing the aforementioned lady. While the readers are still in awe of Sir Roger’s unwavering dedication, the narrator nonchalantly informs us that since the incident dented his confidence, Sir Roger’s desires have become so much humbler that he often indulges in casual liaisons with beggars and gypsies. Such indiscriminate commingling with social inferiors is unexpected from a gentleman belonging to the stature and repute of Sir Roger. Moreover, in the rigid class hierarchy of England, such behavior would have been considered especially reprehensible as it attempts to unnaturally bridge the carefully-maintained gap between the gentry and the populace. Sir Roger, truthful as he is, makes no secret of the fact, but his virtues are so strong that his friends laugh them away. His amicability, humor and humility make him a favorite everywhere.

Steele then goes on to describe the second member of the Club citing his seniority as the rationale behind the order of arrangement. The epithets Steele employs to designate him are

worthy of attention-‘esteem’, ‘authority’, ‘probity’, ‘wit’ and ‘understanding’. A careful analysis of the terminology reveals the fact that Steele continues with the characteristic of gentility which Sir Roger had also shared. This second member is a lawyer by profession and this obvious reason prevents Steele from revealing his name. This unnamed second member’s character is another study in contradictions- he is an esteemed lawyer but his interests lie in Philosophy and drama. While those embroiled in the province of law are considered the epitome of worldliness, this second member of the Spectator Club represents a curious blend of worldliness and refinement, by cultivating philosophy and drama, sans profit motive. The legal experts from antiquity (such as Longinus and Aristotle) are well known to him, but he hardly ever discusses legal experts of renown (such as Littleton or Cooke). However, Steele cautiously reminds that his fascination for Philosophy and Drama does not, in any way, come in the way of his professional acumen, exemplified by his knowledge of the ‘Orations of Demosthenes and Tully’. Society at large has no knowledge of his Wit, since he does not go about parading them. It is only the circle of his intimate friends that acknowledges the range and variety of his Wit. Commenting on his taste for books, Steele finds it “a little too just for the age”, hinting at a level of frankness and virtuosity in this unnamed lawyer, which is rare in contemporary society. Moreover, his infallible punctuality (as testified by the regularity of his habits and haunts) makes him an oddly likeable character. He is also an impressive conversationalist, precisely because of the fact that his interests are not matters of business. Being highly placed and looked upon with respect, his presence in the theatre-house is noted by the actors on stage, who try to give their best and thus impress him.

The third member of the Club is an illustrious merchant by the name of Sir Andrew Freeport, who is as opinionated as the previous two. However Steele characterizes him as an industrious, tireless and highly experienced individual. In short, he is the epitome of the British entrepreneur in the 18th century. Contemporary England thrived due to its scientific and technological innovations which resulted in quicker and greater production. The annexation of foreign lands under the British crown assisted this process. However, Steele opines against any attempt at territorial annexation through war and believes that it were more smoothly done through union of commercial interest. Subtly, Steele presents the English trader of the day as an exemplary, calm and composed individual who is not trigger-happy. On the contrary, he is a lover of peace who intends to untangle the knots of his life through common-sense and rationality. He prefers diligence to valour and his speech abounds in aphorisms of frugality. The narrator is all praise for Sir Freeport’s strongly held convictions, his unaffected nature and his cool-headed practical approach to things in life. Besides, making acquaintance with him is a pleasing experience since the person described next is Captain Sentry. Like the two earlier character sketches, Steele once again gives a summary of the chief characteristics of the person whose character sketch he is setting out to present. In the case of Captain Sentry the defining features that distinguish him from the rest are “bravery, perception and humility. His modesty overpowering as he attempts to evade public attention. Steele describes Captain Sentry as having been earlier employed in the army in a rank no less than that of Captain. During his years of service, Steele recounts, the Captain had given several proofs of his mettle However he willfully gave up the soldier’s profession since he couldn’t master the art of court intrigues so necessary for making progress in that field. Steele, on behalf of the Captain, laments that nothing in British society is obtained through honesty and perseverance. Presently he looks after his own small estate and he is also the next heir to Sir Roger. Though Captain Sentry hates exhibiting his good qualities, he believes in the maxim: “It is civil cowardice to be backward in asserting what you ought to expect, as it is

a military Fear to be slow in attacking when it is your Duty.” The narrator exhorts this outspokenness in the manner of this ex-soldier.

While the characters described so far (notwithstanding their idiosyncrasies) are steadfast in one way or another, the next—an aged gentleman named Will Honeycomb, is the very embodiment of the fashionable rake. Steele humorously mentions this aspect when he says: “But that our Society may not appear a Set of Humourists unacquainted with the Gallantries and Pleasures of the Age, we have among us the gallant Will Honeycomb”. Though belonging to the upper strata of society and most obviously a gentleman, the epithet “gallant” sticks to the person of Mr Honeycomb. Steele’s penchant for naming characters broadly on the basis of their predominant humour is observable in this instance, too. An easy inheritor of wealth, Mr Honeycomb seems to have resisted the strains of ageing, as he continues to look handsome. Steele classifies Mr Honeycomb as a member of that group of gentlemen who command respect and popularity among the female coterie. As observable with old men and women worldwide, Mr Honeycomb can recount incidents and facts from his distant youth. Since he is a rake, Steele humorously posits, he can recount the origins of specific fashions. He is candid about his several affairs. While other old men of his age keep referring to politics, he keeps referring to fashions. The narrator comments with a sly innuendo: “...his Character, where Women are not concerned, he is an honest worthy Man.” Whenever he participates in conversation, his manner of speaking and the subjects he brings up serve to enliven the conversation. His several anecdotes reveal how certain society ladies of his youth, now better-known as the “Mother of the lordsuch-a-one”, etc, were smitten by the gallantry of some lord from his distant youth. Such conversations might prove to be extremely uncomfortable for ladies now commanding respect and in their maturity.

The last person named is a rare visitor and belongs to the clergy. He does not assert himself like the members described so far. On the contrary, he lends a keener ear to listen to what the others have to say. But once he gets his opportunity to speak, he speaks with authority and earnestness. His discourses mainly concern divinity, which is in sharp contrast to the other members who delight in worldly affairs.

Unit 10(c): *The Spectator* No 10

The 10th entry in the *Spectator* papers, composed by Joseph Addison, was published on Monday, 12th March, 1711. Like most of the other essays in *The Spectator*, this particular entry also commences with an epigraph—this time from Virgil: “Non aliter quàm qui adverso vix flumine lembum/ Remigiis subigit: si brachia fortè remisit” which when translated into simple English, reads—“Boat rowing against the stream with a different well as those who do not/ Oars: if the forces of chance”.

This essay talks about the neoclassical idea of culture and the very aim with which *The Spectator* functions. Addison begins by giving a thorough estimate of the handsome sales figures of his newly begun periodical. Besides giving us a hint of *The Spectator*’s success soon after it was begun, this initial description also tells us a lot about the popularity of periodical publications among the general public in Addison’s day. Grateful to all those who subscribe to his paper, he promises to make their reading a pleasurable experience. His vanity is to be seen in the manner in which he describes his readers as superior to “the thoughtless Herd of their ignorant and unattentive Brethren” .Addison suggests that while those who do not subscribe to his paper occupy their time with fruitless endeavours and thoughtless activities, those who do subscribe to

his paper substantially add to their store of 'cultural capital'. Explicitly Addison states that he aims to "enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality". Thus Addison can be seen here an interventionist, who attempts to engineer morality among the reader-cum-citizens of the day. But being a shrewd writer he understands that such an attempt must be made in a subtle way, since dry moralizings would never attain the desired object. Therefore, he must "enliven Morality with Wit", while avoiding the opposite extreme, as suggested by the rejoinder: "temper Wit with Morality". Lamenting the "vice and folly" which had engulfed many of his contemporaries, Addison promises to safeguard his readers from these. Alluding to Socrates' mythical act of bringing Philosophy to earth from Heaven, Addison pledges to bring through his periodical "Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges" into the public domain. Therefore Addison's intention is decidedly democratizing. In the late 17th and early 18th century, with the widespread availability of secular and rational education, judging who would be the arbiter of high culture had become a hotly debated topic. While social prestige and therefore ability had been traditionally accorded to the gentry-hereditary inheritors of property and prestige, the recipients of liberal and technical education had empowered the middle classes sufficiently to enable them to challenge the conventional superiority of the aristocracy. Addison's stated purpose of bringing philosophic discourse out of limited availability and into the domain of mass culture would further the democratic impulse further. Thus having determined to make the diversion of reading his paper a fruitful one for his readers, Addison also aims to dispel Vice and Folly from their minds (though he laments that these have come to characterize the Age he lives in).

Addison also hints at the beginning of the habit that we in modern times take for granted-reading the day's newspaper while sipping our morning tea. He looks to engage the minds of his readers early in the morning, even as they are sipping the beverage and biting into the first morsels of their breakfast. Manifesting his erudition, Addison next alludes to Sir Francis Bacon-who had likened a worthwhile book to the mythical serpent of Moses that engulfed the Egyptians. Addison says his endeavour is significantly humbler, since he neither wishes nor aims to make other prints extinct through the proliferation of his own. Even so, Joseph Addison berates the other publications of his day as merely presenting readers with fables of foreign lands, or serving to increase animosity about the other countries.

In the next paragraph, he ironically calls himself an idle observer and likens his lot to many in society who have considerable wealth but nothing worthwhile to do on a daily basis:

"the Fraternity of Spectators who live in the World without having anything to do in it; and either by the Affluence of their Fortunes, or Laziness of their Dispositions, have no other Business with the rest of Mankind but to look upon them."

It is to be noted that Addison attempts to sharpen the critical faculties of that section of his readers which considers "the world as theatre" by infusing them with the right judgment. For people who are "altogether unfurnish'd with Ideas, till the Business and Conversation of the Day has supplied them" Addison claims his paper to be especially valuable. With its help they can stop relying on hearsay, rumours and illogical thought processes that obstruct the sharpening of critical faculties. This is Addison's euphemistic expression of confidence regarding the superiority of his publication.

Besides, Addison feels that his periodical would be of special service to the fair sex who (he feels) have nothing more than superficial chores to perform (mostly dressing, beautifying themselves, etc). Though Addison concedes that there are women who do perform more

momentous and worthwhile activities, one can sense Addison's misogyny coming to the fore here. For the rest, reading of this paper regularly would do immense good.

Last but not the least, Addison takes an ironic jibe at his 'friends and well-wishers' who doubt the longevity of Addison's successful running of this paper. For them, Addison makes the promise to stop publication as soon he fails to maintain adequate standards or realizes that his works are becoming dull.

Unit 11: Introduction to Samuel Johnson and *The Rambler* essays

Samuel Johnson: A Short Biographical Sketch

Samuel Johnson was the son of Michael Johnson, a bookseller, and his wife, Sarah. From childhood he suffered from a number of physical afflictions. By his own account, he was born "almost dead," and he early contracted scrofula (tuberculosis of the lymphatic glands). Because of a popular belief that the sovereign's touch was able to cure scrofula (which, for that reason, was also called the king's evil), he was taken to London at the age of 30 months and touched by the queen, whose gold "touch piece" he kept about him for the rest of his life. This was succeeded by various medical treatments that left him with disfiguring scars on his face and neck. He was nearly blind in his left eye and suffered from highly noticeable tics that may have been indications of Tourette syndrome. Johnson was also strong, vigorous, and, after a fashion, athletic. He liked to ride, walk, and swim, even in later life. He was tall and became huge.

In 1717 he entered grammar school in Lichfield. In 1726 Johnson visited his cousin, the urbane Reverend Cornelius Ford in Stourbridge, Worcestershire, who may have provided a model for him. In 1728 Johnson entered Pembroke College, Oxford. He stayed only 13 months, until December 1729, because he lacked the funds to continue. In the following year Johnson became undermaster at Market Bosworth grammar school, a position made untenable by the overbearing and boorish Sir Wolstan Dixie, who controlled appointments. With only £20 inheritance from his father, Johnson left his position with the feeling that he was escaping prison. After failing in his quest for another teaching position, he joined his friend Hector in Birmingham. In 1732 or 1733 he published some essays in *The Birmingham Journal*. Dictating to Hector, he translated into English Joachim Le Grand's translation of the Portuguese Jesuit Jerome Lobo's *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, an account of a Jesuit missionary expedition. Published in 1735, this work shows signs of the mature Johnson. In 1735 Johnson married Elizabeth Porter, a widow 20 years his senior. Convinced that his parents' marital unhappiness was caused by his mother's want of learning, he would not follow their example, choosing instead a woman whom he found both attractive and intelligent. His wife's marriage settlement enabled him to open a school in Edial, near Lichfield, the following year. While at Edial, Johnson began his historical tragedy *Irene*, which dramatizes the love of Sultan Mahomet (Mehmed II) for the lovely Irene, a Christian slave captured in Constantinople. The school soon proved a failure, and he left for London in 1737. In 1738 Johnson began his long association with *The Gentleman's Magazine*, often considered the first modern magazine. He soon contributed poetry and then prose, including panegyrics on Edward Cave, the magazine's proprietor, and another contributor, the learned Elizabeth Carter. In 1738 and 1739 he published a series of satiric works that attacked the government of Sir Robert Walpole and even the Hanoverian monarchy: *London* (his first major poem), *Marmor Norfolciense*, and *A Compleat Vindication of the Licensers of the Stage*. *London* is an "imitation" of the Roman satirist Juvenal's third satire. Thales, the poem's main speaker, bears some

resemblance to the poet Richard Savage, of whom Johnson knew and with whom he may have become friendly at this time. Before he leaves the corrupt metropolis for Wales, Thales rails against the pervasive deterioration of London (and English) life, evident in such ills as masquerades, atheism, the excise tax, and the ability of foreign nations to offend against “English honour” with impunity. The most famous line in the poem (and the only one in capitals) is: “SLOW RISES WORTH, BY POVERTY DEPRESSED,” which may be taken as Johnson’s motto at this time. In 1739 Johnson published a translation and annotation of the Swiss philosopher Jean-Pierre de Crousaz’s *Commentary* on Pope’s philosophical poem *An Essay on Man*. About this time Johnson tried again to obtain a position as a schoolteacher. His translations and magazine writings barely supported him; a letter to Cave is signed “impransus,” signifying that he had gone without dinner. Despite his claim that “no man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money,” he never made a hard bargain with a bookseller and often received relatively little payment, even for large projects. From 1741 to 1744 Johnson’s most substantial contribution to *The Gentleman’s Magazine* was a series of speeches purporting to represent the actual debates in the House of Commons.

In the early 1740s Johnson continued his strenuous work for *The Gentleman’s Magazine*; collaborated with William Oldys, antiquary and editor, on a catalog of the great Harleian Library; helped Dr. Robert James, his Lichfield schoolfellow, with *A Medicinal Dictionary*; and issued proposals for an edition of Shakespeare. His *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* (1745), intended as a preliminary sample of his work, was his first significant Shakespeare criticism. In 1746 he wrote *The Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* and signed a contract for *A Dictionary of the English Language*. His major publication of this period was *An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage, Son of the Earl Rivers* (1744). In 1749 Johnson published *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, his most impressive poem as well as the first work published with his name. It is a panoramic survey of the futility of human pursuit of greatness and happiness. Like *London*, the poem is an imitation of one of Juvenal’s satires, but it emphasizes the moral over the social and political themes of Juvenal. Some of the definitions Johnson later entered under “vanity” in his *Dictionary* suggest the range of meaning of his title, including “emptiness,” “uncertainty,” “fruitless desire, fruitless endeavour,” “empty pleasure; vain pursuit; idle show; unsubstantial enjoyment; petty object of pride,” and “arrogance.” He portrays historical figures, mainly from England and continental Europe, alternating them with human types, to show that all are subject to the same disappointment of their desires. *The Vanity of Human Wishes* is imbued with the Old Testament message of Ecclesiastes that “all is vanity” and replaces Juvenal’s Stoic virtues with the Christian virtue of “patience.” The poem surpasses any of Johnson’s other poems in its richness of imagery and powerful conciseness. Johnson’s connections to the theatre in these years included writing several prologues, one for Garrick’s farce *Lethe* in 1740 and one for the opening of the Drury Lane Theatre. Garrick, now its manager, returned the favours. Early in 1749 Johnson’s play *Irene* was at last performed. Thanks to Garrick’s production, which included expensive costumes, an excellent cast (including Garrick himself), and highly popular afterpieces for the last three performances, the tragedy ran a respectable nine nights.

With *The Rambler* (1750–52), a twice-weekly periodical, Johnson entered upon the most successful decade of his career. He wrote over 200 numbers, and stories abound of his finishing an essay while the printer’s boy waited at the door; in his last essay he confessed to “the anxious

employment of a periodical writer.” The essays cover a wide range of subjects. A large number of them appropriately stress daily realities; others are devoted to literature, including criticism and the theme of authorship. Whatever their topic, Johnson intended his essays to “inculcate wisdom or piety” in conformity with Christianity. In tone these essays are far more serious than those of his most important predecessor, Joseph Addison, published in *The Spectator* (1711–12; 1714). Johnson himself ranked them highly among his achievements, commenting “My other works are wine and water; but my *Rambler* is pure wine.” Johnson’s wife Elizabeth was a great admirer of *The Rambler* essays and incidentally died just three days after the last issue of *The Rambler* was published.

A Dictionary of the English Language was published in two volumes in 1755, six years later than planned but remarkably quickly for so extensive an undertaking. The degree of master of arts, conferred on him by the University of Oxford for his *Rambler* essays and the Dictionary, was proudly noted on the title page. Johnson henceforth would be known in familiar 18th-century style as “Dictionary Johnson” or “The Rambler.” There had been earlier English dictionaries, but none on the scale of Johnson’s. In addition to giving etymologies, not the strong point of Johnson and his contemporaries, and definitions, in which he excelled, Johnson illustrated usage with quotations drawn almost entirely from writing from the Elizabethan period to his own time, though few living authors were quoted.

From 1756 onward Johnson wrote harsh criticism and satire of England’s policy in the Seven Years’ War (1756–63) fought against France (and others) in North America, Europe, and India. This work appeared initially in a new journal he was editing, *The Literary Magazine*, where he also published his biography of the Prussian king, Frederick II (the Great). He also contributed important book reviews when reviewing was still in its infancy. His biting sardonic dissection of a dilettantish and complacent study of the nature of evil and of human suffering, *A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil*, by the theological writer Soame Jenyns, may well be the best review in English during the 18th century. Johnson’s busiest decade was concluded with yet another series of essays, called *The Idler*. Lighter in tone and style than those of *The Rambler*, its 104 essays appeared from 1758 to 1760 in a weekly newspaper, *The Universal Chronicle*. While not admired as greatly as *The Rambler*, Johnson’s last essay series contained many impressive numbers.

Johnson’s essays included numerous short fictions, but his only long fiction is *Rasselas* (originally published as *The Prince of Abissinia: A Tale*), which he wrote in 1759, during the evenings of a single week, in order to be able to pay for the funeral of his mother. This “Oriental tale,” a popular form at the time, explores and exposes the futility of the pursuit of happiness, a theme that links it to *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. Prince Rasselas, weary of life in the Happy Valley, where ironically all are dissatisfied, escapes with his sister and the widely traveled poet Imlac to experience the world and make a thoughtful “choice of life.” Yet their journey is filled with disappointment and disillusionment. They examine the lives of men in a wide range of occupations and modes of life in both urban and rural settings—rulers and shepherds, philosophers, scholars, an astronomer, and a hermit. They discover that all occupations fail to bring satisfaction. Rulers are deposed. The shepherds exist in grubby ignorance, not pastoral ease. The Stoic’s philosophy proves hollow when he experiences personal loss. The hermit, miserable in his solitude, leaves his cell for Cairo. In his “conclusion in which nothing is concluded,” Johnson satirizes the wish-fulfilling daydreams in which all indulge. His major characters resolve to substitute the “choice of eternity” for the “choice of life,” and to return to Abyssinia (but not the Happy Valley) on their circular journey.

Johnson never again had to write in order to raise funds. In 1762 he was awarded a pension of £300 a year, “not,” as Lord Bute, the prime minister, told him, “given you for anything you are to do, but for what you have done.” This in all likelihood meant not only his literary accomplishments but also his opposition to the Seven Years’ War, which the new king, George III, and his prime minister had also opposed.

In 1763 Johnson met the 22-year-old James Boswell, who would go on to make him the subject of the best-known and most highly regarded biography in English. The first meeting with this libertine son of a Scottish laird and judge was not auspicious, but Johnson quickly came to appreciate the ingratiating and impulsive young man. Boswell kept detailed journals, published only in the 20th century, which provided the basis for his biography of Johnson and also form his own autobiography.

Johnson participated actively in clubs. In 1764 he and his close friend Sir Joshua Reynolds founded The Club (later known as The Literary Club), which became famous for the distinction of its members. In 1765 Johnson established a friendship that soon enabled him to call another place “home.” Henry Thrale, a wealthy brewer and member of Parliament for Southwark, and his lively and intelligent wife, Hester, opened their country house at Streatham to him and invited him on trips to Wales and, in 1775, to France, his only tour outside Great Britain. Their friendship and hospitality gave the 56-year-old Johnson a new interest in life. Following her husband’s death in 1781 and her marriage to her children’s music master, Gabriel Piozzi, Hester Thrale’s and Johnson’s close friendship came to an end. His letters to Mrs. Thrale, remarkable for their range and intimacy, helped make him one of the great English letter writers.

The pension Johnson had received in 1762 had freed him from the necessity of writing for a living, but it had not released him from his obligation to complete the Shakespeare edition, for which he had taken money from subscribers. Contemporary poet Charles Churchill satirized Johnson for the delay in bringing out the volume. The edition finally appeared in eight volumes in 1765. Johnson edited and annotated the text and wrote a preface, which is his greatest work of literary criticism. As editor and annotator he sought to establish the text, freed from later corruptions, and to explain diction that by then had become obsolete and obscure. Johnson’s approach was to immerse himself in the books Shakespeare had read—his extensive reading for his *Dictionary* eased this task—and to examine the early editions as well as those of his 18th-century predecessors. His annotations are often shrewd, though his admiration reveals at times different concerns from those of some of his contemporaries and of later scholars.

In his “Preface” Johnson addressed several critical issues. For one, he vigorously defends Shakespeare against charges of failing to adhere to the Neoclassical doctrine of the dramatic unities of time, place, and action. Johnson alertly observes that time and place are subservient to the mind: since the audience does not confound stage action with reality, it has no trouble with a shift in scene from Rome to Alexandria. Some critics had made similar points before, but Johnson’s defense was decisive. He also questions the need for purity of dramatic genre. In defending Shakespearian tragicomedy against detractors, he asserts that “there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature.” Echoing Hamlet, Johnson claims that Shakespeare merits praise, above all, as “the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life.” He goes on to say that “in the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual: in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species” and that “Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men.” These comments inveigh

against the rigid notions of decorum upheld by critics, such as Voltaire, who would not allow kings to be drunkards or senators to be buffoons. Johnson's concern for "general nature" means that he is not much interested in accidental traits of a character, such as the "Romanness" of Julius Caesar or Brutus, but in traits that are common to all humanity.

In 1765 Johnson received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Trinity College, Dublin, and 10 years later he was awarded the Doctor of Civil Laws from the University of Oxford. He never referred to himself as Dr. Johnson, though a number of his contemporaries did, and Boswell's consistent use of the title in *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* made it popular. The completion of the Shakespeare edition left Johnson free to write by choice, and one such choice was his secret collaboration with Robert Chambers, professor of English law at the University of Oxford from 1766 to 1773. While it is difficult to determine just how much of Chambers' lectures Johnson may have written, his help was clearly substantial, and the skilled editor was valued by the dilatory professor.

In the early 1770s Johnson wrote a series of political pamphlets supporting positions favourable to the government but in keeping with his own views. These have often appeared reactionary to posterity but are worth considering on their own terms. *The False Alarm* (1770) supported the resolution of the House of Commons not to readmit one of its members, the scandalous John Wilkes, who had been found guilty of libel. The pamphlet ridiculed those who thought the case precipitated a constitutional crisis. *Thoughts on the Late Transactions Respecting Falkland's Islands* (1771) argued against a war with Spain over who should become "the undisputed lords of tempest-beaten barrenness." This pamphlet, his most-admired and least-attacked, disputes the "feudal gabble" of the earl of Chatham and the complaints of the pseudonymous political controversialist who wrote the "Junius" letters.

The Patriot (1774) was designed to influence an upcoming election. Johnson had become disillusioned in the 1740s with those members of the political opposition who attacked the government on "patriotic" grounds only to behave similarly once in power. This essay examines expressions of false patriotism and includes in that category justifications of "the ridiculous claims of American usurpation," the subject of his longest tract, *Taxation No Tyranny* (1775). The title summarizes his position opposing the American Continental Congress, which in 1774 had passed resolutions against taxation by England, perceived as oppression, especially since the colonies had no representation in Parliament. Johnson argues that the colonists had not been denied representation but rather had willingly left the country where they had votes, that England had expended vast sums on the colonies, and that they were rightly required to support the home country. The tract became notorious in the colonies, contributing considerably to the caricature of Johnson the arch-Tory. Yet this view is too simplistic. His rhetorical question to the colonists "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of Negroes?" can be traced in large part to a principled and consistent stance against colonial oppression.

In 1773 Johnson set forth on a journey to the Hebrides. Given his age, ailments, and purported opinion of the Scots, Johnson may have seemed a highly unlikely traveler to this distant region, but in the opening pages of his *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) he confessed to a long-standing desire to make the trip and the inducement of having Boswell as his companion. He was propelled by a curiosity to see strange places and study modes of life unfamiliar to him. His book, a superb contribution to 18th-century travel literature, combines historical information with what would now be considered sociological and anthropological observations about the lives of common people. Johnson's last great work, *Prefaces*,

Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets was conceived modestly as short prefatory notices to an edition of English poetry. When Johnson was approached by some London booksellers in 1777 to write what he thought of as “little Lives, and little Prefaces, to a little edition of the English Poets,” he readily agreed. He loved anecdote and “the biographical part” of literature best of all. The project, however, expanded in scope; Johnson’s prefaces alone filled the first 10 volumes (1779–81), and the poetry grew to 56 volumes.

Throughout much of his adult life Johnson suffered from physical ailments as well as depression (“melancholy”). After the loss of two friends, Henry Thrale in 1781 and Robert Levett in 1782, and the conclusion of *The Lives of the Poets*, his health deteriorated. Above all, his chronic bronchitis and “dropsy” (edema), a swelling of his legs and feet, caused great discomfort. In 1783 he suffered a stroke. He died on December 13 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Though we know a great deal about Samuel Johnson the empiricist, the cultural anthropologist, the political skeptic, and the gloomy poet, little is known about his role as a moralist. Donald Greene’s book *Samuel Johnson* (1970) discusses Johnson the political writer for more than forty pages, but discussion on the 337 essays by Johnson published in *The Rambler* (1750-1752), *The Adventurer* (1753-1754) and *The Idler* (1758-1760) occupy a mere 5 pages in Greene’s book. However, in the 2nd half of the 20th century several writers, such as Walter Jackson Bates (in his 1955 book titled *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson*) have started paying greater critical attention to *The Rambler* in trying to assess Johnson's luminous intelligence more completely.

The Rambler: An Introduction

The Rambler was published on Tuesdays and Saturdays from 1750 to 1752. It was Johnson's most consistent and sustained work in the English language. Though similar in name to preceding publications such as *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*, Johnson made his periodical unique by using a style of prose which differed from that of the time period. The most popular publications of the day were written in the common or colloquial language of the people whereas *The Rambler* was written in elevated prose. As was then common for the type of publication, the subject matter was confined only to the imagination of the author (and the sale of the publication); typically, however, *The Rambler* discussed subjects such as morality, literature, society, politics, and religion. Johnson included quotes and ideas in his publication from Renaissance humanists such as Desiderius Erasmus and René Descartes. His writings in *The Rambler* are considered to be neoclassical.

Older studies of *The Rambler* treat the work as a convenient repository of Johnsonian dicta from which one can deduce “the cornerstones” of his morality. But more recent scholarship points out a cardinal flaw of the older approach, namely that it took no account of the author's apparent and (to some) alarming habit of vacillating, even on issues of great moment, and even within individual essays. Paul Fussell has argued that we can understand *The Rambler* only if we think of Johnson, “caught short at deadline time,” “working things out ad hoc from page to page.” “Where he cannot resolve inconsistencies, he ignores them,” writes Fussell, “where he cannot ignore them, he embraces them. Leopold Damrosch, Jr. detects two “rhetorical modes” in the *Rambler* essays, the first of which is designed “to jolt our complacency by a series of reversals,” and the second “to deepen our understanding by a steady progression of reflections which are held together by association more than by logic. Patrick O Flaherty in his essay ‘Towards an

Understanding of Johnson's *Rambler*' comments that there are fallacies inherent in the approaches adopted both by Fussell and Damrosch. Flaherty in his essay intends to re-focus attention upon the weighty and complicated purpose behind Johnson's writing.

And Johnson's purpose is clearly visible in *Rambler* 208, where he states that his "principal design" was "to inculcate wisdom or piety. To Johnson it appeared that the knowledge he was leading men towards was the most important kind for them to acquire. He thought that men are placed on earth to learn to do good and avoid evil. Repeatedly in *The Rambler* he advised readers to turn away from "remote and unnecessary subjects" to "moral enquiries" and "the various modes of virtue. In Essay No 320 of *The Rambler* Johnson tries to grapple as honestly as he knows with the problems inherent in leading a moral life in the world of men. This involves probing into the complexities of human motivation and "the labyrinth of complicated passions" (IV, 41) in order to detect and uncover the sources of human error. Johnson repeatedly says that he knows the difficulties of making such a scrutiny of the human heart. In essay after essay he tries to explore the configurations and ramifications of a difficult subject and, quite often, giving the impression of vacillating. He will also be conscious of what he wrote in preceding essays, and he may want to correct or modify views which seem to him in retrospect to have been stated with too much appearance of confidence. Though wealth and power may be possessed by others, only authors possess the power of conferring "the honours of a lasting name" upon their fellow men. Johnson emphasizes that the power brings with it a heavy responsibility, requiring of authors "the most vigilant caution and scrupulous justice."

To uncover some of the other potential sources of ambiguity and inconsistency in *The Rambler*, we need to look away from particular essays to the moral vision which pervades the work as a whole. Johnson's perception of man's moral life in these essays is generally of something threatened from within and without and maintained only by perpetual vigilance. The vast majority of men, he writes in No. 70, are in "a kind of equipoise between good and ill" and require only "a very small addition of weight" to be moved in one direction or the other. This sense of the precariousness of virtue is strikingly conveyed in *The Rambler* by a set of three recurring images, each of them commonplace in Christian writing but of interest here in the insistent reinforcement they provide to Johnson's theme. The most conspicuous of these images is of the heart (or mind) as a fortress or city under siege. The fortress image occurs often, expressing poetically Johnson's vision of the embattled heart, preyed upon by its own longings and vanities. A similar recurring image is that of the wanderer, trying to walk "with circumspection and steadiness in the right path at an equal distance between the extremes of error, threatened by "snares", "ambush", "asperities" and deceptively comfortable groves that seem irresistibly pleasant. The third recurring image is that of human life as a ship lost on a stormy ocean, subject to the vicissitudes of wind and tide. The more deeply Johnson burrows into human motivations to expose for men the innumerable strategies and vanities which enable them to live with error, the keener this awareness becomes of the frailty of virtue and the closer he is drawn to an extreme fastidiousness. The reader can be forgiven if he thinks at certain points in *The Rambler* that leading a moral life is too risky and toilsome for mere humans.

Thus he advises young people to enter the world with a policy of "prudent distrust," for the "dangers" to which the "converse of mankind" exposes them are "numerous," and "there is no ambition however petty, no wish however absurd, that by indulgence will not be enabled to

overpower the influence of virtue. Such stern morality, verging on over-scrupulousness, is characteristic of the *Rambler*, but it is only one of his two prevailing moods. Modifying and humanizing this severe attitude is another side of Johnson which is also expressed throughout the work. This is Johnson the compassionate and forgiving observer of men. It is this quality of mercy in him which emerges in No. 63 when, after having earlier repeatedly warned readers against the dangers of being dissatisfied and restless, he writes that it is natural for mankind to be restless and that this condition deserves "pity" and may even "admit some excuse". The strict moralist in him more than once warns against wasting time on trifles and ridicules collectors of useless oddities; and yet he also defends such collectors, since "he who does his best, is always to be distinguished from one who does nothing. Alongside warnings about the dangers inherent in deviating from the beaten track in even trivial ways, he can exclaim "what is there which may not be perverted?" and caution readers against "too much" refining their "delicacy". These two halves of Johnson's concerns jostle with one another throughout *The Rambler*.

Death is a subject to which he is obsessively drawn throughout *The Rambler*. According to Johnson every man should ideally begin his day "with a serious reflection that he is born to die." This will destroy "that vehemence of eagerness" after earthly possessions, make us moderate our desires, contract our designs, and at the same time urge us to do well what we know we are capable of doing (No 17).

What we see in *The Rambler* is a moralist who would have men be perfect in conflict with an onlooker who knew the extent of men's imperfection and felt pity for their suffering. Johnson recognized that many of the problems facing his readers were beyond his powers to solve: the heaviness of time, the secret mortifications of defeated hope, the limits placed for whatever reason on the extent of human knowledge. His pity, his habit of withdrawing from unequivocal moral stances within essays and from essay to essay, expresses his unwillingness to make heavier by chastisement the already burdensome life of men. But the habit also shows once again Johnson's recognition of life's irreducible complexity. Johnson looked abroad at the world and saw what any observer must see: that experience cannot be exhausted or explained by formulae; that hope is both therapeutic and deceptive; that prudence is sometimes a wise policy, sometimes a foolish one; that suffering is both ennobling and degrading. As Imlac perceived in Rasselas, inconsistencies when imputed to man "may both be true". *The Rambler* mirrors, rather than resolves, this complexity. Johnson's reluctance to try to reduce life to a system also shows humility. To take a "distinct and comprehensive" view of "human life," he admitted candidly, "with all its intricacies of combination and varieties of connection, is beyond the power of mortal intelligence".

Johnson believed that the only cure for pain was palliative, not radical; he felt that life was everywhere a state in which there was much to be endured and little to be enjoyed; he thought the desire for happiness in this world is vain, the only true happiness available to man being non-earthly; he believed that man's lot was to suffer. Parts of various Rambler essays can be found to support all of these grim dicta, but a reading of the whole work leaves one with a sense of the utter inadequacy of such phrases to contain the richness and variety of Johnson's commentary. On the whole, despite gloomy interludes, Johnson impresses one as less a despondent, down-at-the-mouth prophet of doom than a humanist thinker, interested in improving the lot of men and advancing civilization.

Unit 12 (a): *The Rambler* No. 4

The 4th number of *The Rambler* papers was published on Saturday, 31 March 1750. In characteristic Johnsonian fashion it begins with an epigraph, this time from Horace, where the Roman lyricist from the age of Augustus Caesar, in his book *Ars Poetica* advocates the fusion of “profit” and “delight”.

Johnson begins the essay by looking at the genre of prose fiction, which was gaining popularity in eighteenth century England. Johnson points out that one of the reasons behind the popularity of this genre is the semblance of truth that it exudes, containing interesting accounts of accidents probable in the real world. Moreover the human characters that one encounters in these works of fiction are more or less in keeping with the real personages that surround us in human society.

However realistic these prose narratives may be, they do contain certain elements more properly associated with the genre of romance. The narrative strategy of novelists is such that they arouse and maintain a level of curiosity among the readers without dragging in fanciful elements commonly featured in the genre of romance. Strategies such as epic machinery or ‘deus-ex-machina’ are rarely, if ever, introduced to extricate heroes from danger. Neither giants, nor knights in shining armour, not even fanciful castles in never-never lands are staples of novels. At this point Johnson alludes to a remark by Scaliger (Italian scholar and physician who employed the techniques and discoveries of Renaissance humanism to defend Aristotelianism against the new learning) on Potanus (likely to be a poet referenced in Scaliger's *Seven Books about Poetry* or *Poetices Libri Septem* of 1591). Scaliger alleges that the poetry of Potanus is full of stock pastoral images featuring lilies, roses, dryads and satyrs. These recur in his poetry time and again, giving the semblance of beauty and artfulness to his works. But Scaliger debates that these are merely props that superficially exult his works without enhancing the core of literariness in them.

Johnson feels genuinely amazed to contemplate how such works featuring stock patterns and strategies could retain popular acclaim for such a long duration. However, the continued acceptability of such strategies among readers ensures writers’ adherence to these tried and tested techniques. Quoting Horace once again, Johnson clarifies that readers’ persistent acceptance places “a greater burden on the less of forgiveness”. In fact readers have become so accustomed to these strategies that they can trace the slightest deviations from these norms, if and when writers introduce innovations. Referring to an incident in the life of ancient Greek painter Apelles, Johnson reminds how a shoemaker once censured the former for ill-executing a slipper in one of his paintings. Through this reference Johnson intends to emphasize upon the point that those who have come to recognize a particular form as the standard become highly sensitive to any deviations from the norm.

Returning to the topic of contemporary novelists, Johnson states that compliance to the tastes of readers is not the chief concern of writers. Novelists of Johnson’s day pandered chiefly to the tastes of young impressionable readers who considered the novelistic discourse as predominantly moralistic. According to Johnson novelists take full advantage of this fact to impress upon the pliant minds of their readers “every false suggestion and partial account”. One cannot help notice how Johnson carefully builds his argument, to subvert the authority novelists wield in the public sphere of Johnson’s day.

Next Johnson reminds us by referring to an unnamed ancient authority on writers and their responsibilities, how every writer should be careful in presenting their material in the public

domain, especially when the readers concerned are young. This is because young readers being impressionable are susceptible to “unjust prejudices, perverse opinions, and incongruous combinations of images”.

Romances, which predominated in an earlier era, featured incidents so distant from the intercourse of daily life that readers were safe from imbibing values from these texts and applying them in their personal and social lives. Readers were free to amuse themselves with the ups and downs in the fates of “heroes and ...traitors, deliverers and persecutors” without running the risk of being influenced by them adversely. The characters of romance acted upon the basis of a value system intrinsic to the make-believe world of romance, lying outside the aegis of lived human reality. But even romances were read voraciously by the youth, whose impressionable minds were susceptible to look upon the heroes of romance as idols and the travails they faced and overcame heroically as admirable.

Given the immense power of example, which readers are likely to emulate, Johnson opines that they are more potent than dry instructions of morality or words of advice. Therefore, Johnson would have writers of fictional narratives choose incidents in such a manner that only the best and morally superior incidents be allowed to feature in their works. This would ensure that even if readers are swayed by their attractiveness and try to emulate such fantastic deeds, they would be emulating virtue rather than vice. Johnson sounds like an apostle of neoclassic decorum in these lines.

Next, Johnson points out how authors stand at an advantageous position since they are at liberty to pick and choose which incidents they would feature in their narratives and which ones they would omit. With regard to this he compares writers to a diamond; diamonds may be artfully polished and placed strategically in order to maximize their luster. Similarly authors may so choose material and arrange them that attention of the readers may be attracted and maintained suitably.

Johnson, following the neoclassic school, reminds that imitation of nature is the ultimate aim of art. But Johnson places a caveat on this dictum by claiming that only those parts of nature should be preferably imitated which bring about an affinity towards virtue in the minds of readers. Though representing life in general, art would be gainfully employed only if those sections of life are imitated which are neither “discoloured by passion”, nor “deformed by wickedness”. Johnson fails to discover any use in such descriptions of life which paint the world in profligate colours. Thus Johnson considers it unwise to portray the entirety of mankind as a mirror in art and literature.

Rather, while describing men and manners, such accounts should ideally be omitted, which would rather “make men cunning than good”. However, even if such details must be provided in fictional accounts, proper care need be taken by the authors to portray them in a negative light, so that readers may learn to distinguish good from evil, the imitable from the disreputable. In other words, the purpose of literature would be truly served if the authors take proper care, thus infusing in readers the ability to identify and segregate that part of human behavior which must be shunned. Johnson the moralist predominates here once again.

Johnson says that there are several writers who so mingle the reprehensible and the imitable that good and evil lose their distinctive qualities. In such cases neither does vice remain abhorrent, nor does virtue retain its merit. Johnson here reminds us that in practical life we are likely to meet people who are “splendidly wicked”, whose crimes are suitably hidden by the gloss of charisma. Johnson finds such people as agents of corruption in every age. However,

Johnson finds that such instances are exceptional and must be omitted from descriptions, as far as practicable.

Johnson in the concluding paragraph admits that certain virtues are inalienably connected to their corresponding faults and one cannot be mentioned without mentioning the other. In this regard Johnson quotes from an observation of Jonathan Swift, to conclude that men are “grateful in the same degree as they are resentful.”

Unit 12 (b): *The Rambler* No. 60

The 60th essay of *The Rambler* papers was published on October 13, 1750. It begins with two epigraphs—one by Horace and the other by Francis. The one by Horace, if translated into plain English, reads: “what is fair, what is foul, what is helpful, what is not, more plainly and better than Chrysippus¹ or Crantor²?” The second one by Philip Francis exalts the work of the Greek poet Homer, whose poetry, he claims, combines “the beautiful and the base”, and assimilates vice and virtue more fruitfully than all the “sober sages of the schools”.

Johnson begins his essay by emphasizing upon the role of the imagination in evoking empathy for the others. The power of the imagination is so great that it transports the reader momentarily from his present, real existence to the imagined locus of the person whose ecstasy or vicissitude he is reading about. This power of the imagination which thus transports lies nascent in the mind of the reader and may only be unlocked by a writer of supreme capability. When we read historical accounts featuring the rise or fall of empires, we are hardly ever led to empathize with the fate of their kings and emperors. Whatever little interest is evoked comes not because we empathize with the human actors on the stage of life, but because we are dazzled by their glamour and grandeur or appalled by their crookedness. On the contrary when one reads a tale of love, even the mind of one generally accustomed to worldly pursuits starts fluttering in hope. Therefore, Johnson comes to the decision that it is only the lives of individual beings that are successful in arousing genuine interest amongst readers. Thence, Johnson reaches the conclusion that the form of the biography is the only one “worthy of cultivation”. The biography may be considered a particularized historical narrative chiefly focusing on the trajectory of a single person’s fate, as opposed to generalized history; it is precisely because of this reason that the former attracts us irresistibly, while the effect of the latter remains inane. Historical narratives (other than biography) involve the fates of too many individuals and include too many incidents. Therefore the reader fails to draw any useful moral lesson applicable to his life as an individual. Moreover, quoting the Roman historian Pliny, Johnson shows us how the quotidian incidents in the lives of commoners differ from the momentous events described in the narratives of history. Johnson opines that the life of every human being, apart from the obvious similarities among them, contains something or the other that is unique—since every human being is different from the other. Therefore, there is always something to learn from the life of each individual. However, this individuality also contains a universality since despite dissimilarities, every human being is buoyed by hope, cribbed by fear and doubt, swayed by love and often trapped by desire and seduction.

¹ Chrysippus of Soli was a Greek Stoic philosopher (and a student of the Stoic School of Cleanthes), who excelled in logic, the theory of knowledge, ethics, and physics. He created an original system of propositional logic in order to better understand the workings of the universe and role of humanity within it.

² Crantor was a Greek philosopher, of the Old Academy, probably born around the middle of the 4th century BC, at Soli in Cilicia.

Next Dr Johnson questions the validity of a widely-held belief among the mass of people, namely that the lives lived by the majority of people engaged in various professions, deemed unheroic, are futile, irrespective of the success they achieve in their respective lives. He questions the basis of such assumptions, stating that this “notion arises from false measures of excellence and dignity, and must be eradicated by considering that... what is of most use is of most value”. While he is not against pomposity and grandeur, he denies the possibility of them becoming the sole criteria for adjudicating virtue or credit. According to Johnson, they are mere “appendages” which can heighten the sense of beauty and credit, rather than being the creator of the same. That attribute is reserved solely for such agencies as virtue and prudence. Quoting Thuanus (French historian, book collector and president of the Parlement de Paris) Johnson explicates how his frankness about his personal life revealed his earnestness and has endeared him to readers of posterity.

Johnson now moves towards a different line or argument, stating that personal anecdotes (whatever be the manner in which we read them) always carry with themselves a significance greater than public occurrences. Alluding to Salust (Roman historian cum politician of the first century BC) and his book *The Conspiracy of Catiline*, Johnson corroborates his argument by showing how the aforementioned work describes something as trivial and personal as the speed of one’s walking as an important indicator of the functions of his brain. Next he alludes to the German Lutheran Reformer Philip Melancthon and his extreme punctuality in every aspect of his life, a detail which has superseded every other regarding his life, activities and contribution since it was this excessive stress on punctuality that ruined his health and led to his premature demise.

However, the art of the biography, according to Johnson, often suffers due to the fact that the author allotted with the task of compiling the biography is technically or temperamentally unsuited to the task. Johnson differentiates between the mere chronicle representation of historical facts and timeline with respect to the lives of individuals and the biography proper. Those who present the former merely collect the dry facts without narrativizing the incidents properly. According to Johnson only proper narrativization results in a biography which rivets the attention of the reader and thus associates him with the glories and vicissitudes of the character whose life is described. Johnson focuses upon the importance of personal anecdotes in enlivening a biographical narrative. Though sometimes these biographers do add certain anecdotes from the lives of the characters described, these details are unimportant and skimmed carelessly, without careful reading or understanding, from the wealth of details available about the given person’s life. For instance he refers to the Tickell’s biography of Addison where the biographer has mentioned the irregular heart-beat of Addison. Johnson comments that even after several careful readings he has failed to understand the significance of this particular detail to the scheme of the biography.

In the final two paragraphs Johnson attempts to point out the reasons why most biographies fail to achieve their intended effect. The first of them is the time gap between the relevance of the personality (whose biography is to be composed) and the time when it is actually composed. If the composition of the same is begun after a substantial time has elapsed, the narrative would be free from bias and dispute, since the biographer, writing in retrospect, would be able to take better measure of the person in question and his contribution. But due to that very reason interest of the readers in the concerned person tends to decrease. Johnson explicitly states that “the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind”, which tend to lose significance once the heat of the moment has cooled off. Here he is pointing at the

shortness of public memory. Besides, the person composing the biography at a later date is naturally prone to draw too many conclusions from the life and activities, especially with the passage of time in between.

But simultaneously, biographers who write before allowing passage of substantial amount of time run the risk of colouring the biography with their personal prejudices. Consequently, fidelity-a key feature of the art of biography, is sacrificed. In several cases, the biographer is so biased towards the personage whose biography he intends to compose, that he conceals the unpalatable details regarding the character whose biography he is composing. Certain biographers curiously feel it their duty to dissemble the shortcomings of their friends, even when the exposure of those would be innocuous. This fallacy leads to the writing of biographies where the protagonist is hardly delineated from the others, thereby diluting and defeating the intended result. In this context, Johnson quotes from Sir Matthew Hale (a pre eminent justice under both Cromwell and Charles II. His works on law and legal procedures became well known after his death) to show how this ideal judge, whenever he felt sympathetic towards a criminal, reminded himself that he needed to sympathize with the law (and by extension his country) in equal measure. Through the reference to Hale, Johnson drives home the point that biographers need to care not only for the historical personage (whom they are writing about), but also for the genre they are writing in-which has its own ethics and conventions.

Suggested Reading

1. *The Commerce of Everyday Life: Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*-edited by Erin Mackie
(Washington University)
2. *Telling People What to Think: Early Eighteenth Century Periodicals from The Review to The Rambler*-
Edited by J.A. Downie and Thomas N Corns (Routledge Publishing House)
3. *Urban Enlightenment and the Eighteenth Century Periodical Essay: Transatlantic Retrospects*-Richard Squibbs (Palgrave Macmillan)
4. *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century: Anxious Employment*-Iona Italia (Routledge)
5. An analysis of the styles of Addison and Steele in the *Spectator* papers-Zelma Inez Turner, Atlanta University.
6. *In Mind of Johnson: A Study of Johnson's The Rambler*-Philip Davis (The Athlone Press)
7. 'Johnson and His 'Readers' in the Epistolary *Rambler* Essays'-Manushag N. Powell
8. 'Excellence in Biography: *Rambler* No. 60 and Johnson's Early Biographies'-John J. Burke Jr.

Assignment

1. How does Samuel Johnson characterize the ideal biographer in *Rambler* No 60?
2. Why does Johnson consider the biography as the only literary form worthy of cultivation? What is Johnson's idea regarding the budding genre of the novel, in the 18th century? How does he distinguish it from the form of the romance?
3. Comment on Johnson's moral intention behind the *Rambler* essays.

4. Discuss *Spectator* No 10 as an instance of attempted democratization of the sphere of literary and Philosophical discourse.
5. Discuss the art of characterization as evident in *Spectator* No 2.

Block IV: 18th Century Non-Fictional English Prose

Unit 13(a): The Discourse on Taste and the Development of Aesthetics

Unit 13(b): David Hume-A Brief Introduction

Unit 14: 'Of The Standard of Taste'-David Hume

Unit 15(a): History of the Sublime

Unit 15(b): Edmund Burke-An Introduction

Unit 16(a): A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful

Unit 16(b): Edmund Burke's *The Sublime and the Beautiful*- Part V

Unit 13(a): The Discourse on Taste and the Development of Aesthetics

Today the term *aesthetics* refers to an identifiable sub-discipline of philosophy concerned with the nature and expression of beauty and the fine arts. The discipline covers a broad spectrum of issues, problems, and approaches, but students and practitioners generally agree that its origins can be traced unequivocally to eighteenth-century British philosophers working predominantly, though not exclusively, in England and Scotland. Many of these writers were based in and around the old universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen, where (with the exception of David Hume who was denied a position twice on account of his religious views) they held chairs in philosophy and related disciplines; these thinkers were the intellectual force at the heart of what has come to be known as the Scottish Enlightenment. Other eighteenth-century writers, such as Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, Joseph Addison, and Edmund Burke, were involved in politics or cut central figures in the polite society of English letters, or, like William Hogarth and Sir Joshua Reynolds, were practicing artists. The earliest works in the tradition are Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners Opinions, Times* (1711), and Addison's essays on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" in *The Spectator* (1712), with Francis

Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) often cited as the first systematic and self-conscious attempt to address questions that came to define a new area of philosophical inquiry, which, by the beginning of the twentieth century crystallized into the discipline complete, in its modern form, with all the attendant paraphernalia of academic respectability.

Although the intellectual roots of modern aesthetics are buried deep in British soil, the term *aesthetics* is of distinctly German stock. Its linguistic heritage lies in the Greek nominal 'aisthetikos' - sensitive or sentient, derived in turn from the verb 'aisthenesthai', meaning to perceive, feel, or sense. Famously, Immanuel Kant used the term for that part of his *Critique of Pure Reason* concerned with the principles of "a priori sensibility" given in the "pure" intuitions of space and time. In doing so he was following the lead of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62), who had already coined the phrase 'episteme aisthetike' both to designate. Knowledge based on sense perception and name the faculty that makes it possible. In his lectures from 1742 onward – the basis for the two-volume *Aesthetica* (1750 and 1758) – Baumgarten subsequently extended the term to designate a "science of sensual cognition" more generally. By the middle of the 18th century the term was popular across philosophical debates in Germany. In 1781, Kant criticized some features of Baumgarten's work, but conceded the fact that "Germans are the only people who currently make use of the word 'aesthetic' in order to signify what others call the critique of taste".

In England and Scotland, "aesthetics" did not become common currency until well into the nineteenth century, and was long disparaged as an obscure German word of little critical import. On the contrary British writers used the term "taste" for the affective faculty and the species of knowledge derived from it, and assigned the term *criticism* to the inquiry that attempted to elucidate its principles. *Aesthetics* is absent from Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), and in 1798 William Taylor could still regard it coolly as part of the "dialect peculiar to Professor Kant.

Things developed apace over the next two decades, however, and by 1821 at least this element of the peculiar dialect had made sufficient inroads that Samuel Taylor Coleridge lamented the lack of a "more familiar word than æsthetic, for works of taste and criticism. By 1846 John Ruskin could report in *Modern Painters II* that "aesthetic" was "commonly employed" with reference to impressions of beauty, and in the 1883 edition of the work he inserted the word *now* before *commonly* and added that "It [aesthetic] was, of course, never so used by good or scholarly English writers, nor ever could be. Whether one focuses on the term or concept, however, it is clear that the first part of the eighteenth century saw the birth of a new and distinct discipline, which one might appropriately call "philosophical aesthetics".

Unit 13(b): David Hume-A Brief Introduction

Hume was born on 26 April 1711 in Edinburgh, Scotland. His father was Joseph Home (an advocate or barrister of Berwickshire, Scotland), and the aristocrat Katherine Lady Falconer. He changed his name to Hume in 1734 because the English had difficulty pronouncing "Home" in the Scottish manner.

He was well read, even as a child, and had a good grounding in Greek and Latin. He attended the University of Edinburgh at the unusually early age of twelve but soon gave up a prospective career in law in favor of philosophy and general learning. At the tender age of eighteen, he made a great "philosophical discovery" that led him to devote the next ten years of

his life to a concentrated period of study, reading and writing, almost to the verge of a nervous breakdown.

In order to earn a living, he took a position in a merchant's office in Bristol before moving to Anjou, France in 1734. It was there that he used up his savings to support himself while he wrote his masterwork, "A Treatise of Human Nature", which he completed in 1737.

After the publication of his "Essays Moral and Political" in 1744, Hume was refused a post at the University of Edinburgh after local ministers petitioned the town council not to appoint Hume due to his Atheism. For about a year he tutored the unstable Marquise of Annandale and became involved with the Canongate Theatre in Edinburgh, where he associated with some of the Scottish Enlightenment luminaries of the time.

From 1746, Hume served for three years as Secretary to a distant relative, Lieutenant-General St. Clair, including as an aide-de-camp on diplomatic missions in Austria and Northern Italy, and even at one point as a staff officer on an ill-fated military expedition as part of the War of the Austrian Succession. It was during this period that he wrote his "Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding", later published as "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding", which proved little more successful than the "Treatise". He was charged with heresy (although he was defended by his young clerical friends, who argued that, as an atheist, he was outside the Church's jurisdiction), and was again deliberately overlooked for the Chair of Philosophy at the University of Glasgow.

In 1752, the Faculty of Advocates employed him as their librarian, for which he received little or no emolument, but which gave him access to a large library, and which enabled him to continue historical research for his "History of Great Britain". This enormous work, begun in 1745 and not completed until 1760, ran to over a million words and traced events from the Saxon kingdoms to the Glorious Revolution. It was a best-seller in its day and became the standard work on English history for many years. Thus, it was as a historian that Hume finally achieved literary fame.

From 1763 to 1765, Hume was Secretary to Lord Hertford in Paris, where he was admired by Voltaire and was friends (briefly) with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. For a year from 1767, he held the appointment of Under Secretary of State for the Northern Department in London, before retiring back to Edinburgh in 1768.

He died in Edinburgh on 25 August 1776, aged 65, probably as a result of a debilitating cancer he suffered from in his latter years, and was buried, as he requested, on Calton Hill, overlooking his home in the New Town of Edinburgh. He remained to the end positive and humane, well-loved by all who knew him, and he retained great equanimity in the face of his suffering and death.

Most of Hume's early philosophical work stems from a mysterious intellectual revelation he appears to have experienced at the age of just eighteen. He spent most of the next ten years frantically trying to capture these thoughts on paper, resulting in "A Treatise of Human Nature" which he completed in 1737 at the age of just 26 (and published two years later). This book, which he subtitled "An Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects", is now considered to be Hume's most important work and one of the most important books in the whole of Western philosophy, despite its poor initial reception. He refined the "Treatise" in the later "Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding" (actually published as "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" in 1748), along with a companion volume "An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals"(1751), although these publications proved hardly more successful than the original "Treatise" on which they were based.

Hume was a thorough-going Empiricist, the last chronologically of the three great British Empiricists of the 18th Century (along with John Locke and Bishop George Berkeley), and the most extreme. He believed that, as he put it, "the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences", that human experience is as close as we are ever going to get to the truth, and that experience and observation must be the foundations of any logical argument. Anticipating the Logical Positivist movement by almost two centuries, Hume was essentially attempting to demonstrate how ordinary propositions about objects, causal relations, the self, etc., are semantically equivalent to propositions about one's experiences.

He argued that all of human knowledge can be divided into two categories: relations of ideas (e.g. mathematical and logical propositions) and matters of fact (e.g. propositions involving some contingent observation of the world, such as "the sun rises in the East"), and that ideas are derived from our "impressions" or sensations. In the face of this, he argued, in sharp contradistinction to the French Rationalists, that even the most basic beliefs about the natural world, or even in the existence of the self, cannot be conclusively established by reason, but we accept them anyway because of their basis in instinct and custom, a hard-line Empiricist attitude verging on complete Skepticism.

But Hume's Empiricism and Skepticism was mainly concerned with Epistemology and with the limits of our ability to know things. Although he would almost certainly have believed that there was indeed an independently existing world of material objects, causally interacting with each other, which we perceive and represent to ourselves through our senses, his point was that none of this could be actually proved. He freely admitted that we can form beliefs about that which extends beyond any possible experience (through the operation of faculties such as custom and the imagination), but he was entirely skeptical about any claims to knowledge on this basis.

Central to grasping Hume's general philosophical system is the so-called "problem of induction", and exactly how we are able to make inductive inferences (reasoning from the observed behavior of objects to their behavior when unobserved). He noted that humans tend to believe that things behave in a regular manner, and that patterns in the behavior of objects will persist into the future and throughout the unobserved present (an idea sometimes called the Principle of the Uniformity of Nature). Hume argued forcefully that such a belief cannot be justified, other than by the very sort of reasoning that is under question (induction), which would be circular reasoning. Hume's solution to this problem was to argue that it is natural instinct, rather than reason, that explains our ability to make inductive inferences, and many have seen this as a major contribution to Epistemology and the theory of knowledge.

Hume was a great believer in the scientific method championed by Francis Bacon, Galileo Galilei (1564 - 1642) and Sir Isaac Newton (1643 - 1727). However, the application of the problem of induction to science suggests that all of science is actually based on a logical fallacy. The so-called induction fallacy states that, just because something has happened in the past, it cannot be assumed that it will happen again, no matter how often it seems to happen. However, this is exactly what the scientific method is built on, and Hume was forced to conclude, rather unsatisfactorily, that even though the fallacy applies, the scientific method appears to work.

Closely linked to the problem of induction is the notion of causality or causation. It is not always clear how we know that something is actually caused by another thing and, although day always follows night and night day, there is still no causal link between them. Hume concluded that it is the mental act of association that is the basis of our concept of causation (although different

commentators differ in their interpretation of Hume's words on the matter, varying from a logical positivist interpretation to a skeptical realist or quasi-realist position).

Hume's views on personal identity arose from a similar argument. For Hume, the features or properties of an object are all that really exist, and there is no actual object or substance of which they are the features. Thus, he argued, an apple, when stripped of all its properties (color, size, shape, smell, taste, etc), is impossible to conceive of and effectively ceases to exist. Hume believed that the same argument applied to people, and he held that the self was nothing but a bundle or collection of interconnected perceptions linked by the properties of constancy and coherence, a view sometimes known as "bundle theory", and one in direct opposition to Descartes's "I think therefore I am" assertion.

Hume's anti-Rationalism, however, was not confined to his theory of belief and knowledge, but also extended into other spheres, including Ethics. He asserted that "reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them". Thus, he severely circumscribed reason's role in the production of action, and stressed that desires are necessary for motivation, and this view on human motivation and action formed the cornerstone of his ethical theory. He conceived moral or ethical sentiments to be intrinsically motivating, and to be the providers of reasons for action. Thus, he argued, given that one cannot be motivated by reason alone (given that motivation requires the additional input of the passions), then reason cannot be behind morality. His theory of Ethics, sometimes described as sentimentalism, has helped to inspire various forms of non-cognitivist and moral nihilist ethical theories including emotivism, ethical expressivism, quasi-realism, error theory, etc.

In his "A Treatise of Human Nature", Hume definitively articulated the so-called "is-ought problem", which has since become so important in Meta-Ethics, noting that claims are often made about what ought to be on the basis of statements about what is. However, Hume pointed out, there are significant differences between descriptive statements (about what is) and prescriptive or normative statements (about what ought to be), and it is not at all obvious how we can get from making descriptive statements to prescriptive. In line with his ingrained Skepticism, he advised extreme caution against making such inferences, and this complete severing of "is" from "ought" is sometimes referred to as "Hume's Guillotine".

As an Empiricist, Hume was always concerned with going back to experience and observation, and this led him to touch on some difficult ideas in what would later become known as the Philosophy of Language. For instance, he was convinced that for a word to mean anything at all, it had to relate to a specific idea, and for an idea to have real content it had to be derived from real experience. If no such underlying experience can be found, therefore, the word effectively has no meaning. In fact, he drew a distinction between thinking (which concerns clear ideas which have a real source in experience) and just everyday talking (which often uses confused notions with no real foundation in experience).

This reasoning also led him to develop what has become known as "Hume's Fork". For any new idea or concept under consideration, he said, we should always ask whether it concerns either a matter of fact (in which case one should then ask whether it is based on observation and experience), or the relation between ideas (e.g. mathematics or Logic). If it is neither, then the idea has no value and no real meaning and should be discarded.

Like Thomas Hobbes before him, Hume sought to reconcile human freedom with the mechanist (or determinist) belief that human beings are part of a deterministic universe whose happenings are governed by the laws of physics. Hume's reconciliation of freedom and determinism (a

position known as compatibilism) involves a more precise definition of Liberty ("a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will") and Necessity ("the uniformity, observable in the operations of nature; where similar objects are constantly conjoined together"), and the argued conclusion that not only are the two compatible, but that Liberty actually requires Necessity. Furthermore, he argued that, in order to be held morally responsible, it is required that our behavior be caused or necessitated.

Hume wrote a great deal on religion, although, due to the rather repressive religious climate of the day, he deliberately constrained his words (as it was, the Church of Scotland seriously considered bringing charges of infidelity against him). He never openly declared himself to be an atheist, and did not acknowledge his authorship of many of his works in this area until close to his death (and some were not even published until afterward).

However, it is certainly true that, in works such as "An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding" (1748) and "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion" (written between about 1750 and his death in 1776, and published posthumously in 1779), he attacked many of the basic assumptions of religion and Christian belief, and he found the idea of a God effectively nonsensical, because there was no way of arriving at the idea through sensory data. Some consider it his best work, and many of his arguments have become the foundation of much of the succeeding secular thinking about religion. Having said that, though, it is likely that Hume was, true to his most basic inclinations, skeptical both about religious belief (at least as demanded by the religious organizations of his time) and of the complete Atheism of such contemporaries as Baron d'Holbach (1723 - 1789), and his position may best be characterized by the term "irreligious".

Hume argued that it is impossible to deduce the existence of God from the existence of the world because causes cannot be determined from effects. Although he left open the theoretical possibility of miracles (which may be defined as singular events that differ from the established laws of Nature), he cautioned that they should only be believed if it were less likely that the testimony was false than that a miracle did in fact occur, and offered various arguments against this ever having actually happened in history.

He gave the classic criticism of the teleological argument for the existence of God (also known as the argument from design, that order and apparent purpose in the world bespeaks a divine origin - see the Arguments for the Existence of God section of the Philosophy of Religion page for more details), arguing that, for the design argument to be feasible, it must be true that order and purpose are observed only when they result from design (whereas, on the contrary, we see order in presumably mindless processes like the generation of snowflakes and crystals). Furthermore, he argued that the design argument is based on an incomplete analogy (that of the universe to a designed machine), and that to deduce that our universe is designed, we would need to have an experience of a range of different universes. Even if the design argument were to be successful, he questioned why we should assume that the designer is God, and, if there is indeed a designer god, then who designed the designer? Also, he asked, if we could be happy with an inexplicably self-ordered divine mind, why should we not rest content with an inexplicably self-ordered natural world?

When faced with Leibniz's contention that the only answer to the question "why is there something rather than nothing?" was God, and that God was a necessary being with no need of explanation, Hume responded that there was no such thing as a necessary being, and that anything that could be conceived of as existent could just as easily be conceived of as non-existent. However, he was not willing to propose a convincing alternative answer to the riddle of

existence, taking refuge in the argument that any answer to such a question would be necessarily meaningless, as it could never be grounded in our experience.

Hume's Political Philosophy is difficult to pinpoint, as his work contains elements of both Conservatism and Liberalism, and he resisted aligning himself with either of Britain's two political parties, the Whigs and the Tories. His central concern was to show the importance of the rule of law, and stressed, in his "Essays Moral and Political" of 1742, the importance of moderation in politics (particularly within the turbulent historical context of 18th Century Scotland). In general, he thought that republics were more likely than monarchies to administer laws fairly, but the important point for Hume was that society be governed by a general and impartial system of laws, based principally on the "artifice" of contract (Contractarianism). He supported freedom of the press; he was sympathetic to elected representation and democracy (when suitably constrained); he believed that private property was not a natural right (as John Locke held), but that it was justified because resources are limited; he was optimistic about social progress arising from the economic development that comes with the expansion of trade; and he counseled strongly against revolution and resistance to governments except in cases of the most egregious tyranny.

Although best known today as a philosopher, Hume also developed many of the ideas that are still prevalent in the field of economics, and Adam Smith, among others, acknowledged Hume's influence on his own economics and Political Philosophy. Hume believed in the need for an unequal distribution of property, on the grounds that perfect equality would destroy the ideas of thrift and industry, and thus ultimately lead to impoverishment. He was among the first to develop the concept of automatic price-specie flow, and proposed a theory of beneficial inflation, which was later to be developed by John Maynard Keynes (1883 - 1946).

Hume was also famous as a prose stylist, and pioneered the essay as a literary genre, publicly engaging with contemporary intellectual luminaries such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith, James Boswell (1740 - 1795), Joseph Butler (1692 - 1752) and Thomas Reid (1710 - 1796).

But it was as a historian that Hume finally achieved literary fame. His immense 6-volume "History of England" (subtitled "From the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688"), written between 1745 and 1760, is a work of immense sweep, running to over a million words. It became a best-seller in its day and became the standard work on English history for many years.

Unit 14: 'Of the Standard of Taste'-David Hume

Hume's seminal essay 'Of the Standard of Taste' consists of four distinct sections:

In the first section Hume outlines the problem, showing how taste varies from person to person on account of its subjective nature. Hume proceeds from this fundamental problematic to closely examine the other aspects of the problem.

In the second section Hume, like a true empiricist, contemplates the possible rules governing the standard of taste.

In the third and probably most significant section, Hume delineates the qualities of a good critic. He states that in order to be labeled a good critic, one must be endowed with qualities like- a) Strong sense, b) intricate imagination, c) thorough practice, d) unbiased comparison and e) absence of prejudice.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned criteria, Hume considers two caveats that will affect every critic, namely: i) natural variations in people and ii) cultural conditioning.

Hume opens the first section by stating that people there exists a great variety of taste in art, even among people whose background and training are similar. Jonathan Bennett points out that Hume does not use the term ‘taste’ in a shallow sense, but in order to refer to ‘every kind of aesthetic reaction to works of art’. However later in his essay Hume does clarify that the focus of his discussion is artistic creations:

“The great variety of Taste, as well as of opinion, which prevails in the world, is too obvious not to have fallen under every one’s observation. Men of the most confined knowledge are able to remark a difference of taste in the narrow circle of their acquaintance, even where the persons have been educated under the same government, and have early imbibed the same prejudices. But those, who can enlarge their view to contemplate distant nations and remote ages, are still more surprised at the great inconsistency and contrariety.”

Hume assures us about the existence of beauty, although his business is not to define it. In this essay he focuses spotlight on discussions revolving the Standard of Taste. Hume reminds us that the variety that exists in judgement of taste is ‘greater in reality than in appearance.’ Although apparently everyone joins in praise of abstract qualities such as elegance, propriety, simplicity and spirit in condemning fustian, affectation, coldness and a false brilliance, people tend to disagree while discussing particular cases. As a result, unanimity vanishes.

This plainly shows a fundamental characteristic of the human mind—we agree in our judgement of artistic qualities in the abstract, but while addressing specific examples, we resort to subjective taste. Hume simultaneously points out the very different role played by subjectivity in scientific debates, where particular findings from different experiments are agreed upon while the general theoretical principles are hotly debated.

Making a comparison between ethics and the present problem of taste, Hume claims that morality is based upon sentiment (emotions) not reason. We agree on general moral qualities we consider good:

“Writers of all nations and all ages concur in applauding justice, humanity, magnanimity, prudence, veracity; and in blaming the opposite qualities. Even poets and other authors, whose compositions are chiefly calculated to please the imagination, are yet found, from HOMER down to FENELON, to inculcate the same moral precepts, and to bestow their applause and blame on the same virtues and vices.”

Everyone can agree that ‘virtue’ is good and ‘vice’ is bad – not to do so would mean perverting language. However, we surrender to subjective taste as soon as we discuss particular moral cases. Hume compares the ancient Greek poet Homer and the French writer Fénelon, author of the 1699 novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque*. Homer’s Achilles and Ulysses are heroes, yet both have less admirable qualities too, whereas Fénelon’s hero Telemachus is perfectly virtuous. The two writers have different opinions of what behaviour is appropriate in a heroic character. Hume then makes a similar point with reference to the Qu’ran. Its followers insist upon its ‘excellent moral precepts’ and it uses the same positive language of justice, charity etc in Arabic that English does, yet it bestows praise on behaviour that would be unacceptable in ‘civilised society’. (I would add that the Bible is just as bad, though Hume may, as a religious sceptic, have had the Bible quietly in mind.) Again, people agree about generalities and quarrel about particulars.

Moral and aesthetic agreement, then, is often based on a linguistic illusion: we agree on certain evaluative terms but not on what they mean.

He says there is therefore little point in making generalisations about ethics. By extension, there is perhaps little point in making them about aesthetics either.

To resolve such difficulties, Hume concludes:

“It is natural for us to seek a Standard of Taste; a rule, by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another.”

The goal of Hume’s essay is to establish a ‘rule’ for how we may settle disputes over taste by judging who is right and who is wrong. The sceptical, relativist position laid out in the opening paragraphs (including 7) is pessimistic about this possibility, but Hume does not agree with that position – as we go on, we find he agrees with some aspects of it, e.g. that beauty is subjective, but nonetheless thinks it is possible to establish a standard.

This paragraph is important. To the question ‘is there a Standard of Taste?’ Hume presents one possible answer: namely, ‘no’. There is a species of philosophy [i.e. relativism], which cuts off all hopes of success in such an attempt, and represents the impossibility of ever attaining any standard of taste. He further outlines the relativist case, drawing the distinction between judgement and sentiment (emotion). All sentiment is right; because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it. But all determinations of the understanding are not right; because they have a reference to something beyond themselves, to wit, real matter of fact; and are not always conformable to that standard. Reason (‘understanding’) expects that something can be proved correct or incorrect by appeal to objective fact. By contrast, a sentiment cannot be judged correct or incorrect.

Among a thousand different opinions which different men may entertain of the same subject, there is one, and but one, that is just and true; and the only difficulty is to fix and ascertain it. On the contrary, a thousand different sentiments, excited by the same object, are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object. If you feel something, the feeling is real, and no one can accuse you of being ‘wrong’ for feeling it. Following these observations, Hume argues that on this view, if taste is based upon feeling rather than objective reason, beauty must be subjective:

“Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty.”

Morality and aesthetics are based upon feeling and are therefore subjective. You cannot pronounce any opinion about beauty correct or incorrect because all such opinions are sentiments. A Standard of Taste is impossible. Each of us may be confident in our opinion yet may make no claim to ‘regulate those of others’. The same object may be thought to taste both sweet and bitter, and it is pointless to claim that one experience is more right than the other – we may extend this bodily example to our sentiments as well. Hume evokes (without actually naming it) the Latin proverb *de gustibus non est disputandum*: ‘there is no disputing over taste’, or in French *chacun à son goût*. This is a rare case, he says, of ‘common sense’ agreeing with philosophy.

But Hume immediately counters this with a contrary ‘common sense’ position. We behave as if there are objective standards. Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between OGILBY³ and MILTON, or BUNYAN and ADDISON, would be thought to defend no less an

³ John Ogilby was a Scottish translator, impresario and cartographer. Best known for publishing the first British road atlas, he was also a successful translator. He was satirized by John Dryden in his satirical *MacFlecknoe*, and by Alexander Pope in *The Dunciad*.

extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as TENERIFFE⁴, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. We take it for granted that Milton is a better writer than John Ogilby, a Scottish poet now only remembered for being namedropped in Hume's famous essay. If there is no Standard of Taste, then an advertising jingle is as aesthetically valuable as Mozart's Requiem. There are always people who think otherwise, but we are comfortable dismissing such opinions as 'absurd and ridiculous'. We respect a plurality of views on taste when its objects seem broadly comparable, but when one work seems obviously better than another, the principle of *de gustibus non est disputandum* quickly breaks down. Things don't in themselves have good and bad, beauty and ugliness. These values come from people. But people can be right or wrong about at least some of them. This 'common sense' position that we may judge people's opinions is at least as valid as the other 'common sense' position that we can't.

Having established this background for the argument, Hume proceeds to defend the former common sense position against the latter by seeking grounds for a Standard of Taste.

9: Hume has already called the Standard of Taste a 'rule'. Here he refers to the 'rules of composition', by which he seems to mean the rules followed by artists when creating their works. Thus we have two sets of rules: those of taste or criticism, and those of composition, but Hume does not make a distinction between them. Presumably, the artist applies the rules of composition to their work, then the critic judges, with reference to those same rules, how well it has been done. The rules will be based upon 'a certain conformity or relation between the object and the organs or faculties of the mind', or what Hume later calls 'the relation, which nature has placed between the form and the sentiment'. Hume's approach to the rules of composition is characteristically empiricist:

"It is evident that none of the rules of composition are fixed by reasonings a priori, or can be esteemed abstract conclusions of the understanding, from comparing those habitudes and relations of ideas, which are eternal and immutable. Their foundation is the same with that of all the practical sciences, experience."

The rules cannot be worked out a priori, that is, from reasoning alone, independent of sensory experience. Reason must be accompanied by facts, which in art is supplied by experience of what works: 'what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages'. Hume rightly observes that poetry does not depend for its effects on strict empirical fact:

"Many of the beauties of poetry and even of eloquence are founded on falsehood and fiction, on hyperboles, metaphors, and an abuse or perversion of terms from their natural meaning. To check the sallies of the imagination, and to reduce every expression to geometrical truth and exactness, would be the most contrary to the laws of criticism; because it would produce a work, which, by universal experience, has been found the most insipid and disagreeable."

But though poetry does not have to accord with scientific fact, it 'must be confined by rules of art'. These rules are general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages... discovered to the author either by genius or observation. Living in the Neoclassical age, Hume has no problem with looking back to older cultural authorities, and admires Homer as a model for all ages. Here he holds up the Italian Renaissance poet Ludovico Ariosto, author of the vast epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (first version 1516), as an example of a second-rate writer whom we still enjoy reading. He wants to make the point that if weaker writers please us, it is because they have other merits that conform to the rules and lead us to forgive the flaws. If we take pleasure from features that criticism considers flaws, then

⁴ An island in Spain

criticism needs to change. 'If they are found to please, they cannot be faults.' Thus Hume asserts that the rules of composition are based upon what pleases the audience, i.e. upon subjective feelings.

Hume concludes that all the general rules of art are founded only on experience and on the observation of the common sentiments of human nature. But he notes that this reference point of common human experience and feelings is unstable, because, as we established earlier, feelings are variable. They don't always behave according to their own general principles and can be thrown out of kilter. To get the best and most representative judgement of taste, therefore, we must choose with care a proper time and place, and bring the fancy to a suitable situation and disposition. A perfect serenity of mind, a recollection of thought, a due attention to the object; if any of these circumstances be wanting, our experiment will be fallacious, and we shall be unable to judge of the catholic and universal beauty. High standards of critical judgement depend upon concentrating upon the object, in the right state of mind. The rules, we have seen, are based upon 'the relation which nature has placed between the form and the sentiment.' We find its influence from the durable admiration, which attends those works, that have survived all the caprices of mode and fashion. It is from proven masterworks that we may find the rule of the Standard of Taste.

We are still no closer to what the rules actually are. Given that we need to iron out the flux of human feelings, Hume thinks the best way to identify them is to examine works that have been tried and tested over a long period of time. He points out:

"The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory."

The passage of time reveals which are the exemplary works of art:

"Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator, but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or by foreigners, the enchantment is dissipated, and his faults appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with."

The immediate pressures of envy, personal acquaintance and so on can cloud our judgement, but once these are removed and the work is judged only on its own merits, we can observe 'the beauties, which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments,' and these have long-standing authority.

This appeal to 'beauties, which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments' implies the rules are in fact not subjective but objective. Otherwise, where do they get their long-standing authority? Hume explains:

"It appears then, that, amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind. Some particular forms or qualities, from the original structure of the internal fabric, are calculated to please, and others to displease."

Note the 'principles of approbation or blame' are not in the object but in the operation of the mind in its response to the object. Hume seems to be saying that yes, all taste is subjective, but there are tendencies in the human organism or constitution that make us more likely to value some beauties/rules over others. There are 'some particular forms or qualities' in the object that give us pleasure or displeasure. Hume clearly considers these properties reliable: they will

please us. If they do not, the blame lies in some defect in the human organism. In each creature, there is a sound and a defective state; and the former alone can be supposed to afford us a true standard of a taste and sentiment. Just as a person with the flu can't be expected to judge the flavours in a meal because his or her sense of taste will be impaired, a person whose faculties are defective can't respond to art with the most appropriate pleasure and thus can't make the best judgements of it. In a community of healthy faculties Hume thinks that we may find our Standard of Taste:

“If, in the sound state of the organ, there be an entire or considerable uniformity of sentiment among men, we may thence derive an idea of the perfect beauty; in like manner as the appearance of objects in daylight, to the eye of a man in health, is denominated their true and real colour, even while colour is allowed to be merely a phantasm of the senses.”

Hume's analogy with colour is illuminating. The healthy organism perceives a 'true and real' colour even though colour is accepted as being a sensation created by the organism itself. By analogy, the healthy organism experiences a 'true and real' beauty even though we all agree beauty and taste are subjective. The beauty is 'true and real' because it is predicated upon a 'structure of the mind' that is broadly common to all human beings. However the general principles are affected by variations in 1) the structure of the mind and 2) the contexts in which objects are experienced, hence the variation in the pleasure felt.

Hume is saying that some objects or properties are 'naturally calculated' to please us via the structure of our minds. To return to colour: our experience or sensation of colour is created for us by the brain, but it is an interpretation based upon actual data, i.e. different colours represent different wavelengths of light that may be scientifically measured; similarly, beauty is a subjective feeling but that feeling has a causal relationship with specific objective properties.

An example of the variability across individuals is 'delicacy of imagination'. It is valued by all but exercised by fewer. To define what he means by 'delicacy', Hume takes an illustration from *Don Quixote*. The Don's squire Sancho Panza relates a story in which two of his relatives detected a taste of leather and iron in a glass of wine. They were ridiculed for this until a key and thong were discovered in the wine cask, revealing that his relatives' judgement was in fact acute. Sancho takes this as evidence that his own judgement of wine will also be acute, i.e. he assumes that the faculty runs in the family. This story is not the best example for what Hume is discussing, as Sancho's claim to good judgement in wine is based simply upon genetic inheritance, whereas Hume will later argue that good judgement comes through five criteria including things like practice. But he wants to make a particular point. He goes on:

“Though it be certain, that beauty and deformity, more than sweet and bitter, are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the sentiment, internal or external; it must be allowed, that there are certain qualities in objects, which are fitted by nature to produce those particular feelings.”

Certain qualities in objects are 'fitted by nature' to produce sentiments of beauty because of that 'structure of the mind' we have already discussed. Beauty is subjective but is prompted by objective properties towards which the human organism is biased. Again, there is a contradiction here that needs further explanation. How can beauty belong 'entirely' to sentiment when those sentiments are produced by fitting qualities in objects? Of course the experience varies across individuals.

Where the organs are so fine, as to allow nothing to escape them; and at the same time so exact as to perceive every ingredient in the composition: This we call delicacy of taste...In making

their delicate judgements of taste, the critic draws upon the general rules of beauty... being drawn from established models, and from the observation of what pleases or displeases.

Here comes Hume's real point with the Sancho Panza story: he likens finding the rules of composition to finding the key at the bottom of the wine cask. Until the key was found, it was impossible to prove the quality of Sancho's relatives' judgement over that of their less delicate critics, but the key existed nonetheless. Once we have identified an 'avowed principle of art' – once we have produced that key from the cask – we can justify our judgement and prove to our opponent that they lack delicacy of imagination:

“When we prove, that the same principle may be applied to the present case, where he did not perceive or feel its influence: He must conclude, upon the whole, that the fault lies in himself.”

Thus we can use the Standard of Taste to settle disputes about taste. This is quite a naive claim. Hume seems to take it for granted that the delicate person can convince the other person by force of reason.

Note that Hume refers in to 'sentiment, internal or external'. External sentiments are our sensations; internal sentiments are our feelings.

In the next few paragraphs Hume discusses what it takes to become a 'true judge' or what I will call an 'ideal critic'. He has already given us delicacy of imagination.

Hume makes a case for improving our critical faculties through practice. Delicate taste is desirable and everyone approves of it. The perfection of that faculty is to perceive with exactness its most minute objects, and allow nothing to escape its notice and observation... the perfection of the man, and the perfection of the sense or feeling, are found to be united. Natural ability varies, but nothing tends further to increase and improve this talent, than practice in a particular art, and the frequent survey or contemplation of a particular species of beauty. For an unpracticed person, the sentiments accompanying objects are 'obscure and confused' and our reason struggles to identify their merits and flaws. The best we can hope for is a general verdict. But allow him to acquire experience in those objects, his feeling becomes more exact and nice: He not only perceives the beauties and defects of each part, but marks the distinguishing species of each quality, and assigns it suitable praise or blame.

Given that practice is so important, we should withhold judgement until we have experienced the object more than once, in different lights, each time giving it our undivided attention. To recall, this sharpening of the faculties applies both to criticism and composition:

“The same address and dexterity, which practice gives to the execution of any work, is also acquired by the same means, in the judging of it.”

Hume continues by stressing the importance of comparison. It is impossible to continue in the practice of contemplating any order of beauty, without being frequently obliged to form comparisons between the several species and degrees of excellence, and estimating their proportion to each other. A man, who has had no opportunity of comparing the different kinds of beauty, is indeed totally unqualified to pronounce an opinion with regard to any object presented to him. By comparison alone we fix the epithets of praise or blame, and learn how to assign the due degree of each. Inferior works often have their attractions, but it takes someone 'familiarized to superior beauties' to see past them and make a mature, well-informed judgement with reference to the greatest works of human culture. One accustomed to see, and examine, and weigh the several performances, admired in different ages and nations, can alone rate the merits of a work exhibited to his view, and assign its proper rank among the productions of genius.

Attaining this breadth of reference requires the critic to free his mind of prejudice. Hume shows he is aware of the importance of cultural context: he notes that works of art often need to be experienced in a particular way, and the critic must try to put himself in the shoes of its intended audience. He uses the example of an orator who tailors his speech to a specific, even hostile, audience, but might not be properly understood by someone who reads the text within a different culture or era. Critics must try to forget their ‘individual being and peculiar circumstances’. A critic who allows their judgement to be distorted by prejudice suffers the consequences:

“By this means, his sentiments are perverted; nor have the same beauties and blemishes the same influence upon him, as if he had imposed a proper violence on his imagination, and had forgotten himself for a moment. So far his taste evidently departs from the true standard; and of consequence loses all credit and authority.”

Note Hume contradicts himself. He says the critic must preserve his mind free from all prejudice, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration, but the very object which is submitted to his examination. But this goes against the application of practice and comparison, which require him to bring other artworks into his consideration as well as the one he’s looking at.

Prejudice is ‘destructive of sound judgment’ and ‘it belongs to good sense to check its influence.’ Hume helpfully describes some of the properties of ‘the nobler productions of genius’. We can detect the influence of Aristotle’s *Poetics* on his list:

“A mutual relation and correspondence of parts.
A certain end or purpose, for which it is calculated.
A chain of propositions and reasonings.”

The characters must be represented as reasoning, and thinking, and concluding, and acting, suitably to their character and circumstances. The purpose of poetry is to please by means of the passions and the imagination. This is as specific as Hume gets about any actual rules. But he is not trying here to describe the rules – he is describing some of the things that can be judged by good sense. The able critic must be aware of such considerations and be sufficiently ‘capacious of thought’ to judge how well they have been used. It seldom, or never happens, that a man of sense, who has experience in any art, cannot judge of its beauty. Good sense is important for fighting prejudice but also for judging an artwork’s structure, unity, purpose, and so on.

Hume believes that a critic capable of all these gifts – what he calls a ‘true judge’, or what we would today prefer to call a ‘true critic’ – is a rare character. Though the principles of taste be universal, and nearly, if not entirely the same in all men; yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as the standard of beauty. The natural faculties might be defective, or the critic lacks the range of necessary qualities. In a key sentence, Hume summarises the five criteria that he thinks characterize the ideal critic:

“Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to this valuable character; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.”

Let’s underline those five criteria:

1. Strong sense
2. Delicate sentiment
3. Practice
4. Comparison
5. Lack of prejudice

These are positive attributes in the critic, and conversely, the lack of them is a hindrance to good judgement. That 'joint verdict of true judges' is, for Hume, the answer to the puzzle of how we decide which subjective opinions are valuable. It is 'the true standard of taste and beauty', confirmed by the 'common sentiments of human nature'. The ideal critic is someone who can best perceive the 'beauties, which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments' because the various defects that impede our perception of those beauties are, in the ideal critic, absent or minimal.

This seems clear enough, but it presents Hume with a new problem. Who is to say whether a particular person is an ideal critic or not? This seems to return us to the problem of relativism with which we started.

Hume's response is to deny that identifying ideal critics is subjective. Taste is subjective, but whether one is an ideal critic or not is objective, a matter of fact. He believes he has proved that the taste of all individuals is not upon an equal footing, and that some men in general, however difficult to be particularly pitched upon, will be acknowledged by universal sentiment to have a preference above others. Whether someone is an ideal critic or not will be a matter of dispute, but everyone agrees that such a person is valuable. Where the disputes occur, people must simply put forward their best arguments:

"they must acknowledge a true and decisive standard to exist somewhere, to wit, real existence and matter of fact; and they must have indulgence to such as differ from them in their appeals to this standard."

Hume seems to be suggesting that to decide who is an ideal critic, we make an appeal to empirical evidence. It is again a bit naive of him to assume this is a straightforward process.

To defend his position, Hume returns to the 'test of time' argument. But in reality the difficulty of finding, even in particulars, the standard of taste, is not so great as it is represented. He claims that establishing truth in science is harder than in literature. Theories of philosophy and science come and go, but the appeal of great works like those of Terence and Virgil persists.

Hume retreads it because he thinks it can help us to identify 'men of delicate taste'. The 'ascendant' or prominence such persons acquire thanks to the quality of their judgements makes their opinion dominant and gives them lasting influence. He claims that it is easy to tell a true person of taste:

"Though men of delicate taste be rare, they are easily to be distinguished in society, by the soundness of their understanding and the superiority of their faculties above the rest of mankind."

People with superior faculties will produce superior judgements, which we may confirm by comparing them to tried and tested principles of art, and they rise to prominence on merit. These are the critics whose opinions we should consult to resolve disputes over taste. Disagreement about them must yield in the long run to 'the force of nature and just sentiment.' Hume wraps up by saying a civilised nation rarely fails to identify its favourite epic or tragic author, i.e. he is talking about artists as well as ideal critics. Note how in this paragraph Hume assigns to his ideal critics a social role:

"The ascendant, which they acquire, gives a prevalence to that lively approbation, with which they receive any productions of genius, and renders it generally predominant. Many men, when left to themselves, have but a faint and dubious perception of beauty, who yet are capable of relishing any fine stroke, which is pointed out to them. Every convert to the admiration of the real poet or orator is the cause of some new conversion."

And though prejudices may prevail for a time, they never unite in celebrating any rival to the true genius, but yield at last to the force of nature and just sentiment.”

The critic’s excellence of judgement makes his or her opinion generally dominant; they can point out qualities in artworks to less perceptive people, who will inevitably defer to the better opinion. Through their verdicts the critics help to fix the taste of wider society.

In the final section, Hume identifies two causes of prejudice even for ideal critics. Despite our attempts at establishing the Standard of Taste, there are two unavoidable influences that will affect our judgements:

1. ‘The different humours of particular men.’
2. ‘The particular manners and opinions of our age and country.’

Where there is such a diversity in the internal frame or external situation as is entirely blameless on both sides, and leaves no room to give one the preference above the other; in that case a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable. In these cases ‘we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments’, i.e. Hume admits that sometimes the Standard of Taste will fail.

First he addresses point no 1. There will always be some diversity of opinion even among true artists and critics, thanks to the variability of human nature and culture. A young person tends to be more amorous, an older person more philosophical and moderate. We also tend to favour different artists at different ages. Broadly we naturally incline more towards artists who resemble ourselves in personality, national customs, etc. This is a defect in a critic, but it is almost impossible not to feel a predilection for that which suits our particular turn and disposition. Such preferences are innocent and unavoidable, and can never reasonably be the object of dispute, because there is no standard, by which they can be decided. In such cases, contending works and judgements are just different and cannot be pronounced right or wrong. Note the phrase: ‘the general principles of taste are uniform in human nature’. Under ideal conditions, everyone responds to art in broadly the same way – with a bit of variation, as he is currently describing.

Hume now turns to point no 2. We tend to prefer ‘pictures and characters’ that resemble our own customs and culture. Unlike a ‘common audience’, a critic or artist makes allowances for such variations.

However, he then alludes to the so-called ‘quarrel between the ancients and moderns’ that was a running debate in the 18th century: had the modern era achieved superior learning to the ancients? We need not reject artists of previous ages because of their different customs:

Must we throw aside the pictures of our ancestors, because of their ruffs and fardingales? Hume has already made this point about throwing off prejudice towards other cultures. But he makes an unexpected move. Instead of taking his own advice and putting himself into the shoes of the ancient Greeks and Romans, he condemns ancient poets who depict ‘vicious manners’ without disapproval (he offers no specific examples). The want of humanity and of decency, so conspicuous in the characters drawn by several of the ancient poets, even sometimes by Homer and the Greek tragedians, diminishes considerably the merit of their noble performances, and gives modern authors an advantage over them. Hume wants a stronger, more explicit morality than he finds in the ancient writers. When he says modern authors have an ‘advantage’ over ancient ones, he seems to be saying, on my reading, that modern morality is better than ancient morality, or at least that the morality of modern authors is better than the morality of ancient authors. The modern critic, it seems, need not forgive gross violations of our higher moral standards even in works from very different cultures. We moderns are better than that.

Hume does not say we cannot excuse the ancient poet (he thus holds true to the criterion of prejudice), but he does say that moral flaws damage our aesthetic enjoyment. However I may excuse the poet, on account of the manners in his age, I never can relish the composition. Our moral displeasure makes it harder for us to enjoy the work:

“Whatever indulgence we may give to the writer on account of his prejudices, we cannot prevail on ourselves to enter into his sentiments, or bear an affection to characters, which we plainly discover to be blamable.”

Hume therefore makes an exception of morality when it comes to ‘making allowances’ about customs. He is asserting that moral values are relevant to the aesthetic value of a work of art (a position known as moderate moralism). A moral blemish is an aesthetic blemish.

Hume finishes his essay with a discussion of religion. He makes a distinction between moral principles on the one hand and ‘speculative opinions’ (ideologies, including religion) on the other. Unlike moral principles, speculative opinions are in ‘continual flux and revolution’, and mistakes in these matters are not serious blemishes on works of art. Whatever speculative errors may be found in the polite writings of any age or country, they detract but little from the value of those compositions. Adjusting ourselves to different morals however requires ‘a very violent effort’, and someone who is confident in the ‘rectitude’ of their moral standards will not make allowances. Hume does not explain why moral principles, which are based upon sentiment and vary across cultures, are not also in ‘flux and revolution’

Writers may be excused for speculative errors on religious matters, as ‘the same good sense, that directs men in the ordinary occurrences of life, is not harkened to in religious matters,’ which lie outside human reason. Critics who wish to form good judgements of ancient literature must not be prejudiced by the writers’ religion, which Hume calls ‘the absurdities of the pagan system of theology’. You cannot expect good sense on such things, whether in life or in works of art. Religious principles are only a problem when they are so strong as to become bigotry or superstition:

“Where that happens, they confound the sentiments of morality, and alter the natural boundaries of vice and virtue. They are therefore eternal blemishes, according to the principle above mentioned; nor are the prejudices and false opinions of the age sufficient to justify them.”

Just as we are right to condemn the worst violations of our moral standards, we are right to condemn the worst violations of our religious standards. In the final two paragraphs he addresses bigotry and superstition in turn.

On this basis he has a dig at Roman Catholicism, which by its nature inspires ‘violent hatred of every other worship’, and gives the examples of two plays – Corneille’s *Polyeucte* (1642) and Racine’s *Athalie* (1691) – that he thinks have been blemished by this sort of ‘bigotry’. Hume describes a scene from *Athalie* where the Jewish priest Joad accuses a priest of Baal of ‘poisoning the air’ with his ‘horrid presence’, earning the applause of the Paris audience. This illustrates an ‘intemperate zeal for particular modes of worship’. Hume also thinks:

“Religious principles are also a blemish in any polite composition, when they rise up to superstition, and intrude themselves into every sentiment, however remote from any connection with religion.”

Local customs are no excuse for the poet, and Hume cites two examples from Petrarch and Boccaccio. He therefore contends that certain violations of morality and religion are serious enough to overrule the critic’s duty to approach other cultures without prejudice, and they ought to be condemned. And thus the essay comes abruptly to an end.

Suggested Reading

1. *The Century of Taste (The Philosophical Odyssey of Taste in the Eighteenth Century)*-George Dickie.
2. *The British Aesthetic Tradition (From Shaftesbury to Wittgenstein)*-Timothy M. Costelloe.
3. *David Hume: Moral and Political Theorist*-Russell Hardin.
4. *The Pursuits of Philosophy (An Introduction to the Life and Thought of David Hume)*-Annette C. Baier.
5. *Hume's Aesthetic Theory*-Dabney Townsend
6. 'Rethinking Hume's Standard of Taste'-Theodore A. Gracyk
7. 'Hume's Standard of Taste'-Noel Carroll

Assignments

1. According to Hume what are the chief characteristics of a critic?
2. Is it possible to come to an objective definition of literary/artistic taste? Following Hume's essay 'Of the Standard of Taste', write an analytical essay.
3. How does Hume define the standard of literary creation and the standard of literary criticism? Does Hume find any similarities between the two?
4. Would it be correct to call David Hume a neoclassical critic?
5. In reaching the definition of a Standard of Taste, Hume mentions encountering two unavoidable influences that affect our judgements. Name them and explain how they hinder reaching a Standard definition of Taste. According to Hume, how can this difficulty be surmounted?

On the Beautiful and the Sublime-Edmund Burke

Unit 15 (a): History of the 'Sublime'

Longinus

Peri Hupsos or *On Sublimity*, by the Greek critic Dionysius Longinus, is widely acknowledged to be the first properly theoretical discussion of the sublime. It is primarily rhetorical, aiming to teach those oratorical devices that enable a speaker to move or persuade an audience. Longinus was a follower of Cicero. What distinguishes *On Sublimity* from its predecessors, however, is the stress its author places on a mode of speech that is indeterminate or without form, a quality that renders the pedagogical aspect of the work extremely problematic. Although standard rhetorical devices such as *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria* and *actio* were amenable to teaching and infusion, the sublime seemed to elude definition. Reading *On Sublimity*, therefore, it is easy to conclude that the author secretly regards his subject as formally unteachable. Therefore the sublime is beyond definition. What strikes an audience with wonder (*ekplexis*) is more powerful than what merely persuades or pleases us. Unlike conventional public speech, therefore, the sublime is a discourse of domination; it seeks to ravish and intoxicate the audience so that a grand conception may be instilled in the mind.

Therefore the sublime according to Longinus is a product of nature rather than of art. All that remains essential to the sublime is a state of feeling, which may be loosely described as wonder, awe, rapture, astonishment, ecstasy, or elevation. Longinus differs significantly from

Horace since the latter in his work *Ars Poetica* had claimed that *ars* is a ‘practiced mastery of craft, a systematic knowledge of theory and technique.’

The Concept of Sublime in the 18th Century

Longinus’ treatise came to the attention of a select number of English readers in the late seventeenth century via the influential French translation and commentary of Despréaux Boileau. Although the Latin text had been made available in 1554, the English translation in 1652, it was not until the mid 1740s that the concept of the sublime reached a wider public. Late seventeenth and early eighteenth century British theorization on the sublime was observable in the work of the following five theorists: Thomas Burnet, John Dennis, Joseph Addison, Anthony Ashley Cooper and John Baillie.

(i) Burnet-*Sacred Theory*: The desire to efface the material nature of human experience, in particular its dependence on the stuff of language, is thus key to our understanding of the sublime. For a better understanding one may look at Burnet’s *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (originally composed in Latin and later translated into English), which begins by revising conventional seventeenth-century attitudes to nature. A 17th century poet like Andrew Marvell had opined that mountains are ‘unjust’, ‘hook-shouldered’ excrescences, which threaten to ‘deform’ the balance of the earth. A smooth, well-ordered garden, offering ease and delight to the spectator, was preferable to the brooding intensity of the mountain crag.

But Burnet’s response to a vision of the mountain is markedly different. He claims that mountains have something ‘august and stately’, filling the mind with ‘great thoughts and passions’, reminding us of the creative potential of the Supreme Maker. Burnet and his contemporaries, after all, conceived nature as a work of beauty, founded on principles of order, proportion, and restraint. The vast irregularity of mountain scenery offended this belief, yet it was the mountains that conveyed an image of the divine. Though the conceptual distinction between the sublime and the beautiful awaits the publication of Burke’s *Enquiry*, the idea of the sublime as a mode of divine excess is already in place.

(ii) John Dennis: Like Burnet, Dennis was moved to express his delight in the ‘extravagancies’ of nature ‘in a language of extravagance and hyperbole’. Dennis struggled to reconcile his aesthetic preference for the order and regularity of beauty with his newfound enthusiasm for the sublime. He attributed the beauty of the universe to its “Proportion, Situation, and (inter)Dependence”. As a child of the Enlightenment, Dennis regarded nature as a rational system. Yet his enthusiasm for the vast and irregular militated against this regard. Thus, whilst the ‘prospect of Hills or Valleys, or flowery Meads, and murmuring Streams’ produced ‘a delight consistent with Reason’, it was the ‘Extravagancies’ of nature that provided an intimation of the divine.

(iii) Joseph Addison: In an issue of the *Spectator* magazine published on 21 June 1712, Addison claims that:

“Our Imagination loves to be filled with an Object, or to grasp at anything that is too big for its Capacity. We are flung into a pleasing Astonishment at such unbounded Views, and feel a delightful Stillness and Amazement in the Soul at the Apprehension of them”

Besides describing the beautiful sights, Addison goes on to describe their origins. Like Burnet, Addison maintains that the underlying cause of greatness rests on the side of the naturally magnificent object. In a distinction derived from the empiricist philosopher John Locke (1632–

1704), Addison insists that the ‘Primary Pleasures of the Imagination’ are stimulated by the ‘Sight’ of such objects, and that the ‘Secondary Pleasures of the Imagination flow from the Ideas of visible Objects’. Marjorie Nicholson comments that for Addison ‘rhetorical ideas’ were ‘secondary’ and they had a “great dependence” upon primary ideas coming to man direct from Nature’.

From the outset, however, it is made clear that since ‘we know neither the Nature of an Idea, nor the Substance of a Human Soul’, then it is impossible to ‘trace out the several necessary and efficient Causes from whence the Pleasure or Displeasure arises’. The impetus by which an idea is produced cannot be established with any certainty; what Addison can be certain of, however, is why we should be so impelled. The ultimate cause is God. Man is created in God’s image, therefore he is conditioned to delight in ‘what is Great or Unlimited’.

(iv) Anthony Ashley Cooper: The Platonic displacement of the senses, the search for ideal objects over and above the fallen objects of this world, is crucial to the development of the sublime in the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury. Shaftesbury’s writing is notable for its ‘enthusiasm’-which ‘signifies divine presence, and was made use of by [Plato] to express whatever was sublime in human passions’. As Shaftesbury’s prose sought to demonstrate the balancing of cosmic order and rhetorical *ekstasis*, so also it aimed to instill a sense of the ultimate goodness of the universe. Drawing again on Plato, Shaftesbury goes on to claim that the mind is in accord with itself and with the universe when it recognizes that ‘what is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable; what is harmonious and proportionable is true; and what is at once both beautiful and true is, of consequence, agreeable and good’.

(v) John Baillie: The order that Shaftesbury perceives was undermined in the latter half of the eighteenth century by the spread of scientific materialism and philosophical skepticism. But the roots for an out-and-out decentring of the harmony between mind, beauty, virtue, and God were already implicit in the rhetorical concept of the sublime. For those writing after Longinus, in the discourse of the sublime, language works insidiously to transgress the boundaries between things, allowing properties to be transferred from one object to another, so that anything, even a dunghill, may be raised to a point of magnificence. John Baillie takes up this point in his *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747). After beginning conventionally enough with the claim that a sublime ‘Disposition of Mind’ is ‘created by grand Objects, Baillie admits that some ‘Objects ... [that] are not great and immense, if long connected with such, will often produce an Exaltedness of Mind. In Shaftesbury’s grand ‘design’, the relations between things are guaranteed by the presence of divine authority. God. Where Baillie departs from Shaftesbury is in his admission of the constructed nature of the sublime.

Unit 15(b): Edmund Burke-An Introduction

He was born in 1730, in Arran Quay, Dublin, and educated at the Quaker school in Ballitore and Trinity College Dublin. Obedient to his father’s wish, he embarked on the formal study of law in the Middle Temple at the Inns of Court in London: a curriculum of professional training he would never complete. He published two early books, *A Vindication of Natural Society* in 1756 and *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757, which caught the eye of David Hume, Samuel Johnson, and other illustrious contemporaries and established him as an author. Burke had already shown an interest in politics, informed by copious knowledge; and in 1758 he contracted with the bookseller Dodsley to produce the

Annual Register and wrote the political history of the year for its first volume in 1759. The same year saw his appointment as private secretary to a member of Parliament, William Gerard Hamilton. In 1761, Hamilton was named chief secretary for Ireland, and Burke accompanied him to Dublin. A disagreement over the freedom that Burke was to be allowed for his own projects led in early 1765 to a falling-out with Hamilton; but a few months later, Burke found a new patron, the Marquess of Rockingham, the leader of a group of Whigs then pressing the House of Commons to assert its independence from the king. Rockingham made Burke his private secretary (a position he would hold for seventeen years), and through affiliation with the Rockingham party, Burke was returned as a member of Parliament for the pocket borough of Wendover. In January 1766, he gave his maiden speech, presenting a petition from Manchester merchants against restrictions on American trade. He went on to distinguish himself as a strategist for the Rockingham administration of 1765–1766 and assisted in its major achievement, the repeal of the stamp tax on the American colonies.

In 1769, Burke joined the parliamentary resistance to an effort by King George III and his parliamentary allies to prevent John Wilkes from taking his seat in the House of Commons. While the legal argument simmered, the Rockingham party began to concert a policy to check the increasing power of the king. Burke's view of the constitution at this crisis emerged in 1770, in his first political book, *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*. This was a practical manifesto for the Rockingham Whigs and also a theoretical defense of the idea of a political party. An organized opposition, Burke argued, was a necessary bulwark of liberty; and to warrant the formation of such a party, one reason would always suffice: "When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall, one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle." Whatever might alter in his subsequent stance, Burke would continue to speak for the good of "association" as a limit on the privilege and aggrandizement of court favorites.

Burke believed that the practice of politics could never be isolated from the ordinary work of moral judgment. Accordingly, he was skeptical of a priori theories of the social contract that codified the definitions of citizenship and state power. In the 1770s and 1780s, most of his energy was given to enlarging the liberty of the people by strengthening the protections against monarchical abuse of power. Yet he was never a believer in popular government: statesmanship always carried, for him, a sense of the dignity and ceremony that should accompany high enterprises, and the capacity to take long views without concern for popular support or mandates. Burke's exalted idea of political duty could not be fulfilled by a monarch. Its embodiment was the leader in a responsible assembly who, drawing on the skill and talents of others, labors to mold the sentiments of the people and to justify the policies and laws of a nation.

In 1774, Burke gained a chance to play such a part. A set of Whigs who admired his views on American affairs invited him to stand for Parliament in Bristol. This was a contested election (rare then), in the second city of the kingdom, and Burke's victory gave him a platform from which he could directly engage the public issues of the time. In the parliamentary sessions of 1774 and 1775, he pleaded for a sympathetic reception of the American protests against taxation. His *Speech on Conciliation with America*, delivered in March 1775, urged a policy of concession to the point of disowning any further intention to tax. The three-hour speech, with its history of trade with the colonies, its bold sketch of American manners and morals, and its genealogy of the descent of British liberty, has been considered from that day to this among the greatest orations in the language: "An Englishman," Burke told his listeners, "is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery." The right use of the Americans, he concluded, was to

take them as equal partners in trade and as allies in time of war. “Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom; and a great empire and little minds go ill together.”

During his Bristol years, from 1774 to 1780, Burke stood out as a defender of free trade with Ireland, of liberalization of the laws controlling imprisonment for debt, and of repeal of the legal disabilities of Catholics— all unpopular positions in a Protestant and mercantile city. When threatened with loss of his constituency in 1780, he gave an unswerving defense of his actions in his *Speech at the Guildhall Previous to the Election*. Looking back on six years of service, Burke said to the voters of Bristol: “I did not obey your instructions: No. I conformed to the instructions of truth and nature, and maintained your interest, against your opinions, with a constancy that became me.”

With Britain still fighting the American war, Burke at this moment began to follow the trail of abuse of power from the western to the eastern empire. A powerful interest linking British policy in those two regions was the East India Company. By the time he re- entered the House of Commons in 1781 as representative for Malton, Burke had found the cause that would occupy the remainder of his parliamentary career: to expose the injustices of the Company in India, where its actions had the corrupt and despotic character of “a state in the disguise of a merchant”; and when the investigation pointed finally to a responsible party, to impeach the highest resident officer of the Company, the governor- general of Bengal, Warren Hastings.

In March 1782, Burke was appointed paymaster of forces in the second Rockingham ministry— a subcabinet position that was the highest he would ever hold— but the administration ended in July with the death of Lord Rockingham. In the running of the party, Burke nevertheless continued to be a central figure, now as an adviser to Charles Fox. Twenty years Burke’s junior, a popular leader and exuberant speaker with a genius for politics, Fox had begun his career as a Tory before acquiring a more generous understanding of constitutional liberty. As leader of the remnant of the Rockingham Whigs, he forged an improbable but politic alliance with Lord North, the minister who had presided over the American war; and from Burke and Fox together, in 1783 there issued a carefully drafted proposal on the governance of India. To rally support for the measure, Burke delivered his *Speech on Fox’s East India Bill*, which recounted in unsparing terms the history of British India and urged a systematic reform of the empire. Fox’s bill would have placed officers of the Company under parliamentary control; rejection of the plan by the House of Commons precipitated the fall of the Fox– North coalition. Burke’s response was to speak more pressingly for the impeachment of Hastings. He took his party with him— Fox, Sheridan, and others— and having secured the partial support of the prime minister, William Pitt, the House of Commons launched the trial of Hastings before the tribunal of the House of Lords. Meeting on the days Parliament could spare from other business, the process stretched from 1788 to 1795 and ended with the acquittal, on all counts, of Warren Hastings by the House of Lords. Burke would look back on this attempt at full- scale reform as his proudest achievement—“my monument.”

A surer fame in his lifetime came from his pamphlets of the 1790s against the French Revolution. The first and most influential of these was *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Published in November 1790, it would provoke, by the end of the decade, more than a hundred replies. Burke warned against a great change in the spirit of society from aristocratic to democratic manners, and from the authority of an ancient landed nobility to that of a mobile commercial class. He spoke as a believer in precedent and prescription and as a defender of natural feelings such as reverence for an established church and a hereditary nobility. Against the

promise of a society based on contract, he offered his vision of a society rooted in trust—“a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” Burke believed that the advent of democracy would destroy the very idea of a human partnership spread out over generations. He gave reasons to support his fear that democracy could never correct the errors that “the people” given unchecked power would commit on a new and terrifying scale. With its broad exposition of political principles and its dramatic narrative of crisis, the *Reflections* did more than any other book to create the French Revolution as a world- historical event for the mind of Europe.

Burke’s attack on the revolutionists in France was also an attack on their allies in England. It split the Whig Party; and in 1791, after a bitter exchange with Fox in the House of Commons, Burke crossed the floor to the administration side. In 1794, he was awarded a pension by Pitt and George III, and retired to his estate in Beaconsfield. Two pamphlets of Burke’s final years exhibit the continuity and the ambivalence of his political views. In 1792, *A Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* made an impassioned plea for the rights of Catholics in Ireland. The *Letters on a Regicidal Peace*, in 1796, sought to justify and instigate a counterrevolutionary war against France. He died in 1797, ending as he began, in isolation.

Unit 16(a): A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful

Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) is not only one of the major theories of the sublime; it is one of the foundational texts of modern aesthetics. The first treatise to systematically compare the sublime and the beautiful, it serves as a bridge between the empiricism of early eighteenth-century British criticism (Addison, Shaftsbury, Hutcheson) and the development of philosophical aesthetics in Germany in the latter half of the eighteenth century (Mendelssohn, Lessing, Kant). Although the treatise is perhaps best known for its promotion of an aesthetics of terror, this reputation tends to obscure Burke’s multifaceted treatment of sublimity, namely his integration of theories of man and society with reflections on art and nature.

This unit endeavours to explore the wider contexts and implications of Burke’s Enquiry, specifically how Burke, by integrating empiricist with literary-critical methods of analysis, seductively recalibrates the sublime for modernity. The first section argues that the narrowness of the term “aesthetic” – a concept that was not available to Burke – can lead to fundamental misunderstandings of Burke’s project and that Longinus’s treatise and rhetorical theory more generally play a greater role in Burke’s conception of sublimity than is typically granted. The second section on Burke’s empirical methodology, aims to dispel the common assumption that the pleasure in the sublime results from the “removal” of pain. However, according to Burke’s own articulation, the sublime involves an irreducible virtuality that is somewhat at odds with Burke’s presentation of elementary sensation. The third section explores Burke’s opposition between the passion of self-perseveration (based on fear) and the social passions, an opposition that does not neatly map onto the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, as Burke initially implies; for the sublime also involves the social passions, namely sympathy and ambition, the former emphasizing the social bond (empathy for the other’s pain) and the latter the individualistic impulse (the agonistic quality of sublimity observed in Longinus). The fourth section delves more deeply into Burke’s association between bourgeois individualism and the sublime. Finally, the fifth section closely examines Burke’s subsection devoted to “Power,”

which was added to the second edition of the Enquiry, showing how it reveals a continuity between a religious and an aesthetic understanding of transcendence in Burke's thought.

Unit 16(b): Edmund Burke's *The Sublime and the Beautiful*- Part V

Section I

The first section of Part V of Burke's *Sublime* begins with the assertion that physical objects of nature exert their respective influences on the human mind in keeping with their motions and configurations, ordered by Nature and supervised by the ever-vigilant Almighty. Though works of painting attract our minds in a similar fashion, they have the additional factor of imitation of life attached to them. The manner in which works of architecture entrance our minds depends on their being founded on the laws of nature and simultaneously the laws of reason. Here Burke reminds us that proportion is a key feature of beauty-whether something will or will not appear alluring depends ultimately on whether they possess proportion or not. But Burke finds that the mechanism by which words allure us differs from the above-mentioned forms of enchantment. Burke finds it essential to undertake a thorough study of the manner in which words appeal to our intellect.

Section II

We generally tend to think that poetry (as well as words in general) affects us by conjuring those ideas in front of our mind's eye which the words stand for. Burke classifies words into three types-

- (i) aggregate words like man, horse, tree, castle, etc. They represent simple ideas united by nature to form a determinate composition.
- (ii) abstract words like red, blue, round, square, etc. They stand for one simple idea.
- (iii) compound abstract words formed by an arbitrary union, of the two previous types and of the various relations between them in greater or less degrees of complexity; as virtue, honour, persuasion, magistrate.

Burke is interested in a discussion of the third type of words-compound abstracts. He claims that they do appeal to us, but not by representing something they denote. Burke points that they do not constitute "real essences". As instance he points out that on hearing compound abstract words like virtue, liberty, or honour-one can't get any precise idea of the relations which these words stand for. Burke says that when we analyze these words we reduce them from one set of general words to another, and then into the simple abstracts and aggregates. Proceeding along this chain of explication, by the time we discover the original ideas the effect of the composition is totally lost. Therefore this sort of meaning-making is unsuited to general conversations. When we encounter such words in reality, we see them being applied to good or evil happening to someone. Thereafter, whenever we encounter such words we associate the sounds to their earlier context and deduce whether they represent good or evil. With time, we completely forget their

original context but only remember whether they point towards good or evil. This impression is consciously/unwittingly used by our minds as we attempt to read across texts in our lives.

Section III

Alluding to John Locke, Edmund Burke points out that even before the complete sense of a word is acquainted to a child, the positive or negative connotation of the word is taught. Later in life when the situations befitting these words arise, it often happens that those words referring to evil give pleasant sensations and vice versa. Burke calls it “a strange confusion of ideas and affections”, resulting in contradiction between notions and actions. Burke opines that even people who sincerely love virtue and detest vice often act wickedly at times. On these occasions passions on the side of virtue were not aroused due to the contradiction between the particular occasion and the ideas with which the sounds have been generally associated. As instance Burke quotes words like “Wise, valiant, generous, good, and great” which generally affect us irrespective of occasion. Burke identifies such scenarios when words unbecoming of necessity are used, as instances of ‘bombast’. He holds good sense and experience as caveats against the wayward power of language.

Section IV

Burke identifies the threefold effect of words on us-

(i) sound, (ii) manner, (iii) the affection of the soul produced by one or by both of the foregoing. Compounded abstract words produce the first and third named effects.

But Simple Abstract words like blue, green, hot, cold etc play all three of the purposes of words. But Burke feels that these words do not derive their power by forming pictures of the several things they would represent in the imagination. Though the simple abstracts may sometimes directly be associated with some particular idea or object, the compound abstracts never conjure any picture in the mind. On the contrary they refer to a train of associations. By quoting a passage describing the course of the river Danube, he explains how in real reading experiences words rapidly appear in clusters and thus forbid tracing the chain of association which they refer to. Therefore, he concludes that “it is impracticable to jump from sense to thought, from particulars to generals, from things to words, in such a manner as to answer the purposes of life; nor is it necessary that we should.”

Section V

Burke says that he has often tried to convince people that their passions are aroused by words whose core ideas they don't know. Moreover, these people are never convinced when he tells them that in common conversation we do understand what others are saying even without delving into the train of associations conjured by the word. Burke proposes disinterested/unbiased analysis of words and mechanism of appeal on us.

Burke says that while composing this work he became aware of the possibility that one might hear/read words which appeal to him (without grasping the complete essence) and later be capable of using them to elicit the same or other appealing emotions in others. In this regard he mentions a blind poet Mr Blacklock who had no way of identifying or distinguishing among

colours. But in Mr Blacklock's description of colourful objects surpasses the propriety or justness with which people without visual deformities may describe those objects. Burke points out that Mr Blacklock is a living example of someone who cannot have a clear idea of colours, yet he has been so moved by their description that he can in turn describe them with vigour.

Section VI

In this Section Burke distinguishes between descriptive and dramatic types of poetry. Burke opines that dramatic poetry imitates the manners and passions of men following the dictum "animi motus effert interprete lingua" (meaning "of the emotional highlights of the tongue"). But descriptive poetry operates chiefly by substitution-it uses sounds (which refer to things or ideas) to give the effect of reality.

Section VII

Words can only represent but cannot conjure the real object which they name or describe and this may lead one to conjecture that the power of words would be trivial. But in reality, they exert profound impact on our minds. Burke accounts the source of this impact to three sources-

(i) Whenever we describe how someone is affected by something, our description is already coloured by the manner in which we are ourselves affected by that person's fate (sympathy/apathy/antipathy). Moreover, the way in which we are affected by the fate of others depends on our perspective, which in turn is built around what others have said/written on that subject. To speak/write, words are indispensable.

(ii) Abstract ideas often do not have material reality. But there are words representing abstract ideas. These words often wield substantial power over our passions and direct our actions.

(iii) Words give us the power to combine things we cannot otherwise combine as materials in reality. Moreover, description through words can impart "enlivening touches" which painting cannot hope to attain. Words connote more than they denote. Therefore they mean more than simply the materials denoted by the words. As an instance Burke quotes Milton in whose description the habitation of the fallen angels-"Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs and dens" is made more gloomy by linking it with "shades of death, /A universe of death." The geographical features listed as the abode of fallen angels could not be equated with suggestion of evil without the mechanism of words.

But once again Burke points out that words do not always "clearly" depict the things they represent. In such cases it is paradoxical that words can emote more effectively than the things represented. But Burke himself untangles this knotty paradox when he defines the nature of human mind as-" We yield to sympathy what we refuse to description".

Actually verbal description conveys a poor and insufficient idea of the thing described. Such "naked description" does not affect us. It requires careful handling of modes of speech to enliven the description so that the listener may be moved. Burke opines that "very polished languages" like the French language are characterized by "superior clearness and perspicuity" but they are deficient in strength. On the other hand Oriental languages are very powerful. He says:

“Uncultivated people are but ordinary observers of things, and not critical in distinguishing them; but, for that reason, they admire more, and are more affected with what they see, and therefore express themselves in a warmer and more passionate manner.”

Burke says that “affection” might often be well-conveyed without the idea being precisely presented. He concludes by stating that to understand how words affect us, it were best to enquire into the properties of such things in nature, as raise love and astonishment in us; and by showing us in what manner they operated to produce these effects.”

Suggested Reading

1. *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke: From the Sublime and Beautiful to American Independence*-David Bromwich
2. *The Theory of the Sublime: From Longinus to Kant*-Robert Doran
3. *The Sublime (The New Critical Idiom)*-Philip Shaw
4. *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question (SUNY Series: Philosophy and Critical Theory)*-Rodolphe Gasche and Mark C. Taylor (eds)
5. *The Sublime: A Reader in Eighteenth Century Aesthetic Theory* –Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla (eds)
6. ‘Burke on the Sublime and the Beautiful’-Anthony Quinton
7. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*-Edmund Burke
8. ‘Edmund Burke and the Emotions’-David Dwan.
9. ‘A Short Guide to the History of the Sublime’-Kenneth Holmqvist and Jaroslaw Pluciennik

Assignment

1. By what mechanism do words exert their influence on the mind?
2. What is Burke’s purpose behind introducing the anecdote of Mr Blacklock?
3. How does Burke characterize dramatic poetry? How can one differentiate it from descriptive poetry?
4. According to Burke, what causes “a strange confusion of ideas and affections”?
5. How far does Burke concur/differ from Longinus’ account of the sublime? Discuss.
6. Present an analytical study of the concept of sublime, as handled by British philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

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