ਜਗਤ ਗੁਰੂ ਨਾਨਕ ਦੇਵ
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ਪਟਿਆਲਾ

JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV

PUNJAB STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY, PATIALA

(Established by Act No. 19 of 2019 of the Legislature of State of Punjab)

The Motto of the University

(SEWA)

SKILL ENHANCEMENT EMPLOYABILITY WISDOM ACCESSIBILITY



M.A. English
Semester – I

Course Code: MAEM23102T

Course Name: Renaissance Drama

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JAGAT GURU NANAK DEV
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M.A. English

Course Code: MAEM23102T

Course: : **Renaissance Drama**

Programme Coordinator

Dr. Navleen Multani

Associate Prof. in English

Head, School of Languages

Course Coordinator and Editor

Mr. Gursandesh Singh

Course Outcome

The Learns of this course will be able to:

- Comprehend 19th to 16th Century Drama.
- Understanding of the social and historical context in which the plays werte writer.
- critically thinking examine Drama.
- Enhanced their knowledge of Renaissance & Elizabethan cultures.

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PREFACE

Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala, established in December 2019 by Act 19 of the Legislature of State of Punjab, is the first and only Open University of the State, entrusted with the responsibility of making higher education accessible to all especially to those sections of society who do not have the means, time or opportunity to pursue regular education.

In keeping with the nature of an Open University, this University provides a flexible education system to suit every need. The time given to complete a programme is double the duration of a regular mode programme. Well-designed study material has been prepared in consultation with experts in their respective fields.

The University offers programmes which have been designed to provide relevant, skill-based and employability-enhancing education. The study material provided in this booklet is self-instructional, with self-assessment exercises, and recommendations for further readings. The syllabus has been divided in sections, and provided as units for simplification.

The Learner Support Centres/Study Centres are located in the Government and Government aided colleges of Punjab, to enable students to make use of reading facilities, and for curriculum-based counselling and practicals. We, at the University, welcome you to be a part of this institution of knowledge.

Prof. G. S. Batra,
Dean Academic Affairs

JGND PSOU

M.A. (English)

Semester – I

MAEM23102T: RENAISSANCE DRAMA

MAX. MARKS: 100

EXTERNAL: 70

INTERNAL: 30

PASS: 35%

Credits: 5

Objective:

The objective of the course is to study the development of British drama through a detailed analysis of texts with an emphasis on significant playwrights and their works. Additionally, it emphasizes on the understanding of the social and political environments influencing the texts in one way or the other.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PAPER SETTER/EXAMINER:

1. The syllabus prescribed should be strictly adhered to.
2. The question paper will consist of five sections: A, B, C, D, and E. Sections A, B, C, andD will have two questions from the respective sections of the syllabus and will carry 15marks each. The candidates will attempt one question from each section.
3. Section E will have four short answer questions covering the entire syllabus. Each question will carry 5 marks. Candidates will attempt any two questions from this section.
4. The examiner shall give a clear instruction to the candidates to attempt questions only atone place and only once. Second or subsequent attempts, unless the earlier ones have been crossed out, shall not be evaluated.
5. The duration of each paper will be three hours.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES:

Candidates are required to attempt any one question each from the sections A, B, C, andD of the question paper and any two short questions from Section E. They have to attempt questions only at one place and only once. Second or subsequent attempts, unless the earlier ones have been crossed out, shall not be evaluated.

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Section - A

Aristotle: *Poetics*

Section - B

Chistopher Marlowe: *Doctor Fanstus*

Section - C

William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*

Section - D

William Shakespeare: *King Lear*

Suggested Readings:

1. House, Humphry: Aristotle's Poetics
2. Lucas, D.W.: Aristotle's Poetics
3. Cheney, Patrick. The Cambridge Companion to Christopher Marlowe. Cambridge UP, 2004.
4. Kastan, David Scott (Ed.) Doctor Faustus. (Norton Critical Edition).
5. Wilson, Richard. Christopher Marlow. Longman Critical Series, 1999.
6. Bradley, A.C. Shakespearean Tragedy, 1904.
7. Muir, Kenneth, Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence, 1972.
8. Lee Bliss: The World’s Perspective: John Webster and the Jacobean Brighton.
9. http://swayam.gov.in/
10. http://edx.org formerly http://mooc.org

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M.A. (English)
Semester – I
Course: Renaissance Drama
Section A

UNIT I: Aristotle Poetics

STRUCTURE

1.0 Objective
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Form And Content
1.3 Form
1.4 Content
1.5 Influence
1.6 Summary
1.7 Analysis
1.8 Let's sum up
1.9 Keywords
1.10 Questions for Review
1.11 Suggested Readings and References

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1.0 OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the unit is to introduce students with Aristotle's poetics. After the study of this unit, the students will be able to understand Aristotle's important concepts:

Tragidy

Epic

Plot

Character

Thought

Diction

Melody

and catharsis

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Aristotle's Poetics is the earliest surviving work of dramatic theory and first extant philosophical treatise to focus on literary theory. Aristotle offers an account of what he calls "poetry" (a term that derives from a classical Greek term, ποιητής, that means "poet; author; maker" and in this context includes verse drama – comedy, tragedy, and the satyr play – as well as lyric poetry and epic poetry). They are similar in the fact that they are all imitationsbut different in three ways that Aristotle describes:

- Differences in music rhythm, harmony, meter and melody.
- Difference of goodness in the characters.

- Difference in how the narrative is presented: telling a story or acting it out.

In examining its "first principles", Aristotle finds two:

1. Imitation and Genres and other concepts by which that of truth is applied/revealed in the poesis.
2. His analysis of tragedy constitutes the core of the discussion. Although Aristotle's Poetics is universally acknowledged in the Western critical tradition, "almost every detail about his seminal work has aroused divergent opinions". The work was lost to the Western world for a long time. It was available in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance only through a Latin translation of an Arabic version written by Averroes.

1.2 FORM AND CONTENT

Aristotle's work on aesthetics consists of the Poetics, Politics and Rhetoric. The Poetics is specifically concerned with drama. At some point, Aristotle's original work was divided in two, each "book" written on a separate roll of papyrus. Only the first part – that which focuses on tragedy and epic (as a quasi-dramatic) – survives. The lost second part addressed comedy. Some scholars speculate that the Tractatuscoislinianus summarises the contents of the lost second book. Some other scholars indicate that "tragedy" is a very misleading translation for the Greek tragoidos, which seems to have meant "goat-song" originally.

1.1 1.3 FORM

The table of contents page of the Poetics found in Modern Library's Basic Works of Aristotle(2001) identifies five basic parts within it.

Preliminary discourse on tragedy, epic poetry, and comedy, as the chief forms of imitative poetry.

Definition of a tragedy, and the rules for its construction. Definition and analysis into qualitative parts.

Rules for the construction of a tragedy: Tragic pleasure, or catharsis experienced by fear and pity should be produced in the spectator. The characters must be four things: good, appropriate, realistic, and consistent. Discovery must occur within the plot. Narratives, stories, structures and poetics overlap. It is important for the poet to visualize all of the scenes when creating the plot. The poet should incorporate complication and dénouement within the story,as well as combine all of the elements of tragedy. The poet must express thought through the

characters' words and actions, while paying close attention to diction and how a character's spoken words express a specific idea. Aristotle believed that all of these different elements had to be present in order for the poetry to be well-done.

Possible criticisms of an epic or tragedy, and the answers to them.

Tragedy as artistically superior to epic poetry: Tragedy has everything that the epic has, even the epic meter being admissible. The reality of presentation is felt in the play as read,as well as in the play as acted. The tragic imitation requires less space for the attainment of itsend. If it has more concentrated effect, it is more pleasurable than one with a large admixture of time to dilute it. There is less unity in the imitation of the epic poets (plurality of actions) and this is proved by the fact that an epic poem can supply enough material for several tragedies.

1.4 CONTENT

Aristotle distinguishes between the genres of "poetry" in three ways:

1. **Matter**

Language, rhythm, and melody, for Aristotle, make up the matter of poetic creation. Where the epic poem makes use of language alone, the playing of the lyre involves rhythm and melody. Some poetic forms include a blending of all materials; for example, Greek tragic drama included a singing chorus, and so music and language were all part of the performance. These points also convey the standard view. Recent work, though, argues that translating rhuthmos here as "rhythm" is absurd: melody already has its own inherent musical rhythm, and the Greek can mean what Plato says it means in Laws II, 665a: "(the name of) ordered body movement," or dance. This correctly conveys what dramatic musical creation, the topic of the Poetics, in ancient Greece had: music, dance, and language. Also, the musical instrument cited in Chapter 1 is not the lyre but the kithara, which was played in the drama while the kithara-player was dancing (in the chorus), even if that meant just walking in an appropriate way. Moreover, epic might have had only literary exponents, but as Plato's Ion and Aristotle's Chapter 26 of the Poetics help prove, for Plato and Aristotle at least some epic rhapsodes used all three means of mimesis: language, dance (as pantomimic gesture), and music (if only by chanting the words).

2. **Subjects**

Also "agents" in some translations. Aristotle differentiates between tragedy and comedy throughout the work by distinguishing between the nature of the human characters that populate either form. Aristotle finds that tragedy deals with serious, important, and virtuous people. Comedy, on the other hand, treats of less virtuous people and focuses on human "weaknesses and foibles". Aristotle introduces here the influential tripartite division of characters in superior (βελτίονας) to the audience, inferior (χείρονας), or at the same level (τοιούτους).

3. Method

One may imitate the agents through use of a narrator throughout, or only occasionally (using direct speech in parts and a narrator in parts, as Homer does), or only through direct speech (without a narrator), using actors to speak the lines directly. This latter is the method of tragedy(and comedy): without use of any narrator.

Having examined briefly the field of "poetry" in general, Aristotle proceeds to his definition of tragedy:

Tragedy is a representation of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play] and [represented] by people acting and not by narration, accomplishing by means of pity and terror and the catharsis of such emotions.

By "embellished speech", I mean that which has rhythm and melody, i.e. song. By "with its elements separately", I mean that some [parts of it] are accomplished only by means of spoken verses, and others again by means of song (1449b25-10).

Parts of Tragedy: Aristotle identifies the following parts of tragedy:

Plot (mythos)

Refers to the "organization of incidents". It should imitate an action evoking pity and fear. The plot involves a change from bad towards good, or good towards bad. Complex plots have reversals and recognitions. The most tragic plot pushes a good character towards undeserved misfortune because of a mistake (hamartia). Plots revolving around such a mistake are more tragic than plots with two sides and an opposite outcome for the good and the bad. Violent situations are most tragic if they are between friends and family. Threats can be resolved (best last) by being done in knowledge, done in ignorance and then discovered, almost be done in ignorance but be discovered in the last moment. Actions should follow logically from the situation created by what has happened before, and from the character of the agent. This goes for recognitions and reversals as well, as even surprises are more satisfying to the audience if they afterwardsare seen as a plausible or necessary consequence.

Character (ethos)

Character is the moral or ethical character of the agents. It is revealed when the agent makes moral choices. In a perfect tragedy, the character will support the plot, which means personal motivations and traits will somehow connect parts of the cause-and-effect chain of actions producing pity and fear.

Main character should be: good

Aristotle explains that audiences do not like, for example, villains "making fortune from

misery" in the end. It might happen though, and might make the play interesting. Nevertheless, the moral is at stake here and morals are important to make people happy (people can, for example, see tragedy because they want to release their anger).

- appropriate—if a character is supposed to be wise, it is unlikely he is young (supposingwisdom is gained with age).
- consistent—if a person is a soldier, he is unlikely to be scared of blood (if this soldieris scared of blood it must be explained and play some role in the story to avoid confusing the audience); it is also "good" if a character doesn't change opinion "that much" if the play is not"driven" by who characters are, but by what they do (audience is confused in case of unexpected shifts in behaviour [and its reasons and morals] of characters).
- "consistently inconsistent"—if a character always behaves foolishly it is strange if he suddenly becomes smart. In this case it would be good to explain such change, otherwise theaudience may be confused. If character changes opinion a lot it should be clear he is a characterwho has this trait, not a real life person – this is also to avoid confusion.

Thought (dianoia)—spoken (usually) reasoning of human characters can explain the characters or story background.

Diction (lexis) Lexis is better translated according to some as "speech" or "language." Otherwise, the relevant necessary condition stemming from logos in the definition (language) has no followup: mythos (plot) could be done by dancers or pantomime artists, given Chs 1, 2 and 4, if the actions are structured (on stage, as drama was usually done), just like plot for us can be given in film or in a story-ballet with no words.

It refers to the quality of speech in tragedy. Speeches should reflect character, the moral qualities of those on the stage. The expression of the meaning of the words melody (melos) "Melos" can also mean "music-dance" as some musicologists recognize, especially given that its primary meaning in ancient Greek is "limb" (an arm or a leg). This isarguably more sensible because then Aristotle is conveying what the chorus actually did.

The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors. It should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action. Should be contributed to the unity of the plot. It is a very real factor in the pleasure of the drama.

Spectacle (opsis)

It refers to the visual apparatus of the play, including set, costumes and props (anything you can see). Aristotle calls spectacle the "least artistic" element of tragedy, and the "least

connected with the work of the poet (playwright). For example: if the play has "beautiful" costumes and"bad" acting and "bad" story, there is "something wrong" with it.

1.5 INFLUENCE

The Arabic version of Aristotle's Poetics that influenced the Middle Ages was translated from a Greek manuscript dated to some time prior to the year 700. This manuscript, translated from Greek to Syriac, is independent of the currently-accepted 11th-century source designated Paris 1741. The Syriac-language source used for the Arabic translations departed widely in vocabulary from the original Poetics and it initiated a misinterpretation of Aristotelian thought that continued through the Middle Ages. Paris 1741 appears online at the Bibliothèquenationale de France (National Library of France).

Arabic scholars who published significant commentaries on Aristotle's Poetics included Avicenna, Al-Farabi and Averroes. Many of these interpretations sought to use Aristotelian theory to impose morality on the Arabic poetic tradition. In particular, Averroes added a moral dimension to the Poetics by interpreting tragedy as the art of praise and comedy as the art of blame. Averroes' interpretation of the Poetics was accepted by the West, where it reflected the "prevailing notions of poetry" into the 16th century.

Recent scholarship has challenged whether Aristotle focuses on literary theory per se (given that not one poem exists in the treatise) or whether he focuses instead on dramatic musical theory that only has language as one of the elements.

1.6 SUMMARY

Aristotle proposes to study poetry by analyzing its constitutive parts and then drawing general conclusions. The portion of the Poetics that survives discusses mainly tragedy and epic poetry. We know that Aristotle also wrote a treatise on comedy that has been lost. He defines poetry as the mimetic, or imitative, use of language, rhythm, and harmony, separately or in combination. Poetry is mimetic in that it creates a representation of objects and events in the world, unlike philosophy, for example, which presents ideas. Humans are naturally drawn to imitation, and so poetry has a strong pull on us. It can also be an excellent learning device, since we can coolly observe imitations of things like dead bodies and disgusting animals whenthe real thing would disturb us.

Aristotle identifies tragedy as the most refined version of poetry dealing with lofty matters andcomedy as the most refined version of poetry dealing with base matters. He traces a brief and speculative history of tragedy as it evolved from dithyrambic hymns in praise of the god Dionysus. Dithyrambs were sung by a large choir, sometimes featuring a narrator. Aeschylus invented tragedy by bringing a second actor into dialogue with the narrator.

Sophocles innovated further by introducing a third actor, and gradually tragedy shifted to its contemporary dramatic form.

Aristotle defines tragedy according to seven characteristics: (1) it is mimetic, (2) it is serious, (1) it tells a full story of an appropriate length, (4) it contains rhythm and harmony, (5) rhythm and harmony occur in different combinations in different parts of the tragedy, (6) it is performed rather than narrated, and (7) it arouses feelings of pity and fear and then purges these feelings through catharsis. A tragedy consists of six component parts, which are listed here in order from most important to least important: plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle.

A well-formed plot must have a beginning, which is not a necessary consequence of any previous action; a middle, which follows logically from the beginning; and an end, which follows logically from the middle and from which no further action necessarily follows. The plot should be unified, meaning that every element of the plot should tie the rest of the plot, leaving no loose ends. This kind of unity allows tragedy to express universal themes powerfully, which makes it superior to history, which can only talk about particular events. Episodic plots are bad because there is no necessity to the sequence of events. The best kind of plot contains surprises, but surprises that, in retrospect, fit logically into the sequence of events. The best kinds of surprises are brought about by peripeteia, or reversal of fortune, and anagnorisis, or discovery. A good plot progresses like a knot that is tied up with increasingly greater complexity until the moment of peripeteia, at which point the knot is gradually untied until it reaches a completely unknotted conclusion.

For a tragedy to arouse pity and fear, we must observe a hero who is relatively noble going from happiness to misery as a result of error on the part of the hero. Our pity and fear is arousedmost when it is family members who harm one another rather than enemies or strangers. In the best kind of plot, one character narrowly avoids killing a family member unwittingly thanks to an anagnorisis that reveals the family connection. The hero must have good qualities appropriate to his or her station and should be portrayed realistically and consistently. Since both the character of the hero and the plot must have logical consistency, Aristotle concludes that the untying of the plot must follow as a necessary consequence of the plot and not from stage artifice, like a deus ex machina (a machine used in some plays, in which an actor playing one of the gods was lowered onto the stage at the end).

Aristotle discusses thought and diction and then moves on to address epic poetry. Whereas tragedy consists of actions presented in a dramatic form, epic poetry consists of verse presented in a narrative form. Tragedy and epic poetry have many common qualities, most

notably the unity of plot and similar subject matter. However, epic poetry can be longer than tragedy, and because it is not performed, it can deal with more fantastic action with a much wider scope. By contrast, tragedy can be more focused and takes advantage of the devices of music and spectacle. Epic poetry and tragedy are also written in different meters. After defending poetry against charges that it deals with improbable or impossible events, Aristotle concludes by weighing tragedy against epic poetry and determining that tragedy is on the whole superior.

Chapter 1-5

Aristotle begins with a loose outline of what he will address in The Poetics:

a. The different kinds of poetry and the 'essential quality' of each
b. The structure necessary for a 'good poem'
c. The method in which a poem is divided into parts
d. Anything else that might tangentially come up in his address of the above topics.

But before tackling these topics, Aristotle first seeks to define poetry. Poetry, as Aristotle defines it, is first and foremost a 'medium of imitation,' meaning a form of art that seeks to duplicate or represent life. Poetry can imitate life in a number of ways, by representing character, emotion, action, or even everyday objects.

Poetry, as Aristotle defines it, includes epic poetry, tragedy, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and music (specifically of flute, and lyre). What differentiates these kinds of poetry is the nature of their 'imitation.' He notes three differences.

1. **Medium of Imitation**

In general, poetry imitates life through rhythm, language, and harmony. This is more pronounced in music or dance, but even verse poetry can accomplish imitation through language alone

2. **Object of Imitation**

Art seeks to imitate men in action - hence the term 'drama' (dramitas, in Greek) is used for it. In order to imitate men, art must either present man as 'better' than they are in life (i.e. of higher morals),as true to life, or as 'worse' than they are in life (i.e. of lower morals).

Each author has his own tendencies - Homer 'makes men better than they are,' Cleophon 'as they are', Nichochares 'worse than they are.' But more important is a general distinction that Aristotle makes between forms of drama: comedy represents men as worse than they are, tragedy as better than they are in actual life.

3. **Mode of Imitation**

A poet can imitate either through:

a. narration, in which he takes another personality (an omniscient 'I' watching the events 'likean observer')
b. speak in his own person, unchanged (the first-person 'I')
c. presents all his characters as living and moving before us (third-person narrator)

Continuing on from imitation, Aristotle turns to the anthropology and history of poetry. As Aristotle sees it, poetry emerged for two reasons -- 1) man's instinct to imitate things and 2) the instinct for 'harmony' and rhythm.

Once poetry emerged, it evolved in two directions. One group of poems imitated 'noble actions,' or the actions of good men. A second group of poets imitated 'the actions of meaner persons' in the form of satire. The former evolved into tragedy, the latter into epic poetry, then tragic drama.

Tragedy began as improvisation and evolved over time, through the contribution of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and others into its natural form of dramatic plot, dialogue, and iambic verse.

Comedy began as an imitation of characters 'of a lower type', meaning a representation of a defect or ugliness in character, which is not painful or destructive. Comedy was at first not taken seriously, but once plot was introduced in Sicily comedic theater, it soon grew into a respected form.

Epic poetry, finally, imitates men of noble action, like tragedy. But epic poetry only allows one kind of meter and is narrative in form. Moreover, tragedy usually confines itself to a single day, whereas epic poetry has no limits of time. Ultimately, all the elements of an epic poem are found in tragedy, but not all the elements of tragedy are found in an epic poem.

Chapter 6-12

Tragedy is an imitation of action with the following characteristics: it is serious, complete, ofsignificant magnitude, depicted with rhythmic language and/or song, in the form of action (notnarrative), and produces a 'purgation' of pity and fear in the audience (also known as catharsis).

Since tragedy is the imitation of action, it is chiefly concerned with the lives of men, and thuspresents a stage for character and thought. Character - the qualities ascribed to a certain man - and thought, according to Aristotle, are the two causes from which actions spring. These elements also determine the success of a given action. Plot, then, is arrangement of incidents (successes or failures) that result from character and thought giving way to action.

With the above in mind, Aristotle lays out the six parts that define a tragedy:

- Plot

- Character
- Diction (rhythmic language)
- Thought
- Spectacle
- Song

Plot is the most important part of a tragedy for a number of reasons. First, the result of a man'sactions determines his success or failure, and hence his happiness, so it is action which is paramount - not character, which doesn't necessarily affect every action. Second, without action, there cannot be a tragedy - but there can be a tragedy without character. Thirdly, diction, song, and thought - even elegantly combined - cannot replicate the action of life without plot.

Plot, then, is the 'soul of a tragedy,' and character comes second. Rounding out his rankings: thought, meaning what a character says in a given circumstance, followed by diction, song, and spectacle.

Aristotle goes on to describe the elements of plot, which include completeness, magnitude, unity, determinate structure, and universality. Completeness refers to the necessity of a tragedyto have a beginning, middle, and end. A 'beginning' is defined as an origin, by which something naturally comes to be. An 'end,' meanwhile, follows another incident by necessity, but has nothing necessarily following it. The 'middle' follows something just as something must followit.

'Magnitude' refers simply to length -- the tragedy must be of a 'length which can be easily embraced by the memory.' Aristotle believes that how longer a tragedy is the more beautiful it can be, provided it maintains its beginning, middle, and end. And in the sequenceof these three acts, the tragedy will present a change 'from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad.'

'Unity' refers to the centering of all the plot's action around a common theme or idea.

'Determinate structure' refers to the fact that the plot all hinges on a sequence of causal, imitative events, so if one were to remove even one part of the plot, the entire tragedy 'will be disjointed and disturbed.' More simply, every part of a good plot is necessary.

'Universality' refers to the necessity of a given character to speak or act according to how all or most humans would react in a given situation, 'according to the law of probability or necessity.'

Aristotle ends this discussion of plot elements by pointing his out his particular disdain for 'episodic' plots - plots in which episodes succeed one another 'without probably or necessary sequence' (like a weekly sitcom, for instance). These episodic dramas stretch plot 'beyond their

capacity,' and hence are inorganic.

Chapter 10-12

In order for plot to function, it not only needs the basic concepts from the previous chapters, but the following components as well: astonishment, reversal (or peripeteia), recognition, andsuffering.

Astonishment refers to a tragedy's ability to inspire 'fear and pity.' Both fear and pity are elicited from an audience when the events come by surprise, but not by chance. The surprise that drives the tragedy must feel like it is part of a grander design.

Reversal is the change by which the main action of the story comes full-circle -- for example, In Oedipus, the messenger who comes to free Oedipus from his fears of his mother produces the opposite effect with his news.

Recognition is the change from ignorance to knowledge, usually involving people coming to understand the identities of one another or discovering whether a person 'has done a thing or not.' The best forms of recognition are linked with a reversal (as in Oedipus) and, in tandem, will produce pity and fear from the audience.

Suffering is a destructive or painful action, which is often the result of a reversal or recognition. Aristotle points out that a 'simple' plot omits a reversal or recognition, but a 'complex plot has one or the other - or both, if it is truly transcendent. All tragedies, however, depend on sufferingas part of its attempt to elicit pity and fear from the audience.

Finally, Aristotle points out the structural parts of a tragedy (or 'quantitative' parts, as he callsthem). These are the prologue, episode, exode, and choric song.

The prologue is the part of the tragedy which precedes the first undivided utterance of the chorus. The episode is the part of the tragedy between choral songs, and the exode is the firstpart of a tragedy with no choric song after it.

Chapter 11-16

Aristotle goes on to addresses what elements comprise the 'best' tragic plots. First, a perfect tragedyshould have a complex plan - thus using reversal and recognition to imitate actions which elicit fear or pity in the audience. And yet, a good tragedy does not simply present the spectacle of a virtuous man suffering adversity, for that is merely 'shocking' and does not make us empathize with the hero.

If pity is aroused by 'unmerited misfortune,' and fear by 'the misfortune of a man like ourselves,' then a good tragedy presents a character whose downfall comes because of a flawin him - 'an error or frailty.' Though he is renowned, prosperous, even seeming virtuous, thereis a chink in his armor that will inevitably be found - and will be the source of his demise.

Fear and pity truly can only be elicited through this tragic flaw in the hero which in turn is motivated by the 'unity' or spine of the entire piece. Some poets, says Aristotle, use spectacle to motivate fear and pity, but this ultimately does not resonate for long, since spectacle produces a different type of 'pleasure' than the one requisite for tragedy. Only pity and fear can produce true 'purgation' or emotions, rather than a spectacle of false catharsis.

Aristotle next summarizes the circumstances that make for good tragedy. First, it must involve incidents between people who are 'dear to one another' - i.e. a son killing a mother, a brother killing a brother, etc. There are all kinds of permutations of such an incident:

- the act can be done consciously and with knowledge of the people involved (i.e. Medeaslaying her children)
- the act can be done ignorantly, and the tie of family or friendship discovered afterwards (i.e.Oedipus)
- the act is not done, because the hero can't go through with it
- the act is about to be done, but then the discovery reveals the true identities of the characters,and the deed is stopped before it does irreparable harm.

When it comes to character, a poet should aim for four things. First, the hero must be 'good,' and thus manifest moral purpose in his speech. Second, the hero must have propriety, or 'manlyvalor.' Thirdly, the hero must be 'true to life.' And finally, the hero must be consistent.

The concept of 'true to life' is addressed further, and Aristotle points out that a well-drawn character acts out of 'probability and necessity,' not because of some arbitrary traits bestowedupon him by the author. Moreover, the unraveling of the plot comes from the actions of the plot itself - the inner logic of the chain of events, rather than the character himself. Indeed, a well-drawn character is simply in service of the plot.

Aristotle next lists the types of recognition available to a poet. First, there is recognition by signs - bodily marks, external ornaments like jewelry, or some other marking that delineates the secret identity of a person. Aristotle calls this type of recognition the 'least artistic type.'

Second, there is recognition 'invented by will,' or the sudden revelation of an identity withoutforewarning or necessity. This too, says Aristotle, is a type of device 'wanting in art.'

A third type is recognition from memory, where a character sees an object and it 'awakens a feeling,' and recognition from 'reasoning' provides a fourth type, where the character determines a secret identity through a process of deduction. Fifth is recognition involving 'false interference,' where a messenger or outside character facilitates the revelation.

But the sixth and best type of recognition is one that 'arises from the incidents themselves' andthe discovery is made naturally in the course of the plot. Again, Aristotle points

to Oedipus Rex as the model, since nothing in the construction of the revelation is artificial. It is simply a process of the plot's unravelling from the center, an essential core of the drama's unity.

Chapter 17-20

Aristotle points out that visualizing the action is crucial for a poet in order to avoid gaps in logic or inconsistencies. Rather than see the action in his head, Aristotle says the poet must work out the action 'before his eyes.'

Aristotle also suggests that a poet construct a general outline and then fill in episodes and detail. Thus, a poet can work out a play's essence, and then focus on the episodes that will support this essence and in effect, create 'unity.'

Every tragedy contains two parts - complication and unraveling (denouement). The complication refers to everything from the beginning of the action to the turning point, or climax where bad fortune turns to good, or good fortune turns to bad. The unraveling, or denouement, extends from the climax to the end, and tracks the final transformation of a hero to good or bad fortune.

Aristotle presents four kinds of tragedy:

a. **complex** - depending entirely on reversal and recognition at the climax
b. **pathetic** - motivated by passion
c. **ethical** - motivated by moral purpose
d. **simple** - without reversal or recognition

Aristotle concludes his discussion of reversal and recognition by suggesting that a tragedy should not assume an epic structure - involving many plots. One plot that creates unity of action is all that is required for tragic catharsis.

Aristotle moves on to diction next, or the expression of thought through speech. Speech can be divided into a) proof and refutation, b) excitation of feelings (pity, fear, and anger), or c) the suggestion of importance. Indeed, action can be divided similarly - but the difference between action and speech is that action can stand alone without exposition, while speech depends on the effect of the speech in order to gain a result. The speech, in itself, is an action.

Chapter 21-24

Aristotle classifies Greek words in an esoteric discussion of 'simple' and 'compound' terms, and the reader can sift through a majority of this analysis and focus instead on his definition of a few key literary terms.

First is 'metaphor,' or the use of 'transference' to link two unlike things. 'Life's setting sun,' for instance, does not hedge or qualify its comparison with 'like' or 'as' (that would be a simile), or create primacy around one term (as in an analogy). Instead, a metaphor simply links

two objects with the understanding that the reader will find the unity of concept that connects them.

Aristotle points out that the best poetry uses only 'current and proper words,' meaning the contemporary lexicon. When an author resorts to 'lofty' or esoteric language, he alienates the reader. Indeed, a metaphor, says Aristotle, only truly works when it uses ordinary words; if one were to use 'strange' or 'raised' words for a metaphor or other literary device, it simply collapses into jargon.

And yet, Aristotle also permits the good poet to lengthen, contract, and alter words to fit his purpose. By playing with ordinary words, the poet creates 'distinct' language, but at the same time ensures that the reader will maintain clarity. By playing with accepted or ordinary words, the poet can engage the reader at the highest level. (One can think of Shakespeare here, and the way he so often uses recognizable words in extraordinary ways to achieve his rhythms andimages.)

Aristotle next proceeds to discuss the epic form - which employs a single meter, a dramatic plot, unity, and all the other features of a tragedy. (As mentioned before, a proper epic maintains all the elements of a tragedy, since tragedy evolved from the epic form.) An epic does not portray a single action, but rather a single 'period,' thus often charting the course of many characters over the course of many events.

Epic poetry falls into the same categories as tragedy: simple, complex, ethical or pathetic. Alsolike tragedy, it requires reversals, recognitions, scenes of suffering, and artistic thought and diction. There are a few differences between tragedy and epic, however.

First, an epic poem, however, will not use song or spectacle to achieve its cathartic effect. Second, epics often cannot be presented at a single sitting, whereas tragedies are usually capable of being brought within a single view. Epic poetry, after all, is not confined to the stage - and thus, many events and characters can be presented simultaneously because of its narrative form. Finally, the 'heroic measure' of epic poetry is hexameter, where tragedy often uses other forms of meter to achieve the rhythms of different characters' speech.

Aristotle points out that the poet should take as little part as possible in the actual story of an epic - meaning limited first-person narration, and no personal appearances in scenes if possible. At the same time, 'wonderment,' created by absurdity or irrational events for the purposes of indulging the reader's pleasure, is allowed in an epic poem - even moreso than ina tragedy. An absurd event or moment can pass more unnoticed in an epic poem, simply because it is not being dramatized onstage.

That said, Aristotle notes that a tragic plot cannot have 'irrational parts.' There must be

likelihood, no matter how seemingly impossible the circumstances - as long as we trust that given the initial incident, the plot follows logically and probably, then the poet is in the realmof good drama. But if we believe neither the inciting incident, nor the chain of events that follows, the poem is simply absurd, and thus summarily dismissed.

Chapter 25-26

Aristotle next tackles 'critical difficulties' that a poet may face and the solutions that will ensurehis success. He names three major 'solutions' for poets in attempting to imitate action and life:

- The poet must imitate either things as they are, things as they are thought to be, or things asthey ought to be
- The poet must imitate in action and language; the latter must be current terms, or metaphors(and occasionally rare words)
- Errors come when the poet imitates incorrectly - and thus destroys the essence of the poem or when the poet accidentally makes an error (a factual error, for instance), which does not ultimately sabotage the entire work. The only error that matters is one that touches the essentialof the given work - for instance, 'not to know that a hind has no horns is a less serious matter than to paint it inartistically.'

Critics often argue with a poet's work if it is seen as either impossible, irrational, morally hurtful, contradictory, or contrary to artistic correctness. Aristotle refutes all of these judgments by saying simply that it is the purpose - the essence - of the work that matters, andits goal in imitating reality as it is, as it is thought to be, or as it ought to be.

Aristotle concludes by tackling the question of whether the epic or tragic form is 'the higher.'Most critics of his time argued that tragedy was for an inferior audience that required the gesture of performers, while epic poetry was for a 'cultivated audience' which could filter a narrative form through their own imagined characters.

Aristotle replies with the following:

- Epic recitation can be marred with overdone gesticulation in the same way as a tragedy; there is no guarantee that the epic form is not one motivated by the oral gestures of the ones who recite it for audiences
- Tragedy, like poetry, produces its effect without action - its power is in the mere reading; enacting it onstage should give the exact same effect as reading a good epic loud
- The tragedy is, in fact, superior, because it has all the epic elements as well as

spectacle andmusic to provide an indulgent pleasure for the audience. Moreover, it maintains a vividness ofimpression in reading as well as staging.

Tragedy, then, despite the argument of critics is the higher art. And with this quite controversial conclusion Aristotle ends his work.

1.7 ANALYSIS

Aristotle takes a scientific approach to poetry, which bears as many disadvantages as advantages. He studies poetry, observing and analyzing first, and only afterward making tentative hypotheses and recommendations. The scientific approach works best at identifying the objective, law like behavior that underlies the phenomena being observed. To this end, Aristotle draws some important general conclusions about the nature of poetry and how it achieves its effects. However, in assuming that there are objective laws underlying poetry, Aristotle fails to appreciate the ways in which art often progresses precisely by overturning the assumed laws of a previous generation. If every play were written in strict accordance with a given set of laws for a long enough time, a revolutionary playwright would be able to achieve powerful effects by consciously violating these laws. In point of fact, Euripides, the last of the three great tragic poets of Ancient Greece, wrote many plays that violated the logical and structured principles of Aristotle's Poetics in aconscious effort to depict a world that he saw as neither logical nor structured. Aristotle himself gives mixed reviews to Euripides' troubling plays, but they are still performed two and a half millennia after they were written.

Aristotle's concept of mimesis helps him to explain what is distinctive about our experience of art. Poetry is mimetic, meaning that it invites us to imagine its subject matter as real while acknowledging that it is in fact fictional. When Aristotle contrasts poetry with philosophy, hispoint is not so much that poetry is mimetic because it portrays what is real while philosophy is nonmimetic because it portrays only ideas. Rather, the point is that the ideas discussed in philosophical texts are as real as any ideas ever are. When we see an actor playing Oedipus, this actor is clearly a substitute through which we can imagine what a real Oedipus might be like. When we read Aristotle's ideas on art, we are in direct contact with the ideas, and there is nothing more real to imagine. Art presents reality at one level of remove, allowing us a certain detachment. We do not call the police when we see Hamlet kill Polonius because we know that we are not seeing a real event but only two actors imitating real-world possibilities. Because we are conscious of the mimesis involved in art, we are detached enough that we can reflect on what we are experiencing and so learn from it. Witnessing a murder in real life is emotionally scarring. Witnessing a murder on stage gives us a chance to reflect on the nature and causes of human violence so that we can lead a more reflective and sensitive life.

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Aristotle identifies catharsis as the distinctive experience of art, though it is not clear whether he means that catharsis is the purpose of art or simply an effect. The Greek word italicise originally means purging or purification and refers also to the induction of vomiting by a doctor to rid the body of impurities. Aristotle uses the term metaphorically to refer to the release of the emotions of pity and fear built up in a dramatic performance. Because dramatic performances end, whereas life goes on, we can let go of the tension that builds during a dramatic performance in a way that we often cannot let go of the tension that builds up over the course of our lives. Because we can let go of it, the emotional intensity of art deepens us, whereas emotional intensity in life often just hardens us. However, if this process of catharsis that allows us to experience powerful emotions and then let them go is the ultimate purpose of art, then art becomes the equivalent of therapy. If we define catharsis as the purpose of art, we have failed to define art in a way that explains why it is still necessary in an era of psychiatry. A more generous reading of Aristotle might interpret catharsis as a means to a less easily defined end, which involves a deeper capacity for feeling and compassion, a deeper awareness of what our humanity consists in.

Aristotle insists on the primacy of plot because the plot is ultimately what we can learn from in a piece of art. The word we translate as “plot” is the Greek word muthos, which is the italicise root for myth. Muthos is a more general term than plot, as it can apply to any art form, including music or sculpture. The muthos of a piece of art is its general structure and organization, the form according to which the themes and ideas in the piece of art make themselves apparent. The plot of a story, as the term is used in the Poetics, is not the sequence of events so much as the logical relationships that exist between events. For Aristotle, the tighter the logical relationships between events, the better the plot. Oedipus Rex is a powerful tragedy precisely because we can see the logical inevitability with which the events in the story fall together. The logical relationships between events in a story help us to perceive logical relationships between the events in our own lives. In essence, tragedy shows us patterns in human experience that we can use to make sense of our own experience.

Poetics begins quickly and efficiently, unlike a number of Aristotle's other works. Instead of laying out an argument for why the subjects merits such a discussion or an overall thesis for his investigation, he immediately lays out an outline for his work - types of poetry, structure, and division - and begins his systematic analysis.

As one critic notes, "The preliminaries are over in ten lines... Nothing is said about the purpose of the discussion, what Aristotle hopes to accomplish by it; next to nothing about method, or the views of others on poetry. But above all we miss something that stands as preface

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to every major work of Aristotle's [best work], namely some general statement by way of orientation..."(Else, 2). In other words, Aristotle usually presents a 'notion of the forest,' before he begins to look at the trees. But not in the Poetics.

The first three chapters of the Poetics are action-packed - nearly every line needs to be carefully dealt with, since Aristotle presents a myriad of definitions, concepts, and categories. But the first major issue is to understand involves the term 'Poetics' - what does Aristotle meanby it? Simply put, 'poetry' to Aristotle is not the final product, but the art of creating poetry. To understand this art, we must first grasp a number of important concepts.

The first is 'imitation,' which is a word used often in the Poetics. 'Imitation,' as a concept, refers to an artist's primary motivation to duplicate or capture life in some form. Imitation, furthermore, is an innate instinct, says Aristotle, that is 'implanted in man from childhood.' Weuse imitation not only for entertainment, but also for learning - by seeing the fortunes or misfortunes of another, they can internalize experience through vicarious living.

Aristotle also uses imitation to differentiate between tragedy and comedy. In the former, poetsreveal men as better than they are - hence the tragic 'hero.' It is in this representation of man as 'better' or of 'higher morality' that we ultimately find catharsis, the release at the end of a tragedy. In comedy, however, a poet presents man as worse than he is - plagued by some defector ugliness which ultimately takes the reader into a satiric worldview. Comedy ultimately works in a similar way to tragedy, but with opposite effect: in a tragedy, we grieve over the fate of a man who must suffer for his flaw, perhaps touched by the possibility that we too might possess this flaw. But in a comedy, we laugh at the hero's flaw, comforted by the fact that it is not ours.

Indeed, comedy and tragedy both have a moralizing effect on the audience. This is less evident in comedy, perhaps, since "comedies tend to be about bad behavior and people doing ugly, immoral, or ridiculous things." The critic Goucher explains how Aristotle solves this problem:"[Aristotle] accepted that the primary object of comedy as imitation: imitation of low characters - not morally bad, but ludicrous, ugly but not painful or destructive. He defended comedies' mimetic representation of ludicrous behavior because it would incite audiences to avoid its imitation" (Goucher 1).

Aristotle's definition of epic poetry may confuse the reader, so it is worth illuminating precisely what he means. Epic poetry is like tragedy it inspires man to be better than heis - but it is narrative in form, depending either on an omniscient first-person narrator, a third- person narrator, or a first-person narrating hero. A tragedy, meanwhile, involves the dialogueof two or more characters. Additionally, tragedy and epic poetry differ in length -- tragedy is confined usually to a single day, in the efforts to reveal a quick devolution of the hero. Epic poetry,

meanwhile, often continues for a man's full lifetime. Ultimately, it seems that tragedy grew from epic poetry, so we find all the qualities of the latter in the former, but an epic poemneed not contain all the elements of a tragedy.

1.8 LET'S SUM UP

Though the precise origins of Aristotle's Poetics are not known, researchers believe that the work was composed around 110 BCE and was preserved primarily through Aristotle's students' notes. Despite its vague beginning, the Poetics has been a central document in the study of aesthetics and literature for centuries, proving especially influential during the Renaissance; it continues to have relevance in scholarly circles today.

Over the years the Poetics has been both praised and disparaged. Some critics object to Aristotle's theory of poetics and regret that the work has held such sway in the history of Western literature. One contemporary critic argues that Aristotle "reduces drama to its language," and the "language itself to its least poetic element, the story, and then encourages insensitive readers...to subject stories to crudely moralistic readings that reduce tragedies to the childish proportions of Aesop-fables" (Sachs 1). Other critics have argued against such views and reclaimed the Poetics for their own times; often these critics emphasize the importance of reading the Poetics in its historical context - it was, after all, written an awfullylong time ago - and stress that despite this historical barrier the insights contained in the work still hold true. Whichever side of the debate you end up on, it is important when studying the Poetics to take time to decode its dense text. The Poetics is widely considered one of Aristotle'smost demanding but rewarding texts, requiring commitment in its study, but offering profound returns to the diligent reader.

The Poetics is Aristotle's attempt to explain the basic problems of art. He both defines art and offers criteria for determining the quality of a given artwork. The Poetics stands in opposition to the theory of art propounded by Aristotle's teacher, Plato. In his Republic, Plato argues that"poetry is a representation of mere appearances and is thus misleading and morally suspect" (Critical, 1). In the poetics, Aristotle, Plato's student, attempts to refute his teacher by exploringwhat unites all poetry: its imitative nature and its ability to bring an audience into its specificplot while preserving a unity of purpose and theme. The tone of the Poetics reflects its argumentative spirit as Aristotle attempts both to explain the "anatomy" of poetry and to justifyits value to human society.

Despite its broad goals, however, Aristotle's arguments are quite concrete. He is less interestedin the abstract "existence" of art than he is in looking at specific artworks by specific playwrights. Aristotle wants to explain why effective poetry has stayed with audiences for so

long. He tends to look for "empirical evidence" - i.e. sensory proof through past observation - that art is both good and useful, no matter how philosophers like Plato try to dismiss it..

1.9 KEYWORDS

Catharsis : Catharsis is a key element of tragedy which induces pity and fear in the audience: pity of the hero's plight, and fear that it will befall us

Comedy: Comedy presents human beings as "worse than they are" in life, in order to present a different type of imitation than in a classical tragedy.

Complex plot :A complex plot involves a unity of action and purpose and ultimatelyleads to a climactic reversal and recognition.

Denouement : Denouement is the unraveling of the plot that takes place after the climax.

Iambic : Iambic is the 'dramatic' meter with a syncopated beat, more closely related tothe way we speak in normal life.

Narrative: Narrative is the dramatization of action by a single narrator.

Pity : Pity is one of the key elements of catharisis, driven by our empathy for the hero'splight.

Plot : Plot is one of the six components of tragedy, but the most important. Aristotle calls plot the "soul of tragedy," since it is the arrangement of incidents that justifies all the other elements of tragedy in its dramatization of action.

1.10 QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

What does Aristotle mean by imitation?

What is Catharsis?

What is superior epic or tragedy?

What is Poetry according to Aristotle?

What is Tragedy according to Aristotle?

Discuss seven characterstics of tragedy.

1.11SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES

Aristotle on the Art of Poetry. A revised Text with Critical Introduction, Translation and Commentary by I. Bywater, Oxford 1909

Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument, by G. F. Else, Harvard 1957

Differentiate between epic and tragedy.

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M.A. (English)
Course: Renaissance Drama

Section-B

UNIT I: Christopher Marlowe : Doctor Faustus

Structure:

2.0 Learning Objective

2.1 Christopher Marlowe

2.2 Plot Overview

2.3 Summary and Analysis

2.4 Characters of the Play

2.5 Faustus

2.6 Mephastophilis

2.7 Themes

2.8 Motifs

2.9 Symbols

2.10 List of Questions

2.11 References

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2.0 Learning Objective

In this unit the students would learn about the playwright Christopher Marlowe and his dramatic techniques. The students will understand what an Elizabethan tragedy is. They will understand the different aspects of the play-Doctor Faustus, how the plot unfolds, the theme, the characters in the play and the message thus communicated through the play. After reading this unit students will be able to write on

a. Elizabethan tragedy

b. Christopher Marlow

c. Dr. Faustus

2.1 Christopher Marlowe

Christopher Marlowe was a poet and playwright at the forefront of the 16th-century dramatic renaissance. His works influenced William Shakespeare and generations of writersto follow.

He was born in Canterbury, England, in 1564. While Christopher Marlowe's literary career lasted only lessthan six years, he wrote a most notable renaissance notable play *The Tragical History of the life and Death of Doctor Faustus*.

Early Years

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury around February 26, 1564 (this was the day on which he was baptized). He went to King's School and was awarded a scholarship that enabled him to study at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, from late 1580 until 1587.

Marlowe earned his bachelor of arts degree in 1584, but in 1587 the university hesitated in granting him his master's degree. Its doubts (perhaps arising from his frequent absences, or speculation that he had converted to Roman Catholicism and would soon attend college elsewhere)were set to rest, or at least dismissed, when the Privy Council sent a letter declaring that he was now working "on matters touching the benefit of his country," and he was awarded his master's degree on schedule.

Marlowe as a Secret Agent?

The nature of Marlowe's service to England was not specified by the Council, but the letter sent to Cambridge has provoked abundant speculation, notably the theory that

Marlowe had become a secret agent working for Sir Francis Walsingham's intelligence service. No direct evidence supports this theory, but the Council's letter clearly suggests that Marlowe was serving thegovernment in some secret capacity.

Surviving Cambridge records from the period show that Marlowe had several lengthy absences from the university, much longer than allowed by the school's regulations. And extant dining roomaccounts indicate that he spent lavishly on food and drink while there, greater amounts than he could have afforded on his known scholarship income. Both of these could point to a secondary source of income, such as secret government work.

But with scant hard evidence and rampant speculation, the mystery surrounding Marlowe's service to the queen is likely to remain active. Spy or not, after attaining his master's degree, Marlowe moved to London and took up writing full-time.

Early Writing Career

After 1587, Christopher Marlowe was in London, writing for the theater and probably also engaging himself occasionally in government service. What is thought to be his first play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, was not published until 1594, but it is generally thought to have been written while he was still a student at Cambridge. According to records, the play was performed by the Children of the Chapel, a company of boy actors, between 1587 and 1591.

Marlowe's second play was the two-part *Tamburlaine the Great* (1590). This was Marlowe's first play to be performed on the regular stage in London and is among the first English plays in blank verse. It is considered the beginning of the mature phase of the Elizabethan theater and was the last of Marlowe's plays to be published before his untimely death.

There is disagreement among Marlowe scholars regarding the order in which the plays subsequent to *Tamburlaine* were written.

Some contend that Doctor Faustus quickly followed *Tamburlaine*, and that Marlowe then turned to writing *Edward the Second, The Massacre at Paris*, and finally *The Jew of Malta*. According to the Marlowe Society's chronology, the order was : T*he Jew of Malta, Doctor Faustus, Edward the Second* and *The Massacre at Paris*, with Doctor Faustus being performed first(1604) and *The Jew of Malta* last (1611).

What is not disputed is that he wrote only these four plays after *Tamburlaine*, from c.

1589 to 1592, and that they cemented his legacy and proved vastly influential.

The Plays

The Jew of Malta

The Jew of Malta (fully *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta*), with a prologue delivered by a character representing Machiavelli, depicts the Jew Barabas, the richest man on all the island of Malta. His wealth is seized, however, and he fights the government to regain it until his death at the hands of Maltese soldiers.

The play swirls with religious conflict, intrigue and revenge, and is considered to have been amajor influence on Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. The title character, Barabas, is seen as the main inspiration for Shakespeare's Shylock, character in *Merchant*. The play is also considered the first (successful) black comedy, or tragicomedy.

Barabas is a complex character who has provoked mixed reactions in audiences, and there hasbeen extensive debate about the play's portrayal of Jews (as with Shakespeare's *Merchant*). Filled with unseemly characters, the play also ridicules oversexed Christian monks and nuns, and portraysa pair of greedy friars vying for Barabas' wealth. *The Jew of Malta* in this way is a fine example ofwhat Marlowe's final four works are in part known for: controversial themes.

Edward the Second

The historical *Edward the Second* (fully *The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England, with the Tragical Fall of Proud Mortimer*) is a play about thedeposition of England's King Edward II by his barons and the queen, all of whom resent the undueinfluence the king's men have over his policies.

Edward the Second is a tragedy featuring a weak and flawed monarch, and it paved the way for Shakespeare's more mature histories, such as *Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V*.

It is the only play that can be reliably said to represent the author'smanuscript, as all of Marlowe's other plays were heavily edited or simply transcribed from performances, and the original texts were lost to the ages.

The Massacre at Paris

The Massacre at Paris is a short and lurid work, the only extant text of which was likely a reconstruction from memory, or "reported text," of the original performance.

Because of its origin, the play is approximately half the length of Edward the Second, *The Jew of Malta* and each part of *Tamburlaine*, and comprises mostly bloody action with little depth of characterization or quality verse. For these reasons, the play has been the most neglected of Marlowe's oeuvre.

Massacre portrays the events of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, in which French royalty and Catholic nobles instigated the murder and execution of thousands of protestant Huguenots. In London, agitators seized on its theme to advocate the murders of refugees, an event that the play eerily warns the queen of in its last scene. Interestingly, the warning comes from a character referred to as "English Agent," a character who has been thought to be Marlowe himself, representing his work with the queen's secret service.

Doctor Faustus

Marlowe's most famous play is *The Tragicall History of the life and Death of Doctor Faustus*, but, as is the case with most of his plays, it has survived only in a corrupt form, and when Marlowe actually wrote it has been a topic of debate.

Based on the German *Faustbuch*, *Doctor Faustus* is acknowledged as the first dramatized version of the Faust legend, in which a man sells his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power. While versions of story began appearing as early as the 4th century, Marlowe deviates significantly by having his hero unable to repent and have his contract annulled at the end of the play. He is warned to do so throughout by yet another Marlowe variation of the retelling--a Good Angel--but Faustus ignores the angel's advice continually.

In the end, Faustus finally seems to repent for his deeds, but it is either too late or just simply irrelevant, as Mephistopheles collects his soul, and it is clear that Faustus exits to hell with him.

Arrest and Death

The constant rumors of Christopher Marlowe's atheism finally caught up with him on Sunday May 20, 1591, and he was arrested for just that "crime." Atheism, or heresy, was a serious offense, for which the penalty was burning at the stake. Despite the gravity of the charge, however, he was not jailed or tortured but was released on the condition that he report daily to an officer of the court.

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On May 10, however, Marlowe was killed by Ingram Frizer. Frizer was with Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley, and all three men were tied to one or other of the Walsinghams--either Sir Francis Walsingham (the man who evidently recruited Marlowe himself into secret service on behalf of the queen) or a relative also in the spy business. Allegedly, after spending the day together with Marlowe in a lodging house, a fight broke out between Marlowe and Frizer over the bill, and Marlowe was stabbed in the forehead and killed.

Conspiracy theories have abounded since, with Marlowe's atheism and alleged spy activities at the heart of the murder plots, but the real reason for Marlowe's death is still debated.

What is not debated is Marlowe's literary importance, as he is Shakespeare's most important predecessor and is second only to Shakespeare himself in the realm of Elizabethan tragic drama.

2.2 Plot Overview

Doctor Faustus, a well-respected German scholar, grows dissatisfied with the limits of traditional forms of knowledge — logic, medicine, law, and religion — and decides to learn magic. His friends Valdes and Cornelius instruct him in the black arts, and he begins his new career as a magician by summoning up Mephastophilis, a devil. Despite Mephastophilis's warnings about the horrors of hell, Faustus tells the devil to return to his master, Lucifer, with an offer of Faustus's soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service from Mephastophilis. Meanwhile, Wagner, Faustus's servant, has picked up some magical ability and Mephastophilis returns to Faustus with word that Lucifer has accepted Faustus's offer. Faustus experiences some misgivings and wonders if he should repent and save his soul; in the end, though, he agrees to the deal, signing it with his blood. As soon as he does so, the words "Homo fuge," Latin for "O man, fly," appear branded on his arm. Faustus again has second thoughts, but Mephastophilis bestows rich gifts on him and gives him a book of spells to learn. Later, Mephastophilis answers all of his questions about the nature of the world, refusing to answer only when Faustus asks him who made the universe. This refusal prompts yet another bout of misgivings in Faustus, but Mephastophilis and Lucifer bring in personifications of the Seven deadly sins.

Armed with his new powers and attended by Mephastophilis, Faustus begins to travel. He goesto the pope's court in Rome, makes himself invisible, and plays a series of tricks.

He disrupts thepope's banquet by stealing food and boxing the pope's ears. Following this incident, he travels through the courts of Europe, with his fame spreading as he goes. Eventually, he is invited to the court of the German emperor, Charles V (the enemy of the pope), who asks Faustus to allow him to see Alexander the Great, the famed fourth-century b.c. Macedonian king and conqueror. A knight scoffs at Faustus's powers, and Faustus chastises him by making antlers sprout from his head. Furious, the knight vows revenge.

Meanwhile, Robin, Wagner's clown, has picked up some magic on his own, and with his fellowstablehand, Rafe, he undergoes a number of comic misadventures. At one point, he manages to summon Mephastophilis, who threatens to turn Robin and Rafe into animals (or perhaps even doestransform them; the text isn't clear) to punish them for their foolishness.

Faustus then goes on with his travels, playing a trick on a horse-courser along the way. Faustus sells him a horse that turns into a heap of straw when ridden into a river. Eventually, Faustus is invited to the court of the Duke of Vanholt, where he performs various feats. The horse-courser shows up there, along with Robin, a man named Dick (Rafe in the A text), and various others who have fallen victim to Faustus's trickery. But Faustus casts spells on them and sends them on their way, to the amusement of the duke and duchess.

As the twenty-four years of his deal with Lucifer come to a close, Faustus begins to dread his impending death. He has Mephastophilis call up Helen of Troy, the famous beauty from the ancient world, and uses her presence to impress a group of scholars. An old man urges Faustus to repent, but Faustus drives him away. Faustus summons Helen again and exclaims rapturously about her beauty. But time is growing short. Faustus tells the scholars about his pact, and they are horror- stricken and resolve to pray for him. On the final night before the expiration of the twenty- four years, Faustus is overcome by fear and remorse. He begs for mercy, but it is too late. At midnight, a host of devils appears and carries his soul off to hell. In the morning, the scholars find Faustus's limbs and decide to hold a funeral for him.

2.3 Summary and Analysis

Summary: Prologue

The Chorus, a single actor, enters and introduces the plot of the play. It will involve

neither love nor war, he tells us, but instead will trace the "form of Faustus' fortunes" (Prologue.8). The Chorus chronicles how Faustus was born to lowly parents in the small town of Rhode, how he came to the town of Wittenberg to live with his kinsmen, and how he was educated at Wittenberg, a famous German university. After earning the title of doctor of divinity, Faustus became famous for his ability to discuss theological matters. The Chorus adds that Faustus is "swollen with cunning" and has begun to practice necromancy, or black magic (Prologue.20). The Prologue concludes by stating that Faustus is seated in his study.

Analysis: Prologue

The Chorus's introduction to the play links Doctor Faustus to the tradition of Greek tragedy, in which a chorus traditionally comments on the action. Although we tend to think of a chorus as a group of people or singers, it can also be composed of only one character. Here, the Chorus not only gives us background information about Faustus's life and education but also explicitly tells us that his swelling pride will lead to his downfall. The story that we are about to see is compared to the Greek myth of Icarus, a boy whose father, Daedalus, gave him wings made out of feathers and beeswax. Icarus did not heed his father's warning and flew too close the sun, causing his wings to melt and sending him plunging to his death. In the same way, the Chorus tells us, Faustus will "mount above his reach" and suffer the consequences (Prologue.21).

The way that the Chorus introduces Faustus, the play's protagonist, is significant, since it reflects a commitment to Renaissance values. The European Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed a rebirth of interest in classical learning and inaugurated a new emphasis on the individual in painting and literature. In the medieval era that preceded the Renaissance, the focus of scholarship was on God and theology; in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the focus turned toward the study of humankind and the natural world, culminating in the birth of modern science in the work of men like Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton.

The Prologue locates its drama squarely in the Renaissance world, where humanistic values hold sway. Classical and medieval literature typically focuses on the lives of the great and famous — saints or kings or ancient heroes. But this play, the Chorus insists, will focus not on ancient battles between Rome and Carthage, or on the "courts of kings" or the "pomp of proud audacious deeds" (Prologue.4–5). Instead, we are to witness the life of an

ordinary man, born to humble parents. The message is clear: in the new world of the Renaissance, an ordinary man like Faustus, a common- born scholar, is as important as any king or warrior, and his story is just as worthy of being told.

Scene 1

Summary: Scene 1

These metaphysics of magicians,

And necromantic books are heavenly!

In a long soliloquy, Faustus reflects on the most rewarding type of scholarship. He first considers logic, quoting the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but notes that disputing well seems to be the only goal of logic, and, since Faustus's debating skills are already good, logic is not scholarly enough for him. He considers medicine, quoting the Greek physician Galen, and decides that medicine, with its possibility of achieving miraculous cures, is the most fruitful pursuit — yet he notes that he has achieved great renown as a doctor already and that this fame has not brough thim satisfaction. He considers law, quoting the Byzantine emperor Justinian, but dismisses law as too petty, dealing with trivial matters rather than larger ones. Divinity, the study of religion and theology, seems to offer wider vistas, but he quotes from St. Jerome's Bible that all men sin and finds the Bible's assertion that "[t]he reward of sin is death" an unacceptable doctrine. He then dismisses religion and fixes his mind on magic, which, when properly pursued, he believes will make him "a mighty god" (1.62).

Wagner, Faustus's servant, enters as his master finishes speaking. Faustus asks Wagner to bring Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus's friends, to help him learn the art of magic. While they are ontheir way, a good angel and an evil angel visit Faustus. The good angel urges him to set aside his book of magic and read the Scriptures instead; the evil angel encourages him to go forward in his pursuit of the black arts. After they vanish, it is clear that Faustus is going to heed the evil spirit, since he exults at the great powers that the magical arts will bring him. Faustus imagines sending spirits to the end of the world to fetch him jewels and delicacies, having them teach him secret knowledge, and using magic to make himself king of all Germany.

Valdes and Cornelius appear, and Faustus greets them, declaring that he has set aside all otherforms of learning in favor of magic. They agree to teach Faustus the principles of the dark arts and describe the wondrous powers that will be his if he remains committed

during his quest to learn magic. Cornelius tells him that "[t]he miracles that magic will perform / Will make thee vow to study nothing else" (1.116–117). Valdes lists a number of texts that Faustus should read, and the two friends promise to help him become better at magic than even they are. Faustus invites them to dine with him, and they exit.

Analysis: Scene 1

The scene now shifts to Faustus's study, and Faustus's opening speech about the various fields of scholarship reflects the academic setting of the scene. In proceeding through the various intellectual disciplines and citing authorities for each, he is following the dictates of medieval scholarship, which held that learning was based on the authority of the wise rather than on experimentation and new ideas. This soliloquy, then, marks Faustus's rejection of this medieval model, as he sets aside each of the old authorities and resolves to strike out on his own in his questto become powerful through magic.

As is true throughout the play, however, Marlowe uses Faustus's own words to expose Faustus's blind spots. In his initial speech, for example, Faustus establishes a hierarchy of disciplines by showing which are nobler than others. He does not want merely to protect men's bodies through medicine, nor does he want to protect their property through law. He wants higher things, and so he proceeds on to religion. There, he quotes selectively from the New Testament, picking out only those passages that make Christianity appear in a negative light. He reads that "[t]he reward of sin is death," and that "[i]f we say we that we have no sin, / We deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us" (1.40–41). The second of these lines comes from the first book of John, but Faustus neglects to read the very next line, which states, "If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Thus, through selective quoting, Faustus makes it seem as though religion promises only death and not forgiveness, and so he easily rejects religion with a fatalistic "What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!" (1.48). Meanwhile, he uses religious language — as he does throughout the play — to describe the dark world of necromancy that he enters. "These metaphysics of magicians/And necromantic books are heavenly" (1.49–50), he declares without a trace of irony. Having gone upward from medicine and law to theology, he envisions magic and necromancy as the crowning discipline, even though by most standards it would be the least noble.

Faustus is not a villain, though; he is a tragic hero, a protagonist whose character

flaws lead to his downfall. Marlowe imbues him with tragic grandeur in these early scenes. The logic he uses to reject religion may be flawed, but there is something impressive in the breadth of his ambition, even if he pursues it through diabolical means. In Faustus's long speech after the two angels have whispered in his ears, his rhetoric outlines the modern quest for control over nature (albeit through magic rather than through science) in glowing, inspiring language. He offers a long list of impressive goals, including the acquisition of knowledge, wealth, and political power, that he believes he will achieve once he has mastered the dark arts. While the reader or playgoer is not expected to approve of his quest, his ambitions are impressive, to say the least. Later, the actual uses to which he puts his magical powers are disappointing and tawdry. For now, however, Faustus's dreams inspire wonder.

Summary: Scene 2

Two scholars come to see Faustus. Wagner makes jokes at their expense and then tells them that Faustus is meeting with Valdes and Cornelius. Aware that Valdes and Cornelius are infamous for their involvement in the black arts, the scholars leave with heavy hearts, fearing that Faustus may also be falling into "that damned art" as well (2.29).

Summary: Scene 3

Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,

And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand
hellsIn being deprived of everlasting
bliss?

That night, Faustus stands in a magical circle marked with various signs and words, and he chants in Latin. Four devils and Lucifer, the ruler of hell, watch him from the shadows. Faustus renounces heaven and God, swears allegiance to hell, and demands that Mephastophilis rise to serve him. The devil Mephastophilis then appears before Faustus, who commands him to depart and return dressed as a Franciscan friar, since "[t]hat holy shape becomes a devil best" (1.26). Mephastophilis vanishes, and Faustus remarks on his obedience. Mephastophilis then reappears, dressed as a monk, and asks Faustus what he desires. Faustus demands his obedience, but Mephastophilis says that he is Lucifer's

servant and can obey only Lucifer. He adds that he came because he heard Faustus deny obedience to God and hoped to capture his soul.

Faustus quizzes Mephastophilis about Lucifer and hell and learns that Lucifer and all his devils were once angels who rebelled against God and have been damned to hell forever. Faustus points out that Mephastophilis is not in hell now but on earth; Mephastophilis insists, however, that he and his fellow demons are always in hell, even when they are on earth, because being deprived of the presence of God, which they once enjoyed, is hell enough. Faustus dismisses this sentiment as a lack of fortitude on Mephastophilis's part and then declares that he will offer his soul to Lucifer in return for twenty-four years of Mephastophilis's service. Mephastophilis agrees to take this offer to his master and departs. Left alone, Faustus remarks that if he had "as many souls as there be stars,"he would offer them all to hell in return for the kind of power that Mephastophilis offers him (1.102).He eagerly awaits Mephastophilis's return.

Summary: Scene 4

Wagner converses with a clown and tries to persuade him to become his servant for seven years. The clown is poor, and Wagner jokes that he would probably sell his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton; the clown answers that it would have to be well-seasoned mutton. After first agreeing to be Wagner's servant, however, the clown abruptly changes his mind. Wagner threatensto cast a spell on him, and he then conjures up two devils, who he says will carry the clown away to hell unless he becomes Wagner's servant. Seeing the devils, the clown becomes terrified and agrees to Wagner's demands. After Wagner dismisses the devils, the clown asks his new master if he can learn to conjure as well, and Wagner promises to teach him how to turn himselfinto any kind of animal — but he insists on being called "Master Wagner."

Analysis: Scenes 2–4

Having learned the necessary arts from Cornelius and Valdes, Faustus now takes the first steptoward selling his soul when he conjures up a devil. One of the central questions in the play is whether Faustus damns himself entirely on his own or whether the princes of hell somehow entraphim. In scene 1, as Faustus makes the magical marks and chants the magical words that summon Mephastophilis, he is watched by Lucifer and four lesser devils, suggesting that hell is waiting for him to make the first move before pouncing on him. Mephastophilis echoes this idea when he insists that he came to Faustus of his own

accord when he heard Faustus curse God and forswear heaven, hoping that Faustus's soul was available for the taking. But while the demons may be active agents eagerly seeking to seize Faustus's soul, Faustus himself makes the first move. Neither Mephastophilis nor Lucifer forces him to do anything against his will.

Indeed, if anything, Mephastophilis seems far less eager to make the bargain than Faustus himself. He willingly tells Faustus that his master, Lucifer, is less powerful than God, having been thrown "by aspiring pride and insolence,/… from the face of heaven" (1.67–68). Furthermore, Mephastophilis offers a powerful portrait of hell that seems to warn against any pactwith Lucifer. When Faustus asks him how it is that he is allowed to leave hell in order to come to earth, Mephastophilis famously says:

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.

Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of
God,And tasted the eternal joys of
heaven,

Am not tormented with ten thousand
hellsIn being deprived of everlasting
bliss? (1.76–80)

Mephastophilis exposes the horrors of his own experience as if offering sage guidance to Faustus.His honesty in mentioning the "ten thousand hells" that torment him shines a negative light on theaction of committing one's soul to Lucifer. Indeed, Mephastophilis even tells Faustus to abandon his "frivolous demands" (1.81).

But Faustus refuses to leave his desires. Instead, he exhibits the blindness that serves as one of his defining characteristics throughout the play. Faustus sees the world as he wants to see it ratherthan as it is. This shunning of reality is symbolized by his insistence that Mephastophilis, who is presumably hideous, reappear as a Franciscan friar. In part, this episode is a dig at Catholicism, pitched at Marlowe's fiercely Protestant English audience, but it also shows to what lengths Faustuswill go in order to mitigate the horrors of hell. He sees the devil's true shape, but rather than flee interror he tells Mephastophilis to change his appearance, which makes looking upon him easier. Again, when Mephastophilis has finished telling him of the horrors of hell and urging him not to sell his soul, Faustus blithely dismisses what Mephastophilis has said, accusing him of lacking

"manly fortitude" (1.85). There is a desperate naïveté to Faustus's approach to the demonic: he cannot seem to accept that hell is really as bad as it seems, which propels him forward into darkness.

The antics of Wagner and the clown provide a comic counterpoint to the Faustus-Mephastophilis scenes. The clown jokes that he would sell his soul to the devil for a well-seasonedshoulder of mutton, and Wagner uses his newly gained conjuring skill to frighten the clown into serving him. Like Faustus, these clownish characters (whose scenes are so different from the rest of the play that some writers have suggested that they were written by a collaborator rather than by Marlowe himself) use magic to summon demons. But where Faustus is grand and ambitious and tragic, they are low and common and absurd, seeking mutton and the ability to turn into a mouse or a rat rather than world power or fantastic wealth. As the play progresses, though, Faustus's grandeur diminishes, and he sinks down toward the level of the clowns, suggesting that degradation precedes damnation.

Summary: Scene 5

Think'st thou that Faustus is so fond to imagine

That after this life there is any pain?

Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales.

Faustus begins to waver in his conviction to sell his soul. The good angel tells him to abandon his plan and "think of heaven, and heavenly things," but he dismisses the good angel's words, saying that God does not love him (5.20). The good and evil angels make another appearance, with the good one again urging Faustus to think of heaven, but the evil angel convinces him that the wealth he can gain through his deal with the devil is worth the cost. Faustus then calls back Mephastophilis, who tells him that Lucifer has accepted his offer of his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service. Faustus asks Mephastophilis why Lucifer wants his soul, and Mephastophilis tells him that Lucifer seeks to enlarge his kingdom and make humans suffer even as he suffers.

Faustus decides to make the bargain, and he stabs his arm in order to write the deed in blood. However, when he tries to write the deed his blood congeals, making writing impossible. Mephastophilis goes to fetch fire in order to loosen the blood, and, while he is gone, Faustus endures another bout of indecision, as he wonders if his own blood is attempting to warn him not to sell hissoul. When Mephastophilis returns, Faustus signs the

deed and then discovers an inscription on his arm that reads "Homo fuge," Latin for "O man, fly" (5.77). While Faustus wonders where he should fly Mephastophilis presents a group of devils, who cover Faustus with crowns and rich garments. Faustus puts aside his doubts. He hands over the deed, which promises his body and soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of constant service from Mephastophilis.

After he turns in the deed, Faustus asks his new servant where hell is located, and Mephastophilis says that it has no exact location but exists everywhere. He continues explaining, saying that hell is everywhere that the damned are cut off from God eternally. Faustus remarks that he thinks hell is a myth. At Faustus's request for a wife, Mephastophilis offers Faustus a she- devil, but Faustus refuses. Mephastophilis then gives him a book of magic spells and tells him to read it carefully.

Faustus once again wavers and leans toward repentance as he contemplates the wonders of heaven from which he has cut himself off. The good and evil angels appear again, and Faustus realizes that "[m]y heart's so hardened I cannot repent!" (5.196). He then begins to ask Mephastophilis questions about the planets and the heavens. Mephastophilis answers all his queries willingly, until Faustus asks who made the world. Mephastophilis refuses to reply because the answer is "against our kingdom"; when Faustus presses him, Mephastophilis departs angrily (5.247). Faustus then turns his mind to God, and again he wonders if it is too late for him to repent. The good and evil angels enter once more, and the good angel says it is never too late for Faustus to repent. Faustus begins to appeal to Christ for mercy, but then Lucifer, Belzebub (another devil), and Mephastophilis enter. They tell Faustus to stop thinking of God and then present a show of the Seven Deadly Sins. Each sin — Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, and finally Lechery — appears before Faustus and makes a brief speech. The sight of the sins delights Faustus'ssoul, and he asks to see hell. Lucifer promises to take him there that night. For the meantime he gives Faustus a book that teaches him how to change his shape.

Summary: Scene 6

Meanwhile, Robin, a stablehand, has found one of Faustus's conjuring books, and he is trying to learn the spells. He calls in an innkeeper named Rafe, and the two go to a bar together, where Robin promises to conjure up any kind of wine that Rafe desires.

Analysis: Scenes 5–6

Even as he seals the bargain that promises his soul to hell, Faustus is repeatedly filled with misgivings, which are bluntly symbolized in the verbal duels between the good and evil angels.His body seems to rebel against the choices that he has made — his blood congeals, for example, preventing him from signing the compact, and a written warning telling him to fly away appears on his arm. Sometimes Faustus seems to understand the gravity of what he is doing: when Lucifer, Belzebub, and Mephastophilis appear to him, for example, he becomes suddenly afraid and exclaims, "O Faustus, they are come to fetch thy soul!" (5.264). Despite this awareness, however, Faustus is unable to commit to good.

Amid all these signs, Faustus repeatedly considers repenting but each time decides against it. Sometimes it is the lure of knowledge and riches that prevents him from turning to God, but other times it seems to be his conviction — encouraged by the bad angel and Mephastophilis — that it is already too late for him, a conviction that persists throughout the play. He believes that God does not love him and that if he were to fly away to God, as the inscription on his arm seems to advise him to do, God would cast him down to hell. When Faustus appeals to Christ to save his soul, Lucifer declares that "Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just," and orders Faustus to cease thinking about God and think only of the devil (5.260). Faustus's sense that he is already damned can be traced back to his earlier misreading of the New Testament to say that anyone who sins will be damned eternally — ignoring the verses that offer the hope of repentance.

At the same time, though, Faustus's earlier blindness persists. We can see it in his delighted reaction to the appalling personifications of the Seven Deadly Sins, which he treats as sources of entertainment rather than of moral warning. Meanwhile, his willingness to dismiss the pains of hell continues, as he tells Mephastophilis that "I think hell's a fable/. . . / Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives' tales" (5.126–115). These are the words of rationalism or even atheism — both oddideologies for Faustus to espouse, given that he is summoning devils. But Faustus's real mistake is to misinterpret what Mephastophilis tells him about hell. Faustus takes Mephastophilis's statement that hell is everywhere for him because he is separated eternally from God to mean that hell will be merely a continuation of his earthly existence. He thinks that he is already separated from God permanently and reasons that hell cannot be any worse.

Once Faustus has signed away his soul, his cosmos seems to become inverted, with Lucifer taking the place of God and blasphemy replacing piety. After Faustus has signed his deed, he swears by Lucifer rather than God: "Ay, take it; and the devil give thee good

on't" (5.112). His rejection of God is also evident when he says, "Consummatum est," meaning "it is finished," which were Christ's dying words on the cross (5.74). Even Faustus's arm stabbing alludes to the stigmata, or wounds, of the crucified Christ.

Meanwhile, the limits of the demonic gifts that Faustus has been given begin to emerge. He is given the gift of knowledge, and Mephastophilis willingly tells him the secrets of astronomy,

but when Faustus asks who created the world, Mephastophilis refuses to answer. The symbolism is clear: all the worldly knowledge that Faustus has so strongly desired points inexorably upward, toward God. The central irony, of course, is that the pact he has made completely detaches him from God. With access to higher things thus closed off, Faustus has nowhere to go but down.Chorus 2–Scene 8

Summary: Chorus 2

Wagner takes the stage and describes how Faustus traveled through the heavens on a chariot pulled by dragons in order to learn the secrets of astronomy. Wagner tells us that Faustus is now traveling to measure the coasts and kingdoms of the world and that his travels will take him to Rome.

Summary: Scene 7

Faustus appears, recounting to Mephastophilis his travels throughout Europe—first from Germany to France and then on to Italy. He asks Mephastophilis if they have arrived in Rome, whose monuments he greatly desires to see, and Mephastophilis replies that they are in the pope's privy chamber. It is a day of feasting in Rome, to celebrate the pope's victories, and Faustus and Mephastophilis agree to use their powers to play tricks on the pope.

Note: *The events described in the next two paragraphs occur only in the B text of Doctor Faustus, in Act III, scene i. The A text omits the events described in the next two paragraphs but resumes with the events described immediately after them.*

As Faustus and Mephastophilis watch, the pope comes in with his attendants and a prisoner, Bruno, who had attempted to become pope with the backing of the German emperor. While the pope declares that he will depose the emperor and forces Bruno to swear allegiance to him, Faustus and Mephastophilis disguise themselves as cardinals and come before the pope. The pope gives Bruno to them, telling them to carry him off to

prison; instead, they give him a fast horse and sendhim back to Germany.

Later, the pope confronts the two cardinals whom Faustus and Mephastophilis have impersonated. When the cardinals say that they never were given custody of Bruno, the pope sends them to the dungeon. Faustus and Mephastophilis, both invisible, watch the proceedings andchuckle. The pope and his attendants then sit down to dinner. During the meal, Faustus and Mephastophilis make themselves invisible and curse noisily and then snatch dishes and food as they are passed around the table. The churchmen suspect that there is some ghost in the room, andthe pope begins to cross himself, much to the dismay of Faustus and Mephastophilis. Faustus boxes the pope's ear, and the pope and all his attendants run away. A group of friars enters, and they sing a dirge damning the unknown spirit that has disrupted the meal. Mephastophilis and Faustus beat the friars, fling fireworks among them, and flee.

Summary: Scene 8

Robin the ostler, or stablehand, and his friend Rafe have stolen a cup from a tavern. They are pursued by a vintner (or wine-maker), who demands that they return the cup. They claim not to have it, and then Robin conjures up Mephastophilis, which makes the vintner flee. Mephastophilis is not pleased to have been summoned for a prank, and he threatens to turn the two into an ape anda dog. The two friends treat what they have done as a joke, and Mephastophilis leaves in a fury, saying that he will go to join Faustus in Turkey.

Analysis: Chorus 2–Scene 8

The scenes in Rome are preceded by Wagner's account, in the second chorus, of how Faustus traveled through the heavens studying astronomy. This feat is easily the most impressive that Faustus performs in the entire play, since his magical abilities seem more and more like cheap conjured tricks as the play progresses. Meanwhile, his interests also diminish in importance from astronomy, the study of the heavens, to cosmography, the study of the earth. He even begins to meddle in political matters in the assistance he gives Bruno (in the B text only). By the end of the play, his chief interests are playing practical jokes and producing impressive illusions for nobles— a far cry from the ambitious pursuits that he outlines in scene 1.

Faustus's interactions with the pope and his courtiers offer another send-up of the Catholic Church. The pope's grasping ambition and desire for worldly power would have

played into late- sixteenth-century English stereotypes. By having the invisible Faustus box the papal ears and disrupt the papal banquet, Marlowe makes a laughingstock out of the head of the Catholic Church.

Yet the absurdity of the scene coexists with a suggestion that, ridiculous as they are, the pope and his attendants do possess some kind of divinely sanctioned power, which makes them symbols of Christianity and sets their piety in opposition to Faustus's devil-inspired magic. When the pope and his monks begin to rain curses on their invisible tormentors, Faustus and Mephastophilis seem to fear the power that their words invoke. Mephastophilis says, "[W]e shall be cursed with bell, / book, and candle" (7.81–82). The fear-imposing power these religious symbols have over Mephastophilis suggests that God remains stronger than the devil and that perhaps Faustus could still be saved, if he repented in spite of everything. Faustus's reply — "Bell, book and candle; candle, book, and bell / Forward and backward, to curse Faustus to hell" — is fraught with foreshadowing (7.81–84). Hell, of course, is exactly where Faustus is "curse[d]" to go, but through his own folly and not the curses of monks or the pope.

The absurd behavior of Robin and Rafe, meanwhile, once again contrasts with Faustus's relationship to the diabolical. Robin and Rafe conjure up Mephastophilis in order to scare off a vintner, and even when he threatens to turn them into animals (or actually does so temporarily — the text is unclear on this matter), they treat it as a great joke. Yet the contrast between Faustus on the one hand and the ostlers and the clown on the other, the high and the low, is not so great as it is originally, since Faustus too has begun using magic in pursuit of practical jokes, like boxing the pope's ear. Such foolishness is quite a step down for a man who earlier speaks of using his magic to become ruler of Germany. Although Faustus does step into the political realm when he frees Bruno and sends him back to Germany, this action seems to be carried out as part of the cruel practical joke on the pope, not as part of any real political pursuit. The degradation of Faustus's initially heroic aims continues as the play proceeds, with Faustus coming to resemble a clown more and more.

Summary: Chorus 3

The Chorus enters to inform us that Faustus has returned home to Germany and developed his fame by explaining what he learned during the course of his journey. The German emperor, Charles V, has heard of Faustus and invited him to his palace, where we

next encounter him.

Summary: Scene 9

Note: *The events described in the first two paragraphs of this summary occur only in the B textof Doctor Faustus, in Act IV, scenes i–ii. The A text omits the events described in the first two paragraphs but resumes with the events described immediately after them.*

At the court of the emperor, two gentlemen, Martino and Frederick, discuss the imminent arrival of Bruno and Faustus. Martino remarks that Faustus has promised to conjure up Alexander the Great, the famous conqueror. The two of them wake another gentleman, Benvolio, and tell him to come down and see the new arrivals, but Benvolio declares that he would rather watch the action from his window, because he has a hangover.

Faustus comes before the emperor, who thanks him for having freed Bruno from the clutches of the pope. Faustus acknowledges the gratitude and then says that he stands ready to fulfill any wish that the emperor might have. Benvolio, watching from above, remarks to himself that Faustus looks nothing like what he would expect a conjurer to look like.

The emperor tells Faustus that he would like to see Alexander the Great and his lover. Faustustells him that he cannot produce their actual bodies but can create spirits resembling them. A knightpresent in the court (Benvolio in the B text) is skeptical, and asserts that it is as untrue that Faustus can perform this feat as that the goddess Diana has transformed the knight into a stag.

Before the eyes of the court, Faustus creates a vision of Alexander embracing his lover (in the B text, Alexander's great rival, the Persian king Darius, also appears; Alexander defeats Darius and then, along with his lover, salutes the emperor). Faustus conjures a pair of antlers onto the head of the knight (again, Benvolio in the B text). The knight pleads for mercy, and the emperor entreats Faustus to remove the horns. Faustus complies, warning Benvolio to have more respect for scholarsin the future.

Note: *The following scenes do not appear in the A text of Doctor Faustus. The summary belowcorresponds to Act IV, scenes iii–iv, in the B text.*

With his friends Martino and Frederick and a group of soldiers, Benvolio plots an attack againstFaustus. His friends try to dissuade him, but he is so furious at the damage done to

his reputation that he will not listen to reason. They resolve to ambush Faustus as he leaves the court of the emperor and to take the treasures that the emperor has given Faustus. Frederick goes out withthe soldiers to scout and returns with word that Faustus is coming toward them and that he is alone. When Faustus enters, Benvolio stabs him and cuts off his head. He and his friends rejoice, and theyplan the further indignities that they will visit on Faustus's corpse. But then Faustus riseswith his head restored. Faustus tells them that they are fools, since his life belongs to Mephastophilis and cannot be taken by anyone else. He summons Mephastophilis, who arrives with a group of lesser devils, and orders the devils to carry his attackers off to hell. Then, reconsidering, he orders them instead to punish Benvolio and his friends by dragging them through thorns and hurling them off of cliffs, so that the world will see what happens to people who attack Faustus. As the men and devils leave, the soldiers come in, and Faustus summons up another clutch of demons to drive themoff.

Benvolio, Frederick, and Martino reappear. They are bruised and bloody from having been chased and harried by the devils, and all three of them now have horns sprouting from their heads. They greet one another unhappily, express horror at the fate that has befallen them, and agree to conceal themselves in a castle rather than face the scorn of the world.

Analysis: Chorus 3–Scene 9

Twenty-four years pass between Faustus's pact with Lucifer and the end of the play. Yet, for us, these decades sweep by remarkably quickly. We see only three main events from the twenty- four years: Faustus's visits to Rome, to the emperor's court, and then to the Duke of Vanholt in scene 11. While the Chorus assures us that Faustus visits many other places and learns many other things that we are not shown, we are still left with the sense that Faustus's life is being accelerated at a speed that strains belief. But Marlowe uses this acceleration to his advantage. By making the years pass so swiftly, the play makes us feel what Faustus himself must feel — namely, that his too- short lifetime is slipping away from him and his ultimate, hellish fate is drawing ever closer. In the world of the play, twenty-four years seems long when Faustus makes the pact, but both he and we come to realize that it passes rapidly.

Meanwhile, the use to which Faustus puts his powers is unimpressive. In Rome, he and Mephastophilis box the pope's ears and disrupt a dinner party. At the court of

Emperor Charles V (who ruled a vast stretch of territory in the sixteenth century, including Germany, Austria, and Spain), he essentially performs conjuring tricks to entertain the monarch. Before he makes the pact with Lucifer, Faustus speaks of rearranging the geography of Europe or even making himself emperor of Germany. Now, though, his sights are set considerably lower. His involvement in the political realm extends only to freeing Bruno, Charles's candidate to be pope. Even this action (which occurs only in the B text) seems largely a lark, without any larger political goals behind it. Instead, Faustus occupies his energies summoning up Alexander the Great, the heroic Macedonian conqueror. This trick would be extremely impressive, except that Faustus tells the emperor that "it is not in my ability to present / before your eyes the true substantial bodies of those two deceased / princes" (9.19–41). In other words, all of Mephastophilis's power can, in Faustus's hands, produce only impressive illusions. Nothing of substance emerges from Faustus's magic, in this scene or anywhere in the play, and the man who earlier boasts that he will divert the River Rhine and reshape the map of Europe now occupies himself with revenging a petty insult by placing horns on the headof the foolish knight.

The B-text scene outside the emperor's court, in which Benvolio and his friends try to kill Faustus, is utterly devoid of suspense, since we know that Faustus is too powerful to be murdered by a gang of incompetent noblemen. Still, Faustus's way of dealing with the threat is telling: he plays a kind of practical joke, making the noblemen think that they have cut off his head, only to come back to life and send a collection of devils to hound them. With all the power of hell behind him, he takes pleasure in sending Mephastophilis out to hunt down a collection of fools who pose no threat to him and insists that the devils disgrace the men publicly, so that everyone will see what happens to those who threaten him. This command shows a hint of Faustus's old pride, which is so impressive early in the play; now, though, Faustus is entirely concerned with his reputation as a fearsome wizard and not with any higher goals. Traipsing from court to court, doing tricks for royals, Faustus has become a kind of sixteenth-century celebrity, more concerned with his public image than with the dreams of greatness that earlier animate him.

Summary: Scene 10

Faustus, meanwhile, meets a horse-courser and sells him his horse. Faustus gives the horse- courser a good price but warns him not to ride the horse into the water. Faustus begins to reflect on the pending expiration of his contract with Lucifer and falls asleep.

The horse-courser reappears, sopping wet, complaining that when he rode his horse into a stream it turned into a heap of straw. He decides to get his money back and tries to wake Faustus by hollering in his ear. He then pulls on Faustus's leg when Faustus will not wake. The leg breaks off, and Faustus wakesup, screaming bloody murder. The horse-courser takes the leg and runs off. Meanwhile, Faustus's leg is immediately restored, and he laughs at the joke that he has played. Wagner then enters and tells Faustus that the Duke of Vanholt has summoned him. Faustus agrees to go, and they depart together.

Note: *The following scene does not appear in the A text of Doctor Faustus. The summary belowcorresponds to Act IV, scene vi, in the B text.*

Robin and Rafe have stopped for a drink in a tavern. They listen as a carter, or wagon-driver, and the horse-courser discuss Faustus. The carter explains that Faustus stopped him on the road andasked to buy some hay to eat. The carter agreed to sell him all he could eat for three farthings,and Faustus proceeded to eat the entire wagonload of hay. The horse-courser tells his own story, addingthat he took Faustus's leg as revenge and that he is keeping it at his home. Robin declares that he intends to seek out Faustus, but only after he has a few more drinks.

Summary: Scene 11

At the court of the Duke of Vanholt, Faustus's skill at conjuring up beautiful illusions wins the duke's favor. Faustus comments that the duchess has not seemed to enjoy the show and asks her what she would like. She tells him she would like a dish of ripe grapes, and Faustus has Mephastophilis bring her some grapes. (In the B text of Doctor Faustus, Robin, Dick, the carter, the horse-courser, and the hostess from the tavern burst in at this moment. They confront Faustus, andthe horse-courser begins making jokes about what he assumes is Faustus's wooden leg. Faustus then shows them his leg, which is whole and healthy, and they are amazed. Each then launches into a complaint about Faustus's treatment of him, but Faustus uses magical charms to make them silent, and they depart.) The duke and duchess are much pleased with Faustus's display,and they promise to reward Faustus greatly.

Analysis: Scenes 10–11

Faustus's downward spiral, from tragic greatness to self-indulgent mediocrity, continues in these scenes. He continues his journey from court to court, arriving this time

at Vanholt, a minor German duchy, to visit the duke and duchess. Over the course of the play we see Faustus go from the seat of the pope to the court of the emperor to the court of a minor nobleman. The power and importance of his hosts decreases from scene to scene, just as Faustus's feats of magic grow ever more unimpressive. Just after he seals his pact with Mephastophilis, Faustus soars through the heavens on a chariot pulled by dragons to learn the secrets of astronomy; now, however, he is reduced to playing pointless tricks on the horse-courser and fetching out-of-season grapes to impress a bored noblewoman. Even his antagonists have grown increasingly ridiculous. In Rome, he faces the curses of the pope and his monks, which are strong enough to give even Mephastophilis pause; at the emperor's court, Faustus is opposed by a collection of noblemen who are brave, if unintelligent. At Vanholt, though, he faces down an absurd collection of comical rogues, and the worst of it is that Faustus seems to have become one of them, a clown among clowns, taking pleasure in using his unlimited power to perform practical jokes and cast simple charms.

Selling one's soul for power and glory may be foolish or wicked, but at least there is grandeurto the idea of it. Marlowe's Faustus, however, has lost his hold on that doomed grandeur and has become pathetic. The meaning of his decline is ambiguous: perhaps part of the nature of apact withLucifer is that one cannot gain all that one hopes to gain from it. Or perhaps Marlowe is criticizingworldly ambition and, by extension, the entire modern project of the Renaissance, which pushed God to one side and sought mastery over nature and society. Along the lines of this interpretation, it seems that in Marlowe's worldview the desire for complete knowledge about the world and power over it can ultimately be reduced to fetching grapes for the Duchess of Vanholt — in other words, to nothing.

Earlier in the play, when Faustus queries Mephastophilis about the nature of the world, Faustussees his desire for knowledge reach a dead end at God, whose power he denies in favor ofLucifer. Knowledge of God is against Lucifer's kingdom, according to Mephastophilis. But if the pursuit of knowledge leads inexorably to God, Marlowe suggests, then a man like Faustus, who tries to live without God, can ultimately go nowhere but down, into mediocrity.

There is no sign that Faustus himself is aware of the gulf between his earlier ambitions and hiscurrent state. He seems to take joy in his petty amusements, laughing uproariously when he confounds the horse-courser and leaping at the chance to visit the Duke of Vanholt. Still, his impending doom begins to weigh upon him. As he sits down to fall

asleep, he remarks, “What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?” (10.24). Yet, at this moment at least, he seems convinced that he will repent at the last minute and be saved — a significant change from his earlierattitude, when he either denies the existence of hell or assumes that damnation is inescapable. “Christ did call the thief upon the cross,” he comforts himself, referring to the New Testament storyof the thief who was crucified alongside Jesus Christ, repented for his sins, and was promised a place in paradise (10.28). That he compares himself to this figure shows that Faustus assumes that he can wait until the last moment and still escape hell. In other words, he wants to renounce Mephastophilis, but not just yet. We can easily anticipate that his willingnessto delay will prove fatal.

Summary: Chorus 4

Wagner announces that Faustus must be about to die because he has given Wagner all of his wealth. But he remains unsure, since Faustus is not acting like a dying man—rather, he is out carousing with scholars.

Summary: Scene 12

Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a
kiss: Her lips sucks forth my soul, see
where it flies!

Come Helen, come, give me my soul
again. Here will I dwell, for heaven be in
these lips,And all is dross that is not
Helena!

Faustus enters with some of the scholars. One of them asks Faustus if he can produce Helen of Greece (also known as Helen of Troy), who they have decided was “the admirablest lady/that ever lived” (12.1–4). Faustus agrees to produce her, and gives the order to Mephastophilis: immediately,Helen herself crosses the stage, to the delight of the scholars.

The scholars leave, and an old man enters and tries to persuade Faustus to repent. Faustus becomes distraught, and Mephastophilis hands him a dagger. However, the old man persuades him to appeal to God for mercy, saying, “I see an angel hovers o’er thy head/And with a vial full of precious grace/Offers to pour the same into thy soul!” (12.44–

46). Once the old man leaves, Mephastophilis threatens to shred Faustus to pieces if he does not reconfirm his vow to Lucifer. Faustus complies, sealing his vow by once again stabbing his arm and inscribing it in blood. He asks Mephastophilis to punish the old man for trying to dissuade him from continuing in Lucifer's service; Mephastophilis says that he cannot touch the old man's soul but that he will scourge his body. Faustus then asks Mephastophilis to let him see Helen again. Helen enters, and Faustus makes a great speech about her beauty and kisses her.

Summary: Scene 13

Now hast thou but one bare hour to live, And then thou must be damned perpetually. Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!

I'll burn my books — ah, Mephastophilis!

The final night of Faustus's life has come, and he tells the scholars of the deal he has made with Lucifer. They are horrified and ask what they can do to save him, but he tells them that there is nothing to be done. Reluctantly, they leave to pray for Faustus. A vision of hell opens before Faustus's horrified eyes as the clock strikes eleven. The last hour passes by quickly, and Faustus exhorts the clocks to slow and time to stop, so that he might live a little longer and have a chance to repent. He then begs God to reduce his time in hell to a thousand years or a hundred thousand years, so long as he is eventually saved. He wishes that he were a beast and would simply cease to exist when he dies instead of face damnation. He curses his parents and himself, and the clock strikes midnight. Devils enter and carry Faustus away as he screams, "Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!/I'll burn my books — ah, Mephastophilis!" (13.112–111).

Summary: Epilogue

The Chorus enters and warns the wise "[o]nly to wonder at unlawful things" and not to trade their souls for forbidden knowledge (Epilogue.6).

Analysis: Chorus 4–Epilogue

The final scenes contain some of the most noteworthy speeches in the play, especially Faustus's speech to Helen and his final soliloquy. His address to Helen begins with the famous line "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships," referring to the Trojan

War, which was fought over Helen, and goes on to list all the great things that Faustus would do to win her love (12.81). He compares himself to the heroes of Greek mythology, who went to war for her hand, and he ends with a lengthy praise of her beauty. In its flowery language and emotional power, the speech marks a return to the eloquence that marks Faustus's words in earlier scenes, before his language and behavior become mediocre and petty. Having squandered his powers in pranks and childish entertainments, Faustus regains his eloquence and tragic grandeur in the final scene, as his doom approaches. Still, asimpressive as this speech is, Faustus maintains the same blind spots that lead him down his dark road in the first place. Earlier, he seeks transcendence through magic instead of religion. Now, he seeks it through sex and female beauty, as he asks Helen to make him"immortal"by kissing him (12.81). Moreover, it is not even clear that Helen is real, since Faustus's earlier conjuring of historical figures evokes only illusions and not physical beings. If Helen too is just an illusion, then Faustus is wasting his last hours dallying with a fantasy image, an apt symbol for hisentire life.

Faustus's final speech is the most emotionally powerful scene in the play, as his despairing mind rushes from idea to idea. One moment he is begging time to slow down, the next he is imploring Christ for mercy. One moment he is crying out in fear and trying to hide from the wrathof God, the next he is begging to have the eternity of hell lessened somehow. He curses his parents for giving birth to him but then owns up to his responsibility and curses himself. His mind's various attempts to escape his doom, then, lead inexorably to an understanding of his own guilt.

The passion of the final speech points to the central question in *Doctor Faustus* of why Faustusdoes not repent. Early in the play, he deceives himself into believing either that hell is not so bad or that it does not exist. But, by the close, with the gates of hell literally opening before him, he still ignores the warnings of his own conscience and of the old man, a physical embodiment of the conscience that plagues him. Faustus's loyalty to Lucifer could be explained by the fact that he is afraid of having his body torn apart by Mephastophilis. But he seems almost eager, even in the next-to-last scene, to reseal his vows in blood, and he even goes a step further when he demands that Mephastophilis punish the old man who urges him to repent. Marlowe suggests that Faustus's self-delusion persists even at the end. Having served Lucifer for so long, he has reached a point at whichhe cannot imagine breaking free.

In his final speech, Faustus is clearly wracked with remorse, yet he no longer seems to

be ableto repent. Christian doctrine holds that one can repent for any sin, however grave, up until the moment of death and be saved. Yet this principle does not seem to hold for Marlowe's protagonist. *Doctor Faustus* is a Christian tragedy, but the logic of the final scene is not Christian.Some critics have tried to deal with this problem by claiming that Faustus does not actually repentin the final speech but that he only speaks wistfully about the possibility of repentance. Such an argument, however, is difficult to reconcile with lines such as:

O, *I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?*
One drop of blood would save my soul, half a drop: ah my
Christ—(13.69–71)

Faustus appears to be calling on Christ, seeking the precious drop of blood that will save his soul. Yet some unseen force — whether inside or outside him — prevents him from giving himself to God.

Ultimately, the ending of *Doctor Faustus* represents a clash between Christianity, which holdsthat repentance and salvation are always possible, and the dictates of tragedy, in which some character flaw cannot be corrected, even by appealing to God. The idea of Christian tragedy, then, is paradoxical, as Christianity is ultimately uplifting. People may suffer — as Christ himself did — but for those who repent, salvation eventually awaits. To make Doctor Faustus a true tragedy, then, Marlowe had to set down a moment beyond which Faustus could no longer repent, so that in the final scene, while still alive, he can be damned and conscious of his damnation.

The unhappy Faustus's last line returns us to the clash between Renaissance values and medieval values that dominates the early scenes and then recedes as Faustus pursues his mediocre amusements in later scenes. His cry, as he pleads for salvation, that he will burn his books suggests, for the first time since early scenes, that his pact with Lucifer is primarily about a thirst for limitlessknowledge — a thirst that is presented as incompatible with Christianity. Scholarship can be Christian, the play suggests, but only within limits. As the Chorus says in its final speech:

Faustus is gone! Regard his hellish
fall, Whose fiendful fortune may exhort
the wiseOnly to wonder at unlawful
things:

Whose deepness doth entice such forward
wits To practice more than heavenly power
permits.(Epilogue.4–8)

In the duel between Christendom and the rising modern spirit, Marlowe's play seems to come down squarely on the side of Christianity. Yet Marlowe, himself notoriously accused of atheism and various other sins, may have had other ideas, and he made his Faustus sympathetic, ifnot necessarily admirable. While his play shows how the untrammeled pursuit of knowledge and power can be corrupting, it also shows the grandeur of such a quest. Faustus is damned, but the gates that he opens remain standing wide, waiting for others to follow.

2.4 Characters of the Play

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wagner: Faustus's servant. Wagner uses his master's books to learn how to summon devils and work magic.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Duke Of Vanholt: A German nobleman whom Faustus visits.

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

2.5 Faustus

Faustus is the protagonist and tragic hero of Marlowe's play. He is a contradictory character, capable of tremendous eloquence and possessing awesome ambition, yet prone to a strange, almostwillful blindness and a willingness to waste powers that he has gained at great cost. When we firstmeet Faustus, he is just preparing to embark on his career as a magician, and while we already anticipate that things will turn out badly (the Chorus's introduction, if nothing else, prepares us), there is nonetheless a grandeur to Faustus as he contemplates all the marvels that his magical powers will produce. He imagines piling up wealth from the four corners of the globe, reshaping the map of Europe (both politically and physically), and gaining access to every scrap of knowledge about the universe. He is an arrogant, self-aggrandizing man, but his ambitions are so grand that we cannothelp being impressed, and we even feel sympathetic toward him. He represents the spirit of the Renaissance, with its rejection of the medieval, God-centered universe, and its embrace of human possibility. Faustus, at least early on in his acquisition of magic, is the personification of possibility.

But Faustus also possesses an obtuseness that becomes apparent during his bargaining sessions with Mephastophilis. Having decided that a pact with the devil is the only way to fulfill his ambitions, Faustus then blinds himself happily to what such a pact actually means. Sometimes he tells himself that hell is not so bad and that one needs only "fortitude"; at other times, even while conversing with Mephastophilis, he remarks to the disbelieving demon that he does not actually believe hell exists. Meanwhile, despite his lack of concern about the prospect of eternal damnation, -Faustus is also beset with

doubts from the beginning, setting a pattern for the play in which he repeatedly approaches repentance only to pull back at the last moment. Why he fails to repent is unclear: -sometimes it seems a matter of pride and continuing ambition, sometimes a conviction that God will not hear his plea. Other times, it seems that Mephastophilis simply.

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

2.6 Mephastophilis

The character of Mephastophilis (spelled Mephistophilis or Mephistopheles by other authors)is one of the first in a long tradition of sympathetic literary devils, which includes figures like JohnMilton's Satan in Paradise Lost and Johann von Goethe's Mephistophilis in the nineteenth- century poem "Faust." Marlowe's Mephastophilis is particularly interesting because he has mixed motives. On the one hand, from his first appearance he clearly intends to act as an agent of Faustus's damnation. Indeed, he openly admits it, telling Faustus that "when we hear one rack the name of God,/Abjure the Scriptures and

his savior Christ,/We fly in hope to get his glorious soul" (1.47– 49). It is Mephastophilis who witnesses Faustus's pact with Lucifer, and it is he who, throughout the play, steps in whenever Faustus considers repentance to cajole or threaten him intostaying loyalto hell.

Yet there is an odd ambivalence in Mephastophilis. He seeks to damn Faustus, but he himself is damned and speaks freely of the horrors of hell. In a famous passage, when Faustus remarks that the devil seems to be free of hell at a particular moment, Mephastophilis insists,

[w]hy this is hell, nor am I out of it.

Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of
God,And tasted the eternal joys of
heaven,

Am not tormented with ten thousand
hellsIn being deprived of everlasting
bliss? (1.76–80)

Again, when Faustus blithely — and absurdly, given that he is speaking to a demon— declares that he does not believe in hell, Mephastophilis groans and insists that hell is, indeed, real and terrible, as Faustus comes to know soon enough. Before the pact is sealed, Mephastophilis actually warns Faustus against making the deal with Lucifer. In an odd way, one can almost sense that partof Mephastophilis does not want Faustus to make the same mistakes that he made. But, of course, Faustus does so anyway, which makes him and Mephastophilis kindred spirits. It is appropriate that these two figures dominate Marlowe's play, for they are two overly proud spirits doomed to hell.

2.7 Themes

Sin, Redemption, and Damnation

Insofar as *Doctor Faustus* is a Christian play, it deals with the themes at the heart of Christianity's understanding of the world. First, there is the idea of sin, which Christianity defines as acts contrary to the will of God. In making a pact with Lucifer, Faustus commits what is in a sense the ultimate sin: not only does he disobey God, but he consciously and even eagerly renounces obedience to him, choosing instead to swear allegiance to the devil. In a Christian framework, however, even the worst deed can be

forgiven through the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, God's son, who, according to Christian belief, died on the cross for humankind's sins. Thus, however terrible Faustus's pact with Lucifer may be, the possibility of redemption is always open to him. All that he needs to do, theoretically, is to ask God for forgiveness. The play offers countless moments in which Faustus considers doing just that, urged on by the good angel on his shoulder or by the old man in scene 12 — both of whom can be seen either as emissaries of God, personifications of Faustus's conscience, or both.

Each time, Faustus decides to remain loyal to hell rather than seek heaven. In the Christian framework, this turning away from God condemns him to spend an eternity in hell. Only at the end of his life does Faustus desire to repent, and, in the final scene, he cries out to Christ to redeem him. But it is too late for him to repent. In creating this moment in which Faustus is still alive but incapable of being redeemed, Marlowe steps outside the Christian worldview in order to maximize the dramatic power of the final scene. Having inhabited a Christian world for the entire play, Faustus spends his final moments in a slightly different universe, where redemption is no longer possible and where certain sins cannot be forgiven.

The Conflict Between Medieval and Renaissance Values

Scholar R.M. Dawkins famously remarked that *Doctor Faustus* tells "the story of a Renaissance man who had to pay the medieval price for being one." While slightly simplistic, this quotation does get at the heart of one of the play's central themes: the clash between the medieval world and the world of the emerging Renaissance. The medieval world placed God at the center of existence and shunted aside man and the natural world. The Renaissance was a movement that began in Italy in the fifteenth century and soon spread throughout Europe, carrying with it a new emphasis on the individual, on classical learning, and on scientific inquiry into the nature of the world. In the medieval academy, theology was the queen of the sciences. In the Renaissance, though, secular matters took center stage.

Faustus, despite being a magician rather than a scientist (a blurred distinction in the sixteenth century), explicitly rejects the medieval model. In his opening speech in scene 1, he goes through every field of scholarship, beginning with logic and proceeding through medicine, law, and theology, quoting an ancient authority for each: Aristotle on logic, Galen on medicine, the Byzantine emperor Justinian on law, and the Bible on religion. In

the medieval model, tradition and authority, not individual inquiry, were key. But in this soliloquy, Faustus considers and rejects this medieval way of thinking. He resolves, in full Renaissance spirit, to accept no limits, traditions, or authorities in his quest for knowledge, wealth, and power.

The play's attitude toward the clash between medieval and Renaissance values is ambiguous. Marlowe seems hostile toward the ambitions of Faustus, and, as Dawkins notes, he keeps his tragic hero squarely in the medieval world, where eternal damnation is the price of human pride. Yet Marlowe himself was no pious traditionalist, and it is tempting to see in Faustus—as many readers have—a hero of the new modern world, a world free of God, religion, and the limits that these imposed on humanity. Faustus may pay a medieval price, this reading suggests, but his successors will go further than he and suffer less, as we have in modern times. On the other hand, the disappointment and mediocrity that follow Faustus's pact with the devil, as he descends from grand ambitions to petty conjuring tricks, might suggest a contrasting interpretation. Marlowe may be suggesting that the new, modern spirit, though ambitious and glittering, will lead only to a Faustian dead end.

Power as a Corrupting Influence

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

The Divided Nature of Man

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

Faustus to commit to Mephastophilis but also to question this commitment continually.

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

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

2.8 Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Magic and the Supernatural

The supernatural pervades Doctor Faustus, appearing everywhere in the story. Angels and devils flit about, magic spells are cast, dragons pull chariots (albeit offstage), and even fools like the two ostlers, Robin and Rafe, can learn enough magic to summon demons. Still, it is worth notingthat nothing terribly significant is accomplished through magic. Faustus plays tricks on people, conjures up grapes, and explores the cosmos on a dragon, but he does not fundamentally reshape the world. The magic power that Mephastophilis grants him is more like a toy than an awesome, earth-shaking ability. Furthermore, the real drama of the play, despite all the supernatural frills andpyrotechnics, takes place within Faustus's vacillating mind and soul, as he first sells his soul to Lucifer and then considers repenting. In this sense, the magic is almost incidental to the real story of Faustus's struggle with himself, which Marlowe intended not as a fantastical battle but rather as a realistic portrait of a human being with a will divided between good and evil.

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Practical Jokes

Once he gains his awesome powers, Faustus does not use them to do great deeds. Instead, he delights in playing tricks on people: he makes horns sprout from the knight's head and sells the horse-courser an enchanted horse. Such magical practical jokes seem to be Faustus's chief amusement, and Marlowe uses them to illustrate Faustus's decline from a great, prideful scholar into a bored, mediocre magician with no higher ambition than to have a laugh at the expense of a collection of simpletons.

2.9 Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas orconcepts.

Blood

Blood plays multiple symbolic roles in the play. When Faustus signs away his soul, he signs in blood, symbolizing the permanent and supernatural nature of this pact. His blood congeals on thepage, however, symbolizing, perhaps, his own body's revolt against what he intends to do. Meanwhile, Christ's blood, which Faustus says he sees running across the sky during his terrible last night, symbolizes the sacrifice that Jesus, according to Christian belief, made on the cross; this sacrifice opened the way for humankind to repent its sins and be saved. Faustus, of course, in his proud folly, fails to take this path to salvation.

Faustus's Rejection of the Ancient Authorities

In scene 1, Faustus goes through a list of the major fields of human knowledge—logic, medicine, law, and theology—and cites for each an ancient authority (Aristotle, Galen, Justinian, and Jerome's Bible, respectively). He then rejects all of these figures in favor of magic. This rejection symbolizes Faustus's break with the medieval world, which prized authority above all else, in favor of a more modern spirit of free inquiry, in which experimentation and innovation trump the assertions of Greek philosophers and the Bible.

The Good Angel and the Evil Angel

The angels appear at Faustus's shoulder early on in the play — the good angel urging him to repent and serve God, the evil angel urging him to follow his lust for power and serve Lucifer. Thetwo symbolize his divided will, part of which wants to do good and part of which is sunk in sin.

2.10 List of Questions

1. Is Faustus' damnation tragic or an act of justice? Discuss in detail.
2. Compare the master-servant relationship in the drama.
3. What is the function of the Good Angel and the Evil Angel in the drama?
4. How are the Good Angel and the Evil Angel related to earlier morality plays? What elsein the drama is a holdover from the morality plays?
5. How are the comic interludes related to the main plot?
6. What is the role of the old man who appears toward the end of the play?
7. How does Faustus' use of his magical powers correlate with his earlier desires and plans?
8. Write a description of hell as it is variously described and presented in this drama.
9. Comment on the weaknesses found in the structure of the drama.
10. How does Greek classical imagery function in the drama?
11. After the original contract with Lucifer, is there a possibility for Dr. Faustus to repent?
12. How is the image of the "fall" used throughout the drama?
13. Explain the satire against the Roman Catholic Church and describe its purpose.
14. How does Marlowe use the classical concept of the chorus during the play?
15. How does Faustus' relationship with Helen of Troy epitomize the activities of the twenty-four years?

2.11 References

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M.A. (English)
Course: Renaissance Drama
Section C

UNIT I: William Shakespeare : *King Lear*

Structure:

4.0 Learning Objective
4.1 Plot Overview
4.2 Summary and the Analysis of the play
4.3 Characters in the play
4.4 Antagonist
4.5 Symbols
4.6 Genre
4.7 Foreshadowing
4.8 List of Questions
4.9 References

4.0 Learning Objective

In this unit the students will learn about one of the finest tragedies of William Shakespeare- *King Lear*. The students will learn about the Plot, Setting of the play, how the characters, the Protagonists, the antagonists are sketched. The students will learn about the tragic flaw in the hero which brings about the tragedy. They will be able to attempt Questions on :

1. *King Lear* as tragedy
2. Character- sketch of *King Lear*
3. Themes of the play
4. Symbols etc.

4.1 Plot Overview

Lear, the aging king of Britain, decides to step down from the throne and divide his kingdom evenly among his three daughters. First, however, he puts his daughters through a test, asking each to tell him how much she loves him. Goneril and Regan, Lear's older daughters, give their father flattering answers. But Cordelia, Lear's youngest and favorite daughter, remains silent, saying that she has no words to describe how much she loves her father. Lear flies into a rage and disowns Cordelia. The king of France, who has courted Cordelia, says that he still wants to marry her even without her land, and she accompanies him to France without her father's blessing.

Lear quickly learns that he made a bad decision. Goneril and Regan swiftly begin to

undermine the little authority that Lear still holds. Unable to believe that his beloved daughters are betrayinghim, Lear slowly goes insane. He flees his daughters' houses to wander on a heath during a great thunderstorm, accompanied by his Fool and by Kent, a loyal nobleman in disguise.

Meanwhile, an elderly nobleman named Gloucester also experiences family problems. His illegitimate son, Edmund, tricks him into believing that his legitimate son, Edgar, is trying to kill him. Fleeing the manhunt that his father has set for him, Edgar disguises himself as a crazy beggar and calls himself "Poor Tom." Like Lear, he heads out onto the heath.

When the loyal Gloucester realizes that Lear's daughters have turned against their father, he decides to help Lear in spite of the danger. Regan and her husband, Cornwall, discover him helping Lear, accuse him of treason, blind him, and turn him out to wander the countryside. He ends up being led by his disguised son, Edgar, toward the city of Dover, where Lear has also beenbrought.

In Dover, a French army lands as part of an invasion led by Cordelia in an effort to save her father. Edmund apparently becomes romantically entangled with both Regan and Goneril, whosehusband, Albany, is increasingly sympathetic to Lear's cause. Goneril and Edmund conspire to kill Albany.

The despairing Gloucester tries to commit suicide, but Edgar saves him by pulling the strange trick of leading him off an imaginary cliff. Meanwhile, the English troops reach Dover, and the English, led by Edmund, defeat the Cordelia-led French. Lear and Cordelia are captured. In the climactic scene, Edgar duels with and kills Edmund; we learn of the death of Gloucester; Gonerilpoisons Regan out of jealousy over Edmund and then kills herself when her treachery is revealed to Albany; Edmund's betrayal of Cordelia leads to her needless execution in prison; and Lear finally dies out of grief at Cordelia's passing. Albany, Edgar, and the elderly Kent are left to take care of the country under a cloud of sorrow and regret.

4.2 Summary and Analysis of the Play

Act 1

Unhappy that I am, I cannot

heaveMy heart into my mouth.

The play begins with two noblemen, Gloucester and Kent, discussing the fact that King Lear is about to divide his kingdom. Their conversation quickly changes, however, when Kent asks Gloucester to introduce his son. Gloucester introduces

Edmund, explaining that Edmund is a bastard being raised away from home, but that he nevertheless loves his son dearly.

Lear, the ruler of Britain, enters his throne room and announces his plan to divide the kingdom among his three daughters. He intends to give up the responsibilities of government and spend his old age visiting his children. He commands his daughters to say which of them loves him the most, promising to give the greatest share to that daughter.

Lear's scheming older daughters, Goneril and Regan, respond to his test with flattery, telling him in wildly overblown terms that they love him more than anything else. But Cordelia, Lear's youngest (and favorite) daughter, refuses to speak. When pressed, she says that she cannot "heave her heart into her mouth," that she loves him exactly as much as a daughter should love her father, and that her sisters wouldn't have husbands if they loved their father as much as they say (1.1.90–91). In response, Lear flies into a rage, disowns Cordelia, and divides her share of the kingdom between her two sisters.

The earl of Kent, a nobleman who has served Lear faithfully for many years, is the only courtier who disagrees with the king's actions. Kent tells Lear that he is insane to reward the flattery of his older daughters and disown Cordelia, who loves him more than her sisters do. Lear turns his anger on Kent, banishing him from the kingdom and telling him that he must be gone within six days. The king of France and duke of Burgundy are at Lear's court, awaiting his decision as to which of them will marry Cordelia. Lear calls them in and tells them that Cordelia no longer has any title or land. Burgundy withdraws his offer of marriage, but France is impressed by Cordelia's honesty and decides to make her his queen. Lear sends her away without his blessing.

Goneril and Regan scheme together in secrecy. Although they recognize that they now have complete power over the kingdom, they agree that they must act to reduce their father's remaining authority.

Later, Edmund enters and delivers a soliloquy expressing his dissatisfaction with society's attitude toward bastards. He bitterly resents his legitimate half-brother, Edgar, who stands to inherit their father's estate. He resolves to do away with Edgar and seize the privileges that society has denied him.

Edmund begins his campaign to discredit Edgar by forging a letter in which Edgar appears to plot the death of their father, Gloucester. Edmund makes a show of hiding this letter from his father and so, naturally, Gloucester demands to read it. Edmund answers

his father with careful lies, so that Gloucester ends up thinking that his legitimate son, Edgar, has been scheming to kill him in order to hasten his inheritance of Gloucester's wealth and lands. Later, when Edmund talks to Edgar, he tells him that Gloucester is very angry with him and that Edgar should avoid him as much as possible and carry a sword with him at all times. Thus, Edmund carefully arranges circumstances so that Gloucester will be certain that Edgar is trying to murder him.

The love test at the beginning of Act 1, scene 1, sets the tone for this extremely complicated play,which is full of emotional subtlety, conspiracy, and double-talk, and which swings between confusing extremes of love and anger. Lear's demand that his daughters express how much they love him is puzzling and hints at the insecurity and fear of an old man who needs to be reassured of his own importance. Of course, rather than being a true assessment of his daughters' love for him, the test seems to invite — or even to demand — flattery. Goneril's and Regan's professions oflove are obviously nothing but flattery: Goneril cannot even put her alleged love into words: "A love that makes speech unable/Beyond all manner of so much I love you" (1.1.59); Regan followsher sister's lead by saying, "I find she names my very deed of love; Only she comes too short" (1.1.70–71).

In contrast to her sisters, whose professions are banal and insincere, Cordelia does not seem to know how to flatter her father — an immediate reflection of her honesty and true devotion to him. "Love, and be silent," she says to herself (1.1.60). When her father asks her the crucial question — what she can say to merit the greatest inheritance — she answers only, "Nothing, my lord," and thus seals her fate (1.1.86). Cordelia's authentic love and Lear's blindness to its existence trigger the tragic events that follow.

The shift of the play's focus to Gloucester and Edmund in Act 1, scene 2, suggests parallels between this subplot and Lear's familial difficulties. Both Lear and Gloucester have children whoare truly loyal to them (Cordelia and Edgar, respectively) and children who are planning to do them harm (Goneril and Regan, and Edmund, respectively); both fathers mistake the unloving forthe loving, banishing the loyal children and designating the wicked ones their heirs. This symbolic blindness to the truth becomes more literal as the play progresses — in Lear's eventual madness and Gloucester's physical blinding. Moreover, Gloucester's willingness to believe the lies that Edmund tells him about Edgar seemsto reflect a preexisting fear: that his children secretly want to destroy him and take his power. Ironically, this is what *Edmund*, of course, wants to do to Gloucester, but Gloucester is blind to Edmund's treachery. Gloucester's inability to see the truth echoes the discussion between Goneril and Regan at the end of Act 1, scene 1, about Lear's

unreliability in his old age: the "infirmity of his age" (1.1.291) and his "unconstant starts" (1.1.298) evoke images of senility and suggest that his daughters ought to take control from him, just as Edmund is taking control from Gloucester.

Edmund is significantly more complicated than the other major villains in the play, Regan and Goneril. He schemes against his father's life, but not just because he wants to inherit his wealth and land; indeed, his principal motive seems to be desire for *recognition* and perhaps even the love denied him because of his bastard status. The first time we see Edmund, at the beginning of Act 1, scene 1, his own father is mocking him because he is illegitimate. Edmund's treachery can be seen as a rebellion against the social hierarchy that makes him worthless in the eyes of the world. He rejects the "plague of custom" (1.2.1) that makes society disdain him and dedicates himself to "nature" (1.2.1) — that is, raw, unconstrained existence. He will not be the only character to invoke nature in the course of the play — the complicated relationships that obtain among the natural world, the gods above, and fate or justice pervade the entire play.

Disguised as a simple peasant, Kent appears in Goneril's castle, calling himself Caius. He puts himself in Lear's way, and after an exchange of words in which Caius emphasizes his plain spokenness and honesty, Lear accepts him into service.

Lear's servants and knights notice that Goneril's servants no longer obey their commands. When Lear asks Oswald where Goneril is, Oswald rudely leaves the room without replying. Oswald soon returns, but his disrespectful replies to Lear's questions induce Lear to strike him. Kent steps in to aid Lear and trips Oswald.

The Fool arrives and, in a series of puns and double entendres, tells Lear that he has made a great mistake in handing over his power to Goneril and Regan. After a long delay, Goneril herself arrives to speak with Lear. She tells him that his servants and knights have been so disorderly that he will have to send some of them away whether he likes it or not. Lear is shocked at Goneril's treasonous betrayal. Nonetheless, Goneril remains adamant in her demand that Lear send away half of his one hundred knights. Enraged Lear repents ever handing his power over to Goneril. He curses his daughter, calling on Nature to make her childless. Surprised by his own tears, he calls for his horses. He declares that he will stay with Regan, whom he believes will be a true daughter and give him the respect that he deserves. When Lear has gone, Goneril argues with her husband, Albany, who is upset with the harsh way she has treated Lear. She says that she has written a letter to her sister Regan, who is likewise determined not to house Lear's hundred knights.

Lear sends Kent to deliver a message to Gloucester. The Fool needles Lear further

about his bad decisions, foreseeing that Regan will treat Lear no better than Goneril did. Lear calls on heaven tokeep him from going mad. Lear and his attendants leave for Regan's castle.

In these scenes, the tragedy of the play begins to unfold. It is now becoming clear to everyone that Lear has made a mistake in handing over his power to Goneril and Regan. Lear's major erroris that, in stepping down from the throne, he has also given up all of his formal authority to thosewho do not actually love him. He no longer has the power to command anyone to do anything, even to give him shelter or food—his daughters, each of whom is now a queen over half of Britain, wield special authority over him.

Goneril and, as we soon discover, Regan enjoy being in power and conspire to destroy Lear's remaining influence. Their plan to whittle down Lear's retinue from a hundred knights to fifty may not seem devious, but they will soon purge his knights altogether. This gradual diminishment of Lear's attendants symbolizes the gradual elimination of his remaining power. Knights and servants are part of the pomp that surrounds a powerful king, and Lear rightly sees his loss of them as representative of his daughter's declining respect for his rank.

Goneril, of course, says that the reason she demands this reduction is that the knights have beenloud and destructive in her castle—they are, she claims, "men so disordered, so deboshed and bold" (1.3.217). To be fair, it is difficult for us, as readers, to know how true this assertion is. Lear claims, "My train are men of choice and rarest parts,/That all particulars of duty know," yetwe have already seen Lear make imperious demands and lose his temper in a seemingly unjustified way (1.3.230–231). At this point in the play, the audience may still be unsure about whether or not to sympathize with Lear, especially given his capricious decision to banish Cordelia. Still, we know that Goneril has been talking, in private, about how best to control her aging father.

Lear seems to begin to question his own identity. When he realizes that Goneril plans to frustratehis desires, he asks, "Doth any here know me? This is not Lear./……./Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (1.3.201–205). It is as if Goneril's insistence that Lear is now senile makes Lear himself wonder whether he is really himself anymore or whether he has lost his mind. Driven todespair at the end of Act 1, scene 5, he says, "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" — a foreshadowing of his eventual insanity (1.5.18).

In Act 1, scene 3, we meet Lear's Fool. Many of Shakespeare's plays feature a clown of some sort, and *King Lear* arguably has two such clowns: the Fool himself and Edgar in his later disguise as Tom O'Bedlam. Many kings and queens during the

Renaissance had court fools to amuse them. However, in addition to wearing funny costumes, singing, performing acrobatic tricks, and juggling, fools also made puns and rude jokes and offered their take on matters to their sovereigns.

Lear's Fool cleverly combines this sort of foolishness with a deeper wisdom. The license, traditionally granted to official "fools," to say things to their superiors that anybody else would be punished for enables him to counsel Lear, even though he seems only to prattle nonsensically. Moreover, Lear seems to have a very close relationship with his Fool: the Fool calls Lear "nuncle" and Lear calls the Fool "boy." He is always speaking in riddles and songs, but in these scenes his meaning can be understood: he advises Lear to be wary of his daughters. In telling Lear,"I/am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing," he hints at the dangerous situation in which Lear has put himself (1.3.168–169). His ostensibly silly singing — "The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long/That it had it head bit off by it young" — clearly warns the king that his daughters, each like a traitorous "cuckoo," plan to turn against the father who raisedthem.(1.3.190–191).

Summary Act 2, Scenes 1–2

Note: Many editions of King Lear, including The Norton Shakespeare, divide Act 2 into fourscenes. Other editions divide Act 2 into only two scenes.

Act 2

In Gloucester's castle, Gloucester's servant Curan tells Edmund that he has informed Gloucester that the duke of Cornwall and his wife, Regan, are coming to the castle that very night. Curan alsomentions vague rumors about trouble brewing between the duke of Cornwall and the duke of Albany.

Edmund is delighted to hear of Cornwall's visit, realizing that he can make use of him in his scheme to get rid of Edgar. Edmund calls Edgar out of his hiding place and tells him that Cornwall is angry with him for being on Albany's side of their disagreement. Edgar has no idea what Edmund is talking about. Edmund tells Edgar further that Gloucester has discovered his hiding place and that he ought to flee the house immediately under cover of night. When he hearsGloucester coming, Edmund draws his sword and pretends to fight with Edgar, while Edgar runs away. Edmund cuts his arm with his sword and lies to Gloucester, telling him that Edgar wanted him to join in a plot against Gloucester's life and that Edgar tried to kill him for refusing. The unhappy Gloucester praises Edmund and vows to pursue Edgar, sending men out to search for him. Cornwall and Regan arrive at Gloucester's house. They believe Edmund's lies about

Edgar, andRegan asks if Edgar is one of the disorderly knights that attend Lear. Edmund replies that he is, and Regan speculates further that these knights put Edgar up to the idea of killing Gloucester inorder to acquire Gloucester's wealth. Regan then asks Gloucester for his advice in answering letters from Lear and Goneril.

Outside Gloucester's castle, Kent, still in peasant disguise, meets Oswald, the chief steward of Goneril's household. Oswald doesn't recognize Kent from their scuffle in Act 1, scene 3. Kent roundly abuses Oswald, describing him as cowardly, vain, boastful, overdressed, servile, and groveling. Oswald still maintains that he doesn't know Kent; Kent draws his sword and attackshim. Oswald's cries for help bring Cornwall, Regan, and Gloucester. Kent replies rudely to their callsfor explanation, and Cornwall orders him to be punished in the stocks, a wooden device that shackles a person's ankles and renders him immobile. Gloucester objects that this humiliating punishment of Lear's messenger will be seen as disrespectful of Lear himself and that the former king will take offense. But Cornwall and Regan maintain that Kent deserves this treatment for assaulting Goneril's servant, and they put him in the stocks.

After everyone leaves, Kent reads a letter that he has received from Cordelia in which she promises that she will find some way, from her current position in France, to help improve conditions in Britain. The unhappy and resigned Kent dozes off in the stocks.

Edmund's clever scheming to get rid of Edgar shows his cunning and his immorality. His ability to manipulate people calls to mind arguably the greatest of Shakespeare's villains, Iago, from Othello, who demonstrates a similar capacity for twisting others to serve his own ends. There is a great deal of irony in Edmund's description to his father of the ways in which Edgar has allegedly schemed against Gloucester's life. Edmund goes so far as to state that Edgar told him that no one would ever believe Edmund's word against his because of Edmund's illegitimate birth. With this remark, Edmund not only calls attention to his bastard status — which is clearly central to his resentful, ambitious approach to life — but proves crafty enough to use it to his advantage.

Gloucester's rejection of Edgar parallels Lear's rejection of Cordelia in Act 1, scene 1, and reminds us of the similarities between the two unhappy families: Edgar and Cordelia are good children of fathers who reject them in favor of children who do not love them. When Gloucester says, "I never got him" — that is, he never begot, or fathered, him — he seems to be denying thathe is actually Edgar's father, just as Lear

has disowned Cordelia (2.1.79). On the other hand, when he praises Edmund as a "loyal and natural boy," he seems to be acknowledging him as a true son (2.1.85).

It is somewhat difficult to know what to make of Kent's attack on Oswald. Oswald's eagerness to serve the treacherous Goneril in Act 1, scene 3, has established him as one of the play's minor villains, but Kent's barrage of insults and subsequent physical attack on Oswald are clearly unprovoked. Oswald's failure to fight back may be interpreted as cowardice, but one can also interpret it as Oswald does: he says that he chooses not to attack Kent because of Kent's "gray beard" — at nearly fifty, Kent is an old man and thus no longer suited for fighting (2.2.55). Kent's attack seems to be rooted in his anger at Goneril's treatment of Lear — "anger hath a privilege" is the excuse that he gives Cornwall and Regan — and his rage at the hypocrisy surrounding Lear's betrayal by his daughters (2.2.62).

Cornwall's and Regan's decision to put Kent in the stocks reinforces what we have already seen of their disrespect for their father. The stocks were a punishment used on common criminals, and their use on Lear's serving man could easily be interpreted as highly disrespectful to Lear's royal status. Gloucester announces as much when he protests, "Your purposed low correction/Is such as basest and contemned'st wretches/ . . . /Are punished with" (2.2.113–117). Regan, however, ignores his pleas; she almost seems to welcome the idea of inviting Lear's anger.

As Kent sleeps in the stocks, Edgar enters. He has thus far escaped the manhunt for him, but he is afraid that he will soon be caught. Stripping off his fine clothing and covering himself with dirt, he turns himself into "poor Tom" (2.1.20). He states that he will pretend to be one of the beggars who, having been released from insane asylums, wander the countryside constantly seeking food and shelter.

Lear, accompanied by the Fool and a knight, arrives at Gloucester's castle. Lear spies Kent in the stocks and is shocked that anyone would treat one of his servants so badly. When Kent tells him that Regan and Cornwall put him there, Lear cannot believe it and demands to speak with them. Regan and Cornwall refuse to speak with Lear, however, excusing themselves on the grounds that they are sick and weary from traveling. Lear insists. He has difficulty controlling his emotions, but he finally acknowledges to himself that sickness can make people behave strangely. When Regan and Cornwall eventually appear, Lear starts to tell Regan about Goneril's "sharp- toothed unkindness" toward him (2.3.128). Regan suggests that Goneril may have been justified in her actions, that Lear is growing old and unreasonable, and that he should return to Goneril and beg her

forgiveness.

Lear asks Regan to shelter him, but she refuses. He complains more strenuously about Goneril and falls to cursing her. Much to Lear's dismay, Goneril herself arrives at Gloucester's castle. Regan, who had known from Goneril's letters that she was coming, takes her sister's hand and allies herself with Goneril against their father. They both tell Lear that he is getting old and weak and that he must give up half of his men if he wants to stay with either of his daughters.

Lear, confused, says that he and his hundred men will stay with Regan. Regan, however, responds that she will allow him only twenty-five men. Lear turns back to Goneril, saying that he will be willing to come down to fifty men if he can stay with her. But Goneril is no longer willing to allow him even that many. A moment later, things get even worse for Lear: both Goneril and Regan refuse to allow him any servants.

Outraged, Lear curses his daughters and heads outside, where a wild storm is brewing. Gloucesterbegs Goneril and Regan to bring Lear back inside, but the daughters prove unyielding and state that it is best to let him do as he will. They order that the doors be shut and locked, leaving their father outside in the threatening storm.

In these scenes, Shakespeare further develops the psychological focus of the play, which centers on cruelty, betrayal, and madness. Lear watches his daughters betray him, and his inability to believe what he is seeing begins to push him toward the edge of insanity. This movement begins with Lear's disbelief when he sees how Regan has treated his servant Kent. By putting Kent in thestocks, Regan indicates her lack of respect for Lear as king and father. When Lear realizes how badly Regan is treating him, he reacts with what seems to be a dramatically physical upwelling of grief: he cries out, "O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!/Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow" (2.3.53–55). "The mother" was a Renaissance term for an illness that felt like suffocation; characterized by light-headedness and strong pain in the stomach, its symptoms resemble those of emotional trauma, grief, and hysteria.

Regan clearly tries to undercut Lear's rapidly waning authority. As her subversion becomes clearer, Lear denies it in ways that become more and more painful to watch. Regan and Cornwall refuse his demands to speak with them, and Lear forgets that, since he has given up his power, he can no longer give them orders. Goneril and Regan eventually insult Lear by telling him that he is senile: "I pray you, father, being weak, seem so" (2.3.196). These barbed words from Regan skirt the issue of Lear's loss of authority and point to something that he can neither deny nor control—that he is growing

old.

The sisters' refusal to allow Lear to keep his hundred knights and Regan's polite but steadfast refusal to allow him to stay with her instead of Goneril finally begin to make Lear understand thathe can no longer command like a king. But he stands in fierce denial of this loss of authority; being forced to this realization causes him to alternate between grief and an anger so powerful thatit seems to be driving him mad.

The servants that Lear wants to keep with him are symbols of more than just his authority. When Regan asks why he needs even one attendant, Lear bursts out, "O, reason not the need!" (2.3.259). Human nature, he says, would be no different from that of animals if humans never needed more than the fundamental necessities of life. Clearly, Lear needs his servants not because of the service that they provide him but because of what they represent: his authority and his importance — in essence, the identity that he has built for himself. Regan and Goneril, in denying Lear his servants, deny their father that which he needs the most: not what he needs to be a king, but what he needs to be a human being.

Lear's cry of "O fool, I shall go mad!" foreshadows the fate that soon befalls him (2.3.281). His words also recall the earlier scene in which Edgar dons a disguise and assumes the identity of a "Bedlam beggar" (2.1.13). "Bedlam" was a nickname for the Bethlehem hospital in Elizabethan London where the mentally ill were housed. When Edgar rips his clothes to shreds and smears himself with dirt, he is taking on the disguise of a "poor Tom" (2.1.20), one of the insane Bedlam beggars who roam the countryside sticking themselves with pins and begging "with roaring voices" (2.1.13). Thus, in these scenes, both Lear and Edgar flee from civilization, leaving the safety of walls and roofs behind in favor of the chaos and confusion of the natural world.

Act 3

A storm rages on the heath. Kent, seeking Lear in vain, runs into one of Lear's knights and learnsthat Lear is somewhere in the area, accompanied only by his Fool. Kent gives the knight secret information: he has heard that there is unrest between Albany and Cornwall and that there are spies for the French in the English courts. Kent tells the knight to go to Dover, the city in England nearest to France, where he may find friends who will help Lear's cause. He gives the knight a ring and orders him to give it to Cordelia, who will know who has sent the knight when she sees the ring. Kent leaves to search for Lear.

Meanwhile, Lear wanders around in the storm, cursing the weather and challenging

it to do its worst against him. He seems slightly irrational, his thoughts wandering from idea to idea but always returning to fixate on his two cruel daughters. The Fool, who accompanies him, urges him to humble himself before his daughters and seek shelter indoors, but Lear ignores him. Kent findsthe two of them and urges them to take shelter inside a nearby hovel. Lear finally agrees and follows Kent toward the hovel. The Fool makes a strange and confusing prophecy.

Inside his castle, a worried Gloucester speaks with Edmund. The loyal Gloucester recounts howhe became uncomfortable when Regan, Goneril, and Cornwall shut Lear out in the storm.

But when he urged them to give him permission to go out and help Lear, they became angry, tookpossession of his castle, and ordered him never to speak to Lear or plead on his behalf.

Gloucester tells Edmund that he has received news of a conflict between Albany and Cornwall.He also informs him that a French army is invading and that part of it has already landed in

England. Gloucester feels that he must take Lear's side and now plans to go seek him out in the storm. He tells Edmund that there is a letter with news of the French army locked in his room, andhe asks his son to go and distract the duke of Cornwall while he, Gloucester, goes onto the heath to search for Lear. He adds that it is imperative that Cornwall not notice his absence; otherwise, Gloucester might die for his treachery.

When Gloucester leaves, Edmund privately rejoices at the opportunity that has presented itself. He plans to betray his father immediately, going to Cornwall to tell him about both Gloucester's plans to help Lear and the location of the traitorous letter from the French. Edmund expects to inherit his father's title, land, and fortune as soon as Gloucester is put to death.

The information that Kent gives the knight brings the audience out of the personal realm of Lear's anguish and into the political world of Lear's Britain. Throughout the play, we hear rumors of conflict between Albany and Cornwall and of possible war with France, but what exactly transpires at any specific moment is rarely clear. The question of the French is not definitively resolved until Act 3. Kent's mention of Dover, however, provides a clue: Dover is a port city in the south of England where ships from France often landed; it is famous for its high white cliffs. As various characters begin moving southward toward Dover in the scenes that follow, the tension of an inevitable conflict heightens. Whatever the particulars of the political struggle, however, it is clear that Lear,

by giving away his power in Britain to Goneril and Regan — and eventually Edmund — has destroyed not only his own authority but all authority. Instead of a stable, hierarchical kingdom with Lear in control, chaos has overtaken the realm, and the country is at the mercy of the play's villains, who care for nothing but their own power.

This political chaos is mirrored in the natural world. We find Lear and his courtiers plodding across a deserted heath with winds howling around them and rain drenching them. Lear, like the other characters, is unused to such harsh conditions, and he soon finds himself symbolically stripped bare. He has already discovered that his cruel daughters can victimize him; now he learns that a king caught in a storm is as much subject to the power of nature as any man.

The importance of the storm, and its symbolic connection to the state of mind of the people caught in it, is first suggested by the knight's words to Kent. Kent asks the knight, "Who's there, besides foul weather?"; the knight answers, "One minded like the weather, most unquietly"(3.1.1–2).

Here the knight's state of mind is shown to be as turbulent as the winds and clouds surrounding him. This is true of Lear as well: when Kent asks the knight where the king is, the knight replies, "Contending with the fretful elements;/ . . ./Strives in his little world of man to out-scorn/The to- and-fro-conflicting wind and rain" (3.1.3–11). Shakespeare's use of pathetic fallacy — a literary device in which inanimate objects such as nature assume human reactions — amplifies the tension of the characters' struggles by elevating human forces to the level of natural forces.

Lear is trying to face down the powers of nature, an attempt that seems to indicate both his despair and his increasingly confused sense of reality. Both of these strains appear in Lear's famous speech to the storm, in which he commands, "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!/You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout/Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!" (3.2.1–1). Lear's attempt to speak to the storm suggests that he has lost touch with the natural world and his relation to it—or, at least, that he has lost touch with the ordinary human understanding of nature. In a sense, though, his diatribe against the weather embodies one of the central questions posed by *King Lea*r: namely, whether the universe is fundamentally friendly or hostile to man. Lear asks whether nature and the gods are actually good, and, if so, how life can have treated him so badly.

The storm marks one of the first appearances of the apocalyptic imagery that is so important in *King Lear* and that will become increasingly dominant as the play

progresses. The chaos reflects the disorder in Lear's increasingly crazed mind, and the apocalyptic language represents the projection of Lear's rage and despair onto the outside world: if his world has come to a symbolic end because his daughters have stripped away his power and betrayed him, then, he seems to think, the real world ought to end, too. As we have seen, the chaos in nature also reflects the very real political chaos that has engulfed Britain in the absence of Lear's authority.

Along with Lear's increasing despair and projection, we also see his understandable fixation on his daughters: "Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters:/I tax you not, you elements, with unkindness" (3.2.13–15). Lear tells the thunder that he does not blame it for attacking him because it does not owe him anything. But he does blame his "two pernicious daughters" for their betrayal (3.2.21). Despite the apparent onset of insanity, Lear exhibits some degree of rational thought — he is still able to locate the source of his misfortune.

Finally, we see strange shifts beginning to occur inside Lear's mind. He starts to realize that he is going mad, a terrifying realization for anyone. Nevertheless, Lear suddenly notices his Fool and asks him, "How dost my boy? Art cold?" (3.2.66). He adds, "I have one part in my heart/That's sorry yet for thee" (3.2.70–71). Here, Lear takes real and compassionate notice of another human being for the first time in the play. This concern for others reflects the growth of Lear's humility, which eventually redeems him and enables him to win Cordelia's forgiveness.

Kent leads Lear through the storm to the hovel. He tries to get him to go inside, but Lear resists, saying that his own mental anguish makes him hardly feel the storm. He sends his Fool inside to take shelter and then kneels and prays. He reflects that, as king, he took too little care of the wretched and homeless, who have scant protection from storms such as this one.

The Fool runs out of the hovel, claiming that there is a spirit inside. The spirit turns out to be Edgar in his disguise as Tom O'Bedlam. Edgar plays the part of the madman by complaining that he is being chased by a devil. He adds that fiends possess and inhabit his body. Lear, whose grip on reality is loosening, sees nothing strange about these statements. He sympathizes with Edgar, asking him whether bad daughters have been the ruin of him as well.

Lear asks the disguised Edgar what he used to be before he went mad and became a beggar. Edgar replies that he was once a wealthy courtier who spent his days having sex with many women and drinking wine. Observing Edgar's nakedness, Lear tears off his

own clothes in sympathy.

Gloucester, carrying a torch, comes looking for the king. He is unimpressed by Lear's companions and tries to bring Lear back inside the castle with him, despite the possibility of evoking Regan and Goneril's anger. Kent and Gloucester finally convince Lear to go with Gloucester, but Lear insists on bringing the disguised Edgar, whom he has begun to like, with him.

Inside Gloucester's castle, Cornwall vows revenge against Gloucester, whom Edmund has betrayed by showing Cornwall a letter that proves Gloucester's secret support of a French invasion. Edmund pretends to be horrified at the discovery of his father's "treason," but he is actually delighted, since the powerful Cornwall, now his ally, confers upon him the title of earl of Gloucester (3.5.10). Cornwall sends Edmund to find Gloucester, and Edmund reasons to himself that if he can catch his father in the act of helping Lear, Cornwall's suspicions will be confirmed.

When Kent asks Lear to enter the hovel at the beginning of Act 1, scene 3, Lear's reply demonstrates that part of his mind is still lucid and that the symbolic connection between the storm outside and Lear's own mental disturbance is significant. Lear explains to Kent that although the storm may be very uncomfortable for Kent, Lear himself hardly notices it: "The tempest in my mind/Doth from my senses take all feeling else" (3.3.11–13). Lear's sensitivity to the storm is blocked out by his mental and emotional anguish and by his obsession with his treacherous daughters. The only thing that he can think of is their "filial ingratitude" (3.3.15).

Lear also continues to show a deepening sensitivity to other people, a trait missing from his character at the beginning of the play and an interesting side effect of his increasing madness and exposure to human cruelty. After he sends his Fool into the hovel to take shelter, he kneels in prayer—the first time we have seen him do so in the play. He does not pray for himself; instead, he asks the gods to help "poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,/That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm" (3.3.29–10). Reproaching himself for his heartlessness, Lear urges himself to "expose thyself to feel what wretches feel" (3.3.15). This self-criticism and newfound sympathy for the plight of others mark the continuing humanization of Lear.

Lear's obsessive contemplation of his own humanity and of his place in relation to nature and to the gods is heightened still further after he meets Edgar, who is clad only in rags. Lear's wandering mind turns to his own fine clothing, and he asks, addressing Edgar's largely uncovered body, "Is man no more than this? Consider him well" (3.3.95–

96). As a king in fact as well as in name, with servants and subjects and seemingly loyal daughters, Lear could be confident of his place in the universe; indeed, the universe seemed to revolve around him. Now, as his humility grows, he becomes conscious of his real relationship to nature. He is frightened to see himself as little more than a "bare, forked animal," stripped of everything that made him secure and powerful (3.3.99–100). The destruction of Lear's pride leads him to question the social order that clothes kings in rich garments and beggars in rags. He realizes that each person, underneath his or her clothing, is naked and therefore weak. He sees too that clothing offers no protection against the forces of the elements or of the gods. When he tries to remove his own clothing, his companions restrain him. But Lear's attempt to bare himself is a sign that he has seen the similarities between himself and Edgar: only the flimsy surface of garments marks the difference between a king and a beggar. Each must face the cruelty of an uncaring world.

The many names that Edgar uses for the demons that pester him seem to have been taken by Shakespeare from a single source — Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostors,* which describes demons in wild and outlandish language to ridicule the exorcisms performed by Catholic priests. Edgar uses similarly strange and haunting language to describe his demons. The audience assumes that he is only feigning madness; after all, we have seen him deliberately decide to pose as a crazed beggar in order to escape capture by his brother and father. But Edgar's ravings are so convincing, and the storm-wracked heath such a bizarre environment, that the line between pretending to be mad and actually *being* mad seems to blur.

Gloucester, Kent, Lear, and the Fool take shelter in a small building (perhaps a shed or farmhouse) on Gloucester's property. Gloucester leaves to find provisions for the king. Lear, whose mind is wandering ever more widely, holds a mock trial of his wicked daughters, with Edgar, Kent, and the Fool presiding. Both Edgar and the Fool speak like madmen, and the trial is an exercise in hallucination and eccentricity.

Gloucester hurries back in to tell Kent that he has overheard a plot to kill Lear. Gloucester begs Kent to quickly transport Lear toward Dover, in the south of England, where allies will be waiting for him. Gloucester, Kent, and the Fool leave. Edgar remains behind for a moment and speaks in his own, undisguised voice about how much less important his own suffering feels now that he has seen Lear's far worse suffering.

Back in Gloucester's castle, Cornwall gives Goneril the treasonous letter concerning the French army at Dover and tells her to take it and show it to her husband,

Albany. He then sends his servants to apprehend Gloucester so that Gloucester can be punished. He orders Edmund to go with Goneril to Albany's palace so that Edmund will not have to witness the violent punishmentof his father.

Oswald brings word that Gloucester has helped Lear escape to Dover. Gloucester is found and brought before Regan and Cornwall. They treat him cruelly, tying him up like a thief, insulting him, and pulling his white beard. Cornwall remarks to himself that he cannot put Gloucester to death without holding a formal trial but that he can still punish him brutally and get away with it.

Admitting that he helped Lear escape, Gloucester swears that he will see Lear's wrongs avenged. Cornwall replies, "See 't shalt thou never," and proceeds to dig out one of Gloucester's eyes, throw it on the floor, and step on it (1.7.68). Gloucester screams, and Regan demands that Cornwall put out the other eye too.

One of Gloucester's servants suddenly steps in, saying that he cannot stand by and let this outragehappen. Cornwall draws his sword and the two fight. The servant wounds Cornwall, but Regan grabs a sword from another servant and kills the first servant before he can injure Cornwall further. Irate, the wounded Cornwall gouges out Gloucester's remaining eye.

Gloucester calls out for his son Edmund to help him, but Regan triumphantly tells him that it was Edmund who betrayed him to Cornwall in the first place. Gloucester, realizing immediately that Edgar was the son who really loved him, laments his folly and prays to the gods to help Edgar. Regan and Cornwall order that Gloucester be thrown out of the house to "smell/His way to Dover" (3.7.96–97). Cornwall, realizing that his wound is bleeding heavily, exits with Regan's aid.

Left alone with Gloucester, Cornwall's and Regan's servants express their shock and horror at what has just happened. They decide to treat Gloucester's bleeding face and hand him over to themad beggar to lead Gloucester where he will.

In these scenes, Shakespeare continues to develop Lear's madness. Lear rages on against his daughters and is encouraged by comments that Edgar and the Fool make. We may interpret the Fool's remark "He's mad that trusts in the tameness of a wolf" as referring to Lear's folly in trusting his two wolflike daughters (3.6.16). Edgar, for his part, speaks like a madman who sees demons everywhere; since Lear has started to hallucinate that he sees his daughters, the two madmen get along well. For instance, when Lear accosts his absent daughters ("Now, you she foxes!"), Edgar scolds them likewise (3.6.20). Animal imagery will be applied to Goneril and Regan again later in

Lear's mock trial of his daughters: "The little dogs and all,/Tray, Blanch, andSweet-heart, see, they bark at me" (3.6.57–58). Having reduced his sense of himself to a "bare, forked animal," he now makes his vicious daughters animals as well — but they, of course, seem like predatory, disloyal creatures to him (3.3.99–100).

Act 1, scene 6, is the Fool's last scene, and Edgar continues to take over the Fool's function byanswering Lear's mad words and jingles. When Lear declares, "We'll go to supper i' the morning" (3.6.77), thus echoing the confusion of the natural order in the play, the Fool answers, "And I'll go to bed at noon" (3.6.78). This line is the last we hear from him in the play. One can argue that since Lear is sliding into madness, he can no longer understand the nonsense of the Fool, who actually is sane, but rather can relate only to Edgar, who pretends to be mad. One can also argue that Lear has internalized the Fool's criticisms of his own errors, and thus he no longer needs to hear them from an outside source. In any case, the Fool, having served Shakespeare's purpose, has become expendable.

Edgar's speech at the end of Act 1, scene 6, in which he leaves off babbling and addresses the audience, gives us a needed reminder that, despite appearances, he is *not* actually insane. We arealso reminded, yet again, of the similarities between his situation and Lear's. "He childed as I fathered," says Edgar, suggesting that just as Lear's ungrateful daughters put Lear where he is now, so Gloucester, too willing to believe the evil words of Edmund, did the same to Edgar (3.6.101).

The shocking violence of Act 1, scene 7, is one of the bloodiest onstage actions in all of Shakespeare. Typically, especially in Shakespeare's later plays, murders and mutilations take place offstage. Here, however, the violence happens right before our eyes, with Cornwall's snarl "Out, vile jelly!" as a ghastly complement to the action (3.7.86). (How graphic our view of the violence is depends on how it is staged.) The horror of Gloucester's blinding marks a turning point in the play: cruelty, betrayal, and even madness may be reversible, but blinding is not. It becomes evident at this point that the chaos and cruelty permeating the play have reached a pointof no return.

Indeed, it is hard to overestimate the sheer cruelty that Regan and Cornwall perpetrate, in ways both obvious and subtle, against Gloucester. From Cornwall's order to "pinion him like a thief" (3.7.21) and Regan's exhortation to tie his arms "hard, hard" (3.7.12) — a disgraceful way to handle a nobleman — to Regan's astonishing rudeness in yanking on Gloucester's white beard after he is tied down, the two seem intent on hurting and humiliating Gloucester. Once again, the social order is inverted: the young

are cruel to the old; loyalty to the old king is punished as treachery to the new rulers; Regan and Cornwall, guests within Gloucester's house, thoroughly violate the age-old conventions of respect and politeness. Cornwall does not have the authority to kill or punish Gloucester without a trial, but he decides to ignore that rule because he can: "Our power/Shall do a courtesy to our wrath, which men/May blame, but not control" (3.7.25–27).

This violence is mitigated slightly by the unexpected display of humanity on the part of Cornwall's servants. Just as Cornwall and Regan violate a range of social norms, so too do the servants, by challenging their masters. One servant gives his life trying to save Gloucester; othershelp the injured Gloucester and bring him to the disguised Edgar. Even amid the increasing chaos,some human compassion remains.

Act 4

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;They kill us for their sport.

Edgar talks to himself on the heath, reflecting that his situation is not as bad as it could be. He is immediately presented with the horrifying sight of his blinded father. Gloucester is led by an old man who has been a tenant of both Gloucester and Gloucester's father for eighty years. Edgar hears Gloucester tell the old man that if he could only touch his son Edgar again, it would be worth more to him than his lost eyesight. But Edgar chooses to remain disguised as Poor Tom rather than reveal himself to his father. Gloucester asks the old man to bring some clothing to cover Tom, and he asks Tom to lead him to Dover. Edgar agrees. Specifically, Gloucester asks to be led to the top of the highest cliff.

Goneril and Edmund arrive outside of her palace, and Goneril expresses surprise that Albany did not meet them on the way. Oswald tells her that Albany is displeased with Goneril's and Regan's actions, glad to hear that the French army had landed, and sorry to hear that Goneril is returning home.

Goneril realizes that Albany is no longer her ally and criticizes his cowardice, resolving to assert greater control over her husband's military forces. She directs Edmund to return to Cornwall's house and raise Cornwall's troops for the fight against the French. She informs himthat she will likewise take over power from her husband. She promises to send Oswald with messages. She bids Edmund goodbye with a kiss, strongly hinting that she wants to become hismistress.

As Edmund leaves, Albany enters. He harshly criticizes Goneril. He has not yet

learned about Gloucester's blinding, but he is outraged at the news that Lear has been driven mad by Goneril and Regan's abuse. Goneril angrily insults Albany, accusing him of being a coward. She tells him that he ought to be preparing to fight against the French invaders. Albany retorts by calling her monstrous and condemns the evil that she has done to Lear.

A messenger arrives and delivers the news that Cornwall has died from the wound that he received while putting out Gloucester's eyes. Albany reacts with horror to the report of Gloucester's blinding and interprets Cornwall's death as divine retribution. Meanwhile, Goneril displays mixed feelings about Cornwall's death: on the one hand, it makes her sister Regan less powerful; on the other hand, it leaves Regan free to pursue Edmund herself. Goneril leaves to answer her sister's letters.

Albany demands to know where Edmund was when his father was being blinded. When he hears that it was Edmund who betrayed Gloucester and that Edmund left the house specifically so that Cornwall could punish Gloucester, Albany resolves to take revenge upon Edmund and help Gloucester.

In these scenes, the play moves further and further toward hopelessness. We watch characters who think that matters are improving realize that they are only getting worse. Edgar, wandering the plains half naked, friendless, and hunted, thinks the worst has passed, until the world sinks to another level of darkness, when he glimpses his beloved father blinded, crippled, and bleeding from the eye sockets. Gloucester, who seems to have resigned himself to his sightless future, expresses a similar feeling of despair in one of the play's most famous and disturbing lines: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;/They kill us for their sport" (4.1.17–18). Here we have nihilism in its starkest form: the idea that there is no order, no goodness in the universe, only caprice and cruelty. This theme of despair in the face of an uncaring universe makes *King Lear* one of Shakespeare's darkest plays. For Gloucester, as for Lear on the heath, there is no possibility of redemption or happiness in the world — there is only the "sport" of vicious, inscrutable gods.

It is unclear why Edgar keeps up his disguise as Poor Tom. Whatever Edgar's (or Shakespeare's) reasoning, his secrecy certainly creates dramatic tension and allows Edgar to continue to babble about the "foul fiend[s]" that possess and follow him (4.1.59). It also makes him unlikely to ask Gloucester his reasons for wanting to go to Dover. Gloucester phrases his request strangely, asking Tom to lead him only to the brim of the cliff, where "from that place/I shall no leading need" (4.1.77–78). These lines clearly

foreshadow Gloucester's later attempt to commit suicide.

Meanwhile, the characters in power, having blinded Gloucester and driven off Lear, are swiftly becoming divided. The motif of betrayal recurs, but this time it is the wicked betraying the wicked. Cornwall has died, and Albany has turned against his wife, Goneril, and her remaining allies, Regan and Edmund. Albany's unexpected discovery of a conscience after witnessing his wife's cruelty raises the theme of redemption for the first time, offering the possibility that even an apparently wicked character can recover his goodness and try to make amends. Significantly, Albany's attacks on his wife echo Lear's own words: "O Goneril!/You are not worth the dust which the rude wind/Blows in your face," Albany tells her after hearing what she has done to her father (4.2.10–12). Like Lear, Albany uses animal imagery to describe the faithless daughters. "Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?" he asks (4.2.31). Goneril, for her part, is hardly intimidated by him; she calls him a "moral fool" for criticizing her while France invades (4.1.59). Goneril equates Albany's moralizing with foolishness, a sign of her evil nature. When Albany hears that Cornwall is dead, he thanks divine justice in words that run counter to Gloucester's earlier despair. "This shows you are above,/You justicers," he cries, offering a slightly more optimistic — if grim — take on the possibility of divine justice than Gloucester's earlier comment about flies, boys, and death (4.2.79–80). His words imply that perhaps it will be possible to restore order after all, perhaps the wicked characters will yet suffer for their sins — orso the audience and characters alike can hope.

Kent, still disguised as an ordinary serving man, speaks with a gentleman in the French camp nearDover. The gentleman tells Kent that the king of France landed with his troops but quickly departed to deal with a problem at home. Kent's letters have been brought to Cordelia, who is now the queen of France and who has been left in charge of the army. Kent questions the gentleman about Cordelia's reaction to the letters, and the gentleman gives a moving account of Cordelia's sorrow upon reading about her father's mistreatment.

Kent tells the gentleman that Lear, who now wavers unpredictably between sanity and madness, has also arrived safely in Dover. Lear, however, refuses to see Cordelia because he is ashamed of the way he treated her. The gentleman informs Kent that the armies of both Albany and the late Cornwall are on the march, presumably to fight against the French troops.

Cordelia enters, leading her soldiers. Lear has hidden from her in the cornfields, draping himself in weeds and flowers and singing madly to himself. Cordelia sends one

hundred of her soldiers tofind Lear and bring him back. She consults with a doctor about Lear's chances for recovering his sanity. The doctor tells her that what Lear most needs is sleep and that there are medicines that can make him sleep. A messenger brings Cordelia the news that the British armies of Cornwall and Albany are marching toward them. Cordelia expected this news, and her army stands ready tofight.

Back at Gloucester's castle, Oswald tells Regan that Albany's army has set out, although Albanyhas been dragging his feet about the expedition. It seems that Goneril is a "better soldier" than Albany (4.5.3). Regan is extremely curious about the letter that Oswald carries from Goneril to Edmund, but Oswald refuses to show it to her. Regan guesses that the letter concerns Goneril's love affair with Edmund, and she tells Oswald plainly that she wants Edmund for herself. Regan reveals that she has already spoken with Edmund about this possibility; it would be more appropriate for Edmund to get involved with her, now a widow, than with Goneril, with whom such involvement would constitute adultery. She gives Oswald a token or a letter (the text doesn'tspecify which) to deliver to Edmund, whenever he may find him. Finally, she promises Oswald a reward if he can find and kill Gloucester.

In these scenes, we see Cordelia for the first time since Lear banished her in Act 1, scene 1. Thewords the gentleman uses to describe Cordelia to Kent seem to present her as a combination idealized female beauty and quasi-religious savior figure. The gentleman uses the language of love poetry to describe her beauty — her lips are "ripe," the tears in her eyes are "as pearls from diamonds dropped," and her "smiles and tears" are like the paradoxically coexisting "sunshine and rain" (4.1.17–21). But the gentleman also describes Cordelia in language that might be used to speak of a holy angel or the Virgin Mary herself: he says that, as she wiped away her tears, "she shook/The holy water from her heavenly eyes" (4.1.28–29). Cordelia's great love for her father, which contrasts sharply with Goneril and Regan's cruelty, elevates her to the level of reverence.

The strength of Cordelia's daughterly love is reinforced in Act 3, scene 3, when Cordelia orders her people to seek out and help her father. We learn that the main reason for the French invasion of England is Cordelia's desire to help Lear: "great France/My mourning and importuned tears hath pitied," she says (4.3.26–27). The king of France, her husband, took pity on her grief and allowed the invasion in an effort to help restore Lear to the throne. When Cordelia proclaims thatshe is motivated not by ambition but by "love, dear love, and our aged father's right," we are reminded of how badly Lear treated

her at the beginning of the play (4.3.29). Her virtue and devotion is manifest in her willingness to forgive her father for his awful behavior. At one point, she declares, "O dear father,/It is thy business that I go about" (4.3.23–25), echoing a biblical passage in which Christ says, "I must go about my father's business" (Luke 2:39). This allusion reinforces Cordelia's piety and purity and consciously links her to Jesus Christ, who, of course, was a martyr to love, just as Cordelia becomes at the play's close.

The other characters in the play discuss Lear's madness in interesting language, and some of the most memorable turns of phrase in the play come from these descriptions. When Cordelia assesses Lear's condition in Act 3, scene 3, she says he is

As mad as the vexed sea; singing aloud;
Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-
weeds, With hordocks, hemlock, nettles,
cuckoo-flowers,
Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow. (4.3.2–5)

Lear's madness, which is indicated here by both his singing and his self-adornment with flowers, is marked by an embrace of the natural world; rather than perceiving himself as a heroic figure who transcends nature, he understands that he is a small, meaningless component of it.

Additionally, this description brings to mind other famous scenes of madness in Shakespeare —

most notably, the scenes of Ophelia's flower-bedecked madness in *Hamlet.*

These scenes set up the resolution of the play's tension, which takes place in Act 5. While Lear hides from Cordelia out of shame, she seeks him out of love, crystallizing the contrast between her forgiveness and his repentance. Regan and Goneril have begun to become rivals for the affection of Edmund, as their twin ambitions inevitably bring them into conflict. On the political and military level, we learn that Albany's and Cornwall's armies are on the march toward the French camp at Dover. The play is rushing toward a conclusion, for all the characters' trajectorieshave begun to converge.

Still disguised, Edgar leads Gloucester toward Dover. Edgar pretends to take Gloucester to the cliff, telling him that they are going up steep ground and that they can hear the sea. Finally, he tells Gloucester that they are at the top of the cliff and that looking down from the great height gives him vertigo. He waits quietly nearby as Gloucester prays to the gods to forgive him.

Gloucester can no longer bear his suffering and intends to commit suicide. He falls

to the ground, fainting.

`Edgar wakes Gloucester up. He no longer pretends to be Poor Tom but now acts like an ordinary gentleman, although he still doesn't tell Gloucester that he is his son. Edgar says that he saw him fall all the way from the cliffs of Dover and that it is a miracle that he is still alive. Clearly, Edgar states, the gods do not want Gloucester to die just yet. Edgar also informs Gloucester that he saw the creature who had been with him at the top of the cliff and that this creature was not a human being but a devil. Gloucester accepts Edgar's explanation that the gods have preserved him and resolves to endure his sufferings patiently.

Lear, wandering across the plain, stumbles upon Edgar and Gloucester. Crowned with wild flowers, he is clearly mad. He babbles to Edgar and Gloucester, speaking both irrationally and with a strange perceptiveness. He recognizes Gloucester, alluding to Gloucester's sin and source of shame — his adultery. Lear pardons Gloucester for this crime, but his thoughts then follow a chain of associations from adultery to copulation to womankind, culminating in a tirade against women and sexuality in general. Lear's disgust carries him to the point of incoherence, as he deserts iambic pentameter (the verse form in which his speeches are written) and spits out the words "Fie, fie, fie! pah! pah!" (4.6.126).

Cordelia's people enter seeking King Lear. Relieved to find him at last, they try to take him into custody to bring him to Cordelia. When Lear runs away, Cordelia's men follow him.

Oswald comes across Edgar and Gloucester on the plain. He does not recognize Edgar, but he plans to kill Gloucester and collect the reward from Regan. Edgar adopts yet another persona, imitating the dialect of a peasant from the west of England. He defends Gloucester and kills Oswald with a cudgel. As he dies, Oswald entrusts Edgar with his letters.

Gloucester is disappointed not to have been killed. Edgar reads with interest the letter that Oswald carries to Edmund. In the letter, Goneril urges Edmund to kill Albany if he gets the opportunity, so that Edmund and Goneril can be together. Edgar is outraged; he decides to keep the letter and show it to Albany when the time is right. Meanwhile, he buries Oswald nearby and leads Gloucester off to temporary safety.

In the French camp, Cordelia speaks with Kent. She knows his real identity, but he wishes it to remain a secret to everyone else. Lear, who has been sleeping, is brought in to Cordelia. He only partially recognizes her. He says that he knows now that he is senile

and not in his right mind, and he assumes that Cordelia hates him and wants to kill him, just as her sisters do. Cordelia tellshim that she forgives him for banishing her.
Meanwhile, the news of Cornwall's death is repeated in the camp, and we learn that Edmund isnow leading Cornwall's troops. The battle between France and England rapidly approaches.

Besides moving the physical action of the play along, these scenes forward the play's psychological action. The strange, marvelous scene of Gloucester's supposed fall over the nonexistent cliffs of Dover, Lear's mad speeches to Gloucester and Edgar in the wilderness, and the redemptive reconciliation between Cordelia and her not-quite-sane father all set the stage forthe resolution of the play's emotional movement in Act 5.

The psychological motivations behind Gloucester's attempted suicide and Edgar's manipulation of it are complicated and ambiguous. Gloucester's death wish, which reflects his own despair at the cruel, uncaring universe — and perhaps the play's despair as well — would surely have been troubling to the self-consciously Christian society of Renaissance England. Shakespeare gets around much of the problem by setting King Lear in a pagan past; despite the fact that the play isfull of Christian symbols and allusions, its characters pray only to the gods and never to the Christian God.

Clearly, Edgar wants his father to live. He refuses to share in Gloucester's despair and still seeks ajust and happy resolution to the events of the play. In letting Gloucester think that he has attempted suicide, Edgar manipulates Gloucester's understanding of divine will: he says to Gloucester after the latter's supposed fall and rebirth, "Thy life's a miracle. . . ./. . ./The clearest gods . . ./. . . have preserved thee" (4.6.55, 71–73). Edgar not only stops Gloucester's suicidal thoughts but also shocks him into a rebirth. He tells his father that he should "bear free and patient thoughts": his life has been given back to him and he should take better care of it fromnow on (4.6.80).

In these scenes, *King Lear*'s madness brings forth some of his strangest and most interesting speeches. As Edgar notes, Lear's apparent ramblings are "matter and impertinency mixed!/Reason in madness!" (4.6.168–169). This description is similar to Polonius's muttering behind Hamlet's back in *Hamlet*: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (*Hamlet*, 2.2.201–203). Some of Lear's rambling does indeed seem to be meaningless babble, as when he talks about mice, cheese, and giants. But Lear swiftly moves on to talk of more relevant things. He finally understands that his older daughters, in Act 1, scene 1, and before, were sweet-talking him: "They flattered me like a dog. To say 'aye' and 'no' to everything that I said!" (4.6.95–98).

Lear has realized, despite what flatterers have told him and he has believed, that he is as vulnerable to the forces of nature as any human being. He cannot command the rain and thunder and is not immune to colds and fever (the "ague" of 4.6.101). Just as, during the storm, he recognizes that beneath each man's clothing is "a poor, bare, forked animal" (3.3.99–100), Lear now understands that no amount of flattery and praise can make a king different from anyone else: "Through tattered clothes small vices do appear;/Robes and furred gowns hide all" (4.6.158–159).

Armed with this knowledge, Lear can finally reunite with Cordelia and express his newfound humility and beg repentance. "I am a very foolish fond old man" (4.7.61), he tells her sadly, and he admits that she has "some cause" to hate him (4.7.76). Cordelia's moving response ("No cause, no, cause") seals their reconciliation (4.7.77). Love and forgiveness, embodied in Lear's best daughter, join with humility and repentance, and, for a brief time, happiness prevails. But the forces that Lear's initial error unleashed — Goneril, Regan, and Edmund, with all their ambition and appetite for destruction — remain at large. We thus turn from happy reconciliation to conflict, as Cordelia leads her troops against the evil that her father's folly has set loose in Britain.

Act 5

In the British camp near Dover, Regan asks Edmund if he loves Goneril and if he has found his way into her bed. Edmund responds in the negative to both questions. Regan expresses jealousy of her sister and beseeches Edmund not to be familiar with her.

Abruptly, Goneril and Albany enter with their troops. Albany states that he has heard that the invading French army has been joined by Lear and unnamed others who may have legitimate grievances against the present government. Despite his sympathy toward Lear and these other dissidents, Albany declares that he intends to fight alongside Edmund, Regan, and Goneril to repel the foreign invasion. Goneril and Regan jealously spar over Edmund, neither willing to leave the other alone with him. The three exit together.

Just as Albany begins to leave, Edgar, now disguised as an ordinary peasant, catches up to him. He gives Albany the letter that he took from Oswald's body — the letter in which Goneril's involvement with Edmund is revealed and in which Goneril asks Edmund to kill Albany. Edgar tells Albany to read the letter and says that if Albany wins the upcoming battle, he can sound a trumpet and Edgar will provide a champion to defend the claims made in the letter. Edgar vanishes and Edmund returns. Edmund tells Albany that the battle is almost upon them, and Albany leaves. Alone, Edmund

addresses the audience, stating that he has sworn his love to both Regan and Goneril. He debates what he should do, reflecting that choosing either one would anger the other. He decides to put off the decision until after the battle, observing that if Albany survives it, Goneril can take care of killing him herself. He asserts menacingly that if the British win the battle and he captures Lear and Cordelia, he will show them no mercy.

The battle begins. Edgar, in peasant's clothing, leads Gloucester to the shelter of a tree and goes into battle to fight on Lear's side. He soon returns, shouting that Lear's side has lost and that Lear and Cordelia have been captured. Gloucester states that he will stay where he is and wait to be captured or killed, but Edgar says that one's death occurs at a predestined time. Persuaded, Gloucester goes with Edgar.

In these scenes, the battle is quickly commenced and just as quickly concluded. The actual fighting happens offstage, during the short Act 5, scene 2. Meanwhile, the tangled web of affection, romance, manipulation, power, and betrayal among Goneril, Regan, Albany, and Edmund has finally taken on a clear shape. We learn from Edmund that he has promised himself to both sisters; we do not know whether he is lying to Regan when he states that he has not slept with Goneril. Nor can we deduce from Edmund's speech which of the sisters he prefers — or, in fact, whether he really loves either of them — but it is clear that he has created a problem for himself by professing love for both.

It is clear now which characters support Lear and Cordelia and which characters are against them. Albany plans to show Lear and Cordelia mercy; Edmund, like Goneril and Regan, does not. Since all of these characters are, theoretically, fighting on the same side — the British — it is unclear what the fate of the captured Lear and Cordelia will be.

Ultimately, the sense that one has in these scenes is of evil turning inward and devouring itself. As long as Lear and Gloucester served as victims, Goneril and Regan were united. Now, though, with power concentrated in their hands, they fall to squabbling over Edmund's affections. Edmund himself has come into his own, taking command of an army and playing the two queens off against each other. It is suddenly clear that he, more than anyone else, will benefit from Lear's division of the kingdom. Gloucester's bastard may, indeed, shortly make himself king.

Edmund leads in Lear and Cordelia as his prisoners. Cordelia expects to confront Regan and Goneril, but Lear vehemently refuses to do so. He describes a vividly imagined fantasy, in which he and Cordelia live alone together like birds in a cage, hearing about the outside world but observed by no one. Edmund sends them away,

giving the captain who guards them a note with

instructions as to what to do with them. He doesn't make the note's contents clear to the audience,but he speaks ominously. The captain agrees to follow Edmund's orders.

Albany enters accompanied by Goneril and Regan. He praises Edmund for his brave fighting on the British side and orders that he produce Lear and Cordelia. Edmund lies to Albany, claiming that he sent Lear and Cordelia far away because he feared that they would excite the sympathy of the British forces and create a mutiny. Albany rebukes him for putting himself above his place, but Regan breaks in to declare that she plans to make Edmund her husband. Goneril tells Regan that Edmund will not marry her, but Regan, who is unexpectedly beginning to feel sick, claims Edmund as her husband and lord.

Albany intervenes, arresting Edmund on a charge of treason. Albany challenges Edmund to defend himself against the charge in a trial by combat, and he sounds the trumpet to summon hischampion. While Regan, who is growing ill, is helped to Albany's tent, Edgar appears in full armor to accuse Edmund of treason and face him in single combat. Edgar defeats Edmund, and Albany cries out to Edgar to leave Edmund alive for questioning. Goneril tries to help the wounded Edmund, but Albany brings out the treacherous letter to show that he knows of her conspiracy against him. Goneril rushes off in desperation.

Edgar takes off his helmet and reveals his identity. He reconciles with Albany and tells the company how he disguised himself as a mad beggar and led Gloucester through the countryside. He adds that he revealed himself to his father only as he was preparing to fight Edmund and thatGloucester, torn between joy and grief, died.

A gentleman rushes in carrying a bloody knife. He announces that Goneril has committed suicide.Moreover, she fatally poisoned Regan before she died. The two bodies are carried in and laid out.

Kent enters and asks where Lear is. Albany recalls with horror that Lear and Cordelia are still imprisoned and demands from Edmund their whereabouts. Edmund repents his crimes and determines to do good before his death. He tells the others that he had ordered that Cordelia behanged and sends a messenger to try to intervene.

Lear enters, carrying the dead Cordelia in his arms: the messenger arrived too late. Slipping in and out of sanity, Lear grieves over Cordelia's body. Kent speaks to Lear, but Lear barely recognizes him. A messenger enters and reveals that Edmund has also died. Lear asks Edgar to loosen Cordelia's button; then, just as Lear thinks that he sees her beginning to breathe again, hedies.

Albany gives Edgar and Kent their power and titles back, inviting them to rule with him.

Kent, feeling himself near death, refuses, but Edgar seems to accept. The few remaining survivors exitsadly as a funeral march plays.

This long scene brings the play to its resolution, ending it on a note of relentless depression and gloom. Almost all of the main characters wind up dead; only Albany, Edgar, and Kent walk off the stage at the end, and the aging, unhappy Kent predicts his imminent demise. Goneril, Regan, Cordelia, and Lear lie dead onstage, and Edmund and Gloucester have passed away offstage.

Albany philosophizes about his merciless end when he says, "All friends shall taste/The wages of their virtue, and all foes/The cup of their deserving" (5.1.101–101). One can argue that these words suggest that, in some sense, order and justice have triumphed over villainy and cruelty, andthat the world is a just place after all.

But one can also argue that Albany's words ring hollow: most of the virtuous characters die along with the villains, making it difficult to interpret the scene as poetic justice. Indeed, death seems to be a defining motif for the play, embracing characters indiscriminately. We may feel that the disloyal Goneril and Regan, the treacherous Edmund, the odious Oswald, and the brutal Cornwall richly deserve their deaths. But, in the last scene, when the audience expects some kind of justice to be doled out, the good characters — Gloucester, Cordelia, Lear — die as well, and their bodies litter the stage alongside the corpses of the wicked.

This final, harrowing wave of death raises, yet again, a question that has burned throughout the play: is there any justice in the world? Albany's suggestion that the good and the evil both ultimately get what they deserve does not seem to hold true. Lear, howling over Cordelia's body,

asks, "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,/And thou no breath at all?" (5.1.105–106). Thisquestion can be answered only with the stark truth that death comes to all, regardless of each individual's virtue or youth. The world of *King Lear* is not a Christian cosmos: there is no messiah to give meaning to suffering and no promise of an afterlife. All that *King Lear* offers is despair.

The play's emotional extremes of hope and despair, joy and grief, love and hate, are brought to the fore as well in this final scene. Lear's address to Cordelia at the beginning of the scene is strangely joyful. He creates an intimate world that knows only love: "We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage./When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,/And ask of thee forgiveness" (5.1.9–11). This blissful vision, however, is countered by the terrible despair that Lear evokes at Cordelia's death: "Thou'lt come no

more,/Never, never, never, never, never." (5.1.106–107). Yet, despite his grief, Lear expires in a flash of utterly misguided hope, thinking that Cordelia is coming back to life. In a sense, this final, false hope is the most depressing moment of all.

Similarly, Gloucester, as Edgar announces, dies partly of joy: "his flawed heart — /. . ./'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,/Burst smilingly" (5.1.195–198). Even Edmund, learning of Goneril's and Regan's deaths, says, "Yet Edmund was beloved./The one the other poisoned for my sake,/And after slew herself" (5.1.218–230). Even the cruel Edmund thinks of love in his last moments, a reminder of the warmth of which his bastard birth deprived him. But for him and the two sister queens, as for everyone else in *King Lear*, love seems to lead only to death. In perhaps the play's final cruelty, the audience is left with only a terrifying uncertainty: the good and the evil alike die, and joy and pain both lead to madness or death.

The corpses on the stage at the end of the play, of the young as well as the old, symbolize despair and death — just as the storm at the play's center symbolizes chaos and madness. For Lear, at least, death is a mercy. As Kent says, "The wonder is, he hath endured so long" in his grief and madness (5.1.115). For the others, however, we are left wondering whether there is any justice, any system of punishment and reward in the "tough world" of this powerful but painful play(5.1.111).

4.3 Characters in the Play

King Lear: The aging king of Britain and the protagonist of the play. Lear is used to enjoying absolute power and to being flattered, and he does not respond well to being contradicted or challenged. At the beginning of the play, his values are notably hollow — he prioritizes the appearance of love over actual devotion and wishes to maintain the power of a king while *King Lear* - The aging king of Britain and the protagonist of the play. Lear is used to enjoying absolute power and to being flattered, and he does not respond well to being contradicted or challenged. At the beginning of the play, his values are notably hollow — he prioritizes the appearance of love over actual devotion and wishes to maintain the power of a king while unburdening himself of the responsibility. Nevertheless, he inspires loyalty in subjects such as Gloucester, Kent, Cordelia, and Edgar, all of whom risk their lives for him.

Cordelia: Lear's youngest daughter, disowned by her father for refusing to flatter him. Cordelia is held in extremely high regard by all of the good characters in the play—the king of France marries her for her virtue alone, overlooking her lack of dowry. She remains loyal to Lear despite his cruelty toward her, forgives him, and displays a mild and

forbearing temperament even toward her evil sisters, Goneril and Regan. Despite her obvious virtues, Cordelia's reticence makes her motivations difficult to read, as in her refusal to declare her love for her father at the beginning of the play.

Goneril: Lear's ruthless oldest daughter and the wife of the duke of Albany. Goneril is jealous, treacherous, and amoral. Shakespeare's audience would have been particularly shocked at Goneril's aggressiveness, a quality that it would not have expected in a female character. She challenges Lear's authority, boldly initiates an affair with Edmund, and wrests military power away from her husband.

Regan: Lear's middle daughter and the wife of the duke of Cornwall. Regan is as ruthless as Goneril and as aggressive in all the same ways. In fact, it is difficult to think of any quality that distinguishes her from her sister. When they are not egging each other on to further acts of cruelty,they jealously compete for the same man, Edmund.

Gloucester: A nobleman loyal to King Lear whose rank, earl, is below that of duke. The first thing we learn about Gloucester is that he is an adulterer, having fathered a bastard son, Edmund.His fate is in many ways parallel to that of Lear: he misjudges which of his children to trust. He appears weak and ineffectual in the early acts, when he is unable to prevent Lear from being turned out of his own house, but he later demonstrates that he is also capable of great bravery.

Edgar: Gloucester's older, legitimate son. Edgar plays many different roles, starting out as a gullible fool easily tricked by his brother, then assuming a disguise as a mad beggar to evade his father's men, then carrying his impersonation further to aid Lear and Gloucester, and finally appearing as an armored champion to avenge his brother's treason. Edgar's propensity for disguises and impersonations makes it difficult to characterize him effectively.

Edmund: Gloucester's younger, illegitimate son. Edmund resents his status as a bastard and schemes to usurp Gloucester's title and possessions from Edgar. He is a formidable character, succeeding in almost all of his schemes and wreaking destruction upon virtually all of the othercharacters.

Kent: A nobleman of the same rank as Gloucester who is loyal to *King Lear*. Kent spends most ofthe play disguised as a peasant, calling himself "Caius," so that he can continue to serve Lear even after Lear banishes him. He is extremely loyal, but he gets himself into trouble throughout the play by being extremely blunt and outspoken.

Albany: The husband of Lear's daughter Goneril. Albany is good at heart, and he eventually denounces and opposes the cruelty of Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall. Yet

he is indecisive and lacks foresight, realizing the evil of his allies quite late in the play.

Cornwall: The husband of Lear's daughter Regan. Unlike Albany, Cornwall is domineering, cruel, and violent, and he works with his wife and sister-in-law Goneril to persecute Lear and Gloucester.

Fool: Lear's jester, who uses double-talk and seemingly frivolous songs to give Lear important advice.

Oswald: The steward, or chief servant, in Goneril's house. Oswald obeys his mistress's commands and helps her in her conspiracies.

King Lear

Lear's basic flaw at the beginning of the play is that he values appearances above reality. He wants to be treated as a king and to enjoy the title, but he doesn't want to fulfill a king's obligations of governing for the good of his subjects. Similarly, his test of his daughters demonstrates that he values a flattering public display of love over real love. He doesn't ask "which of you doth love us most," but rather, "which of you shall we say doth love us most?" (1.1.39). Most readers conclude that Lear is simply blind to the truth, but Cordelia is already his favorite daughter at the beginning of the play, so presumably he knows that she loves him the most. Nevertheless, Lear values Goneril and Regan's fawning over Cordelia's sincere sense of filial duty.

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

Cordelia

Cordelia's chief characteristics are devotion, kindness, beauty, and honesty—honesty to a fault, perhaps. She is contrasted throughout the play with Goneril and Regan, who are neither honest nor loving, and who manipulate their father for their own ends. By refusing to take part in Lear's love test at the beginning of the play, Cordelia establishes herself as a repository of virtue, and the obvious authenticity of her love for Lear makes clear the extent of the king's error in banishing her. For most of the middle section of the play, she

is offstage, but as we observe the depredations of Goneril and Regan and watch Lear's descent into madness, Cordelia is never far from the audience's thoughts, and her beauty is venerably described in religious terms. Indeed, rumors of her return to Britain begin to surface almost immediately, and once she lands at Dover, the action of the play begins to move toward her, as all the characters converge on the coast.

Cordelia's reunion with Lear marks the apparent restoration of order in the kingdom and the triumph of love and forgiveness over hatred and spite. This fleeting moment of familial happiness makes the devastating finale of *King Lear* that much more cruel, as Cordelia, the personification of kindness and virtue, becomes a literal sacrifice to the heartlessness of an apparently unjust world.

Edmund

Edmund is the most complex and sympathetic villain of the play. He is a consummate schemer, a Machiavellian character eager to seize any opportunity and willing to do anything to achieve his goals. However, his ambition is interesting insofar as it reflects not only a thirst for land and power but also a desire for the recognition denied to him by his status as a bastard. His serial treachery is not merely self-interested; it is a conscious rebellion against the social order that has denied him the same status as Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar. "Now, gods, stand up for bastards," Edmund commands, but in fact he depends not on divine aid but on his own initiative (1.2.22). He is the ultimate self-made man, and he is such a cold and capable villain that it is entertaining to watch him work, much as the audience can appreciate the clever wickedness of Iago in *Othello*. Only at the close of the play does Edmund show a flicker of weakness. Mortally wounded, he sees that both Goneril and Regan have died for him, and whispers, "Yet Edmund was beloved" (5.1.218). After this ambiguous statement, he seems to repent of his villainy and admits to having ordered Cordelia's death. His peculiar change of heart, rare among Shakespearean villains, is enough to make the audience wonder, amid the carnage, whether Edmund's villainy sprang not from some innate cruelty but simply from a thwarted, misdirected desire for the familial love that he witnessed around him.

Goneril and Regan

There is little good to be said for Lear's older daughters, who are largely indistinguishable in their villainy and spite. Goneril and Regan are clever — or at least clever enough to flatter their father in the play's opening scene — and, early in the play, their bad behavior toward Lear seems matched by his own pride and temper. But any

sympathy that the audience can muster for them evaporates quickly, first when they turn their father out into the storm at the end of Act 2 and then when they viciously put out Gloucester's eyes in Act 1. Goneril and Regan are, in a sense, personifications of evil — they have no conscience, only appetite. It is this greedy ambition that enables them to crush all opposition and make themselves mistresses of Britain. Ultimately, however, this same appetite brings about their undoing. Their desire for power is satisfied, but both harbor sexual desire for Edmund, which destroys their alliance and eventually leads them to destroy each other. Evil, the play suggests, inevitably turns in on itself.

Gloucester

Gloucester's story runs parallel to Lear's. Like Lear, Gloucester is introduced as a father who does not understand his children. He jokes about Edmund and calls him a "whoreson" (I.i.) when Edmund is standing right next to him. In his first soliloquy Edmund reveals how much he resents the way his father treats him. While the audience understands that Gloucester shouldn't trust

Edmund, Gloucester himself is blind to his son's true motivations. Just as Lear falls for Goneril and Regan's flattery, Gloucester falls for Edmund's deception. Lear banishes Cordelia, the daughter who loves him, and Gloucester tries to execute Edgar, the son who loves him. Both Lear and Gloucester end up homeless, wandering on the beach near Dover. The close similarity between Gloucester's story and Lear's serves to underline that Lear's fate is not exceptional. In the bleak universe of *King Lear,* it's normal for old men to suffer at the hands of their own children and to end up with nothing.

The justness or unjustness of Gloucester's fate remains unclear. Edmund, who deliberately sets out to destroy Gloucester, claims that he is acting in the name of natural justice: "Thou, Nature, art my goddess. To thy law/My services are bound" (I.ii.). Before he blinds Gloucester, Cornwall admits that it is unjust to harm him without a proper trial. Edgar argues that Gloucester deserves to lose his eyes for fathering an illegitimate son. Gloucester himself comes to believe that the world is unjust and cruel: "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods/They kill us for their sport"(IV.i.). Gloucester's blinding is one of the most violent and shocking scenes in any of Shakespeare's plays, but the fact that no two characters can agree if or why Gloucester deserves blinding suggests that the act is not only unjust, but random and meaningless.

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Justice

King Lear is a brutal play, filled with human cruelty and awful, seemingly meaningless disasters. The play's succession of terrible events raises an obvious question for the characters — namely, whether there is any possibility of justice in the world, or whether the world is fundamentally indifferent or even hostile to humankind. Various characters offer their opinions: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;/They kill us for their sport," Gloucester muses, realizing it foolish for humankind to assume that the natural world works in parallel with socially or morally convenient notions of justice (3.1.17–18). Edgar, on the other hand, insists that "the gods are just," believing that individuals get what they deserve (5.1.169). But, in the end, we are left with only a terrifying uncertainty — although the wicked die, the good die along with them, culminating in the awful image of Lear cradling Cordelia's body in his arms. There is goodness in the world of the play, but there is also madness and death, and it is difficult to tell which triumphs in the end.

Authority versus Chaos

King Lear is about political authority as much as it is about family dynamics. Lear is not only a father but also a king, and when he gives away his authority to the unworthy and evil Goneril and Regan, he delivers not only himself and his family but all of Britain into chaos and cruelty. As the two wicked sisters indulge their appetite for power and Edmund begins his own ascension, the kingdom descends into civil strife, and we realize that Lear has destroyed not only his own authority but *all* authority in Britain. The stable, hierarchal order that Lear initially represents falls apart and disorder engulfs the realm.

The failure of authority in the face of chaos recurs in Lear's wanderings on the heath during the storm. Witnessing the powerful forces of the natural world, Lear comes to understand that he, like the rest of humankind, is insignificant in the world. This realization proves much more important than the realization of his loss of political control, as it compels him to re-prioritize his values and become humble and caring. With this new found understanding of himself, Lear hopes to be able to confront the chaos in the political realm as well.

Reconciliation

Darkness and unhappiness pervade *King Lear*, and the devastating Act 5 represents one of the most tragic endings in all of literature. Nevertheless, the play presents the central relationship— that between Lear and Cordelia—as a dramatic embodiment of true, self-sacrificing love. Rather than despising Lear for banishing her, Cordelia remains devoted, even from afar, and eventually brings an army from a foreign country to rescue him from his tormentors. Lear, meanwhile, learns a tremendously cruel lesson in humility

and eventually reaches the point where he can reunite joyfully with Cordelia and experience the balm of her forgiving love. Lear's recognition of the error of his ways is an ingredient vital to reconciliation with Cordelia, not because Cordelia feels wronged by him but because he has understood the sincerity and depth of her love for him. His maturation enables him to bring Cordelia back into his good graces, a testament to love's ability toflourish, even if only fleetingly, amid the horror and chaos that engulf the rest of the play.

Nihilism

King Lear presents a bleak vision of a world without meaning. Lear begins the play valuing justice, the social order, and the value of kingship, but his values are undermined by his experiences. Lear ends up believing that justice, order and kingship are just flattering names for raw, brutal power. Cornwall confirms Lear's view when he admits that even though punishing Gloucester without a trial is unjust, his power gives him the freedom to act as he wants: "our power/Shall do a courtesy to our wrath" (III.vii). Gloucester, too, comes to see life as random, violent and cruel, claiming the gods treat people with the same level of care as schoolboys with flies. Nowhere does *King Lear* suggest life offers meaning or the possibility of redemption. The play's tragic ending offers no lesson. Cordelia dies for no reason; the order for her execution has been reversed. The few characters left alive express despair at what they have seen.

Self-knowledge

King Lear shows that a lack of self-knowledge can cause chaos and tragedy, but the play alsosuggests that self-knowledge is painful, and perhaps not worth the effort it takes to achieve it.

Lear's tragic flaw is a lack of self-knowledge. His daughter Regan identifies this flaw in the play's opening scene: "he hath ever but slenderly known himself." (I.i.). Lear achieves self-

knowledge, but at the cost of his wealth, power and sanity. What he learns about himself is not a pleasant discovery: "I am a very foolish, fond old man" (IV.vii.). Achieving self-knowledge does not allow Lear to escape his tragic fate. In fact, self-knowledge makes his suffering worse. He realizes that his daughter Cordelia loves him after all, which only makes her death more painful. Edmund's story also suggests that self-knowledge is of limited value. Unlike Lear, Edmund sees himself clearly from the beginning of the play, but his self-knowledge doesn't do him much good: he dies before Lear does.

The Unreliability of Speech

King Lear suggests that people's speeches and words are not always reliable and trustworthy. The tragic events of *King Lear* are set in motion because Lear believes the loving speeches Goneril and Regan make, even though they are obviously deceitful. Goneril claims her love makes "speech unable" (I.i.) which is emptied of meaning because she is in the middle of a long speech. Kent argues that simple speech, like Cordelia's, is trustworthy: "Nor are those empty-hearted, whose low sounds / Reverb no hollowness" (I.i.), but Cornwall argues that simple speech can be just as unreliable as elaborate flattery. Edgar suggests that language can never reliably express suffering. At the end of the play, Lear's behavior suggests that Edgar is correct. When he finds his daughter Cordelia dead, Lear abandons language altogether: "Howl, howl, howl, howl" (V.iii.).

Plot Analysis

King Lear is a play about blindness – blindness to others' motivations, blindness to one's own true nature, blindness to the emptiness of power and privilege, and blindness to the importance of selfless love. Lear's only desire is to enjoy a comfortable, carefree old age, but he fails to see the role his absolute power has played in shaping his relationship with his daughters, whom he expects to take care of him. Once he loses his power Lear gains insight into his own nature and realizes his shortcomings, admitting "mine eyes are not 'o th' best." (V.iii) Tragically, this self- knowledge comes too late, at a point when Lear has forfeited the power that might have enabled him to change his fate. He finally sees the world as it really is, but is powerless to do anything about it. He dies after saying the final words, "look there, look there," (V.iii) a literal command that the others look at Cordelia, but also a symbolic plea that the survivors see themselves, and the world, more accurately.

The play opens with a glimpse of the subplot that mirrors the main action, as Gloucester explains that he has two sons, one legitimate and one illegitimate, but he tries to love them equally. They discuss Lear's plans to divide his kingdom, suggesting that he has already decided to share equally among his daughters, and his love test will be just a show, and actually won't decide anything. Lear then announces his intention to divide his kingdom, admitting that Cordelia is his favorite. He clearly expects all three daughters to try to outdo each other with declarations of their love, for which he will reward them with portions of land. But Cordelia refuses to flatter him, and humiliates him publicly with her disobedience. Enraged by Cordelia's stubbornness, Lear disowns

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her, and divides the kingdom between the remaining two daughters. Lear's inability to understand that despite Cordelia's reluctance to publicly flatter her father she actually loves him best is the tragic mistake that incites the action of the rest of the play.

The audience understands that Lear's other two daughters, the deceitful Goneril and Reagan, are the antagonists to Lear's desire to hold onto his power, and the rising action of the play see these two characters actively thwarting their father and hastening his downfall. After dividing his kingdom between Goneril and Reagan Lear continues to demand that his daughters care for him, expecting to retain the privileges of the crown without the responsibilities. Lear has never recognised the role power plays in his family, so he expects his daughters to treat him exactly as they did when he was their king. Instead, Regan and Goneril treat Lear according to his new status as a powerless old man. Lear is deprived not only of the loving care he expected from his daughters, but also of his attendant knights, and finally even the shelter of their roofs. Meanwhile, the subplot reverses the structure of the main plot: while Lear mistakenly believes that power plays no role in his family, Edmund is all too aware of the role power plays in his. Angry that his illegitimate status makes him powerless, Edmund schemes to banish Edgar and take his place as Gloucester's heir.

In keeping with its mirrored plot and subplot, *King Lear* has two simultaneous climaxes where a protagonist comes in direct conflict with an antagonist. For Lear, this moment comes when he is denied shelter by his daughters and forced to wander in the storm, a reversal of fortune that drives him mad. He tries to make the storm obey him, and the result is that he is deprived of the few comforts he has left. Lear spends much of the storm talking with Edgar, who is disguised as a mad beggar called "Poor Tom," and helps Lear see that as king he failed to care enough for the poor and downtrodden "wretches" of his kingdom. Meanwhile, Edmund triggers the climax of the subplot when he reveals to Cornwall that Gloucester has tried to help Lear. As a result, Gloucester is blinded, stripped of his title and banished from his home. The climax of the subplot confirms the vision of the main plot: raw, violent power is a greater force than even the love of families. Edmund has achieved his goal because he understands this truth and is prepared to act on it.

In his madness and suffering, Lear learns how fragile and temporary his former power was, and in the play's falling action this insight allows him to be reconciled with Cordelia. He no longer demands that his daughter treat him like a king. He is happy to be treated as a "foolish, fond old man" (IV.vii) so long as Cordelia loves him. He imagines

that in prison he and Cordelia will be sustained not by power but by their mutual love for one another: "We two alone will sing like birds i'the cage" (V.iii). Edgar, still disguised as Poor Tom, meets his blinded father, Gloucester, who intends to commit suicide: both men are so damaged by the political power that has crushed them — Edgar forced to hide, Gloucester suicidal and unable to see — that father and son are unable to be truly reconciled. Edgar does not reveal his true identity to Gloucester, and he has to trick his father into surviving his suicide attempt. Edgar's deception suggests that true reconciliation is impossible for families torn apart by power, which undermines Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia, and foreshadows the terrible denouement of the play, in which both families will be destroyed.

The play's denouement involves the deaths of many of the characters, most of them violent. Edgarkills his brother Edmund. Edgar also unintentionally kills his father, who is overcome by the discovery that his son has survived and forgives him. Edgar is restored to power, as the new Duke of Gloucester, but like Edmund he has had to destroy his family to do it. Lear's family is also destroyed. Regan, Goneril, Cordelia and finally Lear himself all die. The center of the denouement is Cordelia's death. Even though Edmund reverses his orders to have Cordelia and Lear killed, his decision comes too late. This truth echoes the fatalism of the entire play – a mistake, once made, can't be undone, just as Lear can't undo his fatal mistake of giving the wrong daughters his kingdom. In the play's final scene Lear carries Cordelia's body onstage, howling with grief. Lear has finally learned to love his daughter without asking for anything inreturn, only to have her taken from him. All Lear's suffering has been for nothing.

Protagonist

The protagonist of *King Lear* is Lear. In dividing his kingdom between Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan, Lear sets in motion the events of the play. Lear divides his kingdom because he wants the last years of his life to be restful, and because he expects his daughters will take care of him.

Although Lear has already decided which land to give to each daughter, he insists they prove theirlove to him. This insistence on his daughters' public declarations of love becomes Lear's tragic mistake. Lear has no real motivation for requiring his daughters to profess their love to him other than his own egotism. Lear does not see himself or his situation clearly, blinded to the fact that Goneril and Regan do not really love him. He cannot see that Cordelia does love him, and that his own anger with Cordelia is extreme and misplaced. Lear's lack of self-knowledge causes his plan to go horribly wrong. He

ends up homeless and mad, wandering in a violent storm.

Once he is reduced to the status of a homeless beggar, Lear begins to acquire real self-knowledge.The process of acquiring knowledge is painful for Lear, and comes at the price of everything he previously valued. Lear comes to realize that many of the things he believed in — like kingship, justice, and his family's love — are unreliable or non-existent. He sees that without power, a human is just a "poor, bare, forked animal" (III.iv). Lear realizes he can't take for granted even the most basic human necessities like clothes or shelter. Only after he has lost everything is Lear able to see himself clearly, as "a foolish, fond old man" (IV.vii). This self-knowledge allows him to be reconciled with Cordelia, and Lear's loving bond with her gives him a new sense of meaning. However, Lear's relationship with Cordelia proves to be one last thing that can be taken from him. After Cordelia's murder, Lear ends the play howling with grief, unable to accept his daughter's death. He even seems to lapse back into madness, suggesting he may have lost the self-knowledge he so painfully acquired.

4.4 Antagonist

Edmund, Goneril, and Regan all act as antagonists in *King Lear*, but the real antagonist may bethe idea of power itself. In the beginning of the play, when they have relatively little power, Goneril and Regan flatter Lear to stay in his favor and beguile him into surrendering his power.Goneril and Regan use their new power to plot against Lear and thwart his hopes for a peacefulretirement. Similarly, Edmund uses the power he has over Gloucester to thwart his brother,

Edgar's, chances of becoming king. Briefly, Edmund is the most powerful character in the play, and during that moment he gives orders for Cordelia's execution, thwarting Lear's hopes for theirreunion. Most of all, Lear himself is antagonized by power. At the beginning of the play, Lear fails to see his situation clearly because of his own political power. Once he loses his power to Goneril and Regan and is cast out into the storm, Lear is humbled by his own insignificance in the world and realizes he cannot defeat his antagonist.

Setting

King Lear is set in ancient Britain, several centuries before the arrival of Christianity. In Shakespeare's day, historians believed pre-Christian Britain had been a single united kingdom that was later divided into Britain and Scotland. When Shakespeare wrote the play, King James I ruled both England and Scotland and wanted to reunite his two kingdoms. James's plan was vigorously opposed by both the English

and the Scots. When *King Lear* was performed at James's court, the King would have been pleased to see that Lear's decision to separate the kingdom of Britain ends in disaster, implicitly suggesting the two kingdoms belong together. Even though Shakespeare's play supports the King's cause, the play doesn't explicitly address the topic of reunifying contemporary Britain directly. Playwrights could be imprisoned for writing anything too political. By setting his story in the distant past, Shakespeare freed himself to tackle this important topic.

Without its pre-Christian setting, the nihilistic and despairing tone of *King Lear* might have been unacceptable to Shakespeare's audience. In Shakespeare's England, Christianity was the state religion. Most people believed that the world had been made by God. Life was meaningful and worthwhile because it was an opportunity to serve God. To publicly express the belief that life is meaningless and miserable would have turned away a vast majority of Shakespeare's audience. *King Lear* is set before the arrival of Christianity in England. Its characters talk about the pagan "gods" instead of the Christian "God." This means they can openly express the view that life is not only meaningless but cruel: "As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods / They killus for their sport" (IV.i.). The play seems to endorse this point of view, by making its characters suffer horribly for no obvious reason. *King Lear*'s pre-Christian setting allows Shakespeare to present a bleak vision of a world devoid of meaning while avoiding religious offense.

The first half of *King Lear* is set in the safe, comfortable palaces of Lear, Gloucester and Lear's daughters. However, as the play progresses, an increasing number of its scenes take place in dirty,unsafe surroundings: the heath in a violent storm, a hovel in the middle of nowhere, the fields and beaches near Dover during a military invasion. This shift from safe, interior spaces to threatening, outdoor locations reflects Lear's gradual loss of his wealth and status. The movement from indoors to outdoors also reminds the audience that shelter and security are privileges one can lose. When Lear gives up his power, he is certain he will spend the rest of his life in comfort.

Instead, he ends up in a position of less comfort and safety than he has ever experienced before. Lear's mistake is believing that comfort and safety are guaranteed. *King Lear* shows that it's alltoo easy for people to lose everything.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop andinform the text's major themes.

Madness

Insanity occupies a central place in the play and is associated with both disorder and hidden wisdom. The Fool, who offers Lear insight in the early sections of the play, offers his counsel in aseemingly mad babble. Later, when Lear himself goes mad, the turmoil in his mind mirrors the chaos that has descended upon his kingdom. At the same time, however, it also provides him with important wisdom by reducing him to his bare humanity, stripped of all royal pretensions. Lear thus learns humility. He is joined in his real madness by Edgar's feigned insanity, which also contains nuggets of wisdom for the king to mine. Meanwhile, Edgar's time as a supposedlyinsane beggar hardens him and prepares him to defeat Edmund at the close of the play.

Betrayal

Betrayals play a critical role in the play and show the workings of wickedness in both the familialand political realms — here, brothers betray brothers and children betray fathers. Goneril and Regan's betrayal of Lear raises them to power in Britain, where Edmund, who has betrayed both Edgar and Gloucester, joins them. However, the play suggests that betrayers inevitably turn on one another, showing how Goneril and Regan fall out when they both become attracted to Edmund, and how their jealousies of one another ultimately lead to mutual destruction.

Additionally, it is important to remember that the entire play is set in motion by Lear's blind, foolish betrayal of Cordelia's love for him, which reinforces that at the heart of every betrayal liesa skewed set of values.

4.5 Symbols

Main Ideas Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas orconcepts.

The Storm

As Lear wanders about a desolate heath in Act 1, a terrible storm, strongly but ambiguously symbolic, rages overhead. In part, the storm echoes Lear's inner turmoil and mounting madness: it is a physical, turbulent natural reflection of Lear's internal confusion. At the same time, the storm embodies the awesome power of nature, which forces the powerless king to recognize his own mortality and human frailty and to cultivate a sense of humility for the first time. The storm may also symbolize some kind of divine justice, as if nature itself is angry about the events in the play. Finally, the meteorological chaos also symbolizes the political disarray that has engulfed

Lear's Britain.

Blindness

Gloucester's physical blindness symbolizes the metaphorical blindness that grips both Gloucester and the play's other father figure, Lear. The parallels between the two men are clear: both have loyal children and disloyal children, both are blind to the truth, and both end up banishing the loyal children and making the wicked one(s) their heir(s). Only when Gloucester has lost the use of his eyes and Lear has gone mad does each realize his tremendous error. It is appropriate that the play brings them together near Dover in Act 3 to commiserate about how their blindness to the truth about their children has cost them dearly.

4.6 Genre

Tragedy

Like Shakespeare's other famous tragedies, *King Lear* features a noble-born protagonist whomakes a fatal mistake that leads to widespread suffering and, eventually, the death of himself and several others. Lear makes his fatal mistake in the play's opening scene, when he divides his kingdom among his daughters according to the degree of love they profess for him. Failing to see that Regan and Goneril have lied about their love, he bequeaths all his land to them and condemns Cordelia, the only daughter who truly loves him. Lear therefore remains blind to who his daughters really are, and this metaphorical blindness results in him making a decision that causes enormous suffering—including the literal blinding of Gloucester. Notably, just as Lear fails to see who his daughters are, over the course of the play he loses touch with his own identity. He cries out painfully in Act I, "Does any here know me? This is not Lear Who is it that can tell mewho I am?" (I.iv.197–201). Blind even to himself, Lear slowly goes mad and falls into psychological isolation.

One aspect of *King Lear* that makes it an unusual tragedy is that Lear, though certainly a tragic figure, is a relatively benign protagonist who realizes his mistakes and repents for them. To be sure, Lear often speaks in an abrasive and caustic way, displaying arrogance and peremptoriness toward other characters (notably Kent and Cordelia). But unlike some tragic protagonists he himself never becomes evil or directly commits any evil acts, even if he unleashes evil in the form of his daughters. Ironically, Lear's madness is what enables him, at last, to overcome his blindness and see things clearly. His first moment of clarity arises in Act III, at the height of the storm. Lear hesitates before entering the hovel and expresses empathy for his subjects, whom he's literally and figuratively left out in the cold:

Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you
are, That bide the pelting of this
pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed
sides, Your looped and windowed raggedness,
defend you From seasons such as these? Oh, I
have ta'en
Too little care of this! (III.iv.28–11)

Lear regains clarity at other crucial moments as well, like when he recognizes Cordelia at the end of Act IV and acknowledges that he has wronged her. He repents for his failure and hopes, as he tells Cordelia in Act V, for a chance to "ask of thee forgiveness" (V.iii.11).

Despite Lear's moments of clarity, the play moves inescapably toward a tragic conclusion that, unlike other tragedies, does not feel very cathartic. Catharsis is the moment of release an audience feels after experiencing strong emotions. *King Lear* certainly engages the audience's emotions, but whereas cathartic experiences lead to a feeling of renewal, Shakespeare's play does not. For one thing, punishment in the play often outweighs the crime. Even though Regan, Goneril, and Edmund all deserve their fates, Lear, Gloucester, and Cordelia all die despite their innocence.

Moreover, no one learns valuable lessons through their suffering. Lear realizes his mistakes as a king and as a father, and his brief reunion with Cordelia offers a partial redemption. Yet the pain of Cordelia's undeserved death sends him back into madness and suffering, and he literally dies of a broken heart. Finally, with everyone from Lear's family dead, there is no good candidate to assume the throne. Albany will continue to rule Britain, but his role in the play's disastrous ending leads the audience to question whether the social order can really be repaired. By leaving the audience profoundly sad and virtually hopeless, *King Lear* ranks among Shakespeare's bleakest tragedies.

Style

Shakespeare uses language in *King Lear* to express a range of mostly negative emotions, including loss, deprivation, anger, and misery. Lear's own speech undergoes a transformation in style over the course of the play. In the beginning, Lear speaks grandly and with confidence. He calls on cosmic imagery and alludes to figures in Greek myth to inflate his own sense of power and influence:

For by the sacred radiance of the

sun The mysteries of Hecate and
the night By all the operation of
the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care. (I.i.107–11)

After abdicating the throne, Lear's speech reflects a weakening grip on reality, as well as an inability to come to terms with his diminished status. Despite no longer being king, he continues to issue orders, and he even commands the storm: "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!" (III.ii.1). As madness takes hold, Lear's speech is reduced to mere strings of disconnected nouns, as when Gloucester tells him that the Duke of Cornwall will not see him and he screams, "Vengeance! Plague! Death! Confusion!" (II.iv.90). All of these examples are characterized by violence. Even in the first and most grandiloquent passage quoted above, Lear is in the midst of disowning Cordelia. The persistent violence in Lear's language marks an overriding sense of loss and anger.

At several points in *King Lear* the play's language becomes austere. This austerity sometimes indicates preoccupation, as when Edmund asks, "Why brand they us/With base? With baseness? Bastardy? Base, base?" (I.ii). His repetition of the word "base" demonstrates an obsession with hislow social status, the very same obsession that inspires his nefarious scheming. More frequently the play's stylistic austerity reflects the bleakness of the events that are playing out and the characters' desperate responses to those events. This austerity often takes the form of repetition.

When Edgar utters, "World, world, O world!" (IV.i.10), he does so in response to the misery of seeing his father, Gloucester, with his eyes gouged out. Lear cries out many similarly austere lines, particularly as the play nears its dreadful conclusion. When he enters carrying Cordelia's dead body, his first words are "Howl, howl, howl" (V.iii.211), and just before he dies he utters a line of pure misery: "Never, never, never, never, never!" (V.iii.281). In these moments,the style becomes so austere it's as if language has broken down, giving way to expressions of inexpressible anguish.

But the style of *King Lear* is not all "cheerless, dark, and deadly," as Kent puts it in Act V. The Fool also brings a riddling element to the play with his topsy-turvy style of speech that proves whimsical, obscure, and prophetic — often all at once. Take a simple example from the Fool's firstscene, where he sings:

Fools had ne'er less grace in a

year For wise men are grown foppish
And know not how their wits to wear, Their manners are so apish.
(I.iv.119–32)

The basic sense of these lines is that professional fools (like the Fool himself) have become unpopular because wise men (like Lear) have become foolish. Although cast in the form of an entertaining song, the Fool's words also criticize the king in a way that foreshadows Lear's spell of madness. Elsewhere the Fool's language engages in confusing inversions that make him more difficult to understand. Earlier in this same scene, the Fool says of Lear: "Why, this/fellow has banished two on 's daughters and did the/third a blessing against his will" (I.iv.93–96). Even though Cordelia is the one he actually banished, Lear did her a favor by forcing her out of an increasingly violent kingdom. In the Fool's idiom, then, it's Goneril and Regan who have been banished by being forced to stay and preside over Britain.

Prose And Verse

King Lear is written mostly in verse, but nearly one third of its lines are in prose, reflecting Lear's descent into madness. As in Hamlet, the only tragedy with a greater proportion of prose, Shakespeare uses prose to mark that the protagonist is speaking in a confused or disordered way.

Lear begins the play speaking verse. He has thought carefully about how he will divide his kingdom, so he expresses his intentions in a careful, ordered way. When Cordelia declares that she has "nothing" to say about her love for her father, Lear switches abruptly to prose. This switch shows us that he is no longer thinking clearly, and we understand that Cordelia has upsethim. As Lear goes mad, his thinking becomes more and more confused, so he speaks more oftenin prose. Lear often boasts of being in control of both his kingdom and himself, but his abandonment of verse in favor of prose indicates the opposite. As he loses authority over his people, his family, and finally his mind, his speech reflects this loss of control.

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare switches between prose and verse to mark the difference between truthful speech and flattery. In all of Shakespeare's plays, lower class characters speak prose while higher status characters speak verse, but here verse also seems to be the language of deception, while prose is the language of honesty. When

Lear is talking to the Fool, Lear also uses prose, which shows that he is comfortable with the Fool and doesn't feel the need to assert his noble status. Lear's use of prose also shows that he trusts the fool enough to be honest with him. In the play's opening scene, Goneril and Regan use verse to flatter Lear by telling him howmuch they love him. Once Lear has left, the sisters use prose to reveal their real opinion of Lear,which is much less complimentary. Kent uses verse to make fun of Oswald's dishonest flattery, before switching into prose to explain that he refuses to speak in a flattering way himself. The more Lear's status is reduced, the more often he speaks in prose. Prose shows us that Lear is going mad, but also that in his madness Lear is being more honest with himself.

Point of View

By not having Lear himself deliver any soliloquies, *King Lear* subtly distances us from the point of view of the characters who suffer (like Lear, Cordelia, Gloucester, and Kent) while bringing us closer to evil characters. Lear is the only one of Shakespeare's tragic heroes to have no soliloquies at all, which, along with the unflattering conversations other characters have about him, make it hard for the audience to sympathise with him. Shakespeare typically uses soliloquies to reveal the interior lives of his characters, but Lear is never revealed to us in this way. Instead, in the first half of the play, Lear's most revealing speeches are his angry outbursts, which show us only the tyrannical and egotistical side of his character. The play's other characters present Lear in an unsympathetic way as well. Kent accuses him of "hideous rashness" (I.i), Regan says that "he hath ever but slenderly known himself" (I.i) and the Fool says that Lear would "make a good fool," (I.v) implying Lear is a bad king. Lear suffers terribly during the play, so the audience's distance from his point of view forces us to think about how easily we can fail to empathise witheven the worst suffering.

While denying us insight into the protagonist, King Lear encourages us to share the point of viewof its most evil character, Edmund. He is the character who reveals the most about his motives through soliloquy. His obsession with his social status—"why brand they us/With base?" (I.ii) — helps us to understand why he wants to betray his father and brother. The way Gloucester treats Edmund also encourages us to sympathise with Edmund. When Edmund is introduced at the play's opening, his father calls him a "knave" and a "whoreson" (I.i) right in front of him.

Edmund is one of the play's most active characters: he sets goals and makes plans, which invests the audience in wanting to see the outcome of his plans, even though his goals are evil. Although Edmund is the play's most morally troubling character, he is also

the character who is easiest to sympathise with, which suggests that in the world of King Lear, evil is ordinary, human and understandable.

While Lear is the main character of the play and gives his name to the title, *King Lear* has the most fully developed subplot of all of Shakespeare's tragedies, which weakens the audience's involvement in Lear's suffering. Shakespeare's subplots often develop the themes of the main plot, but the subplot of *King Lear* mirrors the main plot unusually closely. In both plots, an aging father banishes a child who loves him. In both plots the aging father is reduced to the status of a wandering beggar as a result. Because Gloucester is deliberately betrayed by his son Edmund, and loses his eyesight as well as his status, his suffering is actually in some ways worse than Lear's.

The fact that we first see Gloucester explaining himself to Kent onstage – and declaring that he loves Edmund as much as Edward, even though Edmund is illegitimate – makes him initially more sympathetic than Lear, who openly admits to loving Cordelia more than her sisters. The close mirroring of plots suggests that Lear's suffering, far from being the unique fate of a tragic hero, is commonplace, and reinforces the idea that Lear is responsible for much of it.

Tone

The tone of *King Lear* is bitter and hopeless, reflecting the pessimistic outlook of the play and the relentlessly tragic ending in which innocent characters die needlessly. While there are moments of hope when Lear and Cordelia are reunited at the end and Lear repents of his past mistakes, this hope is not rewarded. Cordelia dies despite Lear's attempts to save her, and Lear dies essentially of grief. Violence and cruelty are everywhere in *King Lear*, and they are taken for granted by the characters, which creates a tone of resignation to the worst aspects of life. Characters make violent threats against one another: Lear tells Kent that "the bow is drawn, make from the shaft" (I.i).

Kent is put in the stocks. Oswald is beaten up twice. The blinding of Gloucester is the most shockingly violent scene in any of Shakespeare's plays. Violence happens even when the characters try to avoid it: Cordelia dies after Edmund repeals the order to kill her, implying that human attempts to avoid suffering are pointless. Gloucester captures this aspect of the play's mood: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,/They kill us for their sport." (IV.i).

After a courtly and dignified opening, the tone of *King Lear* becomes progressively less controlled as the action progresses, underscoring the illusory nature of Lear's perception of power. Kent begins the play as a senior courtier, giving Lear wise advice.

When he returns in disguisefrom his banishment, Kent hurls insults and makes rude jokes. In the play's opening scene, Lear's anger is impressive and regal — "Come not between the dragon and his wrath" (I.i) — but as he begins losing power, Lear's outbursts become more like desperate tantrums: "I will do such things —/What they are I know not, but they shall be/The terrors of the earth!" (II.ii). While the first half of the play takes place in palaces and noblemen's homes, the second half of the playtakes place in rough settings like a heath, a shack, a tent and the fields near Dover. This shift in tone creates the sense that the dignity and order of the play's opening scenes is a temporary illusion. The power and authority Lear is desperate to hold onto are essentially meaningless. The one bright aspect of this overwhelmingly bleak play is Cordelia's enduring love for her father, a natural emotion underscored by the tone's shift away from civilization toward nature.

4.7 Foreshadowing

Many of the tragic events of *King Lear* are foreshadowed from the beginning of the play, which creates a sense that the characters' suffering is inevitable, and reflects Lear's blindness to the consequences of his actions by helping the audience to foresee events which Lear himself cannot.Just as significant are the events which are not foreshadowed. The death of Cordelia is the play's most terrible event, but to the audience it comes as a surprise: in the world of King Lear, the reality of suffering exceeds our worst expectations.

Gloucester's Blinding

Gloucester's blinding is foreshadowed from the play's opening scene. Goneril declares that her father's love is "dearer than eyesight," (I.i) a turn of phrase which asks us to think about how terrible it would be to lose the power of sight. Kent underlines the foreshadowing later in the scene when he begs Lear to "let me still be the true blank of thine eye" (I.i). A "blank" is the centre of a target, so Kent's metaphor invites us to picture a weapon aimed at an eye. Immediately before his blinding, Gloucester himself tells Regan: "I would not see your cruel nails/Pluck out [Lear's] poor old eyes" (III.vii). The heavy foreshadowing of Gloucester's blinding underlines the central theme of blindness in *King Lear.*

Lear's Downfall

In an instance of especially cruel ironic foreshadowing, Lear predicts the results of dividing his kingdom will bring him peace and happiness, not understanding he is creating the exact opposite effect by making his daughters declare their love. "tis our fast

intent/To shake all cares and business from our age/… while we/Unburdened crawl toward death," (I.i) he says, in revealing his plans, adding that he's dividing the kingdom so "that future strife/May be prevented now." The early establishment of Lear's expectations for his actions make the actual outcome ironic, as we are aware of the stark disparity between the serenity he hoped to foster and the havoc he created. Lear's decision to divide his kingdom incites everything he is trying to prevent – his daughters are divided by strife and all end up dead, and the last days of his life are heavily burdened by care and unhappiness.

Lear's Madness

The Fool tells Lear that "thou wouldst make a good fool" (I.v) and to "take my coxcomb" (I.iv) (a "coxcomb" is the hat worn by a professional fool). These jokes point out that Lear has behaved foolishly in giving his kingdom away, but they also foreshadow that Lear will take the Fool's place by losing his wits. Lear himself suspects that he might go mad: "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!" (I.v), and shortly before his madness begins he foresees it: "I shall go mad" (II.ii). His daughters also suspect he is not well: Goneril says they should look out for "the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them." (I.i) The foreshadowing of Lear's madness increases the tension of the scenes in which Lear confronts his daughters. As Lear gets angrier, we anticipate that at any moment he will crack and lose his mind altogether. This foreshadowing also increases our sense of Lear's vulnerability, which helps us to pity him and to side with him against his daughters.

Lear's Homelessness

The Fool warns Lear that his decision to give his kingdom to his daughters will end in his being left without a home: "I can tell why a snail has a house…to put's head in, not to give it away to his daughters" (I.v). Lear himself fails to foresee his homelessness, even though it is foreshadowed in some of his own lines. He advises the banished Kent to gather "Provision/To shield thee from disasters of the world" (I.i), a line which invites the audience to imagine everything that might happen to someone left without a home. The audience learns in the play's opening scene that Goneril and Regan are plotting against their father — "We must do something, and i'the heat" (I.i) — so we are not surprised when they shut the gates on Lear. The fact that Lear cannot see what Goneril and Regan are going to do, even though the audience can, emphasises
Lear's blindness to the truth about his daughters.

4.8 List of Questions

1. Is Lear's demand of an expression of love from each daughter likely to bring honestanswers?
2. How are we to account for Cordelia's answer?
3. How would you describe the character of Kent?
4. Does Gloucester's treatment of his two sons at all account for their attitude?
5. How far has Lear a just right to think himself ungratefully treated?
6. What true friends has Lear, and how do they show their friendship?
7. Is Kent in any respects like Lear himself?
8. Trace the growing cruelty of Regan and Goneril.
9. How has the kingdom prospered under Albany and Cornwall?
10. What is the dramatic effect of the storm?
11. Is Edgar really mad? If not, how do you account for his actions and words?
12. How is the King's mind affected?
13. By what steps has Gloucester been led to his betrayal?
14. What is the dramatic effect of the meeting of Gloucester and Edgar?
15. What is the effect on Goneril and her husband of the news of Gloucester's fate?
16. Describe the Dover Cliff incident.
17. Describe the restoration of Lear's sanity.
18. How does Albany learn of the treachery of his wife and Edmund?
19. Compare the characters between Regan and Goneril?
20. Discuss the fate of Cordelia.
21. In what form does Poetic Justice manifest itself in the cases of Lear and Gloucester?

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M.A. (English)

Semester – I
Course: Renaissance Drama
Section D

UNIT I: William Shakespear : *Hamlet*

Structure

3.0 Objectives
3.1 Introduction
3.2 Hamlet's Soliloquies
3.3 The question of subjectivity
3.3 Osric
3.5 Claudius
3.6 Horatio
3.7 Let Us Sum Up
3.8 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to acquaint you with the soliloquy as an important dramatic convention, as well as focus on the many soliloquies present in *Hamlet*. By the end of this Unit you will also be made familiar with the various characters present in the play *Hamlet*. after reading this unit, you will be able to attempt question on:

1. Soliloquies
2. Hamlet's Soliloquies
3. Major Characters
4. Hamlet as tragedy

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A linguistic phenomenon has been described as "the outcome (of natural situations and the state of character's emotions" [Liisa Dahl, *Nominal Style in Shakespearean Soliloquy with Reference to Early English Drama* (sic.) 1969]. Charles Lamb, therefore, thought of the dramatic language as imperfect means of communicating "the inner structure and workings of mind in a character." Characters do, and at some length, what persons never do-speak alone for a considerable length of time, and in verse, too. But the soliloquy, as we shall see, has this unique ability to suggest the subtleties of the hidden self of the speaker. In the Elizabethan dramatic tradition soliloquy became widely used as a vehicle for subjective utterance and became an important dramatic convention. *Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Dr Eaustus*, all

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contain important examples. In the Elizabethan and Jacobean period the playwrights made extensive use of the soliloquy in their plays and the soliloquy, in turn, opened up many dramatic opportunities for the development of theatre. In the process of developing the soliloquy, the Elizabethanverse found an opportunity to attain superior levels of achievement.

Much like a monologue a soliloquy implies a single speaker and a listener. In the imaginative space of a soliloquy, a speaker as well as a listener become legitimate *dramatis personae.* Frequently, the listeners are the audience. The dramatists, thus, were able to convey a great deal of information about characters- their innermost thoughts, feelings, passions and motives--directly to theaudience.

One must add that in *Hamlet* what Richard Hillman describes as "fictional interiority" is created and communicated not only through soliloquies but also "various kinds of monologues, asides and even silences" [*Self Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern Drama: Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage,* 1997]. Other mechanisms by which the illusion of interiority is maintained include *Hamlet*'s book in act II: reading can be considered as "one way of presenting interiority, or at least contemplation, on stage," Edward Bums [*Character: Acting and Being on the Pre-Modern Stage,* 1990) maintains.

The development of the villain as an important ingredient in the dramatic tradition of this period furthercontributed to the refinement of the soliloquy. Much like the Devil in the Morality plays, the villains, too, comment on other characters and action of the play, manipulate the plot and reveal their own mind and thoughts to the audience. For instance, Iago's soliloquy in *Othello*.

Soliloquies often tend to be interior debates -that is what *Hamlet*'s soliloquies are-- as much as direct addresses, such as the one Falstaff makes on honor while speaking directly to the audience.

3.2 *HAMLET*'S SOLILOQUIES

Two of the seven soliloquies in *Hamlet* occur in act I [scene ii, lines 129-159 and scene v, lines 92- 111], and one in act II [scene ii, lines 551-5851. There are three soliloquies in act III, one each in scene one [lines 56-88], scene two [lines 171-182] and scene three [lines 71-95]. The last soliloquy occurs in act IV, scene iv [lines 12- 66]:

1. that this too too, sullied flesh would melt,... I.ii. 129- 159
2. O all you host of heaven!... I.v.92- 111
3. O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!... II.ii 551-585

4. To be, or not to be, that is the question,... III.i 56-88

5. Tis now the very witching time of night,... III.ii. 171-182

6. Now might I do it pat, now a is praying--... III.iii. 71-95

7. How all occasions do inform against me,... IV.iv 11-66

The first soliloquy occurs before the ghost has appeared and the suggestions of a possible treacherous murder have been made to *Hamlet*. He comes to the world of Elsinore, so to say, with his heart heavy with grief for his father's death and the haste with which his mother disowns his father posthumously and accepts Claudius as her husband. Hamlet emerges as a ruminative, reflective and a private person, much loyal to the memory of his father and stunned at his mother's incestuous conduct. This soliloquy also marks Hamlet's recognition that the world is full of both evil and good–a world in which Hyperion and satyr are brothers. His mother's conduct pains him the most–

so loving to my mother

That he might not between the winds of heaven

Visit her face too roughly...

...Why she would hang on

himAs if increase of appetite had

grown

By what it had fed on; and yet within a month--...

...ere those shoes were old

With which she follow'd my poor father's

body,Like Niobe, all tears...

...married my uncle,...

It is the corruption in his mother's conduct that makes him feel his own flesh "too, too sullied." It is inthis frame of mind that *Hamlet* reacts to what life in the world of Elsinore offers him.

The next soliloquy shows *Hamlet* committing himself to avenge his father's death. This soliloquy too deepens his disgust with his mother conduct and the fact that he is his mother's flesh and blood receives a reminder. The third soliloquy finds him remorseful for not having taken any action to avenge his father's death. There is yet another implied and understated reference to his mother in the lines in whichhe describes Claudius as "bloody, bawdy villain! / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, *kindles villain!"*

"**To be, or not to be**," the fourth soliloquy, is the most philosophical statement that Hamlet makes in the play and has provoked much debate and is perhaps the most discussed and interpreted. One of the major concerns that *Hamlet*'s ruminations focus on in this soliloquy is the conflict between passion andreason. In the seventeenth century books such as Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde* (1601) as well as in books published abroad and circulated in the original as well as in English translation including Philippe de Moray's *The Defense of Death* (1577) and Nicolas Coeffeteau's *A Table of Humane Passions* (1621), passions clouded reasonand it was in the interest of the individual as well as the society to keep them in check. Cicero had described passions as "perturbations, the troubled or stirred motions of the mind strayed from reason: enemies of the mind, and also of a quiet life."

Hamlet is portrayed as possessed of the passion of melancholy- sorrow and fear being two other emotions. Right from the beginning *Hamlet* is portrayedas melancholic. He himself says: "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seems to me all the uses of the world." His mother begs him to "cast" his "knighted colours off." *"The dread of sorting after death" constantly hangs heavy upon to mind and thoughts of *Hamlet*. And yet he admires anyone who can control passions and rise above them. A stoic response to the misfortunes of life is something he aspires to be able to show. He praises Horatio as one who "is not passion's slave." He finds Ophelia, Poloniusand especially his own mother slaves of passion.

While reviewing a performance of *Hamlet*, G. B. Shaw writes:

> And please note that this is not a cold *Hamlet*. He is none of your logicians who reason theirway through the world because they cannot feel their way through it: his intellect is the organ of his passion: his eternal self-criticism is as alive and thrilling as it can possibly be. The greatsoliloquy-no: I do not mean "To be or not to be"; I mean the dramatic one, "0 what a rogue and peasant slave am I!"-is as passionate in its scorn of brute passion as the most bull-neckedaffirmation or sentimental dilution of it could be.

All the soliloquies express various passions associated with melancholy and the longer soliloquies seek to attain the stoic ideal of "imperturbability." "To be, or not to be," shows *Hamlet* holding a book, a characteristic gesture on the part of a melancholic-nothing would seem to be more natural.

The fifth soliloquy, "Tis now the very witching time of night," reveals *Hamlet* resolute: "Now I coulddrink hot blood, / And do such bitter business of the day / Would quake to look on." He, in this soliloquy, returns to his mother's incestuous, unnatural conduct, refers to Nero

(who had had his mother Agrippina put to death, who had poisoned her husband, the emperor Claudius), hopes to be able to control his anger while confronting her with the truth of her actions. The sixth occurs in the prayer scene and contains one more reference to his mother- "My mother stays," as does the last soliloquy- "...my mother stained ..."

All the soliloquies emphasise the idea of the delay in the mental make-up of *Hamlet*, as well as the delay embedded in the plot-structure of the play. They reveal *Hamlet* given to self-reflection and excessively speculative, indecisive, and irresolute. *Hamlet* also comes across as a scholar, and a poet. The soliloquies reveal *Hamlet*'s tragic flaw that turns *Hamlet* into a tragedy and *Hamlet* as the prime agent who brings about the tragic denouement: *Hamlet* thinks too much. He weighs the consequences of action to such an excessive length that action becomes postponed as reflection takes the place of action itself. In a sense, one can characterise all the soliloquies as variations on the same theme: an obsessive concern with his mother's incestuous conduct and the contamination that he feels has befouled him, too, as her son.

3.3 THE QUESTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

Laurel Amtower, ["The Ethics of Subjectivity in *Hamlet*," *Studies in the Humanities*, 21.2 (December 1993): 1 examines the "uncomfortably close connection between the subjective bias of human values and the so called moral enforcement of an absolute law." *Hamlet*, Amtower maintains, exemplifies a situation in which there exist no absolutes. The task before *Hamlet* is left to him to interpret, to his discretion. The specifics of his obligation are not identified. Each character's attempt to construct meaning for herself/ himself according to a perspective is severely limited by a context. If the subject is guided by its culture's value system, the answer is that conformity is illusionary as in the play value is always recreated from the standpoint of a subjective agency. Amtower counters the assumption of cultural materialists such as Dolomite, Barker, Reiss and Betsey, that the individual consciousness of the Middle Ages was essentialist and monolithic, isolated from the political and natural spheres, and naively comfortable with its moral responsibilities. Amtower believes that *Hamlet*'s subjectivity is "profoundly and imperturbably pre-modern, a summation in a single character of an entire age and its point of view." Middle Ages thus for him had a highly developed sense of subjectivity. *Hamlet* thus has to justify his task not only politically and theologically but in the light of "who he is". An early *Hamlet* seeks to efface his own subjectivity to the fulfillment of absolute prescription. His madness thus is the abandonment of ethics to solipsism of the subject, the abnegating of the social for the fullest

satisfaction of the private. Amtower goes on: "Instead of realising that he, like every entity of the play, is moved by the greater contexts of discourse and community that immerse him, *Hamlet* responds with greater attempts at control and repression, marked by irrational outbursts, manslaughter, and finally murder." The later *Hamlet* "judges by absolute law--but that absolute law is his own." The tyrannical *Hamlet*, Amtower believes., "at the end of the play actually prefigures the tyrannical, moralising repression that will later characterise the Puritan Commonwealth. It is thus the later Hamlet, Atower concludes, who offers am model of modern subjectivity. In Hamlet, he maintains, "The concept of a balanced subject disintegrates, leaving in its stead only victims and tyrants."

3.4 OSRIC

OSRIC is generally considered a minor character and the only useful function his character serves in the play is to present a contrast through his ridiculous behaviour to *Hamlet*'s serious and dignified conduct. He is also treated by the readers as well as the directors of the play as a clown who provides comic relief in the play.

But the attention that Shakespeare bestows upon his character would suggest that he had much more than this in his mind. He is surely not meant to be a comic character and, thus, a mere source of comic relief in the play. This is clear from the fact that the source of comic entertainment is, more often than not, the prince himself. Also, the gravediggers are the ones who provide comic pleasure in the play either through their own interaction with each other or with *Hamlet*. Osric performs no function in the play other than propose a wager- an action that Shakespeare could easily have assigned to any other unimportant character. He appears in one of the most important scenes in the play, in an important moment, and is shown interacting at some length with the play's most important character. The attention then that Shakespeare lavishes upon Osric is not without a larger purpose. But, then, where does lie the significance of the character of Osric?

He lends a certain lightness of tone to the play's last somber moments and presents a contrast to the protagonist himself. Apart from this, Osric by his presence lends a sharper focus to some of the major themes of the play. He signifies the hollow courtier which is one philosophical strand in the thought- pattern of the play, and of which Claudius is the most important icon in the play. Osric stands for the emptiness of the youth and its predilection for the pointless pursuing of current fashions in dress, conduct and behaviour. *Hamlet* alludes to a lack of balance between the individual merit and reward; Osric is a perfect example of it.

He is a double-dealing hypocrite, has scrupulous disregard for everything that could stand in his way of "advancement."

Claudius plans a scheme for involving *Hamlet* in the fencing match:We'll put on those shall praise your excellence,=

And set a double varnish on the fame

The Frenchman gave you, bring you, in fine,

together,And wager o'er your heads. [*Hamlet*],

being remiss, Most generous, and free from all

contriving,

Will not peruse the foils,...

[IV. vii. 110- 1151

Osric, like Laertes, is a stooge and a pawn, and a weapon in the hands of Claudius. He is the source ofdread and tension-as he sets out to encourage *Hamlet* to lay a wager--as much as he is the source of immediate comic pleasure. Our sense of the impending disaster does not allow us to treat him merely as a source of comic relief. More than comic relief or comic pleasure he provides what has been described as "comic tension."

3.5 CLAUDIUS

After the ghost has revealed the story of the unnatural murder of the old King *Hamlet*, *Hamlet* describes Claudius as "O villain, villain, smiling villan / My tables-meet it is I set it down / That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain." Villain in the sense of "That character in a play, whose motives or actionsform an important element in the plot" [OED] is the attribute easily and most commonly associated with Claudius. *Hamlet* refers to Claudius again later as "Bloody, bawdy villain. / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain." [II. ii. 608-91. here are seven other occasions when *Hamlet* refers to Claudius as a villain.

Apart from the meaning that "villain" is commonly understood to have, for Shakespeare, it also meant"a low born base-minded rustic"; OED also describes "villain" to mean as "one of the class serfs in thefeudal system." The two words in the Elizabethan English were interchangeable and, therefore, denoted base or bastard birth. Therefore, when *Hamlet* calls Claudius "A murderer and a villain" it means, "a murderer and a bastard" and not "a murderer and a wicked man." As David Berkeley points out: "Villain" is the richest, most stinging, most unsheddable curse that can be offered a king in Shakespeare's rich vocabulary of swearing. *Hamlet*'s extreme indignation against Claudius, partly founded on his knowledge

that he a true born son of a true born father must yield the throne of Denmark to a bastard "villain" cannot be reconciled with the reiteration of the relatively waterish "villain" [in the ethical sense of the word]." That each time *Hamlet* refers to Claudius as a bastard has far reachingimplications in the play and is of singular importance and must be appreciated.

Generally, Claudius is accused of incest, hurried remarriage, murder and being a usurper of the throne of Denmark. We must remember that *Hamlet*'s one major accusation against him is that he is a bastard. In a society to which Shakespeare belonged and which was essentially a class-ridden society, being a bastard meant a searing flaw. Shakespeare constantly invokes the images of "weed" and uses words such as "rank" and "gross" to imply "the base-born." In his first soliloquy ["that this too too sullied flesh would melt," ...I.ii 129-1591, *Hamlet* remarks: "Tis an *unwedded* garden, / That grows to seed, things *rank* and gross in nature / Possess it merely." Later in act III, he tells the queen : "And do not spread the compost on the *weeds* / To make them *ranker*." Shakespeare describes Claudius in comparison with his brother not in terms of wickedness but in terms of a bastard birth.

Hamlet draws attention to Claudius's unprepossessing appearance --"hyperion to a satyr." *Hamlet* asks his mother: "Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed / And batten on this *moor*?" For Shakespeare, lack of pleasant looks indicates an unethical character, while those of "gentle" birth had attractive looks. For the poet "beauty breedeth beauty" [*Venus and Adonis*, line 1671. In act III *Hamlet* himself is described as "the rose of the fair state" and "the mould of the from."

Claudius lacks courage: he meekly listens to Laertes accusation, "0 thou vile king," and submits to *Hamlet*'s forcing poison down his throat without much resistance. Bastards, the Elizabethans believed, had envy as their ruling passion. As Francis . Bacon remarked: " ...bastards are envious, for he that cannot possibly mend his case will do what he can to impair another's." [*Of Envy*]. Claudius's whole life arrears to be a series of attempts to "legitimise himself."

3.6 HORATIO

Horatio is generally considered an uninteresting if not a completely unimportant character in the play. He speaks some memorable lines but generally his role is expected to be a mere foil to the protagonist. But Horatio appears in nine scenes of the play compared to Ophelia's six. He speaks about half as many more lines as she does and is the most important speaker both at the beginning and at the end of the play. He delivers a long speech in act I, scene I on the preparation of war in Denmark and the long history of discord between

Denmark and Norway, vividly recalls the portents of Caesar's fall and howthe spirits behave. His second speech is often remembered: "A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye." Hespeaks minor passages of little significance until the last act when he grabs the poisoned cup from *Hamlet*.

Careful readers of the play have encountered a number of inconsistencies involving Horatio in the play.Horatio comes across to the readers as the primary source of information on the appearance of the oldKing *Hamlet* and the likeness of the ghost to him.

> *Hamlet*. Is it not like the
> king?Horatio. As thou art to
> thyself.
> Such was the very armour he had on
> When he th'ambitious Norway
> combated.
> So frowned he once, when in an angry
> parleHe smote the sledded Polacks on
> the ice.
> [I. i. 61-66]

Later he remarks: "I knew your father; these hands are not more like." In reply to *Hamlet*, he says aboutthe ghost's beard, Horatio says: "It was as I have seen it in his life, / A sable silver'd." Horatio thus gives the impression that Horatio knew the king personally well, at least was well acquainted with the old King *Hamlet*'s personal appearance. But he later says, "I saw him once; A was a goodly king." Suggesting that he had not known him well enough-not well enough to account for all that he has earlier said about him. But the answer lies in not reading "I saw him once; A was a goodly king" literallyto mean that he had seen the old King Hamlet only once. After all, "once" can also be taken to mean "when": "I saw him once; A was a goodly king" can also be read to mean that when Horatio saw him on a certain occasion, "A was a goodly king."

Hamlet addresses Horatio as a "fellow student" and therefore it is naturally assumed that both HamletandHoratio are about the same age. But the later elements in the play do not bear this out. We are told in the gravediggers' scene that the duel between the old King Hamlet and Fortinbas took place thirty years ago, the same year young prince Hamlet was born. So if Horatio was among those who witnessedthe duel, he must be appreciably older than Hamlet. But there is no reason to believe that fellow students, even those who are closely acquainted with each other must be of the same age group.

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Yet again Horatio is presented as one who is unacquainted with the custom of accompanying royal toasts with cannonade even though he also gives the impression of having been closely familiar with the current Danish political and other matters. There is nothing in the play to suggest that Horatio came from Elsinore. He, in fact, could have come from anywhere in Denmark and may have, thus, been unfamiliar with customs of the royal court and the city life and its ways in Elsinore.

There is yet another matter involving Horatio. We discover that a month elapses between the royal funeral and the royal wedding. Horatio tells Hamlet that he had come to Elisnore for the funeral but they meet only after the royal wedding. Obviously he had remained in Elsinore for the whole month without having once met *Hamlet*. How is it that they did not meet during this period? But this too appears understandable in view of the fact that during this month Hamlet should have been preoccupied with the funeral of his father and political and other developments in the court.

There is little doubt that Hamlet and Horatio were friends but their friendship need not have been too close as is obvious from the fact that Hamlet uses "you" while addressing him. He uses "thou" when he addresses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It is only later that he starts using "thou" for Horatio. Of course, when he discovers the truth about his two friends, he uses "you" for Guildenstern in act II, scene ii. There is little doubt that Horatio matters to Shakespeare as he does to Hamlet. Shakespeare draws upon the long-standing tradition of heroes's companions which imparts much significance to such a character.

Hamlet forever addresses his friend by his name -in the second scene Hamlet addresses Horatio by his name five times in about twenty lines. Horatio is portrayed as a scholar and a sceptic. He is a man of much courage: he is not afraid to confront the ghost, though his loyalty to the prince demands that he try and dissuade him from confronting his father ghost. For Shakespeare's audience that was .a dangerous enterprise.

Horatio enjoys Hamlet's trust, friendship, and confidence. More than that, Hamlet respects Horatio forsome of his personal virtues:

> Horatio, thou. Art e'ven as just a
> man As e'er my conversation cop'd
> withal...
>
> Nay Do not think I flatter,
> For what advancement may I hope from
> theeThat no revenue hast but thy god

spirits
To feed and clothe thee? Why should be
flatter'd? ...Since my dear soul was mistress of
her choice,

And could of men distinguish her
election, Shathseald thee for herself: for
thou has beenAs one, in suffering all that
suffers nothing, A man that Fortune's
buffets and rewards
Hast teen with equal thanks; and blest are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well
commeddledThat they are not a pipe for
Fortune's fingure
To sound what stop she pleases. Give me that
manthat is not passion's slave, and I will wear
him
In my heart's core, ay in my heart of
heart,As I do thee...
[III. ii. 53-55; 56-59; 61-71]

He does come across as a "foil" to *Hamlet* after the play-within-the-play scene: to *Hamlet*'s feverish questioning, he gives replies that are cool, objective and his demeanour calm. "Didst perceive?" "Verywell, my lord." "Upon the talk of the poisoning?" "I did very well note him." Horatio's stoic calm is *Hamlet*'s greatest advantage.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

There are, in addition, many aspects of the play that should be looked into. The opening scenes in the plays of Shakespeare always have a major significance. In *Hamlet* a number of other scenes must be carefully analysed for additional value; the closet scene, the nunnery scene, the prayer scene, the grave-diggers' scene, the dumb-show and the play scene, the fencing scene: these are some of the situations in the play that are imbued with meaning. Similarly, a careful analysis of the characters --other than the most important ones-Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude- should be done. Hamlet's character can be further studied as a scourge or purifying agent or even as a Fool. His madness, his attitude to his mother remarriage, his

father's death, his attitude to his father, his character as pulled in the opposing directions of the twin forces of sentimentality and intellectualism, his divided nature, his eloquence, his romantic nature are other angles which provide useful insights into his personality. You might like to look up a reference work such as Index to Hamlet *Studies* [1990]: there are numerous entries listed under appropriate headings which would suggest various approaches to a topic. There are, in fact, hundreds of entries under the heading "Hamlet."

There are many issues that are part of the current critical debate about *Hamlet*: the question of "delay" is one of those issues. It has been on the minds of readers- theatergoers-scholars for longer than two hundred years in the history of *Hamlet* criticism. *Hamlet*'s attitude to Ophelia is also a question that deserve a closer examination. *Hamlet* has been examined in the light of philosophical notions such as appearance and reality, or idealism versus pragmatism. The dominance in *Hamlet* of the ideas of death, decay and corruption, both of the body as well as mind and soul, has caught the readers' attention. *Hamlet* has been studied in comparison with Greek tragedies, in the context of Elizabethan culture, Elizabethan and Jacobean politics and in many other contexts such as current interest in psychoanalytical literary criticism.

Some of these issues are discussed in greater detail in many books and articles listed in the bibliographyappended.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. What are the major themes in *Hamlet*'s soliloquies.? How do they contribute to the majorthematic concerns of the play?
2. Analyse "To be, or not to be" in act III, scene i, for its dramatic significance in the context of theplay.
3. Analyse the role played by Osric in the larger context of the Danish politics as reflected in theplay.
4. "Claudius rather than *Hamlet* is the protagonist of the play." Do you agree?

JCND PSOU