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BRITISH DRAMA

(Paper Code: MAEG1002)

MA (English) – I Year

DDE – WHERE INNOVATION IS A WAY OF LIFE

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MASTER OF ARTS

In

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British Drama

Master of Arts in English

British Drama

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UNIT - I

In this unit we shall study

Selections from Aristotle's *Poetics by* way of introduction & Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*

INTRODUCTION

Why start with Aristotle?

It is first of all necessary to know why we have to look at what Aristotle has said when the course we are about to begin studying is British Drama. This is so because in the Western tradition, drama really owes its origins to the Greeks. Not only that, but also the first principles of criticism and of dramatic construction were spelt out by the Greeks. Greek philosophers starting from Plato and then Aristotle, followed by several others have exhaustively discussed the function of literature and its relevance to man and his life.

Aristotle, a philosopher and Plato's pupil, laid the foundation of Greek dramatic criticism. He also became one of the most important influences in all-Western traditions of literature. He analyzed the plays of the fifth century as well as those of his own time, classified the kinds of drama, and laid down rules for the construction of tragedy. He was the founding father of dramaturgy which is the art of dramatic composition, in the west. Dramaturgy is also the theory about the representation of the main elements of drama on the stage.

Aristotle was born in Macedonia, Greece and in spite of the doubts that prevail, it is generally agreed that he was born in 384 BC and died in 322 BC. As a student at Plato's Academy he raised a number of questions never hesitating to disagree with his teacher. Plato stated that poetry and indeed all fine art would weaken the moral health of the citizens of the Greek state, because among the many reasons that he gave, the chief one was that poetry appealed to the emotions rather than to the intellect. Aristotle, on the other hand, felt that poetry would have a positive effect on the development of man's personality.

In ancient Greece, all drama was written in the form of poetry. So when a philosopher used the word poetry it often included drama. The highest form of drama was the tragedy according to the ancient Greek belief. The *Poetics* is one of Aristotle's important treatises. In it he outlines the Six Elements of drama. Down the ages, this

outline has become a guideline for many playwrights throughout history, and is especially emphasized in the works of William Shakespeare.

The treatise we call the *Poetics* was composed at least 50 years after the death of Sophocles. Aristotle was a great admirer of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King,* considering it the perfect tragedy, and not surprisingly, his analysis fits that play most perfectly. Let us therefore use this play to understand the following major parts of Aristotle's analysis of tragedy as a literary genre. The greatest tragedy, in the opinion of Aristotle, was *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles. The reasons for its supremacy lay in the excellent management of plot and chorus, in the beauty of the language, in the irony of the situations, and in the general nobility of conception. Aristotle cited also the *Helena* of Euripides as a model of its kind, and lauded the author for the skill with which he had set forth the complicated plot. Euripides was to him the most tragic of the poets. At the same time, he found much in Euripides to censure. Only in Sophocles, the perfect writer, were united ideal beauty, clearness of construction and religious inspiration--the three qualities that alone make tragedy great.

The subjects of tragic drama, Aristotle said, were rightly drawn from ancient mythology, because coming from that source they must be true. If man had invented such strange incidents, they would have appeared impossible. The chief characters of a tragic action should be persons of consequence, of exalted station. The leading personage should not be a man characterized by great virtue or great vice, but of a mixed nature, partly good and partly bad. His errors and weaknesses lead him into misfortune. Such a mixture of good and evil makes him seem like us, thus more quickly arousing our sympathy. The course of the tragic action should be such as to saturate the spectator with feelings of compassion, drive out his petty personal emotions, and so "purge" the soul through pity and terror (Catharsis). The crimes suitable for tragic treatment may be committed either in ignorance, or intentionally, and are commonly against friends or relatives. Crimes committed intentionally are generally the more dramatic and impressive. (This in spite of the fact that the central crime in Oedipus the King was committed in ignorance.) As to style, a certain archaic quality of diction is needful to the dignity of tragedy.

Aristotle's definition of tragedy

“A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.” (*Poetics* 1449b.24)

Aristotle distinguished **six** elements of a tragic drama: **Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle and Melody.** Diction and Melody are the style of the text or lyrics, and the music to which some of them are set (Greek tragedy was like opera in that parts of it, though not usually the principal lines of the actors, were sung). Spectacle refers to staging, lighting, sets, costumes, and the like. Thought refers to the indications, given primarily through words but also through other means, of what the characters are thinking. That leaves the two elements to which Aristotle paid most attention, Plot and Character. Of these two, Aristotle thought that the Plot comes first. "In a play, they do not act in order to portray the characters; they include the characters for the sake of the action" (*Poetics* 1450a.20). That does not mean he would have approved of modern "action films" in which it hardly matters who does the shooting or the fast driving. For Aristotle, action must be consistent with character, and reveal character.

Aristotle's Six Elements of Drama

1.PLOT – what happens in a play; the order of events, the story as opposed to the theme; what happens rather than what it means.

2.CHARACTER – the personality or the part an actor represents in a play; a role played by an actor in a play

3.THOUGHT-- what the characters think during the course of action of the play, or the main idea expressed through the play.

4.DICTION/LANGUAGE/DIALOGUE – the word choices made by the playwright and the enunciation of the actors delivering the lines.

5.MUSIC/RHYTHM – by music Aristotle meant the sound, rhythm and melody of the speeches.

6.SPECTACLE – the visual elements of the production of a play; the scenery, costumes, and special effects in a production.

Tragedy is the "imitation of an action" (mimesis) according to "the law of probability or necessity." Aristotle indicates that the medium of tragedy is drama, not narrative; tragedy "shows" rather than "tells." According to Aristotle, tragedy is higher and more philosophical than history because history simply relates what has happened while tragedy dramatizes what may happen, "what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity." History thus deals with the particular, and tragedy with the universal. Events that have happened may be due to accident or coincidence; they may be particular to a specific situation and not be part of a clear cause-and-effect chain. Therefore they have little relevance for others. Tragedy, however, is rooted in the fundamental order of the universe; it creates a cause-and-effect chain that clearly reveals what may happen at any time or place because that is the way the world operates. Tragedy therefore arouses not only pity but also fear, because the audience can envision themselves within this cause-and-effect chain (context).

Plot is the first principle, the most important feature of tragedy. Aristotle defines plot as "the arrangement of the incidents": i.e., not the story itself but the way the incidents are presented to the audience, the structure of the play. According to Aristotle, tragedies where the outcome depends on a tightly constructed cause-and-effect chain of actions are superior to those that depend primarily on the character and personality of the protagonist. Plots that meet this criterion will have the following qualities (context).

1. The plot must be a **whole**, with a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning, called by modern critics the **incentive moment**, must start the cause-and-effect chain but not be dependent on anything outside the compass of the play (i.e., its causes are downplayed but its effects are stressed). The **middle, or climax**, must be caused by earlier incidents and it causes the incidents that follow it (i.e., its causes and effects are stressed). The **end, or resolution**, must be caused by the preceding events but not lead to other incidents outside the compass of the play (i.e., its causes are stressed but its effects downplayed); the end should therefore solve or resolve the problem created during the incentive moment. Aristotle calls the cause-and-effect chain leading from the incentive moment to the climax the "tying up" (desis), in modern terminology the **complication**. He therefore terms the more rapid cause-and-effect chain from the climax to the resolution the "unravelling" (lusis), in modern terminology the **dénouement.**

2. The plot must be complete, having unity of action. By this Aristotle means that the plot must be structurally self-contained, with the incidents bound together by internal necessity, each action leading inevitably to the next with no outside intervention, no *deus ex machina*. According to Aristotle, the worst kinds of plots are episodic, in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence; the only thing that ties together the events in such a plot is the fact that they happen to the same person. Playwrights should exclude coincidences from their plots; if some coincidence is required, it should "have an air of design," i.e., seem to have a fated connection to the events of the play. Similarly, the poet should exclude the irrational or at least keep it "outside the scope of the tragedy," i.e., reported rather than dramatized. While the poet cannot change the myths that are the basis of his plots, he "ought to show invention of his own and skillfully handle the traditional materials" to create unity of action in his plot.

3. The plot must be of a certain magnitude, both quantitatively (length, complexity) and qualitatively (seriousness and universal significance). Aristotle argues that plots should not be too brief; the more incidents and themes that the playwright can bring together in an organic unity, the greater the artistic value and richness of the play. Also, the more universal and significant the meaning of the play, the more the playwright can catch and hold the emotions of the audience, the better the play will be .

4. The plot may be either simple or complex, although complex is better. Simple plots have only a change of fortune **(catastrophe**). Complex plots have both reversal of intention **(peripeteia**) and recognition of a truth by the main characters **(anagnorisis**) connected with the catastrophe. Both peripeteia and anagnorisis turn upon surprise. Aristotle explains that a peripeteia occurs when a character produces an effect opposite to that which he intended to produce, while an anagnorisis "is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons destined for good or bad fortune." He argues that the best plots combine these two as part of their cause-and-effect chain (i.e., the peripeteia leads directly to the anagnorisis); this in turns creates the catastrophe, leading to the final scene of suffering.

Character has the second place in importance. In a perfect tragedy, character will support plot, i.e., personal motivations will be intricately connected parts of the cause-and-effect chain of actions producing pity and fear in the audience. The protagonist

should be renowned and prosperous, so his change of fortune can be from good to bad. This change "should come about as the result, not of vice, but of some great error or frailty in a character." Such a plot is most likely to generate pity and fear in the audience, for "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves." The term Aristotle uses here, **hamartia,** often translated **tragic flaw,** has been the subject of much debate. The meaning of the Greek word is closer to mistake than to "flaw," and it is best interpreted in the context of what Aristotle has to say about plot and "the law or probability or necessity." In the ideal tragedy, claims Aristotle, the protagonist will mistakenly bring about his own downfall—not because he is sinful or morally weak, but because he does not know enough. The role of the hamartia in tragedy comes not from its moral status but from the inevitability of its consequences. Hence the peripeteia is really one or more self-destructive actions taken in blindness, leading to results diametrically opposed to those that were intended (often termed tragic irony), and the anagnorisis is the gaining of the essential knowledge that was previously lacking.

Characters in tragedy should have the following qualities:

1. "good or fine" Aristotle relates this quality to moral purpose and says it is relative to class: "Even a woman may be good, and also a slave, though the woman may be said to be an inferior being, and the slave quite worthless."
2. "fitness of character" (true to type); e.g. valor is appropriate for a warrior but not for a woman.
3. "true to life" : realistic
4. "consistency": (true to themselves). Once a character's personality and motivations are established, these should continue throughout the play.
5. "necessary or probable": Characters must be logically constructed according to
. "the law of probability or necessity" that governs the actions of the play.
6. "true to life and yet more beautiful": idealized, ennobled.

Thought is third in importance, and is found "where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim is enunciated." Aristotle says little about thought, and most of what he has to say is associated with how speeches should reveal character However, we may assume that this category would also include what we call the themes of a play.

Diction is fourth, and is "the expression of the meaning in words" which are proper and appropriate to the plot, characters, and end of the tragedy. In this category, Aristotle discusses the stylistic elements of tragedy; he is particularly interested in metaphors: "But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor; . . . it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances."

Song, or melody, is fifth, and is the musical element of the chorus. Aristotle argues that the Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor; choral odes should not be "mere interludes," but should contribute to the unity of the plot.

Spectacle is last, for it is least connected with literature; "the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet." Although Aristotle recognizes the emotional attraction of spectacle, he argues that superior poets rely on the inner structure of the play rather than spectacle to arouse pity and fear; those who rely heavily on spectacle "create a sense, not of the terrible, but only of the monstrous."

The end of the tragedy is a **katharsis** (purgation, cleansing) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear. Katharsis is another Aristotelian term that has generated considerable debate. The word means "purging," and Aristotle seems to be employing a medical metaphor—tragedy arouses the emotions of pity and fear in order to purge away their excess, to reduce these passions to a healthy, balanced proportion. Aristotle also talks of the "pleasure" that is proper to tragedy, apparently meaning the aesthetic pleasure one gets from contemplating the pity and fear that are aroused through an intricately constructed work of art.

THE THREE UNITIES

The most famous of the Aristotelian rules were those relating to the so-called unities--of time, place, and action. The unity of time limits the supposed action to the duration, roughly, of a single day; unity of place limits it to one general locality; and the unity of action limits it to a single set of incidents which are related as cause and effect, "having a beginning, a middle, and an end." Concerning the unity of time, Aristotle noted that all the plays since Aeschylus, except two, did illustrate such unity, but he did not lay down such a precept as obligatory. Perhaps tacitly he assumed that the observance of the unity of place would be the practice of good playwrights, since the chorus was present during

the whole performance, and it would indeed be awkward always to devise an excuse for moving fifteen persons about from place to place. The third unity, that of action, is bound up with the nature not only of Greek but also of all drama.

Greek Drama more concerned with character

Aristotle conceived the action, or plot, of a play as of far greater importance than the characters. This conception he gained from the plays of the fifth century, which, in general, centered around a personified passion rather than around a character. The action was "the vital principle and very soul of drama." Again he says, "Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of actions." Second in importance was characterization; and third were the sentiments aroused by the action. He insisted very clearly that in tragedy the plot does not rise out of the characters, but on the contrary the plot tests the characters through the working-out of destiny -- "blind fate." The main duty of the dramatist was to organize first the action, then display the moral character of his people under the blows of fate. "The incidents of the action, and the structural ordering of these incidents, constitute the end and purpose of tragedy." Finally and perhaps most important of all, was Aristotle's belief that although tragedy should purge the emotions through pity and terror, yet all drama was meant to entertain: tragedy through the sympathies, comedy through mirth.

We have now learned about Aristotle's concept of tragedy. It would be ideal to have a clear idea about the terms that are widely used in dramaturgy. Let us try to explain some terms.

AUDIENCE

The fact of a live audience also has an important impact on the way plays are created. The essential feature of an audience at a play involves the fact that they have, at a single instant, a common experience; they have assembled for the explicit purpose of seeing a play. Drama not only plays before a live audience of real people who respond directly and immediately to it, but drama is also conceived of by the author, in expectation of specific response. Authors calculate for the effect of a community of watchers rather than for the silent response. With this in mind, most plays written deal with topics that are timely.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue provides the substance of a play. Each word uttered by the character furthers the business of the play, contributes to its effect as a whole. Therefore, a sense of DECORUM must be established by the characters, i.e., what is said is appropriate to the role and situation of a character. Also the exposition of the play often falls on the dialogue of the characters. Remember exposition establishes the relationships, tensions or conflicts from which later plot developments derive.

PLOT

The interest generated by the plot varies for different kinds of plays. The plot is usually structured with acts and scenes.

· Open conflict plays: rely on the suspense of a struggle in which the hero, through perhaps fight against all odds, is not doomed.

· Dramatic thesis: foreshadowing, in the form of ominous hints or symbolic incidents, conditions the audience to expect certain logical developments.

· Coincidence: sudden reversal of fortune plays depicts climatic ironies or misunderstandings.

· Dramatic irony: the fulfillment of a plan, action, or expectation in a surprising way, often opposite of what was intended.

STAGECRAFT

The stage creates its effects in spite of, and in part because of, definite physical limitations. Setting and action tend to be suggestive rather than panoramic or colossal. Both setting and action may be little more than hints for the spectator to fill out.

CONVENTIONS

The means the playwright employs are determined at least in part by dramatic convention.

a) Greek: Playwrights of this era often worked with familiar story material, legend about gods and famous families that the audience was familiar with. Since the audience was familiar with certain aspects of these, the playwrights used allusion rather than explicit exposition. In representing action, they often relied on messengers to report off-stage action for the triumph of the human spirit over physical necessity.

b) Comedy: Different kinds of comedy illustrate different ways a playwright may leaven grim truth with humor or temper the playful with the serious. Traditionally comedy is defined as a play that bestows on its characters good fortune, or more popularly, a happy ending. It may deal with the loves and jealousies of the young, and the reluctance other elders to give their blessings or the necessary funds.

CHARACTERIZATION

A playwright's success ultimately depends on his ability to create a character that an actor can "bring to life." The playwright's ability to match the PROTAGONIST against an ANTAGONIST of some complexity and vitality can make the difference between a success and failure. Idiom, a character's personal thoughts and feelings as reflected through dialogue.

Let us now look at Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* in detail and try to figure out the reason why Aristotle considered it a perfect tragedy.

Sophocles: Biography

Born in 495 B.C. about a mile northwest of Athens, Sophocles was to become one of the great playwrights of the golden age. The son of a wealthy merchant, he would enjoy all the comforts of a thriving Greek empire. He studied all of the arts. By the age of sixteen, he was already known for his beauty and grace and was chosen to lead a choir of boys at a celebration of the victory of Salamis. Twelve years later, his studies complete, he was ready to compete in the City Dionysia--a festival held every year at the Theatre of Dionysus in which new plays were presented.

One of the great innovators of the theatre, he was the first to add a third actor. He also abolished the trilogy form. Aeschylus, for example, had used three tragedies to tell a single story. Sophocles chose to make each tragedy a complete entity in itself--as a result, he had to pack all of his action into the shorter form, and this clearly offered greater dramatic possibilities. Many authorities also credit him with the invention of scene painting and periaktoi or painted prisms. Of Sophocles' more than 120 plays, only seven have survived in their entirety. Of these, *Oedipus the King* is generally considered his greatest work.

Oedipus the King c. 420 BC

Dramatic Personae

Oedipus: the king of Thebes, married to Jocasta. He was raised in Corinth but left when an oracle predicted he would kill his father and marry his mother. In his wanderings he killed a man at the crossing of three roads, then came to Thebes, where a monster called the Sphinx was laying waste to the city and killing any man who could not answer her riddle. Oedipus successfully answered the riddle, rescuing Thebes from the Sphinx. Then he married Jocasta, the wife of Laius, king of Thebes, who had recently been killed. When the play opens, Thebes is suffering from a drought, and an oracle has predicted that the drought will end when Laius's killer is found. Oedipus does not know that he himself is Laius's killer. Nor does he know that Jocasta and Laius were in fact his real parents.

Jocasta: wife of Oedipus and queen of Thebes. Before Oedipus, she was married to Laius. Years before this play, an oracle told Laius that his son would kill him and marry Jocasta, so they gave their infant son to a servant to expose on a hillside. Because Laius was supposedly killed by robbers, she does not believe in the power of oracles to predict the future. But she will soon find out that fate cannot be avoided.

Creon: Jocasta's brother, he shares one third of Thebes's riches with Oedipus and Jocasta. He is a devout follower of the oracle of Apollo, and as the play opens, he is returning from the oracle with the news that Laius's killer must be found. He is a loyal friend to Oedipus, unresentful of the accusations Oedipus makes against him and kind to him when Oedipus finally discovers the horrible truth.

Teiresias: a blind prophet who knows the truth about Oedipus's parentage. Oedipus calls on him to find Laius's killer but becomes furious when Teiresias claims that Oedipus himself is the killer. As he leaves he tells Oedipus that he is his wife's son and his father's killer, and that Oedipus will leave Thebes in shame, but Oedipus does not listen, instead accusing Teiresias of conspiring with Creon to overthrow him.

Messenger from Corinth: he arrives to tell Oedipus that his father (the man Oedipus believes to be his father) Polybus is dead, and that the people of Corinth would like Oedipus to be their king. He also reveals to Oedipus that Polybus and Meropé are not his real parents. He says that long ago a stranger from Thebes gave him a baby, and that he gave the baby to the king and queen of Corinth. This baby was, of course, Oedipus.

Shepherd: the man who gave the baby to the messenger. This is also the same man who witnessed Laius's death. When he returned to Thebes and saw that the man who killed

Laius is the new king, he asks leave to flee from the city. Oedipus sends for him when the messenger mentions him, hoping to figure out who his real parents are. The shepherd unhappily reveals that the baby he gave to the messenger was Laius and Jocasta's son.

Priest: his followers are making sacrifices to the gods at the beginning of the play, hoping that the gods will lift the blight that has struck the city.

Attendant: a servant of Oedipus and Jocasta who reveals what happened in the palace after Oedipus discovered his parentage.

Ismene and Antigone: Oedipus's young daughters who are led out at the end of the play. Oedipus laments the fact that they will never find husbands with such a cursed lineage and begs Creon to take care of them.

Chorus of Theban Elders: a group of men who serve as an emotional sounding board and exposition device in the play, reflecting on the happenings and asking questions. The Chorus speaks as one person, although sometimes-single Chorus members will deliver lines.

Summary of the Play

The play opens in front of the Theban palace. Oedipus, the king of Thebes, asks a passing priest why he and his followers are lamenting and praying. The priest replies that they pray to the gods to end the plague that has beset Thebes. This plague has wasted the city's crops and pastures and rendered all Theban women sterile. The priest begs for Oedipus's help. Oedipus tells the priest that he feels the city's pain, and that he has sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to the Pythian oracle of Apollo to ask for help.

Creon appears, bearing good news. The oracle told him that the plague on Thebes was caused by the murder of Laius, the previous king of Thebes. The murderer was born in Thebes and still lives there, and if they can find him and banish him, the plague will be lifted. Oedipus asks Creon about the details of Laius's death. Creon tells him that Laius was killed as he left Thebes on a pilgrimage. There was only one surviving eyewitness, a man who said that the king was killed by a band of robbers. Oedipus asks why the matter was not fully investigated, and Creon tells him that the city's problems with the Sphinx demanded attention at that point. Oedipus swears that he will solve this mystery, not merely for Laius's sake, but for his own, since Laius's killer might attack him next. He summons all the people of Thebes.

The Chorus of Theban elders appears, expressing a sense of foreboding about what Oedipus might find. The Chorus describes again the plague that has stricken the city and calls on the gods to help the city. Oedipus enters from the palace and asks the people of Thebes to help him find Laius's killer; if any of them has any information that would help him, he orders them to come forward. There is silence. He declares that if the killer is among them and will give himself up, his punishment will merely be banishment. Still the people are silent. Oedipus tells them that any information that could help will be rewarded. Still silence and Oedipus declares that if any men are found to be hiding the truth from him, they too will be banished. Nor does Oedipus exempt himself from the punishment he has just declared; if he unknowingly harbors the killer, he will leave Thebes himself. The Chorus finally speaks up, suggesting that Oedipus consult the man closest to Apollo: Teiresias the blind prophet. Oedipus agrees with their suggestion and reveals that he has already sent for Teiresias upon Creon's advice.

Teiresias enters, led by an attendant. Oedipus informs him of the oracle's statements and begs him to help find the killer. Teiresias states that he never should have come, and asks to leave. Oedipus asks him again, telling him that he is an enemy to Thebes if he refuses to help. Again Teiresias refuses to answer Oedipus, and Oedipus gets angry. Teiresias counsels him to look within himself before he blames others. Finally Oedipus angrily declares that Teiresias's silence implicates him in Laius's murder. At this Teiresias , fed up, tells Oedipus what he knows: "You are the cursed polluter of this land" (35). His words enrage Oedipus, who dares him to repeat them. Teiresias obliges, saying "the killer you are seeking is yourself" (36). Again Oedipus goads him, and he elaborates: "you are living / In sinful union with the one you love, / Living in ignorance of your own undoing" (36). Full of fury, Oedipus now calls Teiresias a "shameless and brainless, sightless, senseless sot" and again accuses him of conspiring with Creon (36). Again Teiresias vows that the enemy Oedipus seeks is himself. Continuing to mock Teiresias, Oedipus now charges him with fraud, using the Sphinx's riddle as proof. If Teiresias is a seer, then he should have been able to solve the riddle. But instead Oedipus was the only one who was smart enough to do so. So much for Teiresias's gifts! Now the Chorus tries to step in and calm Oedipus down. Teiresias tries one last time to show him the truth, saying "have you eyes / And do not see your own damnation? Eyes, / And cannot see

what company you keep? / Whose son you are? I tell you, you have sinned -- / And do not know it - against your own on earth / And in the grave" (37). He predicts the future: Oedipus will be more hated and more scorned than any other man. Oedipus orders him to leave. As he goes, Teiresias repeats his warnings and his predictions, saying "he that came seeing, blind shall he go; / Rich now, then a beggar; stick-in-hand, groping his way / To a land of exile; brother, as it shall be shown, / And father at once, to the children he cherishes; son, / And husband, to the woman who bore him; father-killer, / And father-supplanter" (38). Oedipus goes back into his house.

The Chorus reflects on what Teiresias said, but does not understand it, saying that it chooses to think that Oedipus is innocent until proven guilty because he has done such good for Thebes. Creon enters, asking the Chorus if what he heard is true: if Oedipus has actually accused him of treason. The Chorus tries to calm him, telling him that Oedipus was overwrought when he said these things. Oedipus comes out and repeats his accusations against Creon, and the two argue heatedly. Creon tries to reason with him, asking him why he would choose to give up a stable and happy life with a third of Oedipus's estate for an uneasy rule. He tells Oedipus to test him by asking the Pythian oracle if his message was true, and if Creon comes out guilty, Oedipus can sentence him to death. Oedipus continues to argue with him, and eventually Creon charges him with ruling unjustly.

Jocasta enters, and the men tell her the gist of their argument. She begs Oedipus to believe Creon and to be merciful. The Chorus joins in her pleas, and reluctantly Oedipus lets Creon go. Jocasta questions Oedipus, and he reveals Teiresias's prophecies. Jocasta comforts him by telling him that no man can see the future, and she has proof. She relates the story of the prophecy an oracle once made about Laius: that he would be killed by his own son. But that never happened; instead Laius was killed by robbers at a place where three roads met. And as for the son, Jocasta and Laius let their infant be exposed on a hillside with a pin through his ankles to prevent the prophecy from coming true. If Laius's prophecy didn't come true, she says, then why should Oedipus's? But her mention of the meeting of three roads troubles Oedipus, bringing back memories of a murder he committed long ago at a similar place. He asks Jocasta what Laius looked like, and her description matches his memory. Oedipus now begins to suspect that Teiresias's words

were true. He asks Jocasta how many men were with Laius, and she tells him there were five - the same number of men that were with the man Oedipus killed. He asks about the eyewitness, and Jocasta tells him that the man ran away to the country when he found that Oedipus had become king of Thebes.

Oedipus summons this eyewitness, and while they wait for him to arrive, he tells Jocasta more about his youth. His parents were from Corinth, Polybus and Meropé. One day, a drunken man told Oedipus that he was not his father's son. Disturbed, Oedipus asked his parents if this was true, and they denied it. But it still troubled Oedipus, so he secretly went to the oracle at Pythian and asked it. But the oracle told him something even more frightening: that one day he would kill his father and marry his mother. The prediction so shocked Oedipus that he left and never returned to Corinth, afraid that if he did so he would fulfill the oracle's prophesies. In his wanderings, Oedipus came to a crossroads where three roads met, and here he was accosted by a haughty man. Oedipus ended up killing this man. If this man turns out to have been Laius, then Oedipus will be banished from Thebes as punishment, but also from Corinth, to which he can never return for fear of killing his father and marrying his mother. He can only hope that the eyewitness confirms that robbers killed Laius. Jocasta comforts Oedipus again by saying that even if he did kill Laius, the oracle's prophesy for Laius still would not be true, since the son that should have killed him is dead. They return to the house.

Alone, the Chorus muses on what it has learned and speaks about the evils of pride. Pride, it claims, can only bring doom and punishment. Jocasta enters from the house, on her way to visit the holy temples and pray. A messenger from Corinth enters, with the news that Oedipus's father Polybus is dead. The Corinthians would like to make Oedipus king of both Corinth and Thebes. Overjoyed, Jocasta sends for Oedipus. When he hears the news, he rejoices in the falseness of prophecy - he can't kill his father now. But he is still afraid of the other half of the prophecy - that he will marry Meropé. But the messenger assures him that he needn't worry about marrying her, because Polybus and Meropé are not really his parents. He relates the story of how Oedipus came to be their son. A long time ago, the messenger says, he was living as a shepherd on the mountain, and a stranger gave him an infant that he had rescued from death; the infant's ankles were riveted (at this Oedipus confirms that he has had a limp since birth). The messenger gave

this baby to Polybus and Meropé. Oedipus inquires about the identity of the man who gave the baby to the messenger, and the messenger tells him that the stranger was one of Laius's servants. Is he alive? Oedipus wants to know. The messenger replies that Jocasta should know who he is. Oedipus turns to Jocasta, who is white with fear. She begs him not to pursue this matter any more, to forget it. But Oedipus is determined to solve this mystery, and sends for the man who gave the baby to the messenger. Jocasta warns him for his own good to drop this line of questioning and runs into the house.

Nobody but Jocasta has figured out the puzzle yet, and the Chorus reflects that something bad seems about to happen. Oedipus states that he wants to learn the entire truth, no matter how foul it is; he suspects that Jocasta is upset about his seemingly low birth. He declares that he is Fortune's child, and that he will know who he really is. Again the Chorus expresses foreboding. A shepherd approaches; this is the man who gave the baby to the messenger. Oedipus questions him, but he is reluctant to answer. The messenger tells him that Oedipus is that same baby, and the shepherd reacts with fear and begs the messenger to hold his tongue. Oedipus threatens him with physical violence, and finally the man confesses that the baby was a child of Laius's house. Oedipus asks if it was a slave's child or Laius's child, and the shepherd tells him that it was Laius's child, that Jocasta gave him to expose on the hillside because of some prophesy. What prophesy? Oedipus asks. That he would kill his father, the shepherd replies. The shepherd says the he didn't have the heart to kill the infant, so he took it to another country instead. Aghast, Oedipus finally sees the truth and runs screaming into the house. The messenger and the shepherd leave.

The Chorus reflects on the fleeting nature of happiness and the sin of pride. Nobody can escape fate. An attendant enters from the palace with horrifying news. When Jocasta went into the palace, she went straight to her bedroom and slammed the door, tearing her hair with her fingers. There she cried out to Laius and wailed the tragedy of her son/husband. Oedipus entered the palace, crying for a sword and searching for his wife. No servant answered, but he seemed to know instinctively where she was. He slammed his body against her bedroom doors and broke them open. Stumbling in, he found that Jocasta had hanged herself. Moaning horribly, he untied her and laid her on the ground. Then he took the gold brooches with which she had fastened her gown, and,

thrusting his arms out at full length, he gouged his eyes out. Again and again he pierced he eyes until bloody tears streamed down his cheeks. Now he is shouting for someone to open the castle doors and show all of Thebes the man who killed Laius. He swears he will flee this country to try to rid his house of his curse.

The doors to the palace open, and Oedipus stumbles out. The Chorus cries out in agony at the sight and hides its own eyes. Oedipus cries out to the city in a voice that hardly seems his own. The Chorus wails that Oedipus is unspeakable and too terrible for eyes to see, that he has been punished in both body and soul. Oedipus calls for someone to be his guide. The Chorus asks him why he injured himself, and he replies that he doesn't want eyes when all he can see is ugliness. He pleads with the Chorus to lead him out of Thebes and curses the shepherd who saved his life when he was a baby. The Chorus tells him that surely death would have been better than blindness, and Oedipus replies by asking how he could have met his parents in the underworld with seeing eyes. How could he have looked upon children whom he had begotten in sin? In fact, he says, he wishes he could dam up his ears as well. He begs the Chorus to hide him away from human sight.

Creon enters, asking the Chorus to remember their love for the gods, and Oedipus begs him to cast him away from Thebes. Creon replies that he must wait for instructions from Apollo. Oedipus argues that Apollo's instructions were clear: the unclean man must leave Thebes. Oedipus also asks Creon to bury Jocasta properly and to take care of his daughters. But before he goes, he begs, can he see these daughters once more? His daughters Antigone and Ismene are led in, and Oedipus caresses them with hands that are both father's and brother's. He weeps for the fact that they will never be able to find husbands with this tragic family history. With Creon's promise that he will send him away from Thebes upon Apollo's word, Oedipus and his family enter the palace again, Alone on the stage, the Chorus asks the audience to remember the story of Oedipus, the greatest of men; he alone could solve difficult riddles and was envied my his fellows for his prosperity. And now the greatest of misfortunes has befallen him. The Chorus warns the audience that mortal men must always look to their endings, and not suppose that they are happy until they die happy.

Full Analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* on the basis of *Poetics*

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle outlined the ingredients necessary for a good tragedy, and he based his formula on what he considered to be the perfect tragedy, Sophocles's *Oedipus the King.* According to Aristotle, a tragedy must be an imitation of life in the form of a serious story that is complete in itself; in other words, the story must be realistic and narrow in focus. A good tragedy will evoke pity and fear in its viewers, causing the viewers to experience a feeling of catharsis. Catharsis, in Greek, means "purgation" or "purification"; running through the gamut of these strong emotions will leave viewers feeling elated, in the same way we often claim that "a good cry" will make one feel better.

Aristotle also outlined the characteristics of a good tragic hero. He must be "better than we are," a man who is superior to the average man in some way. In Oedipus's case, he is superior not only because of social standing, but also because he is smart - he is the only person who could solve the Sphinx's riddle. At the same time, a tragic hero must evoke both pity and fear, and Aristotle claims that the best way to do this is if he is imperfect. A character with a mixture of good and evil is more compelling that a character who is merely good. And Oedipus is definitely not perfect; although a clever man, he is blind to the truth and refuses to believe Teiresias's warnings. Although he is a good father, he unwittingly fathered children in incest. A tragic hero suffers because of his hamartia, a Greek word that is often translated as "tragic flaw" but really means "error in judgment." Often this flaw or error has to do with fate - a character tempts fate, thinks he can change fate or doesn't realize what fate has in store for him. In Oedipus the King, fate is an idea that surfaces again and again. Whether or not Oedipus has a "tragic flaw" is a matter that will be discussed later. The focus on fate reveals another aspect of a tragedy as outlined by Aristotle: dramatic irony. Good tragedies are filled with irony. The audience knows the outcome of the story already, but the hero does not, making his actions seem ignorant or inappropriate in the face of what is to come. Whenever a character attempts to change fate, this is ironic to an audience who knows that the tragic outcome of the story cannot be avoided.

Dramatic irony plays an important part in *Oedipus the King*. Its story revolves around two different attempts to change the course of fate: Jocasta and Laius's killing of

Oedipus at birth and Oedipus's flight from Corinth later on. In both cases, an oracle's prophecy comes true regardless of the characters' actions. Jocasta kills her son only to find him restored to life and married to her. Oedipus leaves Corinth only to find that in so doing he has found his real parents and carried out the oracle's words. Both Oedipus and Jocasta prematurely exult over the failure of oracles, only to find that the oracles were right after all. Each time a character tries to avert the future predicted by the oracles, the audience knows their attempt is futile; creating the sense of irony that permeates the play.

Even the manner in which Oedipus and Jocasta express their disbelief in oracles is ironic. In an attempt to comfort Oedipus, Jocasta tells him that oracles are powerless; yet at the beginning of the very next scene we see her praying to the same gods whose powers she has just mocked (45-50). Oedipus rejoices over Polybus's death as a sign that oracles are fallible, yet he will not return to Corinth for fear that the oracle's statements concerning Meropé could still come true (52). Regardless of what they say, both Jocasta and Oedipus continue to suspect that the oracles could be right, that gods can predict and affect the future - and of course the audience knows they can.

If Oedipus discounts the power of oracles, he values the power of truth. Instead of relying on the gods, Oedipus counts on his own ability to root out the truth; after all, he is a riddle-solver. The contrast between trust in the gods' oracles and trust in intelligence plays out in this story like the contrast between religion and science in nineteenth-century novels. But the irony is, of course, that the oracles and Oedipus's scientific method both lead to the same outcome. Oedipus's search for truth reveals just that, and the truth revealed fulfills the oracles' prophesies. Ironically, it is Oedipus's rejection of the oracles that uncovers their power; he relentlessly pursues truth instead of trusting in the gods, and his detective work finally reveals the fruition of the oracles' words. As Jocasta says, if he could just have left well enough alone, he would never have discovered the horrible workings of fate (55).

In his search for the truth, Oedipus shows himself to be a thinker, a man good at unraveling mysteries. This is the same characteristic that brought him to Thebes; he was the only man capable of solving the Sphinx's riddle. His intelligence is what makes him great, yet it is also what makes him tragic; his problem-solver's mind leads him on as he works through the mystery of his birth. In the Oedipus myth, marriage to Jocasta was the

prize for ridding Thebes of the Sphinx. Thus Oedipus's intelligence, a trait that brings Oedipus closer to the gods, is what causes him to commit the most heinous of all possible sins. In killing the Sphinx, Oedipus is the city's savior, but in killing Laius (and marrying Jocasta), he is its scourge, the cause of the blight that has struck the city at the play's opening.

The Sphinx's riddle echoes throughout the play, even though Sophocles never mentions the actual question she asked. Audiences would have known the Sphinx's words: "what is it that goes on four feet in the morning, two feet at midday, and three feet in the evening?" Oedipus's answer, of course, was "a man." And in the course of the play, Oedipus himself proves to be that same man, an embodiment of the Sphinx's riddle. There is much talk of Oedipus's birth and his exposure as an infant - here is the baby of which the Sphinx speaks, crawling on four feet (even though two of Oedipus's are pinioned). Oedipus throughout most of the play is the adult man, standing on his own two feet instead of relying on others, even gods. And at the end of the play, Oedipus will leave Thebes an old blind man, using a cane. In fact, Oedipus's name means "swollen foot" because of the pins through his ankles as a baby; thus even as a baby and a young man he has a limp and uses a cane: a prefiguring of the "three-legged" old man he will become. Oedipus is more that merely the solver of the Sphinx's riddle, he himself is the answer.

Perhaps the best example of dramatic irony in this play, however, is the frequent use of references to eyes, sight, light, and perception throughout. When Oedipus refuses to believe him, Teiresias cries, "have you eyes, / And do not see your own damnation? Eyes, / And cannot see what company you keep?" (37). Mentioned twice in the same breath, the word "eyes" stands out in this sentence. Teiresias knows that Oedipus will blind himself; later in this same speech he says as much: "those now clear-seeing eyes / Shall then be darkened" (37). The irony is that sight here means two different things. Oedipus is blessed with the gift of perception; he was the only man who could "see" the answer to the Sphinx's riddle. Yet he cannot see what is right before his eyes. He is blind to the truth, for all he seeks it. Teiresias's presence in the play, then, is doubly important. As a blind old man, he foreshadows Oedipus's own future, and the more Oedipus mocks his blindness, the more ironic he sounds to the audience. Teiresias is a man who

understands the truth without the use of his sight; Oedipus is the opposite, a sighted man who is blind to the truth right before him. Soon Oedipus will switch roles with Teiresias, becoming a man who sees the truth and loses his sense of sight.

Teiresias is not the only character who uses eyes and sight as a metaphor. When Creon appears after learning of Oedipus's accusation of him, he says,"said with unflinching eye was it?" (40). This is a strange thing to say; one would expect a bold statement to be made with "unhalting voice," not "unflinching eye." Yet it continues the theme of eyes and sight; Oedipus makes accusations while boldly staring Creon down, yet later when he knows the truth, he will not be able to look at Creon again. He will be ashamed to look any who love him in the eyes, one reason, according to Oedipus, that he blinds himself: "how could I have met my father beyond the grave / With seeing eyes; or my unhappy mother?" (63). Oedipus himself makes extensive use of eyes and sight as a metaphor. When he approaches Creon a few lines later, he says "did you suppose I wanted eyes to see / The plot preparing, wits to counter it?" (40). Ironically, Oedipus does in fact lack the capacity to see what is happening, and the more he uses his wit to untangle the mystery, the more blind he becomes.

The Chorus's reflections after Oedipus discovers the truth carry the sight theme to another level. "Show me the man," the Chorus says, "whose happiness was anything more than illusion / Followed by disillusion . . . . Time sees all; and now he has found you, when you least expected it; / Has found you and judged that marriage mockery, bridegroom-son! / This is your elegy: / I wish I had never seen you, offspring of Laius, / Yesterday my morning of light, now my night of endless darkness!" (59). Here are a number of binaries associated with the idea of sight and blindness: illusion and disillusion, light and dark, morning and night. Time casts its searchlight at random, and when it does, it uncovers horrible things. The happiness of the "morning of light" is an illusion; the reality is the "night of endless darkness." And the Chorus wishes it had never seen Oedipus. Not only has he polluted his own sight and his own body by marrying his mother and killing his father, he is a pollutant of others' sights by his very existence. When Oedipus enters, blinded, the Chorus shouts "I dare not see, I am hiding / My eyes, I cannot bear / What most I long to see . . . . Unspeakable to mortal ear, / Too terrible for eyes to see" (62). Oedipus has become the very blight he wishes to remove from Thebes,

a monster more terrible than the Sphinx, a sight more horrible than the wasted farmlands and childless Theban women.

What are we to make of the ironies and the structure of this play? There are two ways to read the story of Oedipus. One is to say that he is a puppet of fate; incapable of doing anything to change the destiny that fate has in store for him. Another is to say that the events of the play are his fault, that he possesses the "flaw" that sets these events into action.

As a puppet of fate, Oedipus cannot affect the future that the oracle has predicted for him. This does in fact seem to be an important message of the story; no matter what Jocasta says about the unreliability of oracles, their predictions all come true. In an attempt to change fate, both Jocasta and Oedipus changed the structure of their families, moving as far away as possible from the relatives that threaten to ruin them. Yet in so doing, they set the course of the story into action. You cannot escape fate, no matter what you do. Your dead son will come back to kill his father. The safe harbor you have found from your fated parents turns out to be the very arena in which you will kill and marry them. As the Chorus says, "Time sees all;" fate and the course of time are more powerful than anything a human being can do. Oedipus's tragic end is not his fault; he is merely a pawn in the celestial workings of fate.

At the same time, Oedipus seems like more than merely a passive player lost in the sweep of time. He seems to make important mistakes or errors in judgment (hamartia) that set the events of the story into action. His pride, blindness, and foolishness all play a part in the tragedy that befalls him. Oedipus's pride sets it all off; when a drunken man tells him that he is a bastard, his pride is so wounded that he will not let the subject rest, eventually going to the oracle of Apollo to ask it the truth. The oracle's words are the reason why he leaves Corinth, and in leaving Corinth and traveling to Thebes, he fulfills the oracle's prophecy. A less proud man may not have needed to visit the oracle, giving him no reason to leave Corinth in the first place. In the immediate events of the play, Oedipus's pride continues to be a flaw that leads to the story's tragic ending. He is too proud to consider the words of the prophet Teiresias, choosing, instead to rely on his own powers. Teiresias warns him not to pry into these matters, but pride in his intelligence leads Oedipus to continue his search. He values truth attained through scientific enquiry

over words and warnings from the gods; this is the result of his overweening pride. Another word for pride that causes one to disregard the gods is the Greek word *hubris*.

Oedipus is also foolish and blind. Foolishly he leaves his home in Corinth without further investigating the oracle's words; after all, he goes to the oracle to ask if he is his father's son, then leaves without an answer to this question. Finding out who his true father is, seems important for someone who has just been told he will kill his father. Nor is Oedipus particularly intelligent about the way he conducts himself. Even though he did not know that Laius and Jocasta were his parents, he still does kill a man old enough to be his father and marry a woman old enough to be his mother. One would think that a man with as disturbing a prophesy over his head as Oedipus would be very careful about who he married or killed. Blindly he pursues the truth when others warn him not to; although he has already fulfilled the prophesy, he does not know it, and if he left well enough alone, he could continue to live in blissful ignorance. But instead he stubbornly and foolishly rummages through his past until he discovers the awful truth. In this way, Jocasta's death and his blindness are his own fault.

Regardless of the way you read the play, *Oedipus the King* is a powerful work of drama. Collapsing the events of the play into the moments before and after Oedipus's realization, Sophocles catches and heightens the drama. Using dramatic irony to involve the audience, the characters come alive in all their flawed glory. The play achieves that catharsis of which Aristotle speaks by showing the audience a man not unlike them, a man who is great but not perfect, who is a good father, husband, and son, and yet who unwillingly destroys parents, wife and children. Oedipus is human, regardless of his pride, his intelligence, or his stubbornness, and we recognize this in his agonizing reaction to his sin. Watching this, the audience is certainly moved to both pity and fear: pity for this broken man, and fear that his tragedy could be our own.

Now, let us assess our understanding of the play by answering some questions.

Questions

Short Notes

1. Aristotle's definition of tragedy.
2. Explain the term ‘Tragic Flaw'
3. Catharsis
4. The Three Unities

5. Importance of Plot in a tragedy

Essays

1. Write an essay on Aristotle's definition of tragedy based on his treatise *The Poetics.*

2. Why does Aristotle consider *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles as a perfect tragedy?

3.What is the tragic flaw in Oedipus and how does it result in his tragic fate?

4. Write an essay on the six elements of Drama as prescribed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*

5. What is the importance of Chorus in a tragedy? Explain your ideas referring to the Chorus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.

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The Origins of English Drama.

We have seen at the beginning that English Drama is heavily dependant on Greek dramatic traditions. Along with that these things also lie in the background of all drama:

a) Folk celebrations,

b) Ritual miming of such elemental themes as death and resurrection,

c) Seasonal festivals with appropriate symbolic actions.

As far as we can trace the history of English drama, it begins with the elaboration of the ecclesiastical liturgy in mutually answering dialogues. Of the other sources--pre-Christian seasonal festivals, St. George & Robin Hood plays, Maypole dances, and similar folk activities--we know little else except that they existed.

No substantial continuity can be established between the origins of European drama in the Middle Ages and the drama of Greece and Rome, which had already run its course by the time the Christian era began. Strolling minstrels and other varieties of itinerant entertainments might have preserved some bit of Roman theater but they eventually became absorbed into the repertory of the profession long before it contributed anything to the acting of miracle or mystery and morality plays. With its two great festivals of Christmas and Easter, and its celebration of the significant points of Christ's life and career from birth to resurrection, the Christian Church itself was inherently dramatic.

The ceremonies designed to commemorate these special Christian events naturally lent themselves to dramatization, from

a) simple chanting between priest and choir or two sections of the choir to

b) more elaborate acting out of a scene between two characters or sets of characters.

These ceremonial dramatizations were known as **tropes**--simple but dramatic elaborations of parts of the liturgy--and they represent the beginnings of medieval drama. The simple trope eventually grew into liturgical drama, which was drama arising from or developed in connection with church rites or services. **Liturgical drama** was fully developed in the 12th century. At first these dramatic renderings were presented in Latin but as they increased in popularity, they were presented in the vernacular.

Liturgical dramas represented dimensions of the life of Christ. A play bringing the shepherd to the crib of the infant was introduced at Christmas**. An Epiphany** play introduced the three kings and even a mechanical star. The first **Passion Play** developed in the 13th century.

The passion play began in the Middle Ages and was originally a work depicting Christ's passion or crucifixion. It was performed from about the 13th century onward. In its later manifestations, it came to include both Passion and Resurrection. The form gradually died in popularity after the 16th and 17th centuries, but it remains locally popular.

The history of the religious drama in England, if in it be included a survey of the adjuncts to the church liturgy in the form of alternating song and visible action, goes back to a period before the Norman conquest. To the twelfth century belongs the famous Norman-French—perhaps Anglo-Norman—play of Adam, which may very possibly have grown out of a processional representation of the prophets, but which seems (for the later portion of it is lost) to have aimed at dramatic representation of the entire Scriptural story, after the manner of the French and English collective mysteries of later date. We may safely conclude that the Norman conquest, or the period which followed immediately upon it, introduced into England as a virtually ready-made growth the religious performance or exhibition which could and did edify the devout, without actually forming part of the religious exercises incumbent upon them. At the same time,

the English mystery play did not fail to reveal its liturgical origin, for they were markedly religious plays recalling the priest's elucidatory comment. These plays were acted either within the church walls, or on a scaffold immediately outside them, the performers being no doubt, in the first instance and ordinarily, ecclesiastics or the pupils of ecclesiastics.

Gradually, the professional secular entertainers, who, as we saw, were unlikely to forego such a chance of attracting the public, sought to compete with the clerics and to interfere with their monopoly; in the middle of the thirteenth century, it was certainly no unheard-of thing for secular players to solicit the favour of audiences—surely by means of plays in the vernacular; in 1258, they were forbidden to give such performances in the monasteries of the land.

Thus, then, it seems clear that what dramatic performances were to be seen in England during the later part of the eleventh, the twelfth and the greater part of the thirteenth centuries, were mainly in the hands of the clergy. Attempts were not wanting, even in this early period, to free from exclusive clerical control a species of entertainment the popularity of which was continually on the increase; and there doubtless were from the first, as there certainly were later, voices in the church itself which reprobated loudly and authoritatively this method of attracting the public to the church door or its vicinity.
As is shown below, the Corpus Christi processions of trading-companies in England very soon developed into the performance by them of religious plays; but what in the present connection it is desired to establish is the fact that the friendship between church and stage due to the popularity of Corpus Christi long endured, though exposed to many interruptions and rebuffs from high quarters. The friars, above all, as it would seem, the Minorities, were active in fostering an agency of religious excitement which the older and more aristocratic orders were probably less disposed to look upon with favour.

Miracle Plays

Eventually, dramatic representations moved out of the church altogether--and this simple move brought massive changes to the face of drama. First, they were produced in the churchyard itself and then later they moved into an even larger space, traditionally the marketplace of the town or even a convenient meadow.

Once outside the church, the vernacular ousted Latin and the focus of the story moved away from just the liturgy to encompass the whole range of sacred history from

the Creation to the Last Judgment. Drama began to present the entire range of Christian religious history in England.

The presentation of the plays outdoors became dependent upon on the weather, so they could no longer be acted on all of the different church festivals. The establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi (May or June) in 1264 provided a suitable day for play presentation. Corpus Christi was a good choice because it was warm but also because it involved a professional observance with the Host carried about and displayed at various stations. Dramas were generally given on wagons or pageant carts, which were in effect moving stages. Each pageant cart presented a different scene of the cycle and the wagons followed each other, repeating their scenes at successive stations. Carts were often very elaborate, equipped with a changing room, a stage proper, and two areas which represented hell (usually a painted dragon's head) and heaven (a balcony). Stage machinery and sound effects became integral parts of the plotting.

When the plays moved outdoors, the people who controlled them also changed. Trade or craft guilds-- important in many ways to social and economic life in the Middle Ages--took over sponsoring the plays, making them more secular. In fact, each pageant became the province of a particular guild. For example, at York the Fall of Man was presented by the coopers and The Last Supper by the bakers.

Liturgical drama, confined to the church and designed to embellish the ecclesiastical ritual, thus gave way to plays in English, performed in the open and separated from the liturgy though still religious in subject matter. Such early plays are known as **miracle or mystery plays**.

Miracle Plays and Mystery Plays

Miracle plays had as their subject a story from the Scriptures or the life and martyrdom of a saint.

Mystery plays usually base their stories on the New Testament. For our purposes, the inclusive term miracle play can be used to identify works dealing with either Biblical history or saints' lives. It is at this stage that elements from minstrel performances & older folk festivals began to be incorporated into what was originally Christian drama. These new elements provided vitality for a drama whose primary function was fast beginning to be plain old entertainment.

The transition from simple liturgical drama to miracle and mystery play cannot be accurately dated or documented. It is believed that miracle plays developed rapidly in the 13th century; there are records of cycles of miracle plays in many regions of England during the 14th-15th centuries, even into the 16th.Some of the plays seem to have been written by the same person, who has come to be known as the "Wakefield Master." They date from the 15th century, and the two most famous are *Noah* and *The Second Shepherds' Play.*

The development of the dialogue and the action in these early dramas is relatively naive, simple, as is the story presented. As time passed, however, touches of realistic comedy were introduced

Key Elements & Themes of Morality Plays

Morality plays held several elements in common:

a) The hero represents Mankind or Everyman.

b) Among the other characters are personifications of virtues, vices and Death, as well as angels and demons who battle for the possession of the soul of man.

c) The psychomachia, the battle for the soul, was a common medieval theme and bound up with the whole idea of medieval allegory, and it found its way into medieval drama--and even into some Renaissance drama, as Dr. Faustus indicates.

d) A character known as the Vice often played the role of the tempter in a fashion both sinister and comic.

Certain themes found a home in the morality plays:

a) The theme of the Seven Deadly Sins, which was a commonplace of medieval art and literature;

b) The theme of Mercy and Peace pleading before God for man's soul against Truth and Righteousness; and

c) The Dance of Death, which focuses on Death as God's messenger come to summon all, high and low. The Dance of Death is a dramatic rendition of the *ubi sunt theme*, which figures so largely in literature of the Middle Ages. The *ubi sunt* theme rhetorically asks "Where are all those who were before us?" *(ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt*?).

The Interlude

Toward the end of the 15th century, there developed a type of morality play which dealt in the same allegorical way with general moral problems, although with more pronounced realistic and comic elements. This kind of play is known as the interlude. The term might originally have denoted a short play or playlet actually performed between the courses of a banquet. It can be applied to a variety of short entertainments. including secular farces and witty dialogues with a religious or political point.

Shifts in Theme: from Salvation to Education, Religion to Politics

The shift of thematic interest from salvation to education--which marks a distinction between medieval morality play and Tudor interlude--was accompanied by a parallel shift from religion to politics. And when religion is treated, it is treated in the spirit of controversy produced by the Reformation and the great debate about the true form of Christianity.

Among those who wrote Protestant propaganda plays was John Bale (1495-1563), who wrote *King Johan* (part history play). The play is a mix of history, allegory, medieval vice and virtue representation, and some typical characters are Civil Order, Usurped Power & Sedition.

The Importance of *King Johan*

This play can in a sense be called the first English history play, but it is history treated in a very special way. It is not an example of the English chronicle play, which we know from Shakespeare.

The Classical Influence on English Comedy

At the same time, classical influences were being felt, providing for a developing national drama new themes and new structures, first in comedy and then later in tragedy.

English Tragedy

At the same time these changes were occurring in English comedy, the Humanist interest in Latin and Greek classics helped produce a new kind of English tragedy.

There were no tragedies among the miracle or morality plays; in fact, there was nothing that could be called tragedy in English drama before the classical influence began.The favorite classical writer of tragedies among English Humanists was not Sophocles or Euripides but **Seneca**, the Roman stoic. Although they were never meant to be acted,

Seneca's nine tragedies provided Renaissance playwrights with volatile materials: they adapted Greek myths to produce violent and somber treatments of murder, cruelty, and lust. Seneca's works were translated into English by Jasper Heywood and others in the mid-16th century, and they greatly influenced the direction of drama on the English stage.

Senecan Tragedy

Seneca's tragedies are bloody and bombastic, combining powerful rhetoric, Stoic moralizing and elements of sheer horror. In them, there are numerous emotional crises, and characters are not subtly drawn but are ruled by their passions, being mixtures of sophistication and crudeness.

Seneca's plays were discovered in Italy in the mid-16th century and translated into English, where they greatly influenced the developing English tragedy.

Gorboduc--also known as *Ferrex and Porrex*--written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton and produced around 1561-'62 is considered the first successful English tragedy in the Senecan style:

a) It is divided into 5 acts,

b) It follows the classical manner in avoiding violence on the stage (instead, it presents it offstage), and

c) It is written in blank verse, the first English play to be so.

Professional Players and Theatres

As drama became more abundant and more varied, professionalism developed both among authors and actors. Some actors were independent companies who roamed around; still others were attached as servants to wealthy noblemen and were under their protection.

Players & Theatres

Some quick facts about the development of professional players and theatres:

a) In 1583 Queen Elizabeth's Master of the Revels formed a company of players for the Queen.

b) In 1576, James Burbage, leader of the Earl of Leicester's men, build the first permanent theater, called "The Theatre," in a field near Shoreditch, out of the city

and thus out of the control of the Lord Mayor, who was the official "censor" of plays.

c) Other permanent, public theatres soon followed: the Curtain, 1577; the Rose, 1588; the Swan, 1595.
d) Shakespeare's theatre, the Globe, was built in 1598.
e) In addition to the public theatres, there were private ones, chief among them the Blackfriars (1576). They were different from public theatres because they:
a) were roofed,
b) had more elaborate interior arrangements, and
c) presented plays originally acted by child players.

The University Wits

The growing popularity and diversity of the drama, its secularization, and the growth of a class of writers who were not members of holy orders led in the 16th century to a new literary phenomenon, the secular professional playwright..

The first to exploit this situation was a group of writers known as the University Wits, young men who had graduated at Oxford or Cambridge with no patrons to sponsor their literary efforts and no desire to enter the Church.

They turned to playwriting to make a living. In doing so they made Elizabethan drama more literary and more dramatic--and they also had an important influence on both private and public theaters because they worked for each. They set the course for later Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, and they paved the way for Shakespeare.

The University Wits were

a) **John Lyly** (1554-1606) is best known far court comedies, generally for private theatres, but also wrote mythological and pastoral plays. Endymion & Euphues.
b) **George Peele** (1558-'96) began writing courtly mythological pastoral plays like Lyly's, but also wrote histories and biblical plays. The Arraignment of Paris.
c) **Robert Greene** (1558-'92), who founded romantic comedy, wrote plays which combined realistic native backgrounds with an atmosphere of romance, as well as comedies: *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay.*

d) **Thomas Lodge** (1557-1625) tended toward euphuistic prose romances. His *Rosalynde* provided Shakespeare with the basis for As You Like It.. His most important work is his picaresque tale *The Unfortunate Traveller*, an early novel.

e) Thomas Kyd (1555~94), who founded romantic tragedy, wrote plays mingling the themes of love, conspiracy, murder and revenge. Adapted elements of Senecan drama to melodrama. His *The Spanish Tragedy* (1580s) is the first of the series of revenge plays that captured the Elizabethan and Jacobean imaginations. In these plays, violence and grossness comes to the stage. For example, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, one of the characters bites off his tongue and spits it on the stage.

The Importance of *The Spanish Tragedy*

The Spanish Tragedy brings to the Elizabethan stage numerous elements picked up by later writers:

a) the revenge theme,
b) the play within a play,
c) madness real & faked, and
d) the Machiavellian master of malicious plotting.

This play was the first truly popular tragedy of the English stage and one of the most influential. Along with these playwrights, there were a number of writers who contributed to the development of English Drama. With this brief introduction about the history of Drama in England, we shall proceed to the sixteenth century drama, The Age of Elizabeth, in which the English Drama attained the zenith of its glory.

Questions

Short Notes

1. Interlude

2.Morality Plays

3.Mystery Plays

4. The University Wits

5. The main aspects of a Senecan tragedy

Essays

1. Trace the history of English Drama

2. Compare and contrast the features of Miracle and Mystery Plays

3.How far do you think that the Greek and Roman dramatic traditions have influenced English Drama?

4. Has the Church played any role in the development of English Drama? Discuss

5. Write an essay about the themes and concerns of Morality Plays

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UNIT -II

In this unit we have three plays to be discussed. Of these ***King Lear*** is for detailed study.

1. Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*

2. William Shakespeare's *King Lear - Detailed study*

3. William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

UNIT II .1

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: *Doctor Faustus* (1588)

Biography of the author

Christopher Marlowe, the son of a shoemaker, was born in Canterbury in February of 1564. He was educated at King's School, in Canterbury, and at Corpus Christi College, in Cambridge. He earned a B.A. in 1584 and an M.A. in 1587. After receiving his M.A. degree, Marlowe left Cambridge for London. By this time he had completed the first part of *Tamburlaine the Great*. In London, he got acquainted with other poets and playwrights. He shared a room with Thomas Kyd. The second part of *Tamburlaine* was soon completed, and both plays were staged successfully. In 1588 he worked on the poem, "The Massacre of Paris," and the first part of *Doctor Faustus*. He enlisted himself as a member of Raleigh's "School of Night." Among "the university wits" he was known as a rash and quarrelsome person. In 1589 he was involved in a sword fight, for which he was jailed in the Newgate prison for a short time. In the same year, *The Jew of Malta* was performed. In 1592, *Edward II* was performed. This was followed by *Doctor Faustus*. In the following year, he wrote the incomplete poem, "Hero and Leander," which was completed by George Chapman. On May 18, 1592, as a result of an accusation by Thomas Kyd and Robert Baines, a warrant was issued for Marlowe's arrest. On May 30, 1593, he was killed by Ingram Frizer in a Deptford tavern after a quarrel over the bill.

General Information about the text

Now that we have learned a bit about the life and works of the author, let us now look at the play *Doctor Faustus* chosen for study in general. It would be useful to have an idea about the genre to which the play belongs to and a little bit of insight into the source on which Marlowe has based his work *Dr. Faustus*.

Genre

The whole play is somber **tragedy,** in which the protagonist chooses to be on the side of the devil and to embrace the evil generated by the devil. Faustus' practice of black magic is "more than heavenly power permits" and brings about his "hellish fall." Throughout the play there are comic interludes that provide a temporary mood of levity.

Source of the Play

Marlowe's *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* is based on the legend of Faust had its origin in Europe in the legends and chapbooks of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It developed around a real person, one Doctor Johann Faust, who gained a reputation as a notorious magician and worker in black magic. He was said to have sold his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge. This legend was brought to England by the translation of a German chapbook (a small book of poems, ballads and tales) on the subject. This translation appeared shortly before Marlowe's play and appears to be its immediate source. Marlowe's is the first of many dramatic treatments of the story. His version of the Faust tale was very popular in Europe. In 1587 the stories about Faust had been collected as a biographic story entitled Historia Von D. Johann Faustus. The book was published in the same year in English translation in England. Goethe's *Faust* is a poetic drama in two parts (1808 & 1832). Goethe's version of the legend is different from Marlowe's version. In Goethe's poem Faust is saved. God's angels are sent to snatch his soul from the legion of devils, and he is borne off to heaven.

Brief Summary of the Play

Before we proceed to the detailed analysis of the play, let us now briefly examine the summary of the play:

Faustus, a learned scholar of Wittenberg, has an insatiable thirst for knowledge. When the play opens, Faustus is seen in his study examining the various branches of knowledge he has studied in the past: logic, philosophy, medicine, law and theology. Dissatisfied with all these, he turns to the dangerous practice of necromancy, or black magic. With the help of his servant, Wagner, he summons Valdes and Cornelius and requests them to initiate him into the rudiments of magic. Faustus begins his experiments by conjuring up spirits. Mephistophilis appears before him, but Faustus is so shocked by his horrible appearance that he asks him to go away and come back again in the guise of a friar. Faustus then

learns that it was not his invocation that produced Mephistophilis, but the curses he heaped on the holy trinity. Faustus asks Mephistophilis to return to the mighty Lucifer and meet him again in his study at midnight to enact the pact.

Faustus is then subject to a spiritual conflict. The two angels arrive. The Good Angel admonishes him to leave the black arts and concentrate on "heaven and heavenly things." The Bad Angel advises him to "think of honor and of wealth." Faustus dreams of the power and wealth that will soon be his. Mephistophilis arrives to inform Faustus that Lucifer needs a declaration from him to be signed in blood. Faustus signs a contract by which he agrees to give his soul to Mephistophilis in return for twenty-four years of faithful service. He is, however, upset by several bad omens. To divert Faustus, the three devils (Mephistophilis, Beelzebub and Lucifer) arrange for some entertainment: a parade of the Seven Deadly Sins.

Then Mephistophilis takes Faustus to Rome. In the Pope's private chamber, both of them play practical jokes on the Pope. At the court of Emperor Charles V, Faustus punishes a skeptical courtier by putting horns on his head. He then produces the apparitions of Alexander the Great and his paramour and that of Darius, King of Persia. At the court of the Duke of Vanholt, Faustus, with the help of Mephistophilis, produces grapes in January.

The twenty-four years allotted to Faustus are now almost over, and Faustus expects the devil to come at midnight to claim him. To entertain his scholar friends, Faustus summons the spirit of Helen of Troy from the underworld. But nothing can save Faustus now. The old man witnesses Faustus' exclusion from "the grace of heaven." The Bad Angel warns Faustus to be ready to "taste hell's pains perpetually." The Good Angel tells him that "the jaws of hell are open" to receive him. Faustus has only an hour to live. He dreads the moment of damnation. Faustus begs for relief from the eternal torment in store for him and wishes that he were a beast without a soul. The clock strikes twelve. In the midst of thunder and lightning, devils come and carry Faustus away to hell.

Detailed Analysis and Study of the Play

Doctor Faustus is set in fifteenth-century Germany, mostly in Faustus' house at Wittenberg. In Act III, the setting shifts to Rome. Having traveled through France, Germany and Italy, Faustus and Mephistophilis arrive at the Pope's palace at the Vatican,

Rome. Thereafter he goes to the Court of the Emperor Charles V at Innsbruck, Germany. In Act IV, Scene 5, the setting shifts to the Court of the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt, Germany, where Faustus exhibits his magical powers. The final act of the play is set in Faustus' house at Wittenberg

List of Characters

Major Characters

Faustus - The protagonist, a scholar in Wittenberg, who sells his soul to Lucifer in exchange for unlimited power for twenty-four years.

Mephistophilis - Lucifer's assistant, who comes from hell to serve Faustus for twenty-four years.

Lucifer - The prince of hell; his business is to persuade men to turn away from God.

The Good And Bad Angels - The two figures who visit Faustus periodically in order to influence his behavior.

The Old Man - A spiritually strong man, who tries to prevent Faustus from being forever enslaved by worldly desires.

Minor Characters

Wagner - Faustus' servant.

Valdes and Cornelius - Fellow-magicians and friends of Faustus; they encourage Faustus to attain powers through the practice of magic.

The Clown - He becomes Wagner's servant.

Horse-Courser - A fellow who is cheated into buying Faustus' horse, which disappears when it is taken to a pond.

Robin - He steals some of Faustus' books on magic and attempts to conjure spirits.

Ralph - A friend of Robin's; he witnesses Robin's act of conjuring.

The Pope - The head of the Roman Catholic Church at the Vatican; Faustus and Mephistophilis play practical jokes on him.

Charles V - The Emperor of Germany, at whose court Faustus demonstrates his magical powers.

Knight - A haughty fellow who offends Faustus and incurs his wrath.

Duke and Duchess of Vanholt - A couple whom Faustus visits and for whom he performs magic.

The Seven Deadly Sins, Alexander, Alexander's paramour, Darius (the King of Persia) and Helen of Troy - All of these are spirits which appear before Faustus in the course of the play.

Chorus - Personages who comment on Faustus' intellectual achievements and his fatal choice of "cursed necromancy."

Scene Summaries With Notes

Let us now analyze the play in detail by exploring the scenes in each Acts.

CHORUS

The Chorus informs the audience that the dramatist in this play will not deal with the subject of war or present scenes of love or "the pomp of proud audacious deeds." The play will deal instead with "Faustus' fortunes, good or bad." Faustus, the audience is told, was born in Germany. Though he was of low social origin, he was brought up in the city of Wittenberg. He blossomed into a great scholar who brought grace to the fruitful garden of scholarship. He acquired proficiency in theology. Because of his arrogance as a scholar, he tried to go beyond human limitations and so met with his downfall. He took to the study of "cursed necromancy," or black magic. Magic and the power it promises became more precious to Faustus than the salvation of his soul.

Notes

During the Elizabethan age, the term "Chorus" was applied to a single person who spoke the prologue and epilogue to a play, and sometimes introduced each act as well. The Chorus also provides occasional passages of explanation or commentary at the beginning, middle, or end of the play. In the older versions of the Faust legend, the emphasis is on the doctor's exploits and his exhibition of magical powers. These are relegated by Marlowe to the Chorus and to a few comparatively brief scenes. Marlowe is mainly interested in presenting Faustus, his dreams and aspirations, his initial resolve, his subsequent doubts and his tragic and untimely death. His play opens with a Chorus speech. It gives the necessary exposition to the play's action. The prologue presents Faustus and the circumstances of his birth, his upbringing at Wittenberg, his blossoming into a brilliant scholar, his proficiency in theology, his pride in his own abilities, and his attempt to become godlike, which leads to his tragic downfall.

The Chorus underlines Faustus' tragic flaws. Faustus' "cunning" (misused knowledge) and "self-conceit" (pride in his own abilities) hold the keys to his tragedy. Words like "falling," "glutted," "surfeits" and "sweet" point to the sensual nature of Faustus' pursuit of knowledge. Faustus prefers sweet magic to the knowledge of God, which brings supreme happiness.

The Chorus to compares the tragedy that awaits Faustus that of Icarus, the son of Daedalus, who contrived "waxen wings" for his son. Marlowe refers to the tragic death of Icarus, who ignored his father's warning not to fly too near the sun, his "waxen wings" melted from his body, and he plummeted to death in the sea. In the sixteenth century, Icarus was a familiar emblem for self-will and destructive ambition (Harry Levin, Christopher Marlowe: The Overreacher, pp. 191- 92).

The Chorus lays stress on Faustus' falling a victim to "a devilish exercise," namely, the practice of "cursed necromancy." Right at the beginning of the play, the Chorus pinpoints the stupidity of Faustus' pursuit of the black arts. Tempted by the devil, Faustus practices black magic, which is forbidden by God. Magic is practiced by those who are the followers of the devil. Wise people should merely wonder at what magic can do, but they should neither investigate into nor actually practice magic. The wise man is he who prefers "chief bliss" (hope of salvation) to bitter magic, or the "devilish exercise" of "cursed necromancy," which leads to the hero's tragic downfall. In this way the Chorus prepares the audience and readers for the tragic damnation of Faustus.

Act I, Scene 1

Summary

Faustus is seen in his study, where he is examining various branches of learning in order to choose a particular category of knowledge in which to specialize. He is drawn first to logic but discovers that he has already attained great proficiency in it. The same applies to medicine: his reputation as a physician is known all over the world. However, he cannot revive the dead. He finds the study of law equally dull and limited, suitable only to a man who is keen on making money. So Faustus rejects the study of law, too. Finally, he examines divinity, the most noble of all branches of knowledge. Opening the Bible, he reads about sin and death and is disillusioned. He reasons that sin is inevitable and,

therefore, that eternal death must be inevitable. So he bids adieu to divinity, because it teaches a doctrine of fatalism.

The study of magic appears to be the best choice. Magic opens to Faustus "a world of profit and delight/ of power, of honor, of omnipotence."

Having opted for the pursuit of magic, Faustus sends word through Wagner, his servant, to Valdes and Cornelius, two German experts in magic. A discussion with them will be of great help to Faustus. It is at this stage that the Good Angel and the Bad Angel visit Faustus. The Good Angel admonishes Faustus to discard the book on magic and to read the Bible instead. The Bad Angel advises him to proceed with the study of magic and to become the Lord of the universe. Faustus speculates on the things he will do with the power his forbidden knowledge will bring him.

When Valdes and Cornelius arrive, they discuss Faustus' decision to study magic. They advise Faustus to be persistent in his study, and all the wealth and power he desires will be his. Faustus decides to begin his practice that very night.

Notes

Faustus is anxious to commit himself to a pursuit, which is worthy of his wholehearted devotion and attention. Faustus' review of his previous pursuits is a dramatic way of telescoping his past so that the audience can form an impression of his character. There is something immature about Faustus' enthusiasm, impatience and dissatisfaction. He stands on the frontier of human knowledge. He feels the limitations of human knowledge and goes in quest of something more meaningful in the form of applied knowledge. In other words, the knowledge that Faustus wants to pursue is knowledge that can be put to use. It is knowledge that will bestow upon him the power to effect mighty transformations in the universe around him. It is small wonder, therefore, that Faustus rejects law and medicine as subjects meant "for petty wits" (for simple minds). He rejects divinity as the "basest of the three."

Faustus rejects philosophy and divinity for magic. He chooses magic because it promises to open before him new vistas and new horizons. He finds "a demi-god" in the "sound magician." Faustus wants to be deified in one manner or another.

Faustus ignores the Good Angel's admonition to "lay that damned book aside." The Bad Angel offers him an enticement, which is difficult for Faustus to resist or to reject. He

holds out the hope that he will be "on earth as Jove is in the sky." Faustus begins to envisage a hierarchy of spirits, answering his queries and serving his whims. They will "fly to India for gold," "ransack the ocean for orient pearl" and "search all corners of the new found world/ for pleasant fruits and princely delicacies." He will get all this and much more through the deeds of his "servile spirits."

Faustus finds in Valdes and Cornelius two experienced practitioners of black magic. It is through their persuasion that he embraces magic. They assure Faustus that as a result of their knowledge and expertise, all nations will canonize them and that "the spirits of every element" will serve them. These words of assurance cheer Faustus' soul. Faustus is initiated into the rudiments of the black arts. He is now enjoined to "conjure in some lusty grove, / And have these joys in full possession." Faustus, by the end of the scene, has made a decisive choice to practice necromancy. The seeds of his tragic damnation are sown.

Act I, Scene 2

Summary

Two Scholars inquire with Wagner the whereabouts of Faustus, whom they have not seen for some time at the university. Wagner tries to evade the two Scholars, who have asked him a simple question. Eventually, the Scholars learn that Faustus is at dinner in the company of Valdes and Cornelius, who are notorious for their active interest in the study of the black arts. The Scholars decide to inform the Rector of the University about this.

Notes

This short scene is the comic counterpart to the preceding scene, in which Faustus has made up his mind to practice magic. Wagner has picked up the jargon of his master and other Scholars. On being asked where his master is, he says that his master, being "corpus naturale" (a natural body), might have moved away from his place by now. It is amusing to hear him say that the two Scholars have come so close to "the place of execution." Besides its literal meaning, it also refers to a dining-hall where people do "execution" upon meat. Wagner then claims to have won a victory in his verbal debate with the Scholars.

The two Scholars make a reference to Faustus' excellent reputation as a teacher and logician. The First Scholar speaks of him as a man who used to "make our schools

ring with sic probo." The First Scholar is right in his conjecture that nothing can now reclaim Faustus.

Act I, Scene 3

Summary

The setting is a grove, and Faustus enters to conjure spirits. He tries his magic arts, and then Mephistophilis appears. Startled by his appearance, Faustus tells him to return dressed like a Franciscan friar. He is excited by his power over Mephistophilis, who tells him, however, that he (Mephistophilis) is only Lucifer's servant. Mephistophilis says that he came in the hope of gaining Faustus' soul. It is Faustus' impious speech (his disavowal of the Trinity), rather than his conjuring, that has brought this devil to him.

Faustus boasts of his courage and does not bother about his soul and its salvation. Hell, the devil explains to him, is separation from the presence of God and the everlasting joys of heaven. Faustus sells his soul to Lucifer in return for twenty-four years of sensual pleasure, the services of Mephistophilis, the granting of all his (Faustus') demands, the answering of all his questions, the death of his enemies, the helping of his friends and the unceasing obedience of Mephistophilis. Faustus sees in Mephistophilis the attainment of all worldly power. He eagerly awaits his return.

Notes

Ironically, Faustus is unaware of being watched throughout this scene by Lucifer himself, who, together with four devils, stands on the balcony of the stage. Throughout this first meeting with Mephistophilis, Faustus displays enormous arrogance. Imagining himself to be in control, he issues orders. He treats his contact as a mere messenger between himself and Lucifer. Significantly, Mephistophilis' arrival is not due to Faustus' conjuring, but to the profane state of his soul.

Secondly, Mephistophilis says that Lucifer fell from heaven because of his excessive pride and insolence. Faustus should have realized that he, too, is guilty of excessive pride and insolence because of his desire to rise above his human status and become a "deity." Thirdly, Mephistophilis describes hell as a mental condition, and not as a particular place or region where the damned are doomed to live. However, Faustus ignores this remark and refuses to believe in the existence of hell.

In Faustus' impatience to conclude a bargain with the Devil, he thinks little of the good of his soul. Most of his pleasure in dealing with evil is connected to the acquisition of power. Instead of profiting by Mephistophilis' warnings, Faustus scolds Mephistophilis for feeling sorrowful at the loss of heavenly joys. He sets himself up as an example of "manly fortitude." He is ready to offer his soul to Lucifer in return for twenty-four years of voluptuousness and power. He does not seem to notice the most significant similarity between himself and Lucifer: they both have fallen from grace. Faustus is, at this time, so carried away by his visions of his future that he fervently declares: "Had I as many soul as there be stars, / I'd give them all for Mephistophilis."

Interlude

Summary

Faustus' servant, Wagner, tries to fool a Clown, who is unemployed, half-naked and half-starved. Wagner would like to employ the Clown as his errand-boy, but the Clown has no desire to serve Wagner. Wagner tries to browbeat the Clown by summoning two devils, Banio and Belcher, with magic words, which he has picked up from Faustus' magic books. The Clown has no alternative but to agree to accept employment under Wagner.

Notes

This is another farcical interlude, which provides amusement to the audience even in the course of a tragic play. However, this scene also serves a dramatic purpose. Wagner's desire to command the Clown is a parody of Faustus' desire to command Mephistophilis. According to Wagner, the Clown "would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood-raw." This remark recalls Faustus' agreement to give his soul to the devil, not "for a shoulder of mutton," but for twenty-four years of power and delight. The Clown, however, is not prepared to give his soul to the devil on the terms suggested by Wagner. If he must sell his soul to the devil for food, he would like to have the mutton well roasted and seasoned with a good sauce. The Clown evidently puts a high price on his soul.

There is more fun in this scene. When Wagner threatens to call two devils, the Clown does not take him seriously. He replies that he will "belch" Belcher, since he is "not afraid of a devil." The very next moment, however, the Clown starts running up and

down, crying because the two devils have actually made their appearance. The Clown's bluff has been exposed, and he feels humbled.

However, the moment the devils are sent away by Wagner, the Clown recovers his composure and asks Wagner "(W) ill you teach me this conjuring occupation?" Wagner promises to teach him the art by which he would be able to turn himself into a dog, a cat or a mouse. Finally, Wagner orders him to walk close behind him, "quasi vestigiis nostris insistere" (to tread in his footsteps). The Clown says: "God forgive me, he speaks Dutch Fustian" (high- sounding nonsense). But he agrees to obey Wagner.

Act II, Scene 1

Summary

Faustus, in his study, ponders his damnation. The Good and Bad Angels emphasize that the choice is still open. Faustus, however, is still anxious for the promised glories and the power he associates with Mephistophilis. When he returns, he demands from Faustus a formal compact with Lucifer, couched in legal terms and sealed with Faustus' blood. The blood congeals and requires fire to dissolve it. Instead of "Faustus gives to thee his soul," the inscription on his arm reads: "Homo Fuge!" (Fly, O man!). Faustus is depressed, but Mephistophilis produces a pageant of devils to entertain him. The deed is then exchanged in which Faustus will give his soul to Lucifer for twenty-four years and have Mephistophilis to do his bidding.

Faustus begins to question Mephistophilis about hell. He again learns that, apart from heaven, hell is everywhere; it exists, and is no fable, as Faustus would like to believe. Damnation too, is real, and the existence of Mephistophilis proves that. Faustus desires a wife, and for this he is reproved by Mephistophilis, who will not hear of marriage. Mephistophilis gives him a book containing lines, the use of which will grant him astonishing powers.

Notes

At the crucial moment when Faustus must sign his contract, his resolution characteristically wavers. This lack of resolution is expressed in the particularly jerky rhythm of the verse. Faustus' wavering is the occasion for the reappearance of the Good and Bad Angels. On their previous appearance, Faustus was totally oblivious to them. In this scene, however, he seems to be partially aware of them: "O something soundeth in

my ears." He tells himself: "Abjure this magic, turn to God again." He cannot locate precisely where or what this something is. If he can partially hear the Good Angel, he can also partially hear the Bad Angel. The Bad Angel's last word, "wealth," keeps ringing in his ears. He reaches a temporary resolution as he thinks of God, but this is overcome once more by doubt. Finally, his allegiance is confirmed.

When he writes the deed, Faustus receives two bad omens (his congealing blood and the inscription), which startle him, but his selfishness drives him on to ignore them against his better judgment. When any realization dawns, Mephistophilis is quick to send a diversion to take his mind off harsh reality.

Another significant feature in this scene is Mephistophilis' account of hell. Hell, says Mephistophilis, means a state of everlasting torture. "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed/ In one self place..." When the entire world dissolves, all places that are not heaven shall become hell. Thus Mephistophilis does not speak of hell as a localized place or region. It is one of the notable ironies of the play that Mephistophilis refers to his own example to prove that hell is a state of ever-lasting torture. Faustus proudly dismisses this information as an old wives' tale and goes to the extent of declaring, "hell is a fable."

Faustus' demands on Mephistophilis show a marked lack of imagination. It meets with a disappointing response. He cannot have a wife because marriage is a sacrament. Mephistophilis, therefore, offers Faustus an alternative for a wife, namely, a mistress.

Act II, Scene 2

Summary

Standing near the window of his study, Faustus looks up at the sky. He feels miserable at being deprived of the joys of heaven. Mephistophilis tells him that man is more glorious than the heaven that was made for him. The Good and Bad Angels fight for and against Faustus' repentance. He despairs, as his heart is unable to repent. Only thoughts of pleasure have prevented him from taking his own life. He questions Mephistophilis about astrology. Their discussion is abruptly interrupted when Faustus asks who made the world and Mephistophilis refuses to answer. Faustus dismisses him harshly.

The Good and Bad Angels resume their struggle for Faustus' soul. Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephistophilis enter. Lucifer asserts that Faustus has no hope of

salvation. Faustus vows not to think of heaven or of God. Lucifer causes the Seven Deadly Sins (Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth and Lust) to appear in order to entertain Faustus. Each in turn speaks to Faustus. Lucifer promises Faustus all kinds of delights in hell and promises to send for him at midnight.

Notes

Again Faustus' resolution fails as he discovers how little he has gained in exchange for the treasure he has thrown away. Typically, he blames Mephistophilis for this. Faustus may still repent, but he cannot. He thinks of the pleasures open to him, but finds little satisfaction in the replies to his questions about the universe. At the mention of God, Mephistophilis leaves, with Faustus' sincere but ineffectual curse. This time the Good Angel has the last word. Lucifer's appearance in person shows that Faustus is in definite danger of escaping back to God: the bargain signed in blood is not as binding as they would have him believe.

Faustus spends his time with Mephistophilis chiefly in discussions about "divine astrology," rather than in pleasure. But Mephistophilis cannot provide Faustus with the answers to his questions about the universe, just as he could not provide him with a wife. When Faustus violates his bond by calling upon his savior (Christ), Lucifer, with his attendant devils, appears to rebuke him. Then Lucifer diverts him with the pageant of the seven deadly sins. This pageant is a device derived from the medieval morality plays, but here the personified sins have lost their cautionary nature.

Act II, Scene 3

Summary

Robin, the Clown, tells Dick, another servant, that he has acquired one of Doctor Faustus' conjuring books and wants to try some spells. Dick says he should go and attend to the horses, but Robin is more interested in magic. He promises by this means to provide Dick with all the wine he wants.

Notes

This short scene brings comic relief after the serious subject matter of the previous two scenes. It also puts the theme into perspective. Robin seeks to try out the knowledge stolen from Faustus' book. His idiocy is laughable, while Faustus' ineffectual arrogance and immaturity are tragic. The parody of conjuring is suggested in this scene, but never

fully articulated. It degenerates into a demonstration of the Clown's inability to manipulate magic. Possibly, there is a suggestion that the more basic appetites (drinking, for instance) of Robin and Dick act as a defense against the perils into which Faustus is being led.

Act III

Chorus I

Summary

By means of magic, Faustus is able to transport himself to the remote corners of the universe and to unravel some of its secrets. On one of his journeys, he visits Rome during the festival of Saint Peter.

Notes

The speech of the Chorus summarizes the positive side of Faustus' bargain: his travels, which cannot be depicted on the stage. So far, the setting of the play has been confined to places in and around Faustus' study. Now, the Chorus takes the audience beyond this limited setting and moves the action onto a larger scale. It takes Faustus, in the imagination of the audience, to "Olympus' top," permitting him to view "the clouds, the planets, and the stars" and to "prove cosmography,/ that measures coasts and kingdoms of the earth" (to verify the accuracy of maps).

The Chorus' speech offers the magic of language, which transports the audience to a larger setting. In this new setting, Faustus will perform his magical feats. He will also play new roles, such as that of a skillful instigator of action, a successful trickster and an anti- Catholic champion.

Act III, Scene 1

Summary

Having traveled through France, Germany and Italy, Faustus and Mephistophilis are now at the Pope's palace in Rome. Mephistophilis tells Faustus that it is the feast day of Saint Peter and that great and solemn ceremonies are about to take place in honor of the Pope. Faustus requests that he be allowed to take an active and disruptive part in these celebrations. The Cardinals and Bishops enter, followed by a procession of monks. The Pope is seen with Raymond, the King of Hungary, and Bruno, the defeated rival Pope, who is in chains. Bruno is made to stoop, and the Pope ceremoniously steps on his back

to ascend the throne. The Pope sends two Cardinals away to the Holy Council to discover what decision has been reached concerning Bruno's fate. Faustus suggests that he and his companion should follow the Cardinals, overcome them and then reappear to the Pope as the Cardinals. He should also free Bruno and take him back with them to Germany. They go off.

The Pope declares that Bruno and the Emperor, who elected him, are excommunicated. He shows Bruno the silver belt with the seven keys, which symbolize Saint Peter's keys. They give him power over the whole world. Faustus and Mephistophilis re-enter, disguised as Cardinals. Faustus delivers the "verdict" of the Holy Council: Bruno shall be burnt as a heretic. The Pope delivers Bruno into the hands of the disguised Faustus and his companion. He then declares that there will be a banquet in celebration of his victory over the usurper.

Notes

The second part of the play begins. Faustus is shown enjoying his powers at the Vatican. Mephistophilis appears as a useful traveling companion, who enjoys a good time, especially when practical jokes are involved. There is fresh merriment in this scene. Faustus, free from self-doubt, innocently enjoys himself.

Faustus is shown playing devilish and blasphemous tricks on the Pope. To an English Protestant audience of the late sixteenth century, the Pope was a definite threat. Faustus is shown in a way that would keep the audience entertained.

Act III, Scene 2

Summary

The banquet is brought in, and Faustus and Mephistophilis follow, as themselves. Mephistophilis is invisible, and he uses his powers to make Faustus invisible also. The Pope and his Lords and Cardinals enter. When one of the Cardinals mentions the decision concerning Bruno, the Pope reminds him that he has already received the verdict and acted upon it: Bruno has been given into their hands. Bewildered, they deny this. The Pope threatens them with death unless they can find Bruno, and they go off looking for him.

Then follows a farcical interlude in which Faustus, invisible, insults the Pope and makes a fool of him by playing tricks on him. Finally, Faustus boxes the Pope on the ear,

whereupon the Pope runs away, crying in a most undignified manner. The friars recite a curse over the evil spirit who has disrupted this solemn occasion, but they are driven away by Faustus and his companion.

Notes

Faustus' ridicule of the religious ceremony attached to his own excommunication is a bit disconcerting. In spite of the boisterous comedy of the situation, there is also deep irony.

The second Vatican scene shows Marlowe varying his use of the stage. Here, there is more action, and it descends to the level of farce. The farce depends upon the audience's suspending disbelief: they can see the "invisible" Faustus playing pranks, while the majority of the characters on the stage cannot. Faustus' tricks are intended to reflect the pettiness of the papal court. The rituals of heaven and hell degenerate into squabbles over indignities suffered. Moreover, the clergy here is represented as powerless. The Pope or his friars cannot curse Faustus to hell. He is already aware of the fact that he inhabits hell.

Faustus and Mephistophilis watch the consequences of the actions of the previous scene, in which they whisked Bruno away. The audience sees how the different parties involved respond to the events. The Cardinals cannot possibly explain their position to the Pope. The invisible Faustus disturbs the Vatican's entire routine through his tricks. The Pope is represented as a gluttonous, pompous and proud person, and he is duly humiliated. Faustus and Mephistophilis interrupt the rituals. They "beat the Friars, fling fireworks among them" and run away.

Act III, Scene 3

Summary

At an inn, Robin and Dick have stolen a cup. Robin says he will "conjure" the innkeeper so that they can escape. The innkeeper comes after them, asking about the cup. Robin denies the accusation of theft indignantly. The innkeeper searches first Robin and then Dick, but fails to find the cup. When Robin calls upon devils, to his surprise, Mephistophilis appears. The innkeeper runs away.

Notes

Mephistophilis' quick appearance seems to contradict his earlier assertion to Faustus that conjuring does not always lead to a devil's arrival. In revenge for having been summoned

"but in jest," Mephistophilis says that Dick will be changed into an ape and Robin into a dog.

Thematically, the action parodies what has gone before in the previous scene. Faustus' supernatural thieving from the banquet of the Pope is echoed by Robin's less significant theft of a cup from an inn. Interestingly, the vintner appears to be a much more dignified figure than the Pope. The attempts of Robin and Dick to hide the cup from the unlucky vintner lead them to resort to conjuring. Their conjuring, once again, is a parody of Faustus' own association with devils and the black arts.

Chorus II

Summary

Faustus' continued travels are described by the Chorus. His increasing experience and knowledge make him famous throughout the world and evoke the admiration of his friends. Eventually, he comes to the palace of the Emperor Charles V.

Notes

The Chorus gives the audience information regarding Faustus' further travels. The audience is told that his fame has now "spread forth in every land." The audience is also given an idea of the kind of reception he gets in his native land. Faustus returns home after seeing many sights and royal courts. His friends and "close companions" welcome his return. They question him about astrology and are lost in wonder at his knowledge and skill. Finally, the audience is prepared by the Chorus for the kind of reception Faustus will receive at the court of the German Emperor.

Act IV, Scene 1

Summary

At the court of the Emperor Charles V, preparations are being made for the arrival of Bruno and Faustus. Frederick and Martino discuss their friend, Benvolio, who is suffering after a night's drunkenness. They call up to Benvolio's window. However, Benvolio, who is skeptical regarding Faustus' magic powers, refuses to come down to witness Faustus' demonstration. He will watch it from his balcony. At the request of the Emperor, Faustus is going to present the ghosts of Emperor Alexander and his paramour.

Notes

The emphasis, in this scene, is not on the great respect, which Faustus commands. The scene, on the contrary, highlights the growing cynicism which some show towards Faustus. Frederick and Martino seem to be impressed by Faustus' reputation. Benvolio, however, does not believe in Faustus' magical powers. The audience waits with expectation and excitement to see "the royal shapes and warlike semblance/ Of Alexander and his beauteous paramour" on the stage.

Act IV, Scene 2

Summary

Faustus summons the spirits of Alexander and his paramour to appear before the Emperor. The spectacle includes Alexander's fight with Darius, King of Persia. The apparitions salute the Emperor, who moves to embrace them, but Faustus prevents this. The Emperor is entranced by the vision. Benvolio has fallen asleep and grown horns on his head, and the Emperor is delighted with the joke. Benvolio is woken and is very angry on discovering what has happened. The Emperor begs Faustus to remove the horns. Faustus agrees, but Benvolio is still angry, vowing that he will have revenge on Faustus for this humiliation.

Notes

By now, Faustus has become a professional entertainer who stages shows for emperors and dukes. At the court of Carolus the Fifth he stages a show for the audience with Mephistophilis' help. The weaknesses as well as the strengths of Faustus as a professional "entertainer" are emphasized. It is true that Faustus can summon the spirits of Alexander and his paramour. Yet there is something unsettling and unsatisfactory about this show, as Faustus himself says: "These are but shadows, not substantial."

The creation of a character like Benvolio has a precise artistic purpose. The Emperor corresponds to that section of the audience that is carried away by the life-like representations of Alexander and his paramour. Benvolio, however, corresponds to the section of the audience that is not so receptive. It is no wonder; therefore, that Benvolio heckles Faustus by declaring that he "looks as like a conjurer as the Pope to the Costermonger (a street-vendor)".

For Benvolio's scoffing and impertinence, Faustus punishes him by setting horns upon his head, the traditional symbol of the cuckold. Benvolio's fate is likened to that of Actaeon. The youth Actaeon gazed on Diana, the goddess of chastity, when she was bathing. He was discovered by her and turned into a stag to be hunted down by her dogs.

Act IV, Scene 3

Summary

Benvolio, assisted by his friends, Martino and Frederick, and some soldiers, seeks revenge by planning to ambush and kill the "peasant" Faustus in a grove. Faustus, however, proves to be indestructible. He has his head cut off, only for it to be revealed to be a false one.

Notes

The theatrical trick of this scene is bound to be effective. This is particularly so when it is seen for the first time on the stage. The same theatrical trick is used in a morality play, Mankind.

It is true that Faustus escapes death on this occasion. However, Benvolio and his accomplices gloat over the task of dismembering his apparently lifeless body. This incident foreshadows the final image of Faustus' limbs "(a)ll torn asunder by the hand of death" (Act V, Scene 3)

Act IV, Scene 4

Summary

The heads and faces of Benvolio, Frederick and Martino are bloody and smeared with mud and dirt. Horns appear on all their heads. They decide to repair to Benvolio's Castle, located near the woods, and live there in obscurity. They will rather "die with grief, than live with shame."

Notes

The skeptical Benvolio and his friends are punished once again by Faustus. The practical joke that Faustus plays on his enemies provides entertainment for the audience. For the time being, the audience is freed from its preoccupation with Faustus' soul and its moral destiny. In this way, Faustus provides an amusing comic spectacle for the benefit of the audience and the readers.

Act IV, Scene 5

Summary

Faustus sells a horse to a dealer for forty dollars. He warns the man not to ride it into water. The dealer goes away satisfied. Exhausted and unhappy, Faustus considers the end of his life, which is approaching. He settles down to sleep.

The horse dealer returns in anger. When he rode his horse into the river, the horse turned into a bundle of hay. When he tugs at Faustus' leg to wake him, the whole leg comes off in his hands. Horrified, the dealer runs away, but not before paying Faustus another forty dollars. Wagner enters with the news that the Duke of Vanholt wishes Faustus to attend him at his court. Faustus prepares for the journey.

Notes

The confrontation between Faustus and the horse dealer shows Faustus using his magic to gain the sum of forty dollars. Earlier, in Act II, Scene 2, goaded by the Bad Angel, Faustus had dreams of enormous power and wealth. In this scene, however, he degenerates into a cheap magician who aims at petty gain. The scene highlights the change that has come over Faustus. For the first time, he hears the voice of his own conscience. He begins to realize that his "fatal time draws to a final end." Despair begins to fill his thoughts with doubt. Faustus tries to calm these unquiet passions by falling into a deep sleep.

Act IV, Scene 6

Summary

Dick and Robin arrive at the inn. Robin says that he owes eighteen pence but hopes the hostess has forgotten all about it. The hostess welcomes them. After instructing the servants to serve beer, she goes away. The men at the inn exchange gossip about Faustus. He has deceived each of them. The carter has lost a complete load of hay, which Faustus himself devoured. The horse dealer has been sold a bundle of hay, instead of a horse. (He brags, nevertheless, of pulling Faustus' leg off.) Robin has been changed into an ape by one of Faustus' devils. They decide to seek out Faustus, but first they will go into another room for some more drinks.

Notes

The horse dealer is allowed a scene in which he gloats over his supposed victory over Faustus. He is seen talking to other victims of Faustus' magic. The horse dealer's story makes more sense when it is balanced against the carter's story of Faustus eating the hay. The horse dealer recounts how he got the better of Faustus by dismembering him. Robin, too, recounts his transformation into an ape.

Marlowe here makes an indirect reference to the legend of Circe, another magician, who transformed men into dumb animals. This legend is traditionally associated with the dangers of strong drink. These four characters drink more and more until they work themselves into a state of false bravado. In the next scene they appear in the presence of Faustus and the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt. They are once again reduced to an animal-like state in which they are deprived of language.

Act IV, Scene 7

Summary

Back at court, the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt congratulate Faustus on his skill in conjuring. Faustus says that he will provide for the Duchess, who is pregnant, any delicacy that she fancies. At Faustus' command, Mephistophilis goes away and returns with some grapes. The Duke and the Duchess are impressed that Faustus can find grapes in January.

Dick and his friends enter noisily. They are under the impression that they have simply gone into another room of the inn. In fact, by means of Faustus' magic, they have been transported to the court of Vanholt. Faustus says that they should be admitted, as they will provide some amusement. The carter asks Faustus about his leg, reminding him also of the trick he played on the horse dealer. Faustus tells them that he has both his legs intact. The clowns remind him of the other tricks he has played on them. Faustus uses his magic powers to silence them.

Notes

Faustus stages another show in this scene, this time to entertain the Duke and the Duchess of Vanholt. He erects an "enchanted castle in the air" for the Duke and fetches a bunch of grapes for the Duchess. But once again, there is a sense of emptiness regarding these theatrical achievements. Faustus' patrons derive pleasure from his "demonic" skills and

his magical performances. However, they do not share in the guilt of his pact with Lucifer. They do not have to suffer any of the accompanying mental and physical tortures. Faustus himself will have to face the consequences of his pact with the devil. This is a question that also concerns the spectators and the readers: are those who witness Faustus' spectacular shows within the play guilty of forming their own pact with Lucifer? This question may be further extended to include the audience.

The performance at Vanholt is interrupted by the arrival of the horse dealer, the carter, Robin, and Dick. Faustus strikes the drunken hecklers dumb one after the other. The Duke and the Duchess conclude that Faustus' magic is quite powerful: "His artful sport drives all sad thoughts away." The Duke and Duchess become on-stage spectators who enjoy Faustus' "theater of Hell" without being made to suffer for it. The same is true of the theater spectators who enjoy a similar position and a similar privilege. They too are entertained by "the artful sport" which Faustus, with the help of Mephistophilis, provides for them.

Act V, Scene 1

Summary

In the midst of thunder and lightning, Mephistophilis brings in devils with food that they take to Faustus' study. Wagner tells the audience that he thinks Faustus is preparing for death and that he has made his will in which he gives all his wealth to Wagner. However, he does not understand why Faustus appears to be spending all his time feasting and drinking with the scholars. At this point Faustus and Mephistophilis come in with some scholars. One of the scholars suggests that Faustus should make Helen of Troy appear before them. Faustus agrees. Mephistophilis brings in Helen. The scholars praise her beauty and then exit. An old man enters. Hoping to save Faustus' soul, he tries to persuade him to give up magic. Faustus is now desperate at the thought of the suffering he must undergo and feels he has no hope of salvation. He decides to end everything quickly by killing himself. Mephistophilis gives him a dagger, and Faustus is about to use it. The old man stops him, saying that he sees an angel above Faustus' head. He advises Faustus to pray for God's mercy. Faustus is moved to consider this.

Alone with Faustus, Mephistophilis threatens him with indescribable torment if he backs out of the pact he signed twenty- four years earlier. Faustus humbly and fearfully begs

Lucifer to pardon him. He even offers to confirm the pact by rewriting it in his blood. Mephistophilis says that he will make the old man's body suffer, but that nothing can touch his soul.

Faustus is resigned to his fate. He is determined to enjoy what little time remains. He therefore asks Mephistophilis to bring Helen to him again, this time as his mistress. Helen comes in and Faustus kisses her. He says that she is his heaven and that her love is worth the price of his soul. The old man enters and watches as Faustus goes off with Helen. The devils come in to drag the old man away, but he calls upon God as they go off.

Notes

This scene marks the beginning of the play's outcome: Faustus' tragic end. As confirmed by Wagner's speech, Faustus shows no outward sign of repentance. Wagner reports that his master continues to "banquet and carouse and swill" with the scholars. The old man, who enters immediately after the banquet, makes a strong case against Faustus' choice of evil. He corrects Faustus' earlier interpretation of the Bible by indicating that all sinners have opportunities for repentance. This forces Faustus momentarily to regret his actions. His despair is, nevertheless, mocked by Mephistophilis, who continues to demand total obedience. Faustus, the rebel, is not allowed to rebel against "the father of all rebel." He re-affirms his allegiance to the "Prince of the East." When he asks that the old man be punished, Mephistophilis' answer proves the truth of the old man's words. The devil has little power over those with strong faith, and therefore the old man can be made to suffer physically, but not spiritually. Faustus begins to understand that the only power that the devils have over the human soul is that which humans give to them.

Faustus, however, does not pay attention to the old man's words. He wants Mephistophilis to stage yet another show to delight and distract him. Mephistophilis gratifies him with the "sweet embraces" of Helen of Troy. Naturally, this is not Helen herself. Just as spirits represented "the royal shapes/ Of Alexander and his paramour", so Helen too is impersonated by a spirit. Faustus, in embracing her, commits the sin of bodily intercourse with demons.

Faustus' address to Helen of Troy employs a formal, lyric blank verse developed by Marlowe. Helen herself is a paragon of female beauty and one of the most famous

figures of antiquity. Her loveliness and charm inspired Paris to kidnap her from her husband, Menelaus, and thus the Trojan War began. One of the scholars present is determined to "see that peerless dame of Greece." Another scholar praises her by saying that "all the world admires her majesty." A third scholar remarks that her "heavenly beauty passeth all compare." Nevertheless, "the face that launched a thousand ships" serves as a symbol of both beauty and doom.

The thousand ships launched were ships of war, and the "topless towers of Ilium" were burnt because of her. The images that Faustus chooses to praise her beauty are also images of destruction: the sacking of Wittenberg, the killing of Achilles, and the consuming of Semele by the brightness of Jupiter. Ironically enough, Faustus is not aware that the one thing Helen cannot give him is his soul, which has been "sucked forth" for ever.

The Old Man has no time for Faustus' poetic rapture. Hence, the audience sees him pronouncing an eternal death sentence on Faustus. His voice is both granted and denied authority. The more sympathetic the audience feels toward the old man, the more devastating is Faustus' rejection of him.

Act V, Scene 2

Summary

With Mephistophilis and Beelzebub, Lucifer himself, comes to claim Faustus' soul. Mephistophilis speaks contemptuously of Faustus as a "worldling," seeking pleasure, in vain, since he faces eternal damnation.

Faustus and Wagner have just finalized Faustus' latest will. Faustus asks Wagner if he has perused his will and whether he likes it. Wagner replies in the affirmative. In humble duty Wagner submits his life and lasting service for the sake of his love for Faustus.

Faustus' end approaches. He speaks to the scholars about his fate. He realizes that his sin has led to his damnation. The scholars urge him to look to heaven and call on God. Faustus once more despairs. His sin is the one that can never be pardoned. He has been led astray by the desire for knowledge and pleasure for twenty-four years. Now his time is up. If he calls out to God, the devil will tear him to pieces. He begs his friends to leave

him if they do not wish to share his fate. His friends are loyal to him and promise to pray that God will have mercy on him.

A meeting with Mephistophilis follows Faustus' meeting with the scholars. Mephistophilis tells Faustus that he has no hope of heaven now. Therefore, he must despair and think only of hell, since he will be dwelling there as in a mansion. Faustus blames Mephistophilis, his "bewitching friend," for his troubles. Mephistophilis says that it was he (Faustus) who obstructed his own passage to heaven. Faustus begins to weep. Mephistophilis remarks that it is too late, since "Fools that will laugh on earth, must weep in Hell."

When Mephistophilis has gone, the two angels enter. They remind him that his present suffering is his own fault. He chose to listen to the Bad Angel. The Good Angel shows Faustus a magnificent throne symbolizing the glory that would have been his had he not lost his chance at heaven. Then the Bad Angel shows him a vision of hell. The two angels exit.

As the clock strikes eleven, Faustus realizes that he has but one hour to live before he is forever damned. He begs time to stand still so that he may still save his soul, but time moves on. One drop of Christ's blood would still save him. He wishes that the mountains and the hills would fall on him to hide him from God's anger. Neither the earth nor the clouds hold any refuge for Faustus.

The clock strikes the half-hour; Faustus still begs God's mercy and asks, in the name of Christ, for some limit to his damnation. He envies the beasts for whom death is the end and for whom there is no eternal damnation. He curses himself and Lucifer, who has deprived him of the joys of heaven. The clock strikes twelve, hell reaches out for Faustus and the devils bear him away.

Notes

The appearance of Lucifer, Beelzebub and Mephistophilis makes it clear that Faustus' private tragedy is framed by cosmic powers. That does not mean that Faustus is a mere puppet moved and manipulated by external power. The more the audience is aware of the supernatural forces, the more striking is the voice of the individual caught up in those forces.

Faustus' conversation with Wagner brings out the human element in his character. He has a genuine concern for his servant, as is evident from his will. He has bequeathed all his property to him. Wagner, too, expresses his love of and loyalty to his master.

In the meeting with the scholars, some light is shed on Faustus' human feelings. His attitude towards the scholars is affectionate, and the scholars' devotion towards him is emphasized. Faustus is full of self-pity, while the scholars are full of sympathy for him. Although Faustus' conscience has always been nagging him, his agony has never been greater than it is at this time. He knows that he is guilty of a sin for which there can be no pardon: "The serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus." He shudders with horror as he foresees the end, which is imminent.

The appearance of the Good Angel and Bad Angel reaffirms the cosmic character of Faustus' tragedy. Previously, they had been in opposition to each other. In this scene they are presented in a different light. They seem to be in agreement, virtually in harmony. Both drive home the same point: Faustus loved the world, and hence he "must taste hell's pains perpetually." For the first time, the Good Angel makes his exit from the stage, leaving the Bad Angel alone with Faustus so that he can gloat over Faustus' damnation and paint a horrific picture of the tortures awaiting him. "Hell is discovered," as the stage direction tells the reader. The audience sees the fate that awaits Faustus.

Faustus' last soliloquy is the most brilliant in the entire play. It superbly dramatizes the panic experienced by a troubled mind. The "one bare hour" which remains for Faustus' life is compressed wonderfully into fifty-eight lines of text. Faustus helplessly invokes the universe to cease its motion: "Stand still, you ever- moving spheres of heaven/ That time may cease, and midnight never come." There is something unreal about this invocation. As his end nears, he detaches himself from the natural processes, which govern the universe. He asks the sun to rise again so that time will reverse itself into "perpetual day." He feels time slip away: "A year, a month, a weak, a natural day." The span diminishes even as he talks. Trying to call on Christ to save him, Faustus is here being tormented physically by Lucifer. "Rend not my heart for naming of my Christ," he cries. Then he summons up all his strength and determination: "Yet will I call on him--," but the line ironically turns into "O, spare me, Lucifer." Trying to answer "Whether should I fly?" he looks for places to hide from the wrath of God. The image of the

martyred and compassionate Christ has been replaced by that of the wrathful Jehovah. When the half-hour strikes, he becomes aware of the terrible reality of eternity. He does not mind a hundred thousand years of existence in hell, as long as he is saved at the end. He wants his soul to be "dissolved in elements." He even contemplates the burning of his books on necromancy, which may save him. Through this act, Faustus the Scholar symbolically rejects the pursuit of knowledge. Faustus' last words as he is dragged to hell, "ah, Mephistophilis!," signify little, but are full of pain.

Act V, Scene 3

Summary

The next morning, the scholars are very concerned about the dreadful noises heard during the night. They find Faustus' body torn to pieces. Out of consideration for his expertise as a scholar, and because of the respect and pity they feel for him, they decide to give Faustus a good Christian burial.

Notes

Critics look upon this scene, in which the scholars discover Faustus' "mangled limbs," as an anti-climax. An anti-climax, of course, is inevitable after the massive tension of the previous scene. The burial service, with its prayers for the soul, is essentially irrelevant.

Epilogue--Chorus

Summary

The Chorus informs the audience that Faustus, like the branch of a tree that might have grown straight, has died prematurely. Faustus, the devotee of Apollo, the god of wisdom, has died before his learning could truly mature: "(B)urned is Apollo's laurel bough/ That sometime grew within this learned man." The Chorus poignantly laments, "Faustus is gone." The audience is invited to "regard his hellish fall" as a consequence of his error in wasting his abilities and his knowledge on evil goals. The Chorus says that Faustus' life teaches a moral lesson, namely, that "forward wit" should not dare to do more than what "heaven permits."

Notes

The Epilogue spoken by the Chorus underlines the premature and tragic death of Faustus: "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight." The next line, "And

burned is Apollo's laurel bough," alludes to the destruction that Faustus' desire for knowledge has caused. The final lines are a weighty warning against those who would go beyond mankind's natural limits. The Epilogue, therefore, reinforces the moral of the entire play. The Chorus laments the senseless waste of Faustus' life. Some critics have remarked that the Epilogue spoken by the Chorus is trite and insincere. This interpretation may be due to an overall lack of consistency and purpose in the Chorus of this play.

Important Quotations Explained

It would be helpful to examine some of the important lines from the play to have an insight into the events in the play and the beauty and splendor of Marlowe's poetic lines:

1. The reward of sin is death? That's hard…

   If we say that we have no sin,
   We deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us.
   Why then belike we must sin,
   And so consequently die.
   Ay, we must die an everlasting death.
   What doctrine call you this? Che sarà, sarà:
   What will be shall be! Divinity, adieu!
   These metaphysics of magicians,
   And necromantic books are heavenly!

   (I.1.40–50)

Faustus speaks these lines near the end of his opening soliloquy. In this speech, he considers various fields of study one by one, beginning with logic and proceeding through medicine and law. Seeking the highest form of knowledge, he arrives at theology and opens the Bible to the New Testament, where he quotes from Romans and the first book of John. 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's no truth in us." The logic of these quotations—everyone sins, and sin leads to death—makes it seem as though Christianity can promise only death, which leads Faustus to give in to the fatalistic "What will be, shall be! Divinity, adieu!" However, Faustus neglects to read the very next line in John, 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). By ignoring this passage, Faustus ignores the possibility of redemption, just as he ignores it throughout the play. Faustus has blind spots; he sees what he wants to see rather than what is really there. This blindness is apparent in the very next line of his speech: having turned his back on heaven, he pretends that "[t]hese metaphysics of magicians, / And necromantic books are heavenly." He thus inverts the cosmos, making black magic "heavenly" and religion the source of "everlasting death."

2. MEPHISTOPHILIS: 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 hells
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?
O Faustus, leave these frivolous demands,
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul.
FAUSTUS: What, is great Mephistophilis so passionate
For being deprivèd of the joys of heaven?
Learn thou of Faustus manly fortitude,
And scorn those joys thou never shalt possess.
(I 3.76–86)

This exchange shows Faustus at his most willfully blind, as he listens to Mephistophilis describe how awful hell is for him even as a devil, and as he then proceeds to dismiss Mephistophilis' words blithely, urging him to have "manly fortitude." But the dialogue also shows Mephistophilis in a peculiar light. We know that he is committed to Faustus's damnation—he has appeared to Faustus because of his hope that Faustus will renounce God and swear allegiance to Lucifer. Yet here Mephistophilis seems to be urging Faustus against selling his soul, telling him to "leave these frivolous demands, / Which strike a terror to my fainting soul." There is a parallel between the experience of Mephistophilis and that of Faustus. Just as Faustus now is, Mephistophilis was once prideful and rebelled against God; like Faustus, he is damned forever for his sin. Perhaps because of this connection, Mephistophilis cannot accept Faustus' cheerful

dismissal of hell in the name of "manly fortitude." He knows all too well the terrible reality, and this knowledge drives him, in spite of himself, to warn Faustus away from his terrible course.

3. MEPHISTOPHILIS: Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
In one self-place; for where we are is hell,
And where hell is, there must we ever be….
All places shall be hell that is not heaven.
FAUSTUS: Come, I think hell's a fable.
MEPHISTOPHILIS: Ay, think so still, till experience change thy mind.
FAUSTUS: 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.
(II.1.117–131)

This exchange again shows Mephistophilis warning Faustus about the horrors of hell. This time, though, their exchange is less significant for what Mephistophilis says about hell than for Faustus' response to him. Why anyone would make a pact with the devil is one of the most vexing questions surrounding Doctor Faustus, and here we see part of Marlowe's explanation. We are constantly given indications that Faustus doesn't really understand what he is doing. He is a secular Renaissance man, so disdainful of traditional religion that he believes hell to be a "fable" even when he is conversing with a devil. Of course, such a belief is difficult to maintain when one is trafficking in the supernatural, but Faustus has a fallback position. Faustus takes Mephistophilis's assertion that hell will be "[a]ll places … that is not heaven" to mean that hell will just be a continuation of life on earth. He fails to understand the difference between him and Mephistophilis: unlike Mephistophilis, who has lost heaven permanently, Faustus, despite his pact with Lucifer, is not yet damned and still has the possibility of repentance. He cannot yet understand the torture against which Mephistophilis warns him, and imagines, fatally, that he already knows the worst of what hell will be.

FAUSTUS: Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

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!
(V.2.91–97)

These lines come from a speech that Faustus makes as he nears the end of his life and begins to realize the terrible nature of the bargain he has made. Despite his sense of foreboding, Faustus enjoys his powers, as the delight he takes in conjuring up Helen makes clear. While the speech marks a return to the eloquence that he shows early in the play, Faustus continues to display the same blind spots and wishful thinking that characterize his behavior throughout the drama. At the beginning of the play, he dismisses religious transcendence in favor of magic; now, after squandering his powers in petty, self-indulgent behavior, he looks for transcendence in a woman, one who may be an illusion and not even real flesh and blood. He seeks heavenly grace in Helen's lips, which can, at best, offer only earthly pleasure. "[M]ake me immortal with a kiss," he cries, even as he continues to keep his back turned to his only hope for escaping damnation—namely, repentance.

5. Ah Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually…
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.
O I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah my Christ—
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ;
Yet will I call on him—O spare me, Lucifer!...
Earth, gape! O no, it will not harbor me.
You stars that reigned at my nativity,

Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist
Into the entrails of yon laboring cloud,
That when you vomit forth into the air
My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,
So that my soul may but ascend to heaven…
O God, if thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be saved…
Cursed be the parents that engendered me:
No, Faustus, curse thy self, curse Lucifer,
That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven.
My God, my God, look not so fierce on me! …
Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!
I'll burn my books—ah, Mephistophilis!

(V.3.66–123)

These lines are Faustus's final speech, just before the devils take him down to hell. It is easily the most dramatic moment in the play, and Marlowe uses some of his finest rhetoric to create an unforgettable portrait of the mind of a man about to carried off to a horrific doom. Faustus goes from one idea to another, desperately seeking a way out. But no escape is available, and he ends by reaching an understanding of his own guilt: "No, Faustus, curse thy self, curse Lucifer, / That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven." This final speech raises the question of why Faustus does not repent earlier and, more importantly, why his desperate cries to Christ for mercy are not heard. In a truly Christian framework, Faustus would be allowed a chance at redemption even at the very end. But Marlowe's play ultimately proves more tragic than Christian, and so there comes a point beyond which Faustus can no longer be saved. He is damned, in other words, while he is still alive.

Faustus's last line aptly expresses the play's representation of a clash between Renaissance and medieval values. "I'll burn my books," Faustus cries as the devils come for him, suggesting, for the first time since scene 2, when his slide into mediocrity

begins, that his pact with Lucifer is about gaining limitless knowledge, an ambition that the Renaissance spirit celebrated but that medieval Christianity denounced as an expression of sinful human pride. As he is carried off to hell, Faustus seems to give in to the Christian worldview, denouncing, in a desperate attempt to save himself, the quest for knowledge that has defined most of his life.

Some significant aspects of the play

Character Analysis

It is really interesting to dwell deep into the characters and examine what makes them unique in the play.

Doctor Faustus

Faustus is the central character of the play. The attention of the audience is certainly focused upon him. Faustus was born of poor parents in Rhode in Germany. Like so many outstanding men who were humbly born, it was through learning that he was able to rise above his lowly beginnings. He was brought up by relatives who sent him to the university at Wittenberg. There he excelled in the study of divinity and was awarded his doctorate. He was so outstanding in scholarship and in learned argument that he grew proud of himself and his powers.

At the beginning of the play, he is no longer content with the pursuit of knowledge. He has studied all the main branches of learning of his time and is satisfied by none of them. He demands more from logic than the ability it gives one in debate. Medicine has brought him fame and riches but confers upon him only human powers. The study of law is for slaves and leads to nothing significant. Divinity is preferable to all of these but cannot get beyond sin and death. It is magic that promises to open up new worlds of power and to make man into a god.

Aristotle stated that the tragic hero is a predominantly good man, whose undoing is brought about by some error of human frailty, “the stamp of one defect.” The audience sees three such defects in Faustus that lead to his ultimate domination by Mephistophilis: his pride, his restless intellect and his desire to be more than man (to possess the power and the insight of a god.) Any one of these three defects would have been sufficient to ensure his downfall in terms of the theory of tragedy. In his pride, he is guilty of hubris, a quality, which in Greek tragedy was certain to arouse the wrath of the gods. His desire to

be equated with God is a sin in Christian terms as well. His restless intellect and deep dissatisfaction with the normal life inevitably lead to misfortune. Step by step, Faustus falls into damnation.

In some ways, Faustus' aspirations are admirable. It was the glory and the ambition of the Renaissance man to have an "aspiring mind." Faustus, on one level, represents the new man emerging from the womb of the Middle Ages. The authority of the Church, which had limited the thought of the Middle Ages, was lessening. There was a movement of power from the Church to the State, which meant, to a limited extent, the transfer of power to the individual man. The classical spirit was certainly a source of influence for Marlowe and his fellow dramatists. The Greek attitude to their gods was very different from that of the medieval Church. The Greeks encouraged a spirit of inquiry in their thought that was quite foreign to the attitude of the medieval Church.

This is the key to much of the duality of Faustus' thoughts and attitudes. He looks sometimes backwards to the medieval world, and sometimes forward to the modern world. Above all, he is a Renaissance figure, adventurously surveying a world whose horizons were widening every day as a result of voyages and exploration. Faustus is full of excitement for geographical discovery. The Renaissance men were in love with life and its possibilities. They lived dangerously but wholeheartedly. In other words, they were secular. Fundamentally, Faustus' choice is that of a Renaissance man, not a medieval man. He sacrifices eternity for twenty-four years of full life in the here and now. That is the basic conflict in the mind of Faustus, a man caught between two worlds.
It is a commonplace for critics to state that Faustus derives little satisfaction from his acquired powers. This is a problem of character; it is also a question of human limitation. Faustus' desire for knowledge cannot be satisfied fully. In one sense, Faustus is satisfied. Mephistophilis refuses to give him a wife, but he does promise him the possession of any woman he desires. His longings find their realization in Helen of Troy. This represents an important facet of Faustus' character: his willingness to carry things to an ultimate conclusion. Helen is a spirit raised by the devil, and therefore, one may presume, a spirit of evil. She certainly portends evil for Faustus.

Faustus is given to bouts of despair. Mephistophilis, despite his own rather melancholy disposition, tries to cheer him through a series of "spectacles." Even Lucifer

provides the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins. Faustus is excited by all facets of life. He is determined to live it to the full, but he is unhappy in it. This melancholy and despair may well have influenced his agreement to the compact with Lucifer.

There is, in Faustus, no serious motivation towards good when he speaks of it. The reference is always outside himself. He does not seek a genuine relationship with Christ or with God. He sees Christ's blood as something separate from his reality. He is concerned, at the end, with the clock and with time, rather than with God. Faustus throughout the play does not accept the limitations imposed upon man by human life, the world and the social order. So, in his last moments, he struggles both to resolve and escape from the idea of eternity, which means for him eternal damnation. He is honest here as elsewhere. He places the blame upon himself and upon Lucifer. In his desire to burn his books, he recognizes that his greed for knowledge and his insatiable curiosity have led to his damnation. The Chorus leaves the audience with a tragic sense of waste. Faustus, who might have been a force for good, remains as a warning to those who desire a power beyond what God is prepared to grant.

Mephistophilis

Mephistophilis is an agent of Lucifer. Like Faustus, he is on the devil's side. He is not without his good qualities. He is bluntly honest with Faustus from his very first appearance. He obeys Faustus' command and returns as a Franciscan Friar. On that occasion Faustus remarks: "How pliant is this Mephistophilis/ Full of obedience and humility." Once the pact is made, Mephistophilis carries out his side of the bargain faithfully. In addition to satisfying Faustus' intellectual curiosity, he attempts to keep him entertained. He is wholly honest on the subjects of hell and damnation.

Mephistophilis is no moralist. He has nothing to do with the conventional morality of marriage. He promises Faustus that he can have any woman he desires. Indeed, he does a fine job of producing Helen of Troy before Faustus.

Towards the end of the play, the relationship between Mephistophilis and Faustus changes. Instead of providing the despairing Faustus with amusement, he gives him a dagger. He even threatens to tear Faustus apart if he does not remain faithful to Lucifer.

The name of Mephistophilis is the last word Faustus utters before he dies. He has been Faustus' companion in his passage towards damnation. He is at once servant, companion,

master, teacher and entertainer for Faustus. He does not destroy Faustus. Faustus does that for himself.

Valdes and Cornelius

Valdes and Cornelius are instrumental in instructing Faustus in the rudiments of magic and in the conjuring of spirits. They both speak glowingly of the power and glory of magic and astrology and begin by associating themselves with Faustus in the enterprise; they speak of "the audience three," but significantly, they do not join him when he conjures Mephistophilis. Apparently they are not prepared to push their art to any real conclusion.

Lucifer

Lucifer is the prince of Hell. "Lucifer" is another name for Satan, the archangel who was hurled from heaven for rebelling against God. Marlowe's Lucifer is less majestic and terrible than Mephistophilis, who is the key representative of evil in *Doctor Faustus*. Yet when Mephistophilis speaks of Lucifer, it is with considerable respect. His actual appearance in the play is disappointing.

The Old Man

The old man appears only at the end of the play when Faustus, in despair, is about to commit suicide. In the source book for the play, he is a neighbor. In Marlowe's play he is a vague, allegorical figure utterly lacking in any individual character traits. He is the ideal Christian and takes the place of the Good Angel, who has exited for good. He is a continuing reminder, even at this stage, of the possibility of repentance. He speaks coaxingly of "the way of life" and bluntly of the way of damnation, "(the) most vile and loathsome filthiness." The blood of Christ, he asserts, can still save Faustus. This is a very important assertion, which Faustus tragically fails to accept.

The old man goes out sadly, for he can see no signs of repentance in Faustus. On his next and final appearance, he pronounces Faustus' inevitable doom. After Helen has appeared to Faustus, the old man despairs. He witnesses and hears the major part of Faustus' lines in praise of Helen. His presence adds a further dimension to this speech. He symbolizes salvation through repentance and the mercy of Christ at the very time when Faustus is uniting himself with Helen, the symbol of physical beauty, desire and the glory of the flesh. He laments the rejection by Faustus of heaven in favor of earthly delight, not with a

living woman, but with a manifestation produced by the powers of evil. Finally, the old man shows by example how evil and devils can be resisted. In him good is the ultimate power. In Faustus, the search for power is through evil.

The Chorus

The Chorus is a well-known device that dates from Greek drama. The function of the Chorus was to provide a link between the actors and the audience and to comment on the events of the play. In the opening speech of Marlowe's play, the Chorus prepares the audience for the subject of the play. It gives the necessary early biography of Faustus and sets the scene. The Chorus is the objective moral voice of the play. Even at this early stage it clearly outlines Faustus' fate and condemns him. The fate of Icarus is to be that of Faustus. He is to bring wrath of heaven upon himself; he prefers magic before "his chiefest bliss."

The appearance of the Chorus after the Seven Deadly Sins is almost purely a dramatic convention. The Chorus returns again to testify to the affections of Faustus' friends and to the fame that he has gained by his knowledge and his power. Again, the speech is morally neutral. At the end the Chorus laments the waste of Faustus' potential and holds this up as a warning to others who might be so tempted.

Helen of Troy

Helen is a symbol of physical perfection and represents all that Faustus desires in a woman. She is an ideal, not a real person. Therefore, she is completely unresponsive and silent. To the audience, she is merely a phantom, but to Faustus, at the end of his life, she is the one thing that makes his suffering and rebellion worthwhile. He believes that she literally can make him "immortal with a kiss." Faustus' address to Helen offers the most poetic lines in the play. In that passage gentle lyricism is combined with intensity of emotion. At the same time, Marlowe reminds the audience that Helen's beauty is a symbol of destruction, for her face "launched a thousand ships/ And burnt the topless towers of Ilium."

The Good Angel

The Good Angel is a supernatural being. He is a symbolic representation of Faustus' own conscience. His words are the expression of Faustus' secret thoughts. Whenever he

appears, he reminds Faustus of the joys of heaven, to which he can aspire. When Faustus has given up all hope of salvation, the Good Angel becomes silent and then disappears.

The Bad Angel

The Bad Angel is a supernatural and a symbolic creature. He represents the ambitions and evil side of Faustus. He encourages Faustus to proceed in his search for power. Because this is what Faustus wants, he listens. At the end, the vision of hell is too much for Faustus. This angel's last words are surprisingly moralistic: "He that loves pleasure must for pleasure fall."

PLOT (Structure)

Doctor Faustus is a well-constructed play. In the opening of the play, the audience is given the exposition: an explanation of the subject matter of this tragedy. Faustus the man is presented by the Chorus. In the first act, Faustus surveys different branches of knowledge and chooses to practice the black arts. In this section of the play, Faustus has a foretaste of what magic can do for him when he commands Mephistophilis to perform certain magical feats, with which the action rises.

The climax is reached in Act II, Scene 1, in which Faustus signs a pact with Lucifer. Following this pact, the audience sees a series of demonstrations of Faustus' magical powers. The action falls in Act IV, in which Faustus as a magician, is challenged by Benvolio, as well as Robin, Dick, the horse dealer and other plebeians.

The outcome of the protagonist's pact with the devil is seen in Act V. In this act the devils come and carry Faustus away to hell. Faustus is perpetually damned. The Epilogue presents the moral of the play. Men should not delve into forbidden territories. They should go only where "heaven permits" one to tread.

Throughout the play the comic scenes parody Faustus' magical feats, which are imitated by the clown. They serve as a sub-plot that runs parallel to the main plot of the play.

Themes

We have examined the play in detail commenting on the major incidents and the importance of the main characters in the play. Let us now look some of the themes that are prevalent in the play.

Major

Pride

The major theme of *Doctor Faustus* is the pride that goes before a fall. Faustus' sin is not his practice of necromancy, but his denial of God's power and majesty. His pride is the source of his damnation. All the other sins committed by him are various aspects of the sin of pride. Even his despair in the last scene of the play is another aspect of his pride because it prevents him from asking for God's forgiveness. Faustus' despair denies God's mercy.

The theme of pride is seen in Mephistophilis' discussion with Faustus on the subject of hell. Mephistophilis replies honestly to all Faustus' questions about hell. However, Faustus, out of pride in his own "resolution," refuses to accept the truth. When asked how Lucifer fell from grace, Mephistophilis says, "by aspiring pride and insolence/ For which God threw him from the face of heaven."

The theme of pride recurs throughout the play. Like Lucifer, Faustus rebels against God. However, he realizes that the freedom he hoped for is only another form of slavery. It is true that at the end of the play, Faustus is no longer proud, but he is afraid to turn to God and despairs of receiving His mercy.

Minor

The quest for knowledge

One of the play's minor themes is Faustus' quest for knowledge. He examines all the orthodox branches of knowledge and finds them wanting. He chooses magic, for it promises "a world of profit and delight, /Of power, of honor, of omnipotence." For twenty- four years, he seeks experience of all kinds. However, finally, his knowledge brings him despair instead of freedom. Marlowe's Faustus embodies the Renaissance aspiration for infinite knowledge.

Faustus' pursuit of knowledge involves every aspect of his complex being: spiritual, intellectual and physical. Faustus' choice of magic make more sense if the audience imagines him in the modern world rejecting theoretical studies and choosing technology. He commits himself to the world of experience. This appeals to his creative instinct, but in the process it leads to his destruction.

Faustus' knowledge gives him power. He exhibits his magical power to emperors and dukes. He descends to the level of a court entertainer by invoking the spirits of

Alexander and his paramour and of Helen of Troy. He is reduced to the role of producing grapes out of season for a pregnant duchess. All this is far removed from his initial assertion: "A sound magician is a demi-god." The knowledge of magic and its powers makes a buffoon of him. In this way, Faustus' quest for knowledge is shown to be inadequate, unsatisfying and incomplete.

The quest for power

Another minor theme of the play is the quest for power. Faustus' power exists more in his imagination than in fact. When he performs magic, the audience gets the impression that he is a practical joker or a court entertainer. It is true that he plays pranks on the Pope, produces the spirits of Alexander, his paramour, Darius and Helen of Troy. It is also true that he produces grapes out of season for a pregnant duchess. All these performances are far removed from his first confident assertion that "a sound magician is a demi-god." Faustus' power is illusory, since at each stage he depends upon Mephistophilis

The theme of the quest for power in *Doctor Faustus* is connected with the theme of the quest for knowledge. Knowledge bestows power on the knower. The kind of knowledge pursued by Faustus is practical knowledge, bestowing upon him practical powers.

However, Faustus' quest for power transforms him into a magician. With the help of Mephistophilis, he demonstrates his powers in the papal court and in the palace of the Duke and the Duchess of Vanholt. His power reduces him to the position of a mere court entertainer. Faustus' quest for power does not take into account the need for acquiring spiritual power. Faustus' magic is magic divorced from spirituality. Hence, it is shown to be dangerous. Instead of leading to his salvation, his quest for power results in his damnation.

***Doctor Faustus* as a morality play**

Despite being a tragedy, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* has many features of a morality play which are the conflict between good and evil, the creation of Good and Bad Angels, the Old Man as Good Counsel, the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins and the appearance of Faustus' enemies to ambush and kill him.

The conflict between Good and Evil was a recurring theme in the medieval morality plays. From this point of view, Marlowe's play is a dramatization of the

medieval morality play, *Everyman. Doctor Faustus* becomes a morality play in which heaven struggles for the soul of a Renaissance Everyman, namely *Doctor Faustus*.

The Good Angel and the Bad Angel are characters derived from the medieval morality plays like The *Castle of Perseverance*. They are sometimes regarded as an externalization of the thoughts of Faustus. This is a twentieth-century view. The Angels are independent absolutes, one wholly good and one wholly evil. They appear in *Doctor Faustus* like allegorical figures of a morality play. They reflect the possibility of both damnation and redemption being open to Faustus. A close examination shows that the Evil Angel declines in importance as the play advances. The angels work by suggestion, as allegorical characters in morality plays do.

The audience also observes the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins in *Doctor Faustus*. This is another feature borrowed by Marlowe from the tradition of the morality play. In Marlowe's play, to divert Faustus' attention from Christ, his savior, Lucifer, comes with his attendant devils to rebuke him for invoking Christ and then presents the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins as a diversion.

Benvolio's attempts to ambush and take revenge on Faustus are also a device taken from the medieval morality play. Faustus loses his head, only for it to be revealed as a false one. This theatrical device was originally used in the medieval morality play, *Mankind*. Similarly, Faustus' attempt to strike Dick, Robin and the others dumb in the Vanholt show scene is also derived from the medieval morality play. Thus *Doctor Faustus* has many features of the morality play of the Middle Ages.

***Doctor Faustus* as a Renaissance play**

Doctor Faustus touches upon many aspects of the Renaissance age. Marlowe's play deals with the ambition of the Renaissance to cultivate an "aspiring mind." The Renaissance aspiration for infinite knowledge is embodied in Faustus. However, Faustus shows little discrimination in his pursuits. He delights, for example, in the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, ironically remarking: "O this feeds my soul." Throughout the twenty-four years, he seeks experience of all kinds in the true Renaissance manner. Finally, instead of freedom, his knowledge brings him despair.

Another quality possessed by the ambitious Renaissance humanist is his desire to reach the highest peaks of life experience. This is manifested in Faustus in his desire to be none other than a god: "A sound magician is a demi-god".

A third characteristic is the Renaissance worship of beauty for its own sake. Faustus' address to Helen of Troy makes it evident that he feels something of the Renaissance quest for beauty. In this way *Doctor Faustus* is seen to be a play preoccupied with Renaissance concerns.

Conclusion

We have studied the tragedy, *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe by going through the Acts and analyzing the scenes in detail. We have seen that Faustus is the protagonist of the play. He makes the fatal choice of "cursed necromancy" (black magic) in order to gain absolute power for twenty-four years. Lucifer, who is assisted by Mephistophilis and the bad angel, receives Faustus' soul in exchange for granting him twenty-four years of absolute power. The climax is reached in the scene in which Faustus agrees to sell his soul to Mephistophilis in exchange for twenty-four years of faithful service. The outcome of the play is tragic. Faustus has to pay heavily for his rebellion against the fixed laws of heaven and for practicing "more than heavenly power permits." He is dragged off to hell, and the real tragedy lies in the fact that Faustus does not believe that repentance can save him. The characters and themes are also studied elaborately. Let us now try to assess our endeavor by looking at the play from an examination point of view.

Questions

Short notes

1.Sketch the character of Mephistophilis.

2.Comment on the theme of pride, which leads Faustus to his tragic damnation.

3.The Chorus in *Doctor Faustus*

4.Analyze the character of Dr. Faustus

5.The significance of Helen of Troy in the play

Essays

1.Examine Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* as a tragedy

2.*Doctor Faustus* is a play that explores in depth Faustus' quest for knowledge. Elaborate.

3.Examine how Marlowe skillfully combines the features of Renaissance drama and morality plays in *Doctor Faustus*

4.What do you think is the tragic conflict in *Dr. Faustus?*

5.Examine the farcical element in the play by analyzing the comic interludes in the play.

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UNIT II. 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *KING LEAR* (1605)

Biography of the author

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

The known facts of Shakespeare's life, few as they are, are yet rather more numerous than those concerning most of the other playwrights of his time. Stratford-on-Avon, at the time of Shakespeare's birth, was a village of about two thousand inhabitants, eighty miles from London. John Shakespeare, father of William and resident of Stratford, is reported to have been at one time a farmer doing business in hides and meats. His wife was Mary Arden, rather an heiress for her time, who brought into the family a house and fifty acres of land. William, the third child, was baptized the twenty-sixth of April 1564. The day of his birth is unknown, but is usually reckoned as three days earlier than his baptism. William went to the free grammar school of the town; but when he was about thirteen years old the father got into financial difficulties, and William, apparently, was taken out of school and put to work at home. In 1582 the license for the marriage of William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway was entered in the town records. Three children, Susanna, the eldest, and twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born to the couple. William left his family at Stratford, went up to London in about 1586. At that time Queen Elizabeth had already reigned about twenty-eight years, and London had grown rich and prosperous. It was in those times that the first theaters--The Theater, the Curtain, and the remodeled house known as Newington Butts--had been built ten years earlier.

Shakespeare at first took jobs as a man-of-all-work about the theaters. The tradition is that he held horses at the door, and employed boys for this service, so that for a long time these servitors were called "Shakespeare's boys." At that time the Scholar Poets

belonging to Greene's circle were in practical possession of the stage, so far as authorship was concerned. About 1587 Greene was somewhat eclipsed by Marlowe and Kyd, whose *Tamburlaine* and *The Spanish Tragedy*, respectively, appeared that year. During the years immediately following, Shakespeare must have gained a foothold, both as an actor and playwright. In the early 1590's Shakespeare's activities as a theater man were well begun. He was summoned to act at court and he received a salary as actor, a share of the profits of the enterprise, and certain sums for each play he wrote. In 1599 the Shakespeare family was granted a coat-of-arms; and "William Shakespeare" became "William Shakespeare, Gent." Shakespeare, three or four years before his death, made Stratford his home again. He made his will early in 1616, about the time his daughter Judith married Thomas Quincey; and on the twenty-third day of April, the same day of the same month in which he is supposed to have been born, he died.

Shakespeare's Plays

Thirty-seven plays are usually attributed to Shakespeare and they are generally broken down into four categories: the histories, the comedies, the romances, and the tragedies.

The Histories

There are ten history plays in all and they tell the story of England from the fourteenth century through Henry VIII. They are:

- *Henry VI, Parts I, II and III*
- *Henry IV, Parts I, and II*
- *Richard III*
- *King John*
- *Richard II*
- *Henry V*
- *Henry VIII*

The Comedies

To be considered a comedy during the Renaissance, a play needed nothing more than a happy ending and an optimistic point of view. Shakespeare's romantic comedies, which were popular during the period 1595 to 1600, generally revolved around love affairs that were temporarily in trouble. After 1600, the tone of his comedies changed, becoming

more somber or dismal. However, since they had happy endings, they were still considered comedies. Shakespeare's comedies are:

- *Twelfth Night*
- *The Comedy of Errors*
- *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*
- *Love's Labour's Lost*
- *The Taming of the Shrew*
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- *The Merchant of Venice*
- *Much Ado About Nothing*
- *As You Like It*
- *The Merry Wives of Windsor*
- *Troilus and Cressida*
- *All's Well That Ends Well*
- *Measure for Measure*

The Romances

The four plays that Shakespeare wrote when his theater company began producing plays at the Black friars Theatre in 1608 are known as the Romances. This theater allowed for sets that used more scenery, more lighting effects, and consequently, cost more money. But the better-educated audience that was attending these plays at this point in history demanded extravagant plays with emotional plots, suffering, and happy endings. Shakespeare's Romances are:

- *Pericles*
- *Cymbeline*
- *A Winter's Tale*
- *The Tempest*

The Tragedies

Shakespeare's tragedies were written between 1601 and 1606 and involve parallel plots, symbolism, psychological complexity, and of course, death. Happiness is unheard of in his tragedies, and good and evil are usually clearly separated. The Tragedies are:

- *Titus Andronicus*
- *Romeo and Juliet*
- *Julius Caesar*
- *Hamlet*
- *Othello*
- *Macbeth*
- *Antony and Cleopatra*
- *Timon of Athens*
- *Coriolanus*
- *King Lear*

Shakespeare's works were collected and printed in various editions in the century following his death, and by the early eighteenth century his reputation as the greatest poet ever to write in English was well established. Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the thirty-seven plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to affect profoundly the course of Western literature and culture ever after.

General Information about the text

Before going to the play in detail it would be helpful to have a general idea about to genre and the text in general.

Genre

The text is one of Shakespeare's Four Great **Tragedies**; the other three are *Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth.* The protagonist King Lear considers external appearances as reality and takes false decisions which results in the tragedy.

Brief Summary of the Play

Before going to the detailed analysis, let us have an idea about what is happening in the play.

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 betraying him, 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 been brought.

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 Goneril and Regan, whose husband, 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; Goneril poisons 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.

Detailed Analysis and Study of the Play
Setting of the Play

Shakespeare authored *King Lear* around 1605, between *Othello* and *Macbeth,* and it is usually ranked with *Hamlet* as one of Shakespeare's greatest plays. The setting of *King Lear* is as far removed from Shakespeare's time as the setting of any of his other plays, dramatizing events from the eighth century B.C. But the parallel stories of Lear's and Gloucester's sufferings at the hands of their own children reflect anxieties that would have been close to home for Shakespeare's audience. One possible event that may have influenced this play is a lawsuit that occurred not long before King Lear was written, in which the eldest of three sisters tried to have her elderly father, Sir Brian Annesley, declared insane so that she could take control of his property. Annesley's youngest daughter, Cordell, successfully defended her father against her sister. Another event that Shakespeare and his audience would have been familiar with is the case of William Allen, a mayor of London who was treated very poorly by his three daughters after dividing his wealth among them. Not least among relevant developments was the then recent transfer of power from Elizabeth I to James I, which occurred in 1603. Elizabeth had produced no male heir, and the anxiety about who her successor would be was fueled by fears that a dynastic struggle along the lines of the fifteenth-century Wars of the Roses might ensue.

Elizabethan England was an extremely hierarchical society, demanding that absolute deference be paid and respect be shown not only to the wealthy and powerful but also to parents and the elderly. King Lear demonstrates how vulnerable parents and noblemen are to the depredations of unscrupulous children and thus how fragile the fabric of Elizabethan society actually was.

List of Characters

King Lear - The aging king of Britain and the protagonist of the play.

Goneril- Lear's elder daughter and the wife of the Duke of Albany

Regan - Lear's middle daughter and the wife of the duke of Cornwall

Cordelia - Lear's youngest daughter, disowned by her father for refusing to flatter him.

Gloucester - A nobleman loyal to King Lear whose rank, earl, is below that of duke.

Edgar - Gloucester's older, legitimate son.

Edmund - Gloucester's younger, illegitimate son.

Kent - A nobleman of the same rank as Gloucester who is loyal to King Lear. Kent spends most of the 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.

Act wise Analysis

Act I, scenes i - ii

Act I, scene i: King Lear's palace.

Summary

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 elder 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 (I.i.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 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.

Act I, scene ii: The Earl of Gloucester's castle.

Summary

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.

Analysis: Act I, scenes i–ii

The love test at the beginning of Act I, scene i, 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 and Regan's professions of love 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" (I.i.59); Regan follows her sister's lead by saying, "I find she names my very deed of love; Only she comes too short" (I.i.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 (I.i.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 (I.i.86). Lear becomes enraged with these words and dismisses Cordelia saying, "Nothing can come out of nothing".

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 I, scene ii, suggests parallels between this subplot and Lear's familial difficulties. Both Lear and Gloucester have children who are 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 for the 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 seems to 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 I, scene i, about Lear's unreliability in his old age: the "infirmity of his age" (I.i.291) and his "unconstant starts" (I.i.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 I, scene i, 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" (I.ii.3) that makes society disdain him and dedicates himself to "nature" (I.ii.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.

Act I, scene iii: The Duke of Albany's palace.

Summary

Lear is spending the first portion of his retirement at Goneril's castle. Goneril complains to her steward, Oswald, that Lear's knights are becoming "riotous" and that Lear himself is an obnoxious guest (I.iii.6). Seeking to provoke a confrontation, she orders her servants to behave rudely toward Lear and his attendants.

Act I, scene iv: A hall in the same.

Summary

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 plainspokenness 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. An 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.

Act I, scene v: Court before the same.

Summary

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 to keep him from going mad. Lear and his attendants leave for Regan's castle.

Analysis: Act I, scenes iii–v

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 error is that, in stepping down from the throne, he has also given up all of his formal authority to those who 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 been loud and destructive in her castle—they are, she claims, "men so disordered, so deboshed and bold" (I.iv.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," yet we have already seen Lear make imperious demands and lose his temper in a seemingly unjustified way (I.iv.240–241). 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 frustrate his desires, he asks, "Doth any here know me? This is not Lear. / . . . / Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (I.iv.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 to despair at the end of Act I, scene v, he says, "O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!"—a foreshadowing of his eventual insanity (I.v.38).

In Act I, scene iv, 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 (I.iv.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 raised them (I.iv.190–191).

Act II, scenes i–ii

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

Act II, scene i: Gloucester's castle

Summary

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 also mentions 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 hears Gloucester 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, and Regan 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 in order to acquire Gloucester's wealth. Regan then asks Gloucester for his advice in answering letters from Lear and Goneril.

Act II, scene ii: Before Gloucester's castle.

Summary

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 I, scene iv. 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 attacks him.

Oswald's cries for help bring Cornwall, Regan, and Gloucester. Kent replies rudely to their calls for explanation, and Cornwall orders him to be punished in the stocks, a wooden device that shackles a person's ankles and renders them 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.

Analysis: Act II, scenes i–ii

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 I, scene i, 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 that he is actually Edgar's father, just as Lear has disowned Cordelia (II.i.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 (II.i.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 I, scene iv, 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 (II.ii.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 (II.ii.62).

Cornwall 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" (II.ii.134–137). Regan, however, ignores his pleas; she almost seems to welcome the idea of inviting Lear's anger.

Act II, scenes iii–iv

Act II, scene iii: A wood.

Summary

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" (II.iii.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.

Act II, scene iv: Before Gloucester's castle, Kent in Stocks.

Summary

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 (II.iv.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.

On his knees, Lear begs 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. Gloucester begs 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.

Analysis: Act II, scenes iii–iv

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 the stocks, 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" (II.iv.54–55). "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" (II.iv.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 that he 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 anger so powerful that it seems to be driving him mad. We see flashes of this anger and madness when he curses Goneril, and then, later, when he declares that instead of returning to Goneril's house without servants, he will flee houses entirely and live in the open air.

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!" (II.iv.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 (II.iv.281). His words also recall the earlier scene in which Edgar dons a disguise and assumes the identity of a "Bedlam beggar" (II.iii.14). "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" (II.iii.20), one of the insane Bedlam beggars who roam the countryside sticking themselves with pins and begging "with roaring voices" (II.iii.14). 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 III, scenes i–iii

Act III, scene I: **A heath.**

Summary

A storm rages on the heath. Kent, seeking Lear in vain, runs into one of Lear's knights and learns that 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.

Act III, scene ii: Another part of the heath. Storm still.

Summary

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 finds the 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.

Act III, scene iii: Gloucester's castle.

Summary

Inside his castle, a worried Gloucester speaks with Edmund. The loyal Gloucester recounts how he 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, took possession 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, and he 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 notices 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.

Analysis: Act III, scenes i–iii

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 IV. 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 also 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"(III.i.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" (III.i.4–11). 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!" (III.ii.1–3). 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 Lear: 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" (III.ii.14–15). 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 (III.ii.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?" (III.ii.66). He adds, "I have one part in my heart / That's sorry yet for thee" (III.ii.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.

Act III, scenes iv–v
Act III, scene iv: The heath. Before a hovel.

Summary

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.

Act III, scene v: Gloucester's castle.

Summary

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 (III.v.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.

Analysis: Act III, scenes iv–v

When Kent asks Lear to enter the hovel at the beginning of Act III, scene iv, 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” (III.iv.13–14). 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” (III.iv.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” (III.iv.29–30). Reproaching himself for his heartlessness, Lear urges himself to “expose thyself to feel what wretches feel” (III.iv.35). 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” (III.iv.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 (III.iv.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.

Act III, scenes vi–vii

Act III, scene vi: A chamber in a farmhouse adjoining the castle.

Summary

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.

Act III, scene vii: Gloucester's castle.

Summary

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 punishment of 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 (III.vii.68). Gloucester screams, and Regan demands that Cornwall put out the other eye too.

One of Cornwall's servants suddenly steps in, saying that he cannot stand by and let this outrage happen. 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" (III.vii.96–97). Cornwall, realizing that his wound is bleeding heavily, exits with Regan's aid.

Left alone with Gloucester, Cornwall 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 the mad beggar to lead Gloucester where he will.

Analysis: Act III, scenes vi–vii

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 wolf like daughters (III.vi.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 (III.vi.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, and Sweet-heart, see,

they bark at me" (III.vi.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 (III.iv.99–100).

Act III, scene vi, is the Fool's last scene, and Edgar continues to take over the Fool's function by answering Lear's mad words and jingles. When Lear declares, "We'll go to supper i' the morning" (III.vi.77), thus echoing the confusion of the natural order in the play, the Fool answers, "And I'll go to bed at noon" (III.vi.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 III, scene vi, in which he leaves off babbling and addresses the audience, gives us a needed reminder that, despite appearances, he is not actually insane. We are also 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 (III.vi.103).

The shocking violence of Act III, scene vii 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 (III.vii.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 point of 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" (III.vii.23) and Regan's exhortation to tie his arms "hard, hard" (III.vii.32)—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" (III.vii.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; others help the injured Gloucester and bring him to the disguised Edgar. Even amid the increasing chaos, some human compassion remains

Act IV, scenes i–ii

Act IV, scene i: The heath.

Summary

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.

Act IV, scene ii: Before Albany's palace.

Summary

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 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 him that 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 his mistress.

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.

Analysis: Act IV, scenes i–ii

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" (IV.i.37–38). 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 (IV.i.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" (IV.i.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 (IV.ii.30–32). Like Lear, Albany uses animal imagery to describe the faithless daughters. "Tigers, not daughters, what have you performed?" he asks (IV.ii.41). Goneril, for her part, is hardly intimidated by him; she calls him a "moral fool" for criticizing her while France invades (IV.i.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 (IV.ii.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—or so the audience and characters alike can hope.

Act IV, scenes iii–v

Act IV, scene iii: The French camp near Dover

Summary

Kent, still disguised as an ordinary serving man, speaks with a gentleman in the French camp near Dover. 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.

Act IV, scene iv: The same. A tent.

Summary

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 to find 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 to fight.

Act IV, scene v: Gloucester's castle.

Summary

Back at Gloucester's castle, Oswald tells Regan that Albany's army has set out, although Albany has been dragging his feet about the expedition. It seems that Goneril is a "better soldier" than Albany (IV.v.4). 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't specify which) to deliver to Edmund, whenever he may find him. Finally, she promises Oswald a reward if he can find and kill Gloucester.

Analysis: Act IV, scenes iii–v

In these scenes, we see Cordelia for the first time since Lear banished her in Act I, scene i. The words 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" (IV.iii.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" (IV.iii.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 IV, scene iv, 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 (IV.iv.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 that she 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 (IV.iv.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" (IV.iv.24–25), echoing a biblical passage in which Christ says, "I must go about my father's business" (Luke 2:49). 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 IV, scene iv, 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. (IV.iv.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 V. 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 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' trajectories have begun to converge.

Act IV, scenes vi–vii

Act IV, scene vi: Fields near Dover.

Summary

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!" (IV.vi.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 being 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.

Act IV, scene vii: A tent in the French camp. Lear a bed asleep

Summary

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 tells him that she forgives him for banishing her.

Meanwhile, the news of Cornwall's death is repeated in the camp, and we learn that Edmund is now leading Cornwall's troops. The battle between France and England rapidly approaches.

Analysis: Act IV, scenes vi–vii

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 for the resolution of the play's emotional movement in Act V.

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 is full 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 a just 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" (IV.vi.55, 73–74). 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 from now on (IV.vi.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!" (IV.vi.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,* II.ii.203–204). 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 I, scene i, and before, were sweet-talking him: "They flattered me like a dog. . . . To say 'aye' and 'no' to everything that I said!" (IV.vi.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 IV.vi.103). Just as, during the storm, he recognizes that beneath each man's clothing is "a poor, bare, forked animal" (III. iv. 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" (IV.vi.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" (IV.vii.61), he tells her sadly, and he admits that she has "some cause" to hate him (IV.vii.76). Cordelia's moving response ("No cause, no, cause") seals their reconciliation (IV.vii.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 V, scenes i–ii

Act V, scene i: The British camp, near Dover.

Summary

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 Lear has joined the invading French army 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.

Act V, scene ii: A field between the two camps.

Summary

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.

Analysis: Act V, scenes i–ii

In these scenes, the battle is quickly commenced and just as quickly concluded. The actual fighting happens offstage, during the short Act V, scene ii. 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.

Act V, scene iii: The British camp near Dover.

Summary

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 his champion. 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 that Gloucester, 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 be hanged 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, he dies.

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 exit sadly as a funeral march plays.

Analysis

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" (V.iii.301–303). One can argue that these words suggest that, in some sense, order and justice have triumphed over villainy and cruelty, and that 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?" (V.iii.305–306). This question 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" (V.iii.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." (V.iii.306–307). 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" (V.iii.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" (V.iii.238–240). 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 (V.iii.315). 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 (V.iii.313).

Important Quotations Explained

Now let us examine some of the important lines from the play to have an insight into the events in the play

1. Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
   My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
   According to my bond; no more nor less.

Cordelia speaks these words when she address her father, King Lear, who has demanded that his daughters tell him how much they love him before he divides his kingdom among them (I.i.90–92). In contrast to the empty flattery of Goneril and Regan, Cordelia offers her father a truthful evaluation of her love for him: she loves him "according to my bond"; that is, she understands and accepts without question her duty to love him as a father and king. Although Cordelia loves Lear better than her sisters do, she is unable to "heave" her heart into her mouth, as her integrity prevents her from making a false declaration in order to gain his wealth. Lear's rage at what he perceives to be her lack of affection sets the tragedy in motion. Cordelia's refusal to flatter Lear, then, establishes

her virtue and the authenticity of her love, while bringing about Lear's dreadful error of judgment.

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

Gloucester speaks these words as he wanders on the heath after being blinded by Cornwall and Regan (IV.i.37–38). They reflect the profound despair that grips him and drives him to desire his own death. More important, they emphasize one of the play's chief themes—namely, the question of whether there is justice in the universe. Gloucester's philosophical musing here offers an outlook of stark despair: he suggests that there is no order—or at least no good order—in the universe, and that man is incapable of imposing his own moral ideas upon the harsh and inflexible laws of the world. Instead of divine justice, there is only the "sport" of vicious, inscrutable gods, who reward cruelty and delight in suffering. In many ways, the events of the play bear out Gloucester's understanding of the world, as the good die along with the wicked, and no reason is offered for the unbearable suffering that permeates the play

3.Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone forever!
I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
She's dead as earth.

Lear utters these words as he emerges from prison carrying Cordelia's body in his arms (V.iii.256–260). His howl of despair returns us again to the theme of justice, as he suggests that "heaven's vault should crack" at his daughter's death—but it does not, and no answers are offered to explain Cordelia's unnecessary end. It is this final twist of the knife that makes King Lear such a powerful, unbearable play. We have seen Cordelia and Lear reunited in Act IV, and, at this point, all of the play's villains have been killed off, leaving the audience to anticipate a happy ending. Instead, we have a corpse and a howling, ready-for-death old man. Indeed, the tension between Lear as powerful figure and Lear as animalistic madman explodes to the surface in Lear's "Howl, howl, howl, howl," a spoken rather than sounded vocalization of his primal instinct.

4.Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moonshines
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate. Fine word—"legitimate"!
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed,
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top the legitimate. I grow; I prosper.
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Edmund delivers this soliloquy just before he tricks his father, Gloucester, into believing that Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar, is plotting against him (I.ii.1–22). "I grow; I prosper," he says, and these words define his character throughout the play. Deprived by his bastard birth of the respect and rank that he believes to be rightfully his, Edmund sets about raising himself by his own efforts, forging personal prosperity through treachery and betrayals. The repeated use of the epithet "legitimate" in reference to Edgar reveals Edmund's obsession with his brother's enviable status as their father's rightful heir. With its attack on the "plague of custom," this quotation embodies Edmund's resentment of the social order of the world and his accompanying craving for respect and power. He invokes "nature" because only in the unregulated, anarchic scheme of the natural world can one of such low birth achieve his goals. He wants recognition more than anything else—perhaps, it is suggested later, because of the familial love that has been denied him—and he sets about getting that recognition by any means necessary.

5.O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life's as cheap as beast's . . .
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!

> If it be you that stir these daughters' hearts
> Against their father, fool me not so much
> To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,
> And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
> Stain my man's cheeks! No, you unnatural hags,
> No, I'll not weep.
> I have full cause of weeping, but this heart
> Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws,
> Or ere I'll weep. O fool, I shall go mad!
>
> (II.iv.259–281)

Lear delivers these lines after he has been driven to the end of his rope by the cruelties of Goneril and Regan. He rages against them, explaining that their attempts to take away his knights and servants strike at his heart. "O, reason not the need!" he cries, explaining that humans would be no different from the animals if they did not need more than the fundamental necessities of life to be happy. Clearly, Lear needs knights and attendants not only because of the service that they provide him but because of what their presence represents: namely, his identity, both as a king and as a human being. Goneril and Regan, in stripping Lear of the trappings of power, are reducing him to the level of an animal. They are also driving him mad, as the close of this quotation indicates, since he is unable to bear the realization of his daughters' terrible betrayal. Despite his attempt to assert his authority, Lear finds himself powerless; all he can do is vent his rage.

Some Significant Aspects of the Play

Character Analysis

King Lear

Lear is 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.

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?" (I.i.49). Most readers conclude that Lear is simply blind to the truth, but Cordelia is already his favorite daughter at the beginning of the play, so presumably he knows that she loves him the most. Nevertheless, Lear values Goneril and Regan's flattery 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 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. 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 Cord

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 II and then when they viciously put out Gloucester's eyes in Act III. 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

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

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 other characters. Of all of the play's villains, Edmund is the most complex and sympathetic. He is a consummate schemer, a Machiavellian character eager to seize any opportunity and willing to do anything to achieve his goals. However, his ambition is interesting insofar as it reflects not only a thirst for land and power but also a desire for the recognition denied to him by his status as a bastard. His serial treachery is not merely self-interested; it is a conscious rebellion against the social order that has denied him the same status as Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar. "Now, gods, stand up for bastards," Edmund commands, but in fact he depends not on divine aid but on his own initiative (I.ii.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" (V.iii.238). After this ambiguous statement, he seems to repent of his villainy and admits to having ordered Cordelia's death. His peculiar change of heart, rare among Shakespearean villains, is enough to make the audience wonder, amid the carnage, whether Edmund's villainy sprang not from some innate cruelty but simply from a thwarted, misdirected desire for the familial love that he witnessed around him.

Major Themes, Motifs & Symbols

Having analyzed the complete play, its major events and characters, let us now look at the major themes, motifs and symbols that are prevalent in the play.

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work**.** All literary works will have a dominating theme, which carries the main idea that the author

wants to convey to the readers. Despite a dominant theme there will be a number of minor themes also.

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 (IV.i.37–38). Edgar, on the other hand, insists that "the gods are just," believing that individuals get what they deserve (V.iii.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 reprioritize his values and become humble and caring. With this newfound 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 V 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 to flourish, even if only fleetingly, amid the horror and chaos that engulf the rest of the play.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform 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 a seemingly 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 supposedly insane 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 familial and 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 lies a skewed set of values.

Symbols

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

The Storm

As Lear wanders about a desolate heath in Act III, 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 IV to commiserate about how their blindness to the truth about their children has cost them dearly.

Conclusion

King Lear is a **tragedy** in which the threefold dignity of a king, an old man, and a father, is dishonored by the cruel in gratitude of his unnatural daughters. The old king, who out of a foolish tenderness has given away everything, is driven out into the world a homeless

beggar; the childish imbecility to which he was fast advancing changes into the wildest insanity, and when he is rescued from the destitution to which he was abandoned, it is too late. Lear's tragic flaw is that he believes the external appearances to be real and makes a mistake in judging the character of his children which results in his tragedy. A parallel plot also runs through the play where Gloucester makes the same mistake as Lear and he too realizes his mistake very late. Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a moving story about love and human relationships. As we have looked at the play in detail in every aspect, let us now assess our understanding of the play from an examination point of view.

Questions / Possible passages for Annotations

1. Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
   My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
   According to my bond; no more nor less. I. i

2. And my poor fool is hang'd: No, no, *no* life?
   Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
   And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
   Never, never, never, *never, never*.V.iii.

3. He that has and a little tiny wit--
   With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,--
   Must make content with his fortunes fit,
   Though [For] the rain, it raineth every day. III.ii

4. Nothing can come of nothing: speak again I. i

5. Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:
   Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
   That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone forever!
   I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
   She's dead as earth.V.iii.

Sample Annotations:

1. Cordelia: [Aside] What shall Cordelia speak? Love,
   and be silent.
   (Act I,scene i,lines 63-64)

The play begins with Lear, an old king ready for retirement, preparing to divide the kingdom among his three daughters. Lear has his daughters compete for their inheritance by judging who can proclaim their love for him in the grandest possible fashion. Cordelia

finds that she is unable to show her love with mere words. Cordelia's nature is such that she is unable to engage in even so forgivable a deception as to satisfy an old king's vanity and pride. Cordelia clearly loves her father, and yet realizes that her honesty will not please him. Her nature is too good to allow even the slightest deviation from her morals. An impressive speech similar to her sisters' would have prevented much tragedy, but Shakespeare has crafted Cordelia such that shecould never consider such an act. These lines are from Act I, scene i, lines 63 & 64.

2. Cordelia: O my dear father, restoration hang
Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
Have in reverence made.
(Act IV, Scene vii, lines 26-29)

Later in the play Cordelia,who has been banished for her honesty, still loves her father and displays great compassion and grief for him. Cordelia could be expected to display bitterness or even satisfaction at her father's plight, which was his own doing. However, she still loves him, and does not fault him for the injustice he did her. Shakespeare has crafted Cordelia as a character whose nature is entirely good, unblemished by any trace of evil throughout the entire play. These lines are from Act Iv, scene vii, lines 26-27.

3. Edmund: This is the excellent foppery of the world,
that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits
of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters
the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were
villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion;
knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical
predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by
an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and
all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on…
…I should have been that I am,
had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled
on my bastardizing."
(Act I, scene ii, lines 127-137, 143-145)

Edmund is an example of one of the wholly evil characters in the play. In the subplot is Edmund's betrayal of his father and brother. Edmund has devised a scheme to discredit his brother Edgar in the eyes of their father Gloucester. Edmund is fully aware of his evil nature, and revels in it.Clearly, Edmund recognizes his own evil nature and decides to use it to his advantage. He mocks the notion of any kind of supernatural or divine influence

over one's destiny. Edgar must go into hiding because of Edmund's deception, and later Edmund betrays Gloucester himself, naming him a traitor which results in Gloucester's eyes being put out. Edmund feels not the slightest remorse for any of his actions.

4. King Lear: He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes. Wipe thine eyes;
The good years shall devour them, flesh and fell,
Ere they shall make us weep. We'll see 'em starved first."
(Act V, scene iii lines 22-25)

After the storm, when Lear's madness has run its course, both he and Cordelia are taken prisoner by Albany's army. We see the full effect of Lear's transformation in his joy at his reunion with his daughter, uncaring of his status as a prisoner.This new carefree Lear is certainly a far cry from the arrogant king we saw at the beginning of the play. His joy at reconciliation with his daughter outweighs any other concerns he might have. Shakespeare has transformed Lear in the reader's eyes from a hateful old king into almost a grandfatherly, loving figure. It is not necessarily a transformation from evil into good; rather it is a transformation from blindness into sight.

5. Edmund :Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound. Wherefore should I
Stand in the plague of custom, and permit
The curiosity of nations to deprive me,
For that I am some twelve or fourteen moon-shines
Lag of a brother? Why bastard? wherefore base?
When my dimensions are as well compact,
My mind as generous, and my shape as true,
As honest madam's issue? Why brand they us
With base? *with baseness*? bastardy? base, *base*? (I ii 1-10)

This scene introduces two conflicting views of Nature, a theme which runs throughout the play. In the traditional view since the Middle Ages, Nature formed a Great Chain of Being, a benevolent order established by God and suitable for humanity to follow as a pattern of social behavior. Every living creature had its divinely determined and appropriate place in the chain: kings above subjects, men above women, fathers above children, the elderly above the young. To challenge this hierarchy was to strike against heaven's ordained order. Edmund’s denunciation of the power of the divine over the

destiny of man is also simultaneously the denunciation of the Elizabethan faith in the great chain of being which assigns each human being a place in the order of creation. As such Edmund does not enjoy the social status or recognition that Edgar enjoys as the legitimate son of Gloucester. Shakespeare presents a psychological insight into the character of Edmund and attempts to get at the root of his rage and reason for plotting the downfall of Edgar. The goddess of Nature that Edmund worships upholds the principle of survival of the fittest, with no respect for tradition or custom; to the strong and cunning go the spoils. He scoffs at the idea that the heavens determine a person's fate or place in society.

6. King Lear: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world, … (Act III, scene ii,lines 1-7)

Like most tragic protagonists of great stature, Lear is accustomed to thinking that the world of phenomenon is at his command. If he now suffers, the universe must suffer as well. In his rage he commands floods to cover the steeples, and lightning to flatten the earth and destroy all possibility of future life. Lear's tragedy is externalised and symbolised in the elements of the earth.

7. King Lear: No, no, *no, no*! Come, let's away to prison:
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: so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones,
That ebb and flow by the moon. (Act V, scene iii)

These lines show Lear's rejection of the world, its destructive powers expressed through man's wickedness and hatred. So he tells Cordelia when he meets her that they need notgrieve because they are losers in war and intrigue. He suggests that they shall both sit inside the prison and cells and like children return to a world of innocence and tell each fairy tales. Lear's use of paradisal images, uncorrupted by the wickedness of the world is in sharp contrast to the images of corruption of the court.

Essay Questions

1. Evaluate Shakespeare's *King Lear* as a tragedy.

2.Write an essay about the themes, motifs and symbols that dominate the play *King Lear*

3. How does justice and chaos interplay and perpetrate the tragedy on the morally good people at the end of the play in *King Lear*

4. Contrast and compare the characters of Goneril, Regan and Cordelia and examine their roles in the tragic fate of King Lear.

5. Comment on the role of the Fool and Kent in *King Lear*

6. Madness and blindness play a major role in the change in attitudes of the two fathers in the play: Lear and Gloucester. Do you agree?

7.What role does Edmund play in the impending tragedy of Lear?

8."Nothing can come out of nothing..."

Can we say that Lear invites his tragic fate by uttering this line to Cordelia? Discuss.

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UNIT - II. 3

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* (1596)

William Shakespeare's come in many forms. There are histories, tragedies, comedies and tragicomedies. Among the most popular are the comedies that are full of laughter, irony, satire and word play. Have you ever thought about what makes a play a comedy instead of a tragedy? Comedies treat subjects lightly, meaning that they don't treat seriously such things as love. Shakespeare's comedies often use puns, metaphors and insults to provoke 'thoughtful laughter'. The action is often strained by artificiality, especially elaborate and contrived endings. Disguises and mistaken identities are often very common.

The plot is very important in Shakespeare's comedies. It is often very convoluted, twisted and confusing, and extremely hard to follow. Other characteristics of Shakespearean comedy are the themes of love and friendship, played within a courtly society. Songs - often sung by a jester or a fool, parallel the events of the plot. Foil and stock characters are often inserted into the storyline to provide amusement.

Love provides the main ingredient. If the lovers are unmarried when the play opens, they either have not met or there is some obstacle to their relationship. Examples of these obstacles are familiar to every reader of Shakespeare: the slanderous tongues which nearly wreck love in *Much Ado About Nothing*; the father insistent upon his daughter marrying his choice, as in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*; or the expulsion of the rightful Duke's daughter in *As You Like It.* The plots are very carefully constructed in every play.

Shakespeare uses many predictable patterns in his plays. The hero rarely appears in the opening lines; however, we hear about him from other characters. He often does not normally make an entrance for at least a few lines into the play, if not a whole scene. The hero is also virtuous and strong but always possesses a character flaw.

In the comedy itself, Shakespeare assumes that we know the basic plot and he jumps right into it with little or no explanation. Foreshadowing and foreboding are put in the play early and can be heard throughout the drama. All Shakespearean comedies follow similar patterns. All of them have five acts. The climax of the play is always in the third act.

Shakespearean comedies also contain a wide variety of characters. Shakespeare often introduces a character and then discards him, never to be seen again during the play. Shakespeare's female leads are usually described as petite and often assume male disguises. Often, foul weather parallels the emotional state of the characters. The audience is often informed of events before the characters and when a future meeting is to take place it usually doesn't happen immediately. Character names are often clues to their roles and personalities, such as Malvolio from *Twelfth Night* and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

There are many themes that recur in Shakespeare's comedies. One theme is the never-ending struggle between the forces of good and evil. Another theme is that love has profound effects and that people often hide behind false faces.
The comedies themselves can be sub-categorized as tragicomedies, romantic comedies, comedies of justice and simple entertaining comedies with good wholesome

General Information about the text

Genre

A Midsummer Night's Dream was written in 1596.It is a **comedy** which has all the elements of a romantic comedy. The play can be classified as a **romance,** a genre involving much more than love. The play has the following characteristics that make it a romance.

Characters are often idealized (as types; blurry, weak, young lovers).

a) Love serves as much of the motivation (the initial set-up and conflict).
b) Action takes place as ritualistic quest (Search for Tomorrow, Guiding Light), often obliquely having an erotic intensity. Idyllic wish fulfillment seems involved.
c) Plot transitions are somewhat irrational.
d) Nostalgia for a golden age may be felt.
e) Setting is usually a fantastic marvelous world, having a childlike quality. (The move from court to country in the play is one of mind too -- as shown in the "wood" pun).
f) Atmosphere involves confusion, akin to sleep, madness, a dream world.

Indeed, the distinctive feature of romance is its resemblance to the dream state, whether this is manifested in a move out of the civilized world of the court, initiated by a knight dreaming by a well and waking to adventure, or in any other means.

Source of the Play

The play demonstrates both the extent of Shakespeare's learning and the expansiveness of his imagination. The range of references in the play is among its most extraordinary attributes: Shakespeare draws on sources as various as Greek mythology (Theseus, for instance, is loosely based on the Greek hero of the same name, and the play is peppered with references to Greek gods and goddesses); English country fairy lore (the character of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, was a popular figure in sixteenth-century stories); and the theatrical practices of Shakespeare's London (the craftsmen's play refers to and parodies many conventions of English Renaissance theater, such as men playing the roles of women). Further, many of the characters are drawn from diverse texts: Titania comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* and Oberon may have been taken from the medieval romance *Huan of Bordeaux,* translated by Lord Berners in the mid-1530s. Unlike the plots of many of Shakespeare's plays, however, the story in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems not to have been drawn from any particular source but rather to be the original product of the playwright's imagination.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is unusual among Shakespeare's plays in lacking a written source for its plot. The wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta was described in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" and elsewhere. The theme of a daughter who wants to marry against her father's desires was a common theme in Roman comedy. Bottom and his friends are caricatures of amateur players.

Shakespeare must have derived his forest spirits from oral folk traditions. The mysterious people of the forest might be in turn helpful (household chores), mischievous (pranks, illusions), or sinister. In *Henry IV Part* I, the king relates a folk legend that "some night-tripping fairy" might steal babies and leave a fairy child or someone else's child (a "changeling", see II.i.23). People may have believed, or half-believed, in the fairies (elves, sprites, pixies, leprechauns, and so forth). "Goblin" was the name of a lesser devil in *Piers Plowman,* and Puck's aliases include "Hob Goblin" (Robert Goblin). They might also have been imaginary figures of fun that personify nature, as we speak of "Mother Nature" and the artistic "Jack Frost", painter of autumn leaves and creator of the beautiful ice patterns on windowpanes.

Literary trips to fairyland included "Sir Orfeo", a retelling of Orpheus's descent to the underworld. Sir Orfeo visits a dreadful supernatural realm in which other humans are imprisoned, looking as they did at the moments of their deaths. "Thomas of Erceldoune" met the fairy queen, who took him to her realm, full of beautiful people living in luxury -- as Satan's cattle.

Brief Summary of the Play

Let us now have a look at the story line of the play briefly.

Theseus, duke of Athens is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, with a four-day festival of pomp and entertainment. He commissions his Master of the Revels, Philostrate, to find suitable amusements for the occasion. Egeus, an Athenian nobleman, marches into Theseus's court with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius (who loves Hermia), but Hermia is in love with Lysander and refuses to comply. Egeus asks for the full penalty of law to fall on Hermia's head if she flouts her father's will. Theseus gives Hermia until his wedding to consider her options, warning her that disobeying her father's wishes could result in her being sent to a convent or even executed. Nonetheless, Hermia and Lysander plan to escape Athens the following night and marry in the house of Lysander's aunt, some seven leagues distant from the city. They make their intentions known to Hermia's friend Helena, who was once engaged to Demetrius and still loves him even though he jilted her after meeting Hermia. Hoping to regain his love, Helena tells Demetrius of the elopement that Hermia and Lysander have planned. At the appointed time, Demetrius stalks into the woods after his intended bride and her lover; Helena follows behind him.

In these same woods are two very different groups of characters. The first is a band of fairies, including Oberon, the fairy king, and Titania, his queen, who has recently returned from India to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. The second is a band of Athenian craftsmen rehearsing a play that they hope to perform for the duke and his bride. Oberon and Titania are at odds over a young Indian prince given to Titania by the prince's mother; the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him a knight, but Titania refuses. Seeking revenge, Oberon sends his merry servant, Puck, to acquire a magical flower, the juice of which can be spread over a sleeping person's eyelids to make

that person fall in love with the first thing he or she sees upon waking. Puck obtains the flower, and Oberon tells him of his plan to spread its juice on the sleeping Titania's eyelids. Having seen Demetrius act cruelly toward Helena, he orders Puck to spread some of the juice on the eyelids of the young Athenian man. Puck encounters Lysander and Hermia; thinking that Lysander is the Athenian of whom Oberon spoke, Puck afflicts him with the love potion. Lysander happens to see Helena upon awaking and falls deeply in love with her, abandoning Hermia. As the night progresses and Puck attempts to undo his mistake, both Lysander and Demetrius end up in love with Helena, who believes that they are mocking her. Hermia becomes so jealous that she tries to challenge Helena to a fight. Demetrius and Lysander nearly do fight over Helena's love, but Puck confuses them by mimicking their voices, leading them apart until they are lost separately in the forest.

When Titania wakes, the first creature she sees is Bottom, the most ridiculous of the Athenian craftsmen, whose head Puck has mockingly transformed into that of an ass. Titania passes a ludicrous interlude doting on the ass-headed weaver. Eventually, Oberon obtains the Indian boy, Puck spreads the love potion on Lysander's eyelids, and by morning all is well. Theseus and Hippolyta discover the sleeping lovers in the forest and take them back to Athens to be married—Demetrius now loves Helena, and Lysander now loves Hermia. After the group wedding, the lovers watch Bottom and his fellow craftsmen perform their play, a fumbling, hilarious version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. When the play is completed, the lovers go to bed; the fairies briefly emerge to bless the sleeping couples with a protective charm and then disappear. Only Puck remains, to ask the audience for its forgiveness and approval and to urge it to remember the play as though it had all been a dream.

Detailed Analysis and Study of the Play

List of Characters

Theseus - Duke of Athens, Greece

Hippolyta - Queen of the Amazons, future wife to Theseus

Egeus - Hermia's father

Demetrius- A young man was in love with Helena, but discards her when he sees Hermia

Lysander--The man with whom Hermia is in love

Helena -Hermia's friend who is in love with Demetrius

Hermia - Egeus' daughter who is in love with Lysander

Philostrate - Master of the revels under Theseus

Nick Bottom - Weaver, ass.

Peter Quince - Carpenter

Francis Flute - Bellows-mender

Tom Snout -Tinker

Snug - Joiner

Robin Starveling - Tailor

Oberon - King of the Fairies

Titania - His queen

Robin Goodfellow (Puck) - Fairy, servant to Oberon

Peaseblossom - Fairy

Cobweb - Fairy

Mote - Fairy

Mustardseed - Fairy

Fairies, lords, extras, revels, bugs, amebas

Act I, scene i: Athens. The Palace of Theseus

Summary

At his palace, Theseus, duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, his fiancée, discuss their wedding, to be held in four days, under the new moon. Impatient for the event and in a celebratory mood, Theseus orders Philostrate, his Master of the Revels, to "stir up the Athenian youth to merriments" and devise entertainments with which the couple might pass the time until their wedding (I.i.12). Philostrate takes his leave, and Theseus promises Hippolyta that though he wooed her with his sword (Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, presumably met Theseus in combat), he will wed her "with pomp, with triumph, and with revelling"—with a grand celebration to begin at once and last until the wedding (I.i.19).

Egeus, a citizen of Athens, strides into the room, followed by his daughter Hermia and the Athenian youths Lysander and Demetrius. Egeus has come to see Theseus with a complaint against his daughter: although Egeus has promised her in marriage to

Demetrius, who loves her, Lysander has won Hermia's heart, and Hermia refuses to obey her father and marry Demetrius. Egeus demands that the law punish Hermia if she fails to comply with his demands. Theseus speaks to Hermia sharply, telling her to expect to be sent to a nunnery or put to death. Lysander interrupts, accusing Demetrius of being fickle in love, saying that he was once engaged to Hermia's friend Helena but abandoned her after he met Hermia. Theseus admits that he has heard the story and he takes Egeus and Demetrius aside to discuss it. Before they go, he orders Hermia to take the time remaining before his marriage to Hippolyta to make up her mind. Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, and Demetrius depart, leaving Hermia alone with Lysander.

Hermia and Lysander discuss the trials that must be faced by those who are in love: "The course of true love never did run smooth," Lysander says (I.i.134). He proposes a plan: he has an aunt, wealthy and childless, who lives seven leagues from Athens and who dotes on Lysander like a son. At her house, Hermia and Lysander can be married—and, because the manor is outside of Athens, they would be free from Athenian law. Hermia is overjoyed, and they agree to travel to the house the following night.

Helena, Hermia's friend whom Demetrius jilted, enters the room, lovesick and deeply melancholy because Demetrius no longer loves her. Hermia and Lysander confide their plan to her and wish her luck with Demetrius. They depart to prepare for the following night's journey. Helena remarks to herself that she envies them their happiness. She thinks up a plan: if she tells Demetrius of the elopement that Lysander and Hermia are planning, he will be bound to follow them to the woods to try to stop them; if she then follows him into the woods, she might have a chance to win back his love.

Analysis

From the outset, Shakespeare subtly portrays the lovers as a group out of balance, a motif that creates tension throughout the play. For the sake of symmetry, the audience wants the four lovers to form two couples; instead, both men love Hermia, leaving Helena out of the equation. The women are thus in nonparallel situations, adding to the sense of structural imbalance. By establishing the fact that Demetrius once loved Helena, Shakespeare suggests the possibility of a harmonious resolution to this love tangle: if Demetrius could only be made to love Helena again, then all would be well. By the end of the play, the fairies' intervention effects just such an outcome, and all *does* become

well, though it is worth noting that the restoration of Demetrius's love for Helena is the result of magic rather than a natural reawakening of his feelings.

The genre of comedy surrounding the Athenian lovers is farce, in which the humor stems from exaggerated characters trying to find their way out of ludicrous situations. Shakespeare portrays the lovers as overly serious, as each is deeply and earnestly preoccupied with his or her own feelings: Helena is anxious about her looks, reacting awkwardly when Lysander calls her "fair"; Hermia later becomes self-conscious about her short stature; Demetrius is willing to see Hermia executed to prevent her from marrying another man; and Lysander seems to have cast himself as the hero of a great love story in his own mind (III.ii.188, III.ii.247). Hermia is stubborn and quarrelsome, while Helena lacks self-confidence and believes that other people mock her. The airy world of the fairies and the absurd predicaments in which the lovers find themselves once in the forest make light of the lovers' grave concerns.

Act 1, Scene 2: Athens. Quince's house.

Summary

In another part of Athens, far from Theseus's palace, a group of common laborers meets at the house of Peter Quince to rehearse a play that the men hope to perform for the grand celebration preceding the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta. Quince, a carpenter, tries to conduct the meeting, but the talkative weaver Nick Bottom continually interrupts him with advice and direction. Quince tells the group what play they are to perform: *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe,* which tells the story of two lovers, separated by their parents' feud, who speak to each other at night through a hole in a wall. In the play, a lion surprises Thisbe one night and tatters her mantle before she escapes. When Pyramus finds the shredded garment, he assumes that the lion has killed Thisbe; stricken with grief, he commits suicide. When Thisbe finds Pyramus's bloody corpse, she too commits suicide. Quince assigns their parts: Bottom is to play Pyramus; Francis Flute, Thisbe; Robin Starveling, Thisbe's mother; Tom Snout, Pyramus's father; Quince himself, Thisbe's father; and Snug, the lion.

As Quince doles out the parts, Bottom often interrupts, announcing that he should be the one to play the assigned part. He says that his ability to speak in a woman's voice would make him a wonderful Thisbe and that his ability to roar would make him a

wonderful lion. Quince eventually convinces him that Pyramus is the part for him, by virtue of the fact that Pyramus is supposed to be very handsome. Snug worries that he will be unable to learn the lion's part, but Quince reassures him that it will be very easy to learn, since the lion speaks no words and only growls and roars. This worries the craftsmen, who reason that if the lion frightens any of the noble ladies in the audience, they will all be executed; since they are only common laborers, they do not want to risk upsetting powerful people. Bottom says that he could roar as sweetly as a nightingale so as not to frighten anyone, but Quince again convinces him that he can only play Pyramus. The group disperses, agreeing to meet in the woods the following night to rehearse their play.

Analysis

The most important motif in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and one of the most important literary techniques Shakespeare uses throughout the play, is that of contrast. The three main groups of characters are all vastly different from one another, and the styles, moods, and structures of their respective subplots also differ. It is by incorporating these contrasting realms into a single story that Shakespeare creates the play's dreamlike atmosphere. Almost diametrically opposite the beautiful, serious, and love-struck young nobles are the clumsy, ridiculous, and deeply confused craftsmen, around whom many of the play's most comical scenes are centered.

Where the young lovers are graceful and well spoken—almost comically well suited to their roles as melodramatically passionate youths—the craftsmen often fumble their words and could not be less well suited for acting. This disjunction reveals itself as it becomes readily apparent that the craftsmen have no idea how to put on a dramatic production: their speeches are full of impossible ideas and mistakes (Bottom, for example, claims that he will roar "as gently / as any sucking dove"); their concerns about their parts are absurd (Flute does not want to play Thisbe because he is growing a beard); and their extended discussion about whether they will be executed if the lion's roaring frightens the ladies further evidences the fact that their primary concern is with themselves, not their art (II.i.67–68).

The fact that the workmen have chosen to perform the Pyramus and Thisbe story, a Babylonian myth familiar to Shakespeare's audiences from Ovid's *Metamorphoses,*

only heightens the comedy. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe is highly dramatic, with suicides and tragically wasted love (themes that Shakespeare takes up in *Romeo and Juliet* as well). Badly suited to their task and inexperienced, although endlessly well meaning, the craftsmen are sympathetic figures even when the audience laughs at them—a fact made explicit in Act V, when Theseus makes fun of their play even as he honors their effort. The contrast between the serious nature of the play and the bumbling foolishness of the craftsmen makes the endeavor all the more ridiculous. Further, the actors' botched telling of the youthful love between Pyramus and Thisbe implicitly mocks the melodramatic love tangle of Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, and Lysander.

Act II Scene i. A wood near Athens

Summary

In the forest, two fairies, one a servant of Titania, the other a servant of Oberon, meet by chance in a glade. Oberon's servant tells Titania's to be sure to keep Titania out of Oberon's sight, for the two are very angry at each other. Titania, he says, has taken a little Indian prince as her attendant, and the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him his knight. Titania, however, refuses to give the boy up. Titania's servant is delighted to recognize Oberon's servant as Robin Goodfellow, better known as Puck, a mischievous sprite notorious for his pranks and jests. Puck admits his identity and describes some of the tricks he plays on mortals. The two are interrupted when Oberon enters from one side of the glade, followed by a train of attendants. At the same moment, Titania enters from the other side of the glade, followed by her own train. The two fairy royals confront one another, each questioning the other's motive for coming so near to Athens just before the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. Titania accuses Oberon of loving Hippolyta and of thus wishing to bless the marriage; Oberon accuses Titania of loving Theseus. The conversation turns to the little Indian boy, whom Oberon asks Titania to give him. But Titania responds that the boy's mother was a devotee of hers before she died; in honor of his mother's memory, Titania will hold the boy near to her. She invites Oberon to go with her to dance in a fairy round and see her nightly revels, but Oberon declines, saying that they will be at odds until she gives him the boy. Titania storms away, and Oberon vows to take revenge on her before the night is out. He sends Puck to seek a white-and-purple flower called love-in-idleness, which was once hit with

one of Cupid's arrows. He says that the flower's juice, if rubbed on a sleeper's eyelids, will cause the sleeper to fall in love with the first living thing he or she sees upon waking. Oberon announces that he will use this juice on Titania, hoping that she will fall in love with some ridiculous creature; he will then refuse to lift the juice's effect until she yields the Indian prince to him.

Analysis

Act II serves two main functions: it introduces the fairies and their realm, and it initiates the romantic confusion that will eventually help restore the balance of love. The fairies, whom Shakespeare bases heavily on characters familiar from English folklore, are among the most memorable and delightful characters in the play. They speak in lilting rhymes infused with gorgeous poetic imagery. A Midsummer Night's Dream is a play dominated by the presence of doubles, and the fairies are designed to contrast heavily with the young lovers and the craftsmen. Whereas the lovers are earnest and serious, Puck and the other pixies are merry and full of laughter; whereas the craftsmen are bumbling, earthy, and engage in methodical labor, the fairies are delicate, airy, and indulge in effortless magic and enchantment. The conflict between Oberon and Titania imports into the fairy realm the motif of love being out of balance. As with the Athenian lovers, the eventual resolution of the tension between the two occurs only by means of magic. Though the craftsmen do not experience romantic confusion about one another, Bottom becomes involved in an accidental romance with Titania in Act III, and in Act V two craftsmen portray the lovers Pyramus and Thisbe, who commit suicide after misinterpreting events. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was probably performed before Queen Elizabeth, and Shakespeare managed to make a flattering reference to his monarch in Act II, scene i. When Oberon introduces the idea of the love potion to Puck, he says that he once saw Cupid fire an arrow that missed its mark: "That very time I saw, but thou couldst not, Flying between the cold moon and the earth Cupid, all armed. A certain aim he took At a fair vestal thronèd by the west, And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts. But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon, And the imperial vot'ress passèd on, In maiden meditation, fancy-free " (II.i.155–164). Queen Elizabeth never married and was celebrated in her time as a woman of chastity, a virgin queen whose concerns were

above the flesh. Here Shakespeare alludes to that reputation by describing Cupid firing an arrow “at a fair vestal thronèd by the west”—Queen Elizabeth—whom the heat of passion cannot affect because the arrow is cooled “in the chaste beams of the wat’ry moon.” Shakespeare celebrates how Elizabeth put affairs of state before her personal life and lived “in maiden meditation, fancy-free.” He nestles a patriotic aside in an evocative description, couching praise for the ruler on whose good favor he depended in dexterous poetic language. (Audiences in Shakespeare’s day would most likely have recognized this imaginative passage’s reference to their monarch.)Because many of the main themes and motifs in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are very light, even secondary to the overall sense of comedy and the dreamlike atmosphere, it is perhaps more important to try to understand not what the play means but rather how Shakespeare creates its mood. One technique that he uses is to embellish action with a wealth of finely wrought poetic imagery, using language to work upon the imagination of the audience and thereby effect a kind of magic upon the stage: “I must go seek some dewdrops here,” one fairy says, “And hang a pearl in every cowslip’s ear” (II.i.14–15). The fairies conjure many of the play’s most evocative images: Oberon, for instance, describes having heard a mermaid on a dolphin’s back Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath" That the rude sea grew civil at her song And certain stars shot madly from their spheres To hear the sea-maid’s music " (II.i.150–154) and seen a bank where the wild thyme blows, Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows, Quite over canopied with luscious woodbine, "With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine. There sleeps Titania sometime of the night, Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight " (II.i.249–254). This technique extends even to the suggestive names of some of the characters, such as the craftsmen Snug, Starveling, Quince, Flute, and Snout, and the fairies Cobweb, Mustardseed, Mote, and Peaseblossom.

Act II, scene ii. Another part of the wood.

Summary

As Puck flies off to seek the flower, Demetrius and Helena pass through the glade. Oberon makes himself invisible so that he can watch and hear them. Demetrius harangues Helena, saying that he does not love her, does not want to see her, and wishes that she would stop following him immediately. He curses Lysander and Hermia, whom he is pursuing, hoping to prevent their marriage and slay Lysander. Helena repeatedly declares

her adoration for, and loyalty to, Demetrius, who repeatedly insults her. They exit the grove, with Helena following closely behind Demetrius, and Oberon materializes. He declares that before the night is out, Demetrius will be the one chasing Helena. Puck appears, carrying the flower whose juice will serve as the love potion. Oberon takes the flower and says that he knows of a fragrant stream bank surrounded with flowers where Titania often sleeps. Before hurrying away to anoint Titania's eyelids with the flower's juice, Oberon orders Puck to look for an Athenian youth being pursued by a lady and to put some of the juice on the disdainful youth's eyelids, so that when he wakes he will fall in love with the lady. He informs Puck that he will know the youth by his Athenian garb. Puck agrees to carry out his master's wishes. After her dancing and revelry, Titania falls asleep by the stream bank. Oberon creeps up on her and squeezes the flower's juice onto her eyelids, chanting a spell, so that Titania will fall in love with the first creature she sees upon waking. Oberon departs, and Lysander and Hermia wander into the glade. Lysander admits that he has forgotten the way to his aunt's house and says that they should sleep in the forest until morning, when they can find their way by daylight. Lysander wishes to sleep close to Hermia, but she insists that they sleep apart, to respect custom and propriety. At some distance from each other, they fall asleep. Puck enters, complaining that he has looked everywhere but cannot find an Athenian youth and pursuing lady. He is relieved when he finally happens upon the sleeping forms of Lysander and Hermia, assuming that they are the Athenians of whom Oberon spoke. Noticing that the two are sleeping apart, Puck surmises that the youth refused to let Hermia come closer to him. Calling him a "churl," Puck spreads the potion on Lysander's eyelids, and he departs. Simultaneously, Helena pursues Demetrius through the glade. He insults her again and insists that she no longer follow him. She complains that she is afraid of the dark, but he nonetheless storms off without her. Saying that she is out of breath, Helena remains behind, bemoaning her unrequited love. She sees the sleeping Lysander and wakes him up. The potion takes effect, and Lysander falls deeply in love with Helena. He begins to praise her beauty and to declare his undying passion for her. Disbelieving, Helena reminds him that he loves Hermia; he declares that Hermia is nothing to him. Helena believes that Lysander is making fun of her, and she grows angry.

She leaves in a huff, and Lysander follows after her. Hermia soon wakes and is shocked to find that Lysander is gone. She stumbles into the woods to find him.

Analysis

Act II, scene ii introduces the plot device of the love potion, which Shakespeare uses to explore the comic possibilities inherent in the motif of love out of balance. Oberon's meddling in the affairs of humans further disrupts the love equilibrium, and the love potion symbolizes the fact that the lovers themselves will not reason out their dilemmas; rather, an outside force—magic—will resolve the love tangle. The ease with which characters' affections change in the play, so that Lysander is madly in love with Hermia at one point and with Helena at another, has troubled some readers, who feel that Shakespeare profanes the idea of true love by treating it as inconstant and subject to outside manipulation. It is important to remember, however, that while *A Midsummer Night's Dream* contains elements of romance, it is not a true love story like *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare's aim is not to comment on the nature of true love but rather to mock gently the melodramatic afflictions and confusions that love induces. Demetrius, Helena, Hermia, and Lysander are meant not to be romantic archetypes but rather sympathetic figures thrown into the confusing circumstances of a romantic farce. Like much farce, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* relies heavily on misunderstanding and mistaken identity to create its humorous entanglements. Oberon's unawareness of the presence of a second Athenian couple—Lysander and Hermia—in the forest enables Puck's mistaken application of the flower's juice. This confusion underscores the crucial role of circumstance in the play: it is not people who are responsible for what happens but rather fate. In *Hamlet* and *Macbeth,* oppositely, Shakespeare forces his characters to make crucial decisions that affect their lives. Much of the comic tension in this scene (and throughout the rest of the play, as the confusion wrought by the love potion only increases) stems from the fact that the solution to the love tangle seems so simple to the reader/audience: if Demetrius could simply be made to love Helena, then the lovers could pair off symmetrically, and love would be restored to a point of balance. Shakespeare teases the audience by dangling the magic flower as a simple mechanism by which this resolution could be achieved. He uses this mechanism, however, to cycle through a

number of increasingly ridiculous arrangements before he allows the love story to arrive at its inevitable happy conclusion.

Act III, scene i. The wood. Titania lying asleep.

Summary

The craftsmen meet in the woods at the appointed time to rehearse their play. Since they will be performing in front of a large group of nobles (and since they have an exaggerated sense of the delicacy of noble ladies), Bottom declares that certain elements of the play must be changed. He fears that Pyramus's suicide and the lion's roaring will frighten the ladies and lead to the actors' executions. The other men share Bottom's concern, and they decide to write a prologue explaining that the lion is not really a lion nor the sword really a sword and assuring the ladies that no one will really die. They decide also that, to clarify the fact that the story takes place at night and that Pyramus and This be are separated by a wall, one man must play the wall and another the moonlight by carrying a bush and a lantern. As the craftsmen rehearse Puck marvels at the scene of the "hempen homespuns" trying to act (III.i.65). When Bottom steps aside, temporarily out of view of the other craftsmen, Puck transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass. When the ass-headed Bottom reenters the scene, the other men become terrified and run for their lives. Delighting in the mischief, Puck chases after them. Bottom, perplexed, remains behind.

In the same grove, the sleeping Titania wakes. When she sees Bottom, the flower juice on her eyelids works its magic, and she falls deeply and instantly in love with the ass-headed weaver. She insists that he remain with her, embraces him, and appoints a group of fairies—Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed—to see to his every wish. Bottom takes these events in stride, having no notion that his head has been replaced with that of an ass. He comments that his friends have acted like asses in leaving him, and he introduces himself to the fairies. Titania looks on him with undisguised love as he follows her to her forest bower.

Analysis

The structure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is roughly such that Act I introduces the main characters and the conflict; Act II sets up the interaction among the Athenian lovers, the fairies, and the craftsmen (the lovers wander through the forest, the fairies make mischief with the love potion); and Act III develops the comical possibilities of these

interactions. As Act III is the first act in which all three groups appear, the fantastic contrasts between them are at their most visible.

The craftsmen's attempt at drama is a comedy of incongruity, as the rough, unsophisticated men demonstrate their utter inability to conceive a competent theatrical production. Their proposal to let the audience know that it is night by having a character play the role of Moonshine exemplifies their straightforward, literal manner of thinking and their lack of regard for subtlety. In their earthy and practical natures, the craftsmen stand in stark contrast to the airy and impish fairies.

The fairies' magic is one of the main components of the dreamlike atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* and it is integral to the plot's progression. It throws love increasingly out of balance and brings the farce into its most frenzied state. With the youths' love tangle already affected by the potion, Shakespeare creates further havoc by generating a romance across groups, as Titania falls in love with the ass-headed Bottom. Obviously, the delicate fairy queen is dramatically unsuited to the clumsy, monstrous craftsman. Shakespeare develops this romance with fantastic aplomb and heightens the comedy of the incongruity by making Bottom fully unaware of his transformed state. Rather, Bottom is so self-confident that he finds it fairly unremarkable that the beautiful fairy queen should wish desperately to become his lover. Further, his ironic reference to his colleagues as asses and his hunger for hay emphasize the ridiculousness of his lofty self-estimation.

Act III, scenes ii–iii

Act III, scene ii. Another part of the wood.

Summary

In another part of the forest, Puck tells Oberon about the predicament involving Titania and Bottom. Oberon is delighted that his plan is working so well. Hermia, having discovered Demetrius after losing Lysander, enters the clearing with Demetrius. Puck is surprised to see the woman he saw earlier with a different man from the one he enchanted. Oberon is surprised to see the man he ordered Puck to enchant with a different woman. He realizes that a mistake has been made and says that he and Puck will have to remedy it. Hermia presses Demetrius about Lysander's whereabouts, fearing that he is dead, but Demetrius does not know where Lysander has gone, and he is bitter and

reproachful that Hermia would rather be with Lysander than with him. Hermia grows angrier and angrier, and Demetrius decides that it is pointless to follow her. He lies down and falls asleep, and Hermia stalks away to find Lysander.

When Hermia is gone, Oberon sends Puck to find Helena and squeezes the flower juice onto Demetrius's eyelids. Puck quickly returns, saying that Helena is close behind him. Helena enters with Lysander still pledging his undying love to her. Still believing that he is mocking her, Helena remains angry and hurt. The noise of their bickering wakes Demetrius, who sees Helena and immediately falls in love with her. Demetrius joins Lysander in declaring this love. Lysander argues that Demetrius does not really love Helena; Demetrius argues that Lysander is truly in love with Hermia. Helena believes that they are both mocking her and refuses to believe that either one loves her.

Hermia reenters, having heard Lysander from a distance. When she learns that her beloved Lysander now claims to love Helena, as does Demetrius, she is appalled and incredulous. Helena, who is likewise unable to fathom that both men could be in love with her, assumes that Hermia is involved in the joke that she believes the men are playing on her, and she chides Hermia furiously for treating their friendship so lightly. Lysander and Demetrius are ready to fight one another for Helena's love; as they lunge at one another, Hermia holds Lysander back, provoking his scorn and disgust: "I will shake thee from me like a serpent" (III.ii.262). Hermia begins to suspect that Helena has somehow acted to steal Lysander's love from her, and she surmises that, because she is short and Helena is tall, Helena must have used her height to lure Lysander. She grows furious with Helena and threatens to scratch out her eyes. Helena becomes afraid, saying that Hermia was always much quicker than she to fight. Demetrius and Lysander vow to protect Helena from Hermia, but they quickly become angry at each other and storm off into the forest to have a duel. Helena runs away from Hermia, and Hermia, reannouncing her amazement at the turn of events, departs.

Oberon dispatches Puck to prevent Lysander and Demetrius from fighting and says that they must resolve this confusion by morning. Puck flies through the forest hurling insults in the voices of both Lysander and Demetrius, confusing the would-be combatants until they are hopelessly lost.

Act III, scene iii. The same place

Summary

Eventually, all four of the young Athenian lovers wander back separately into the glade and fall asleep. Puck squeezes the love potion onto Lysander's eyelids, declaring that in the morning all will be well.

Analysis

The confusion in Act III continues to heighten, as the Athenian lovers and the fairies occupy the stage simultaneously, often without seeing each other. The comedy is at its silliest, and the characters are at their most extreme: Helena and Hermia nearly come to blows as a result of their physical insecurities, and Lysander and Demetrius actually try to have a duel. The plot is at its most chaotic, and, though there is no real climax in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* the action is at its most intense. With the falling action of Acts IV and V, however, matters will sort themselves out quickly and order will be restored.

Like Act III, scene i, Act III, scene ii serves a mainly developmental role in the plot structure of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, focusing on the increasing confusion among the four Athenian lovers. Now that both men have been magically induced to switch their love from Hermia to Helena, the vanities and insecurities of both women become far more pronounced. Helena's low self-esteem prevents her from believing that either man could really be in love with her. Hermia, who is used to having both men fawn on her, has her vanity stung by the fact that they are suddenly cold and indifferent toward her. She reveals a latent insecurity about her short stature when she assumes that Helena has used her height ("her personage, her tall personage") to win Lysander's love, and her quick temper is revealed in Helena's fear that Hermia will attack her (III.ii.293). The men's exaggerated masculine aggression leads them to vow to protect Helena from the dreaded Hermia—a ridiculous state of affairs given that they are two armed men whereas Hermia is a tiny, unarmed woman. Their aggression betrays Helena, however, as the men refocus it on their competition for her love.

The potion is responsible for the confusion of the lovers' situation; thus, Shakespeare links the theme of magic to the motif of imbalanced love, which dominates the scene. Had the love potion never been brought into play, the Athenian lovers would

still be tangled in their romantic mess, but they would all understand it, whereas the fairies' meddling has left both Hermia and Helena unable to comprehend the situation. Additionally, Puck's magical ventriloquism is what prevents Lysander and Demetrius from killing each other at the end of the scene. Thus, magic both brings about their mutual hostility (to this point, Lysander has not been antagonistic toward Demetrius) and resolves it.

Act IV, scene i. The same. Lysander, Demetrius, Helena, and Hermia

Summary

As the Athenian lovers lie asleep in the grove, Titania enters with Bottom, still with the head of an ass, and their fairy attendants. Titania tells Bottom to lie down with his head in her lap, so that she may twine roses into his hair and kiss his "fair large ears" (IV.i.4). Bottom orders Peaseblossom to scratch his head and sends Cobweb to find him some honey. Titania asks Bottom if he is hungry, and he replies that he has a strange appetite for hay. Titania suggests that she send a fairy to fetch him nuts from a squirrel's hoard, but Bottom says that he would rather have a handful of dried peas. Yawning, he declares that he is very tired. Titania tells him to sleep in her arms, and she sends the fairies away. Gazing at Bottom's head, she cries, "O how I love thee, how I dote on thee!" and they fall asleep (IV.i.42).

Puck and Oberon enter the glade and comment on the success of Oberon's revenge. Oberon says that he saw Titania earlier in the woods and taunted her about her love for the ass-headed Bottom; he asked her for the Indian child, promising to undo the spell if she would yield him, to which she consented. Satisfied, Oberon bends over the sleeping Titania and speaks the charm to undo the love potion. Titania wakes and is amazed to find that she is sleeping with the donkey like Bottom. Oberon calls for music and takes his queen away to dance. She says that she hears the morning lark, and they exit. Puck speaks a charm over Bottom to restore his normal head, and he follows after his master.

As dawn breaks, Theseus, his attendants, Hippolyta, and Egeus enter to hear the yelping of Theseus's hounds. They are startled to find the Athenian youths sleeping in the glade. They wake them and demand their story, which the youths are only partly able to recall—to them, the previous night seems as insubstantial as a dream. All that is clear to them is that Demetrius and Helena love each other, as do Lysander and Hermia. Theseus

orders them to follow him to the temple for a great wedding feast. As they leave, Bottom wakes. He says that he has had a wondrous dream and that he will have Peter Quince write a ballad of his dream to perform at the end of their play.

Analysis

Barely 300 lines long, Act IV is the shortest and most transitional of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s five acts. The first three serve respectively to introduce the characters, establish the comic situation, and develop the comedy; Act IV ends the conflict and leads to the happy ending in Act V. What is most remarkable, perhaps, is the speed with which the conflict is resolved and the farce comes to an end; despite the ubiquity of chaos in Act III, all that is necessary to resolve matters is a bit of potion on Lysander's eyelids and Oberon's forgiveness of his wife. The climactic moment between Titania and Oberon, during which she agrees to give him the Indian boy, is not even shown onstage but is merely described.

Though Demetrius's love of Helena is a by-product of the magic potion rather than an expression of his natural feelings, love has been put into balance, allowing for a traditional marriage ending. As is often the case with Shakespeare, the dramatic situation is closely tied to the circumstances of the external environment; just as the conflict is ending and a semblance of order is restored among the characters, the sun comes up. There is no real climax in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; rather, as soon as the scenario has progressed to a suitable degree of complication and hilarity, Shakespeare simply invokes the fairies' magic to dispel all conflict. As the sun comes up, the reappearance of Theseus and Hippolyta, who symbolize the power and structure of the outside world, begins to dispel the magical dream of the play.

Theseus and Hippolyta are extremely important figures both at its beginning and at its end, but they disappear entirely during the main action in the magical forest. The duke and his Amazon bride are romanticized in the play, but they belong solely to the nonmagical waking world, where they remain wholly in control of their own feelings and actions. An important element of the dream realm, as the lovers come to realize upon waking in a daze, is that one is in control of neither oneself nor one's surroundings. In this way, the forest and fairies contribute to the lovers' sense of their experience as a dream, even though the action happens largely while they are awake.

Act IV, scene ii. Athens. Quince's house.

Summary

At Quince's house, the craftsmen sit somberly and worry about their missing friend Bottom. Having last seen him shortly before the appearance of the ass-headed monster in the forest, the craftsmen worry that some terrifying creature has felled him. Starveling suspects that the fairies have cast some enchantment on Bottom. Flute asks whether they will go through with the play if Bottom does not return from the woods, and Peter Quince declares that to do so would be impossible, as Bottom is the only man in Athens capable of portraying Pyramus. The sad craftsmen agree that their friend is the wittiest, most intelligent, and best person in all of Athens.

Snug enters with an alarming piece of news: Theseus has been married, along with "two or three lords and ladies" (presumably Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena), and the newlyweds are eager to see a play (IV.ii.16). Flute laments Bottom's absence, noting that Bottom would certainly have won a great deal of money from the admiring duke for his portrayal of Pyramus.

Just then, Bottom bursts triumphantly into the room and asks why everyone looks so sad. The men are overjoyed to see him, and he declares that he has an amazing story to tell them about his adventure in the forest. Quince asks to hear it, but Bottom says that there is no time: they must don their costumes and go straight to the duke's palace to perform their play. As they leave, Bottom tells them not to eat onions or garlic before the play, as they must be prepared to "utter sweet breath" (IV.ii.36).

Analysis

This brief comic scene returns the focus of the play to the subplot of the Athenian craftsmen. Structurally, Act IV, scene ii represents something of a new beginning *for A Midsummer Night's Dream:* the main conflict of the play has been resolved, but rather than ending with the weddings of the lovers, as is customary in an Elizabethan comedy (the weddings do not even occur onstage here), Shakespeare chooses to include an extended epilogue devoted to sheer comedy. The epilogue takes up all of Act V and centers around the craftsmen's performance of Pyramus and Thisbe for the Athenian crowd. Act IV, scene ii transfers the focus of the play from magic and unbalanced love to a play-within-a-play, in which the themes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, not too heavy

to begin with, are recycled into a form so ridiculous and garbled that the play draws to a wholly untroubled conclusion.

Though the preceding events of A Midsummer Night's Dream have been far from tragic, many of the characters have experienced unpleasant emotions, such as jealousy, lovesickness, and insecurity. Act IV, scene ii makes a basic transition from sadness to joy as Bottom's return transforms his fellow craftsmen's sorrow and confusion into delight and eagerness. It is no coincidence that Bottom's reappearance occurs almost simultaneously with the audience being told that the lovers have been married. Just as the marriages dispel the romantic angst of the play, so does Bottom's return dispel the worry of his comrades. Similarly, the arrival in the forest of Theseus and Hippolyta, representatives of order, coincides with the Athenian lovers' waking from their chaotic, dreamlike romp of the previous night.

Act V, Scene i. Athens: The palace of Theseus

Summary

Theseus discusses the retold dreams of the lovers with his bride, but tells everyone to dismiss it as pure fancy. Then, since the wedding is over yet the night is still young (and the honeymoon has not started..), they decide to hear a play. A short play of ten lines. And a play that produces tears, only tears of laughter.. Then, the players enter and Quince tells the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe. Two lovers, from different kingdoms, meet in a hole in a wall. They fall in love, and plan to meet at a tomb to run away together. Thisbe comes upon the tomb first, but is frightened away by a lion, and drops her scarf in the process. The lion, with a bloody mouth, stains the scarf. Pyramus, seeing the stained scarf, thinks that the lion has eaten Thisbe, and promptly commits suicide. Thisbe, seeing her beau dead, kills herself. A tragic story... The king and his subjects howl with laughter at the talking wall, unthreatening lion, the moon that sets at a plea, and lovers who can't act. Theseus, happy with such a laughable performance, thinks it best to retire. Everyone disperses. Oberon, Titania, Robin, and hordes of other fairies then enter the court of Theseus. They dance, and wish the lovers well. A sort of be-all, end-all to the play, then they leave. Robin, alone, urges the audience to forget all that they have seen on stage, and dismiss it as a mid summer night's dream.

Important Quotations Explained

It would be helpful to examine some of the important lines from the play to have an insight into the events in the play and its beauty and splendor.

1 Ay me, for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth...
(I.i.137, I.i.142–144).

Lysander speaks these lines to soothe Hermia when she despairs about the difficulties facing their love, specifically, that Egeus, her father, has forbidden them to marry and that Theseus has threatened her with death if she disobeys her father (I.i.132–134). Lysander tells Hermia that as long as there has been true love, there have been seemingly insurmountable difficulties to challenge it. He goes on to list a number of these difficulties, many of which later appear in the play: differences in birth or age ("misgrafted in respect of years") and difficulties caused by friends or "war, death, or sickness," which make love seem "swift as a shadow, short as any dream" (I.i.137, I.i.142–144). But, as Hermia comments, lovers must persevere, treating their difficulties as a price that must be paid for romantic bliss. As such, the above lines inaugurate the play's exploration of the theme of love's difficulties and presage what lies ahead for Lysander and Hermia: they will face great difficulties but will persevere and ultimately arrive at a happy ending.

2. Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.
He will not know what all but he do know.
And as he errs, doting on Hermia's eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
(I.i.227–235).

Helena utters these lines as she comments on the irrational nature of love. They are extremely important to the play's overall presentation of love as erratic, inexplicable, and exceptionally powerful (I.i.227–235). Distressed by the fact that her beloved Demetrius loves Hermia and not her, Helena says that though she is as beautiful as Hermia, Demetrius cannot see her beauty. Helena adds that she dotes on Demetrius (though not all of his qualities are admirable) in the same way that he dotes on Hermia. She believes that love has the power to transform "base and vile" qualities into "form and dignity"—that is, even ugliness and bad behavior can seem attractive to someone in love. This is the case, she argues, because "love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind"—love depends not on an objective assessment of appearance but rather on an individual perception of the beloved. These lines prefigure aspects of the play's examination of love, such as Titania's passion for the ass-headed Bottom, which epitomizes the transformation of the "base and vile" into "form and dignity."

3. Lord, what fools these mortals be! (III.ii.115).

Puck makes this declaration in his amazement at the ludicrous behavior of the young Athenians (III.ii.115). This line is one of the most famous in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for its pithy humor, but it is also thematically important: first, because it captures the exaggerated silliness of the lovers' behavior; second, because it marks the contrast between the human lovers, completely absorbed in their emotions, and the magical fairies, impish and never too serious.

4. I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called 'Bottom's Dream', because it hath no bottom. (IV.i.199–209).

Bottom makes this bombastic speech after he wakes up from his adventure with Titania; his human head restored, he believes that his experience as an ass-headed monster beloved by the beautiful fairy queen was merely a bizarre dream (IV.i.199–209). He remarks dramatically that his dream is beyond human comprehension; then,

contradicting himself, he says that he will ask Quince to write a ballad about this dream. These lines are important partially because they offer humorous commentary on the theme of dreams throughout the play but also because they crystallize much of what is so lovable and amusing about Bottom. His overabundant self-confidence burbles out in his grandiose idea that although no one could possibly understand his dream, it is worthy of being immortalized in a poem. His tendency to make melodramatic rhetorical mistakes manifests itself plentifully, particularly in his comically mixed-up association of body parts and senses: he suggests that eyes can hear, ears see, hands taste, tongues think, and hearts speak.

5. If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear;
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend.
If you pardon, we will mend.

(V.epilogue.1–8).

Puck speaks these lines in an address to the audience near the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, extending the theme of dreams beyond the world of the play and putting the reality of the audience's experience into question (V.epilogue.1–8). As many of the characters (Bottom and Theseus among them) believe that the magical events of the play's action were merely a dream, Puck tells the crowd that if the play has offended them, they too should remember it simply as a dream—"That you have but slumbered here, / While these visions did appear." The speech offers a commentary on the dreamlike atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and casts the play as a magical dream in which the audience shares.

Discussion of some significant aspects of the Play

Character Analysis

Puck

Though there is little character development in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and no true protagonist, critics generally point to Puck as the most important character in the play. The mischievous, quick-witted spirit sets many of the play's events in motion with his magic, by means of both deliberate pranks on the human characters (transforming Bottom's head into that of an ass) and unfortunate mistakes (smearing the love potion on Lysander's eyelids instead of Demetrius's).

More important, Puck's capricious spirit, magical fancy, fun-loving humor, and lovely, evocative language permeate the atmosphere of the play. Wild contrasts, such as the implicit comparison between the rough, earthy craftsmen and the delicate, graceful fairies, dominate *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Puck seems to illustrate many of these contrasts within his own character: he is graceful but not so saccharine as the other fairies; as Oberon's jester, he is given to a certain coarseness, which leads him to transform Bottom's head into that of an ass merely for the sake of enjoyment. He is good-hearted but capable of cruel tricks. Finally, whereas most of the fairies are beautiful and ethereal, Puck is often portrayed as somewhat bizarre looking. Indeed, another fairy mentions that some call Puck a "hobgoblin," a term whose connotations are decidedly less glamorous than those of "fairy" (II.i.40).

Nick Bottom

Whereas Puck's humor is often mischievous and subtle, the comedy surrounding the overconfident weaver Nick Bottom is hilariously overt. The central figure in the subplot involving the craftsmen's production of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, Bottom dominates his fellow actors with an extraordinary belief in his own abilities (he thinks he is perfect for every part in the play) and his comical incompetence (he is a terrible actor and frequently makes rhetorical and grammatical mistakes in his speech). The humor surrounding Bottom often stems from the fact that he is totally unaware of his own ridiculousness; his speeches are overdramatic and self-aggrandizing, and he seems to believe that everyone takes him as seriously as he does himself. This foolish self-importance reaches its pinnacle after Puck transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass.

When Titania, whose eyes have been anointed with a love potion, falls in love with the now ass-headed Bottom, he believes that the devotion of the beautiful, magical fairy queen is nothing out of the ordinary and that all of the trappings of her affection, including having servants attend him, are his proper due. His unawareness of the fact that his head has been transformed into that of an ass parallels his inability to perceive the absurdity of the idea that Titania could fall in love with him.

Helena

Although Puck and Bottom stand out as the most personable characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* they themselves are not involved in the main dramatic events. Of the other characters, Helena, the lovesick young woman desperately in love with Demetrius, is perhaps the most fully drawn. Among the quartet of Athenian lovers, Helena is the one who thinks most about the nature of love—which makes sense, given that at the beginning of the play she is left out of the love triangle involving Lysander, Hermia, and Demetrius. She says, "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind," believing that Demetrius has built up a fantastic notion of Hermia's beauty that prevents him from recognizing Helena's own beauty (I.ii.134). Utterly faithful to Demetrius despite her recognition of his shortcomings, Helena sets out to win his love by telling him about the plan of Lysander and Hermia to elope into the forest. Once Helena enters the forest, many of her traits are drawn out by the confusion that the love potion engenders: compared to the other lovers, she is extremely unsure of herself, worrying about her appearance and believing that Lysander is mocking her when he declares his love for her.

Major Themes, Motifs & Symbols

Having analyzed the complete play, its major events and characters, let us now look at the major themes, motifs and symbols that are prevalent in the play.

Love's Difficulty

"The course of true love never did run smooth," comments Lysander, articulating one of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*'s most important themes—that of the difficulty of love (I.i.134). Though most of the conflict in the play stems from the troubles of romance, and though the play involves a number of romantic elements, it is not truly a love story; it distances the audience from the emotions of the characters in order to poke fun at the torments and afflictions that those in love suffer. The tone of the play is so lighthearted

that the audience never doubts that things will end happily, and it is therefore free to enjoy the comedy without being caught up in the tension of an uncertain outcome.

The theme of love's difficulty is often explored through the motif of love out of balance—that is, romantic situations in which a disparity or inequality interferes with the harmony of a relationship. The prime instance of this imbalance is the asymmetrical love among the four young Athenians: Hermia loves Lysander, Lysander loves Hermia, Helena loves Demetrius, and Demetrius loves Hermia instead of Helena—a simple numeric imbalance in which two men love the same woman, leaving one woman with too many suitors and one with too few. The play has strong potential for a traditional outcome, and the plot is in many ways based on a quest for internal balance; that is, when the lovers' tangle resolves itself into symmetrical pairings, the traditional happy ending will have been achieved. Somewhat similarly, in the relationship between Titania and Oberon, an imbalance arises out of the fact that Oberon's coveting of Titania's Indian boy outweighs his love for her. Later, Titania's passion for the ass-headed Bottom represents an imbalance of appearance and nature: Titania is beautiful and graceful, while Bottom is clumsy and grotesque.

Magic

The fairies' magic, which brings about many of the most bizarre and hilarious situations in the play, is another element central to the fantastic atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare uses magic both to embody the almost supernatural power of love (symbolized by the love potion) and to create a surreal world. Although the misuse of magic causes chaos, as when Puck mistakenly applies the love potion to Lysander's eyelids, magic ultimately resolves the play's tensions by restoring love to balance among the quartet of Athenian youths. Additionally, the ease with which Puck uses magic to his own ends, as when he reshapes Bottom's head into that of an ass and recreates the voices of Lysander and Demetrius, stands in contrast to the laboriousness and gracelessness of the craftsmen's attempt to stage their play.

Dreams

As the title suggests, dreams are an important theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream;* they are linked to the bizarre, magical mishaps in the forest. Hippolyta's first words in the play evidence the prevalence of dreams ("Four days will quickly steep themselves in

night, / Four nights will quickly dream away the time"), and various characters mention dreams throughout (I.i.7–8). The theme of dreaming recurs predominantly when characters attempt to explain bizarre events in which these characters are involved: "I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what / dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream," Bottom says, unable to fathom the magical happenings that have affected him as anything but the result of slumber.

Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams, in how events occur without explanation, time loses its normal sense of flow, and the impossible occurs as a matter of course; he seeks to recreate this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, saying that, if they have been offended by the play, they should remember it as nothing more than a dream. This sense of illusion and gauzy fragility is crucial to the atmosphere of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* as it helps render the play a fantastical experience rather than a heavy drama.

Motifs

Contrast

The idea of contrast is the basic building block of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* The entire play is constructed around groups of opposites and doubles. Nearly every characteristic presented in the play has an opposite: Helena is tall, Hermia is short; Puck plays pranks, Bottom is the victim of pranks; Titania is beautiful, Bottom is grotesque. Further, the three main groups of characters (who are developed from sources as varied as Greek mythology, English folklore, and classical literature) are designed to contrast powerfully with one another: the fairies are graceful and magical, while the craftsmen are clumsy and earthy; the craftsmen are merry, while the lovers are overly serious. Contrast serves as the defining visual characteristic of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* with the play's most indelible image being that of the beautiful, delicate Titania weaving flowers into the hair of the ass-headed Bottom. It seems impossible to imagine two figures less compatible with each other. The juxtaposition of extraordinary differences is the most important characteristic of the play's surreal atmosphere and is thus perhaps the play's central motif; there is no scene in which extraordinary contrast is not present.

Symbols

Theseus and Hippolyta

Theseus and Hippolyta appear in the daylight at both the beginning and the end of the play's main action. They disappear, however, for the duration of the action, leaving in the middle of Act I, scene one and not reappearing until Act IV, as the sun is coming up to end the magical night in the forest. Shakespeare uses Theseus and Hippolyta, the ruler of Athens and his warrior bride, to represent order and stability, to contrast with the uncertainty, instability, and darkness of most of the play. Whereas an important element of the dream realm is that one is not in control of one's environment, Theseus and Hippolyta are always entirely in control of theirs. Their reappearance in the daylight of Act IV to hear Theseus's hounds signifies the end of the dream state of the previous night and a return to rationality.

The Love Potion

The love potion is made from the juice of a flower that was struck with one of Cupid's misfired arrows; it is used by the fairies to wreak romantic havoc throughout Acts II, III, and IV. Because the meddling fairies are careless with the love potion, the situation of the young Athenian lovers becomes increasingly chaotic and confusing (Demetrius and Lysander are magically compelled to transfer their love from Hermia to Helena), and Titania is hilariously humiliated (she is magically compelled to fall deeply in love with the ass-headed Bottom). The love potion thus becomes a symbol of the unreasoning, fickle, erratic, and undeniably powerful nature of love, which can lead to inexplicable and bizarre behavior and cannot be resisted.

The Craftsmen's Play

The play-within-a-play that takes up most of Act V, scene i is used to represent, in condensed form, many of the important ideas and themes of the main plot. Because the craftsmen are such bumbling actors, their performance satirizes the melodramatic Athenian lovers and gives the play a purely joyful, comedic ending. Pyramus and Thisbe face parental disapproval in the play-within-a-play, just as Hermia and Lysander do; the theme of romantic confusion enhanced by the darkness of night is rehashed, as Pyramus mistakenly believes that Thisbe has been killed by the lion, just as the Athenian lovers experience intense misery because of the mix-ups caused by the fairies' meddling. The

craftsmen's play is, therefore, a kind of symbol for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* itself: a story involving powerful emotions that is made hilarious by its comical presentation. The story of Pyramus and Thisbe offers a very subtle return to a couple of the main elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: lovers caught up in misunderstanding and sorrow enhanced by the darkness of night. Like the main story of the outer play, the inner play consists of a tragic premise made comical by the actors. The craftsmen's unintentionally goofy portrayal of the woe of Pyramus and Thisbe makes the melodramatic romantic entanglements of the young Athenian lovers seem even more comical.

However, it is important to recognize as well that the inherent structure of a play-within-a-play allows Shakespeare to show off his talent by inserting a gem of pure comedy. The conflicts have been resolved and a happy ending procured for all; the performance, thus, has no impact on the plot. Rather, the craftsmen's hilarious bungling of the heavy tragedy allows the audience, and the melodramatic Athenian lovers, to laugh and take delight in the spectacle of the play.

A Note on Contrasting tones and characters in the play

Shakespeare takes his characters from vastly different sources (e.g., the bumbling, rough craftsmen and the delicate, fanciful fairies) and that contributes to the imaginative scope and pervasive absurdity of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shakespeare combines the contrasting elements of the play in startling and grotesque ways, as in the royal Titania's love for the ass-headed Bottom. He thus creates the sense that the normal rules and operations of reality have been suspended: if the magical Titania can fall in love with the ludicrous Bottom, anything can happen. The play's extraordinarily varied frame of reference, which includes elements of Greek mythology (Theseus and Hippolyta), aspects of the contemporary London theatrical tradition (males playing females in the craftsmen's play), characters of Babylonian origin (Pyramus and Thisbe) and from English fairy lore (Puck), and classical literary analogues (Titania and Oberon), adds to the surreal quality of the play by juxtaposing elements that clash stylistically.

A Note on the Structure of the play

A Midsummer Night's Dream fits into four acts all of the material that would normally occupy a five-act play; the main story, climax, and even a period of falling action are

capped by a happy turn of events that would seem to mark the play's end. It is somewhat strange, then, that Shakespeare includes a fifth act. Since he has already resolved the tensions of the main plot, he treats Act V as a joyful comic epilogue. Except for a short closing scene, the act is committed wholly to the craftsmen's performance of Pyramus and Thisbe. In wrapping up the conflict before the last act, Shakespeare affords himself the opportunity to give the audience one act of pure, uncomplicated comedy. He offers a play-within-a-play whose comical rendition caps the cheerful mood of the Athenians watching the play.

Conclusion

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedy through which Shakespeare makes us think about the credibility of the idea of falling in love at the first sight with someone. Love is the butt of a colossal joke here, made to look absurd, grotesque, and foolish. We saw in the play that imagination can make even an ass desirable. As with Bottom and Titania, love makes an ass out of you. All love is ironical here. The irrationality of love is shown -- this doesn't mean Shakespeare stands for moderation and sobriety. He seems to encourage setting limits not just to passion, but also to the roles of common sense and reason in life.

Now let us assess our learning by trying to answer some questions.

Questions

Short Answers

1. The importance of play within the play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
2. Write short notes on a) Puck,

   b) Bottom
3. Theme of love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
4. The role of magic in the action of the play
5. The relevance of Theseus and Hippolyta in the play.

Essays

1. Compare and contrast the Athenian lovers with the craftsmen.

   In what ways are the dispositions of the two groups different from each other? Are they similar in any way?

2. Do you think that Puck is the protagonist of the play? Substantiate your arguments with reference to the play

3.Analyse *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a comedy highlighting the comical aspects of the play.

4.Do you feel that the characters of Demetrius and Lysander and that of Helena and Hermia are similar? Do you feel that Shakespeare attribute any individuality to these lovers? Support your arguments referring the text.

5. What role do Theseus and Hippolyta play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? What is the significance of the fact that they are absent from the play's main action?

6. "The course of love did never run smooth..." How far do you see this statement made by Lysander true in the play?

7. Comment on the relevance of the title of the play*, A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

8. Has the story of Pyramus and Thisbe got any significance in the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream?* How does the play with in the play contribute to the plot?

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UNIT - III

The following two plays will be studied in this unit.

1. G B Shaw : *Pygmalion*
2. T S Eliot : *Murder in the Cathedral- Detailed Study*

UNIT III.1

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: *PYGMALION* (1912)

Biography of the author

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) was born in Dublin, the son of a civil servant. His education was irregular, due to his dislike of any organized training. After working in an estate agent's office for a while he moved to London as a young man (1876), where he established himself as a leading music and theatre critic in the eighties and nineties and became a prominent member of the Fabian Society, for which he composed many pamphlets. He began his literary career as a novelist; as a fervent advocate of the new theatre of Ibsen (*The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, 1891) he decided to write plays in order to illustrate his criticism of the English stage. His earliest dramas were called appropriately *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898). Among these, *Widowers' Houses* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession* savagely attack social hypocrisy, while in plays such as *Arms and the Man* and *The Man of Destiny* the criticism is less fierce. Shaw's radical rationalism, his utter disregard of conventions, his keen dialectic interest and verbal wit often turn the stage into a forum of ideas, and nowhere more openly than in the famous discourses on the Life Force, "Don Juan in Hell", the third act of the dramatization of woman's love chase of man, *Man and Superman* (1903).

In the plays of his later period discussion sometimes drowns the drama, in *Back to Methuselah* (1921), although in the same period he worked on his masterpiece *Saint Joan* (1923), in which he rewrites the well-known story of the French maiden and extends it from the Middle Ages to the present.

Other important plays by Shaw are *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901), a historical play filled with allusions to modern times, and *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), in which he exercised a kind of retrospective history and from modern movements drew deductions for the Christian era. In *Major Barbara* (1905), one of Shaw's most successful

"discussion" plays, the audience's attention is held by the power of the witty argumentation that man can achieve aesthetic salvation only through political activity, not as an individual. *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906), facetiously classified as a tragedy by Shaw, is really a comedy the humour of which is directed at the medical profession. *Candida* (1898), with social attitudes toward sex relations as objects of his satire, and *Pygmalion* (1912), a witty study of phonetics as well as a clever treatment of middle-class morality and class distinction, proved some of Shaw's greatest successes on the stage. It is a combination of the dramatic, the comic, and the social corrective that gives Shaw's comedies their special flavour. Shaw's complete works appeared in thirty-six volumes between 1930 and 1950, the year of his death. One of Shaw's greatest contributions as a modern dramatist is in establishing drama as serious literature, negotiating publication deals for his highly popular plays so as to convince the public that the play was no less important than the novel. In that way, he created the conditions for later playwrights to write seriously for the theater.

General Information about the Play

Genre

Shaw's *Pygmalion* belongs to the genre of realist plays that deal with issues of common man. Based on classical myth, Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion plays on the complex business of human relationships in a social world. Of all of Shaw's plays, *Pygmalion* is without the doubt the most beloved and popularly received, if not the most significant in literary terms. Several film versions have been made of the play, and it has even been adapted into a musical. In fact, writing the screenplay for the film version of 1938 helped Shaw to become the first and only man ever to win the much coveted Double: the Nobel Prize for literature and an Academy Award. The successful musical *My Fair Lady* was based on this Bernard Shaw classic.

Pygmalion derives its name from the famous story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Pygmalion, disgusted by the loose and shameful lives of the women of his era, decides to live alone and unmarried. With wondrous art, he creates a beautiful statue more perfect than any living woman. The more he looks upon her, the more deeply he falls in love with her, until he wishes that she were more than a statue. This statue is Galatea. Lovesick, Pygmalion goes to the temple of the goddess Venus and prays that she

give him a lover like his statue; Venus is touched by his love and brings Galatea to life. When Pygmalion returns from Venus' temple and kisses his statue, he is delighted to find that she is warm and soft to the touch. And they both are happy.

Brief Summary of the Play

Let us now go to the brief summary of the play before starting the Act wise analysis.

Two old gentlemen meet in the rain one night at Covent Garden. Professor Higgins is a scientist of phonetics, and Colonel Pickering is a linguist of Indian dialects. The first bets the other that he can, with his knowledge of phonetics, convince high London society that, in a matter of months, he will be able to transform the cockney speaking Covent Garden flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, into a woman as poised and well-spoken as a duchess. The next morning, the girl appears at his laboratory on Wimpole Street to ask for speech lessons, offering to pay a shilling, so that she may speak properly enough to work in a flower shop. Higgins makes merciless fun of her, but is seduced by the idea of working his magic on her. Pickering goads him on by agreeing to cover the costs of the experiment if Higgins can pass Eliza off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. The challenge is taken, and Higgins starts by having his housekeeper bathe Eliza and give her new clothes. Then Eliza's father Alfred Doolittle comes to demand the return of his daughter, though his real intention is to hit Higgins up for some money. The professor, amused by Doolittle's unusual rhetoric, gives him five pounds. On his way out, the dustman fails to recognize the now clean, pretty flower girl as his daughter.

For a number of months, Higgins trains Eliza to speak properly. Two trials for Eliza follow. The first occurs at Higgins' mother's home, where Eliza is introduced to the Eynsford Hills, a trio of mother, daughter, and son. The son Freddy is very attracted to her, and further taken with what he thinks is her affected "small talk" when she slips into cockney. Mrs. Higgins worries that the experiment will lead to problems once it is ended, but Higgins and Pickering are too absorbed in their game to take heed. A second trial, which takes place some months later at an ambassador's party (and which is not actually staged), is a resounding success. The wager is definitely won, but Higgins and Pickering are now bored with the project, which causes Eliza to be hurt. She throws Higgins' slippers at him in a rage because she does not know what is to become of her, thereby

bewildering him. He suggests she marry somebody. She returns him the hired jewelry, and he accuses her of ingratitude.

The following morning, Higgins rushes to his mother in a panic, because Eliza has run away. On his tail is Eliza's father, now unhappily rich from the trust of a deceased millionaire who took to heart Higgins' recommendation that Doolittle was England's "most original moralist." Mrs. Higgins, who has been hiding Eliza upstairs all along, chides the two of them for playing with the girl's affections. When she enters, Eliza thanks Pickering for always treating her like a lady, but threatens Higgins that she will go away with his rival phonetician, Nepommuck. The outraged Higgins cannot help but start to admire her. As Eliza leaves for her father's wedding, Higgins shouts out a few errands for her to run, assuming that she will return to him at Wimpole Street. Eliza, who has a lovelorn sweetheart in Freddy, and the wherewithal to pass as a duchess, never makes it clear whether she will return or not. Shaw ends the play this unanswered question.

Detailed Analysis of the Play

List of Characters

Professor Henry Higgins - Henry Higgins is a professor of phonetics who plays Pygmalion to Eliza Doolittle's Galatea.

Eliza Doolittle-- The flower girl who is taught by Higgins and Pickering

Alfred Doolittle - Eliza's father

Colonel Pickering-- the author of Spoken Sanskrit, is a match for Higgins (although somewhat less obsessive) in his passion for phonetics.

Mrs. Higgins - Professor Higgins' mother

Freddy Eynsford Hill --A young man who gets attracted to Eliza

Mrs.Eynsford Hill -- Freddy's mother

Ms.Eynsford Hill-- Freddy's sister

Mrs. Pearce-- The House keeper of Prof. Higgins

Act wise Analysis

Act I

Summary

A heavy late-night summer thunderstorm opens the play. Caught in the unexpected downpour, passersby from distinct strata of the London streets are forced to seek shelter

together under the portico of St Paul's church in Covent Garden. The hapless Son is forced by his demanding sister and mother to go out into the rain to find a taxi even though there is none to be found. In his hurry, he knocks over the basket of a common Flower Girl, who says to him, "Nah then, Freddy: look wh' y' gowin, deah." After Freddy leaves, the mother gives the Flower Girl money to ask how she knew her son's name, only to learn that "Freddy" is a common by-word the Flower Girl would have used to address anyone. An elderly military Gentleman enters from the rain, and the Flower Girl tries to sell him a flower. He gives her some change, but a bystander tells her to be careful, for it looks like there is a police informer taking copious notes on her activities. This leads to hysterical protestations on her part, that she is only a poor girl who has done no wrong. The refugees from the rain crowd around her and the Note Taker, with considerable hostility towards the latter, whom they believe to be an undercover cop. However, each time someone speaks up, this mysterious man has the amusing ability to determine where the person came from, simply by listening to that person's speech, which turns him into something of a sideshow. The rain clears, leaving few other people than the Flower Girl, the Note Taker, and the Gentleman. In response to a question from the Gentleman, the Note Taker answers that his talent comes from "simply phonetics...the science of speech." He goes on to brag that he can use phonetics to make a duchess out of the Flower Girl. Through further questioning, the Note Taker and the Gentleman reveal that they are Henry Higgins and Colonel Pickering respectively, both scholars of dialects who have been wanting to visit with each other. They decide to go for a supper, but not until Higgins has been convinced by the Flower Girl to give her some change. He generously throws her a half-crown, some florins, and a half-sovereign. This allows the delighted girl to take a taxi home, the same taxi that Freddy has brought back, only to find that his impatient mother and sister have left without him.

Analysis

This act is carefully constructed to portray a representative slice of society, in which characters from vastly different strata of society who would normally keep apart are brought together by untoward weather. It is no coincidence that this happens at the end of a show at the theater, drawing our attention to the fact that the ensuing plot will be highly theatrical, that its fantastic quality is gleaned from the illusionary magic of theater. While

the transformation of Eliza in the play focuses on speech, each one of her subsequent tests is also something highly theatrical, depending on the visual impact she makes, and how she moves. The highly visual, on top of aural (therefore, altogether theatrical), way in which the flower girl is made into a duchess is emphasized right from this opening act. Under these terms, it should help us to think about the comparison of the artificial makeover of Eliza Doolittle that the phonetics scientist can achieve, to the genuine increase in self-esteem that the considerate gentleman can bestow upon her. The confusion of the thunderstorm foreshadows the social confusion that will ensue when Higgins decides to play god with the raw material that the unschooled flower girl presents to him. In this act, everyone is introduced in very categorized roles. In this scene, Shaw introduces almost all his major characters, but refers to them by role rather than name in his stage directions: Note-Taker, The Flower Girl, The Daughter, The Gentleman, etc. Furthermore, his stage directions describing where characters stand with every line, particularly in relation to other characters, come across as more than fastidious in their detail. All this evokes a society whose members have rigid relations to one another. The odd, seemingly irrelevant episode when The Mother gives the Flower Girl money to find out how she knew her son's name shows the Mother's fear that her son might be associating with the wrong sort. The incident also conflates a real name with a common term that can apply to anyone; Freddy is for a moment both term and character. By the end of the act, The Note-Taker, The Gentleman, and The Flower Girl have become Higgins, Pickering, and Eliza, respectively. This move will continue through the length of the play, where a less visible blooming of real persons out of mere social positions occurs. If Higgins is one kind of Pygmalion who makes a flower girl a duchess, Shaw is a grander, more total Pygmalion who can transform mere titles into human names. Remembering that Pygmalion is subtitled "A Romance in Five Acts," this act strikes us as a rather odd, unceremonious way of introducing the heroes of a romance. For starters, the heroine is described as being "not at all a romantic figure." The hero calls the heroine a "squashed cabbage leaf," while she can do no better than "Ah-ah-ah-ow-ow-ow-oo" back at him. The impression she makes on him is abstract (as an interesting phonetic subject) while that which he makes on her is monetary (he throws her some change), so that we get no indication at all that any feelings of affection will eventually develop

between these two. Indeed, we must see the play as a deliberate attempt by Shaw to undo the myth of Pygmalion, and, more importantly, the form of the romance itself. Bearing this in mind, it is possible to approach the rest of the play without a preconceived idea of how a romantic play should conclude, and to notice, as Shaw intends, that there are more utilitarian than romantic aspects to the characters' relationships with one another.

Act II

Summary

The next day, Higgins and Pickering are just resting from a full morning of discussion when Eliza Doolittle shows up at the door, to the tremendous doubt of the discerning housekeeper Mrs. Pearce, and the surprise of the two gentlemen. Prompted by his careless brag about making her into a duchess the night before, she has come to take lessons from Higgins, so that she may sound genteel enough to work in a flower shop rather than sell at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. As the conversation progresses, Higgins alternates between making fun of the poor girl and threatening her with a broomstick beating, which only causes her to howl and holler, upsetting Higgins' civilized company to a considerable degree. Pickering is much kinder and considerate of her feelings, even going so far as to call her "Miss Doolittle" and to offer her a seat. Pickering is piqued by the prospect of helping Eliza, and bets Higgins that if Higgins is able to pass Eliza off as a duchess at the Ambassador's garden party, then he, Pickering, will cover the expenses of the experiment. This act is made up mostly of a long and animated three- (sometimes four-) way argument over the character and the potential of the indignant Eliza. At one point, incensed by Higgins' heartless insults, she threatens to leave, but the clever professor lures her back by stuffing her mouth with a chocolate, half of which he eats too to prove to her that it is not poisoned. It is agreed upon that Eliza will live with Higgins for six months, and be schooled in the speech and manners of a lady of high class. Things get started when Mrs. Pearce takes her upstairs for a bath. While Mrs. Pearce and Eliza are away, Pickering wants to be sure that Higgins' intentions towards the girl are honorable, to which Higgins replies that, to him, women "might as well be blocks of wood." Mrs. Pearce enters to warn Higgins that he should be more careful with his swearing and his forgetful table manners now that they have an impressionable young lady with them, revealing that Higgins's own gentlemanly ways are

somewhat precarious. At this point, Alfred Doolittle, who has learned from a neighbor of Eliza's that she has come to the professor's place, comes a-knocking under the pretence of saving his daughter's honor. When Higgins readily agrees that he should take his daughter away with him, Doolittle reveals that he is really there to ask for five pounds, proudly claiming that he will spend that money on immediate gratification and put none of it to useless savings. Amused by his blustering rhetoric, Higgins gives him the money. Eliza enters, clean and pretty in a blue kimono, and everyone is amazed by the difference. Even her father has failed to recognize her. Eliza is taken with her transformation and wants to go back to her old neighborhood and show off, but she is warned against snobbery by Higgins. The act ends with the two of them agreeing that they have taken on a difficult task.

Analysis

Even though Higgins is immediately obvious as the Pygmalion figure in this play, what this act reveals is that there is no way his phonetic magic could do a complete job changing Eliza on its own. What we see here is that Mrs. Pearce and Colonel Pickering are also informal Pygmalions, and with much less braggadocio (the alliteration of Pygmalion, Pearce, and Pickering would support this notion). Only with Mrs. Pearce working on the girl's appearance and manners, and with Pickering working, albeit unknowingly, on her self-respect and dignity, will Eliza Doolittle become a whole duchess package, rather than just a rough-mannered common flower girl who can parrot the speech of a duchess. We learn in this scene, quite significantly, that while Higgins may be a brilliant phonetician, Mrs. Pearce finds fault with his constant swearing, forgetful manners, quarrelsome nature, and other unpleasant habits. His own hold on polite respectability is tenuous at best, and it is only his reputation, and his fundamental lack of malice that keeps him from being disliked by others. If Higgins cannot be a Pygmalion on his own, and is such an untidy, manner less Pygmalion at that, then the obvious question posed to us is if Pygmalion, the transformer of others, can himself be transformed. Implicit in this question is another: whether it could be imperviousness to change, rather than superior knowledge, which differentiates Pygmalion from Galatea. This act shows Higgins as an incorrigible scientist. He is not only "violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject," but interested in them only as

subjects of scientific study. For that reason, when "quite a common girl" is said to at his door, Higgins thinks it is a lucky happenstance that will allow him to show Pickering the way he works. When he sees it is Eliza, he chases her away, for, having learned all he can about the Lisson Grove accent; he cannot see how she can be of any more use to him. Later, his mind seizes upon her as being "no use to anybody but me." And when Alfred Doolittle is announced, Higgins is not worried about the trouble, but looks forward instead to listening to this new accent. He displays such a dogged determination and exaggerated focus on his work that it is hard to tell if Shaw wants to make fun of this character or put it on a pedestal. In either case, there is no denying that Higgins makes an absolutely inept romantic hero. For him, if women do not inform his science in any way, "they might as well be blocks of wood." Eliza's criticism comes well-deserved--"Oh, you've no feeling heart in you: you don't care for nothing but yourself." Even Mrs. Pearce chides him for treating people like objects--"Well, the matter is, sir, that you can't take a girl up like that as if you were picking up a pebble on the beach." Alfred Doolittle is one of those delightful, quintessential characters that populate all of Shaw's plays. He makes the most iconoclastic, scandalous statements, but all with such wit and humor that we cannot help but find his ideas attractive. In this act, Doolittle performs the extra role of inspiring Higgins break off in the middle of their conversation to analyze Doolittle's language and comment that "this chap has a certain natural gift of rhetoric." This unnatural break to the flow of talk forces us to pay a similar attention to all the rhetoric of the play. There is a brief episode in this act in which Eliza threatens to leave because Higgins is being so rude to her, and he calls her an ingrate. She does not leave because he uses chocolates to tempt her back. This is in contrast to the final act when Higgins again calls her an ingrate. However, in the last act, to his request that she return with him, she does indeed step out the door, leaving Higgins alone in the room.

Act III

Summary

It is Mrs. Higgins' at-home day, and she is greatly displeased when Henry Higgins shows up suddenly, for she knows from experience that he is too eccentric to be presentable in front of the sort of respectable company she is expecting. He explains to her that he wants to bring the experiment subject on whom he has been working for some months to her at-

home, and explains the bet that he has made with Pickering. Mrs. Higgins is not pleased about this unsolicited visit from a common flower girl, but she has no time to oppose before Mrs. and Miss Eynsford Hill (the mother and daughter from the first scene) are shown into the parlor by the parlor-maid. Colonel Pickering enters soon after, followed by Freddy Eynsford Hill, the hapless son from Covent Garden.

Higgins is about to really offend the company with a theory that they are all savages who know nothing about being civilized when Eliza is announced. She makes quite an impact on everyone with her studied grace and pedantic speech. Everything promises to go well until Mrs. Eynsford Hill brings up the subject of influenza, which causes Eliza to launch into the topic of her aunt, who supposedly died of influenza. In her excitement, her old accent, along with shocking facts such as her father's alcoholism, slip out. Freddy thinks that she is merely affecting "the new small talk," and is dazzled by how well she does it. He is obviously infatuated with her. When Eliza gets up to leave, he offers to walk her but she exclaims, "Walk! Not bloody likely. I am going in a taxi." The Mrs. Eynsford Hill leaves immediately after. Clara, Miss Eynsford Hill, is taken with Eliza, and tries to imitate her speech.

After the guests leave, Mrs. Higgins chides Higgins. She says there is no way Eliza will become presentable as long as she lives with the constantly swearing Higgins. She demands to know the precise conditions under which Eliza is living with the two old bachelors. She is prompted to say, "You certainly are a pretty pair of babies, playing with your live doll," which is only the first of a series of such criticisms she makes of Higgins and Pickering. They assail her simultaneously with accounts of Eliza's improvement until she must quiet them. She tries to explain to them that there will be a problem of what to do with Eliza once everything is over, but the two men pay no heed. They take their leave, and Mrs. Higgins is left exasperated by the "infinite stupidity" of "men! men!! men!!!"

Analysis

In this, Eliza's first debut and debacle, we are shown that just speaking correctly is not enough to pass a flower girl off as a duchess. As Higgins knows, "You see, I've got her pronunciation all right; but you have to consider not only how a girl pronounces, but what she pronounces." Mrs. Higgins puts it succinctly with the line, "She's a triumph of your

art and of her dressmaker's; but if you suppose for a moment that she doesn't give herself away in every sentence she utters, you must be perfectly cracked about her." In other words, there are aspects to a person that are susceptible to change or improvement, but these cannot override those aspects that are innate to that person, which will surface despite the best grooming.

While it may seem that this is the act in which Eliza is exposed for what she is, just about all the other characters are shown up in the process. Pickering and Higgins are an example. After they have been shown to be the undoubted masters of their (phonetic) dominion, lording it over Eliza, here, in Mrs. Higgins' feminine environment, they come across more like over-enthusiastic, ineffective little boys than mature men of science. Mrs. Higgins repeatedly rebukes Higgins for his lack of manners, his surly behavior towards her guests, and for his klutzy habit of stumbling into furniture, and is very reluctant to have him in front of company. This act also reveals middle class civility for what it really is--something dull and uninspiring. Mrs. Higgins' at-home turns out to be an unexciting conversation determinedly choked full with "how do you do's" and "goodbye's," with barely anything interesting said in between. In fact, the only time something is said with any spirit is when Eliza forgets herself and slips back into her normal manner of speaking. Clara Eynsford Hill, for example, is shown to be a useless wannabe with no character of her own (quite in contrast to the feisty and opinionated Eliza). So unremarkable is the mother-son-daughter threesome of the Eynsford Hills that Higgins cannot recall where he has met them (at Covent Garden, in the first act) until halfway through this act. He can only tell that their voices are familiar, suggesting that all they have to recommend them is their accents, and nothing else. If staged well, this act can expose the clumsiness and vapidity of polite Victorian society, causing us to question if the making of a duchess out of a flower girl is really doing her a favor.

We get another indication in this act that Higgins is incapable of being the romantic hero of the play. We see that when he says to this mother, "My idea of a lovable woman is somebody as like you as possible. I shall never get into the way of seriously liking young women: some habits lie too deep to be changed." The irony is that even though he has no doubt that he can transform Eliza, he takes it as a given that there are natural traits in himself that cannot be changed.

Act IV

Summary

The trio return to Higgins' Wimpole Street laboratory, exhausted from the night's happenings. They talk about the evening and their great success, though Higgins seems rather bored, more concerned with his inability to find slippers. While he talks absentmindedly with Pickering, Eliza slips out, returns with his slippers, and lays them on the floor before him without a word. When he notices them, he thinks that they appeared out of nowhere. Higgins and Pickering begin to speak as if Eliza is not there with them, saying how happy they are that the entire experiment is over, agreeing that it had become rather boring in the last few months. The two of them then leave the room to go to bed. Eliza is clearly hurt ("Eliza's beauty turns murderous," say the stage directions), but Higgins and Pickering are oblivious to her.

Higgins pops back in, once again mystified over what he has done with his slippers, and Eliza promptly flings them in his face. Eliza is mad enough to kill him; she thinks that she is no more important to him than his slippers. At Higgins' retort that she is presumptuous and ungrateful, she answers that no one has treated her badly, but that she is still left confused about what is to happen to her now that the bet has been won. Higgins says that she can always get married or open that flower shop (both of which she eventually does), but she replies by saying that she wishes she had been left where she was before. She goes on to ask whether her clothes belong to her, meaning what can she take away with her without being accused of thievery. Higgins is genuinely hurt, something that does not happen to him often. She returns him a ring he bought for her, but he throws it into the fireplace. After he leaves, she finds it again, but then leaves it on the dessert stand and departs.

Analysis

If we consider the conventional structure of a romance or fairy tale, the story has really already reached its climax by this point, because Cinderella has been turned into a princess, and the challenge has been met. Then why does the play carry on for another two acts? This would appear completely counter- productive, only if one thinks that this play is only about changing appearances. The fact that the play carries on indicates that there are more transformations in Eliza to be witnessed: this act shows the birth of an

independent spirit in the face of Higgins' bullying superiority. The loosely set-up dichotomy between people and objects (i.e., whether Higgins treats people like people or objects) is brought to a head when Eliza flings his slippers in his face, and complains that she means no more to him than his slippers--"You don't care. I know you don't care. You wouldn't care if I was dead. I'm nothing to you--not so much as them slippers." Not only does she object to being treated like an object, she goes on to assert herself by saying that she would never sell herself, like Higgins suggests when he tells her she can go get married. This climactic move forces Higgins to reconsider what a woman can be, and, as he confesses in the final act, marks the beginning of his considering Eliza to be an equal rather than a burden.

One thing to consider in this act is why Shaw has chosen not to portray the climax at the ambassador's party where Eliza can prove how well she has been instructed by Higgins (although his movie screenplay does allow for a scene at the embassy). One reason is that most theatrical productions do not have the capacity to stage an opulent, luxurious ball just for a short scene. But another reason is that Shaw's intention is to rob the story of its romance. We are spared the actual training of Eliza as well as her moment of glory (that is, both the science and the magic); instead, all we get is scenes of her pre- and post- the dramatic climax.

Act V

Summary

Higgins and Pickering show up the next day at Mrs. Higgins' home in a state of distraction because Eliza has run away. Alfred Doolittle, who enters resplendently dressed, as if he were the bridegroom of a very fashionable wedding, interrupts them. He has come to take issue with Henry Higgins for destroying his happiness. It turns out that Higgins wrote a letter to a millionaire jokingly recommending Doolittle as a most original moralist, so that in his will the millionaire left Doolittle a share in his trust, amounting to three thousand pounds a year, provided that he lecture for the Wannafeller Moral Reform World League. Newfound wealth has only brought him more pain than pleasure, as long lost relatives emerge from the woodwork asking to be fed, not to mention that he is now no longer free to behave in his casual, slovenly, dustman ways. He has been damned by "middle class morality." The talk degenerates into a squabble

over who owns Eliza, Higgins or her father (Higgins did give the latter five pounds for her after all). To stop them, Mrs. Higgins sends for Eliza, who has been upstairs all along. But first she tells Doolittle to step out on the balcony so that the she will not be shocked by the story of his new fortune.

When she enters, Eliza takes care to behave very civilly. Pickering tells her she must not think of herself as an experiment, and she expresses her gratitude to him. She says that even though Higgins was the one who trained the flower girl to become a duchess, Pickering always treated her like a duchess, even when she was a flower girl. His treatment of her taught her not phonetics, but self-respect. Higgins is speaking incorrigibly harshly to her when her father reappears, surprising her badly. He tells her that he is all dressed up because he is on his way to get married to his woman. Pickering and Mrs. Higgins are asked to come along. Higgins and Eliza are finally left alone while the rest go off to get ready.

They proceed to quarrel. Higgins claims that while he may treat her badly, he is at least fair in that he has never treated anyone else differently. He tells her she should come back with him just for the fun of it--he will adopt her as a daughter, or she can marry Pickering. She swings around and cries that she won't even marry Higgins if he asks. She mentions that Freddy has been writing her love letters, but Higgins immediately dismisses him as a fool. She says that she will marry Freddy, and that the two will support themselves by taking Higgins' phonetic methods to his chief rival. Higgins is outraged but cannot help wondering at her character--he finds this defiance much more appealing than the submissiveness of the slippers-fetcher. Mrs. Higgins comes in to tell Eliza it is time to leave. As she is about to exit, Higgins tells her offhandedly to fetch him some gloves, ties, ham, and cheese while she is out. She replies ambivalently and departs; we do not know if she will follow his orders. The play ends with Higgins's roaring laughter as he says to his mother, "She's going to marry Freddy. Ha ha! Freddy! Freddy!! Ha ha ha ha ha!!!!!"

Analysis

This final act brings together many of the themes that we have examined in the other acts, such as what constitutes the determinants of social standing, the fault of taking people too literally, or for granted, the emptiness of higher English society, etc. With regard to the

first of these themes, Eliza makes the impressively astute observation that "the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated." The line packs double meaning by stating clearly that what is needed is not just one's affectation of nobility, while her delivery is proof of the statement itself as she has grown enough to make such an intelligent claim. Quite contrary to the dresses, the vowels, the consonants, the jewelry (significantly, only hired) that she learned to put on, probably the greatest thing she has gained from this experience is the self-respect that Pickering endowed her with from the first time he called her "Miss Doolittle." In contrast to the "self-respect" that Eliza has learned is the "respectability" that Doolittle and his woman have gained, a respectability that has "broke all the spirit out of her." While respectability can be learned, and is what Higgins has taught Eliza, self-respect is something far more authentic, and helps rather than hinders the growth of an independent spirit. Alfred Doolittle makes the unmitigated claim that acquiring the wealth to enter this society has "ruined me. Destroyed my happiness. Tied me up and delivered me into the hands of middle class morality." Higgins' haughty proclamation--"You will jolly soon see whether she has an idea that I haven't put into her head or a word that I haven't put into her mouth."--mistakes the external for the internal, and betrays too much unfounded pride, which is the ultimate cause of his misunderstanding with Eliza. The greatest problem that people have with Pygmalion is its highly ambivalent conclusion, in which the audience is left frustrated if it wants to see the typical consummation of the hero and heroine one expects in a romance--which is what the play advertises itself to be after all. Most people like to believe that Eliza's talk about Freddy and leaving for good is only womanly pride speaking, but that she will ultimately return to Higgins. The first screenplay of the movie, written without Shaw's approval, has Eliza buy Higgins a necktie. In the London premier of the play, Higgins tosses Eliza a bouquet before she departs. A contemporary tour of the play in America had Eliza return to ask, "What size?" Other films of the play either show Higgins pleading with Eliza to stay with him, or Higgins following her to church. Doubtless, everyone wanted to romanticize the play to a degree greater than that which the playwright presented it. All this makes us question why Shaw is so insistent and abrupt in his conclusion. However, in an epilogue that Shaw wrote after too many directors tried to adapt the conclusion into something more romantic, he writes, "The rest

of the story need not be shown in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-mades and reach-me-downs of the rag shop in which Romance keeps its stock of 'happy endings to misfit all stories." He goes on to deliver a detailed and considered argument for why Higgins would never marry Eliza, and vice versa. For one, Higgins has too much admiration for his mother to find any other woman even halfway comparable, and even "had Mrs. Higgins died, there would still have been Milton and the Universal Alphabet." To Shaw's mind, if Eliza marries anyone at all, it must be Freddy--"And that is just what Eliza did." The epilogue goes on to give a dreary account of their married life and faltering career as the owners of a flower and vegetable shop (an ironic treatment of the typical "happily ever after" nonsense) in which Freddy and Eliza must take accounting and penmanship classes to really become useful members of society. One can see this whole play as an intentional deconstruction of the genre of Romance, and of the myth of Pygmalion as well.

Discussion of some significant aspects

Characters

Professor Henry Higgins

Henry Higgins is a professor of phonetics who plays Pygmalion to Eliza Doolittle's Galatea. He is the author of Higgins' Universal Alphabet, believes in concepts like visible speech, and uses all manner of recording and photographic material to document his phonetic subjects, reducing people and their dialects into what he sees as readily understandable units. He is an unconventional man, who goes in the opposite direction from the rest of society in most matters. Indeed, he is impatient with high society, forgetful in his public graces, and poorly considerate of normal social niceties--the only reason the world has not turned against him is because he is at heart a good and harmless man. His biggest fault is that he can be a bully.

Eliza Doolittle

"She is not at all a romantic figure." So is she introduced in Act I. Everything about Eliza Doolittle seems to defy any conventional notions we might have about the romantic heroine. When she is transformed from a sassy, smart-mouthed kerbstone flower girl with deplorable English, to a (still sassy) regal figure fit to consort with nobility, it has less to

do with her innate qualities as a heroine than with the fairy-tale aspect of the transformation myth itself. In other words, the character of Eliza Doolittle comes across as being much more instrumental than fundamental. The real (re-)making of Eliza Doolittle happens after the ambassador's party, when she decides to make a statement for her own dignity against Higgins' insensitive treatment. This is when she becomes, not a duchess, but an independent woman; and this explains why Higgins begins to see Eliza not as a mill around his neck but as a creature worthy of his admiration.

Colonel Pickering

Colonel Pickering, the author of Spoken Sanskrit, is a match for Higgins (although somewhat less obsessive) in his passion for phonetics. But where Higgins is a boorish, careless bully, Pickering is always considerate and a genuinely gentleman. He says little of note in the play, and appears most of all to be a civilized foil to Higgins' barefoot, absentminded crazy professor. He helps in the Eliza Doolittle experiment by making a wager of it, saying he will cover the costs of the experiment if Higgins does indeed make a convincing duchess of her. However, while Higgins only manages to teach Eliza pronunciations, it is Pickering's thoughtful treatment towards Eliza that teaches her to respect herself.

Alfred Doolittle

Eliza's father, an elderly but vigorous dustman who has had at least six wives and who "seems equally free from fear and conscience." When he learns that his daughter has entered the home of Henry Higgins, he immediately pursues to see if he can get some money out of the circumstance. His unique brand of rhetoric, an unembarrassed, unhypocritical advocation of drink and pleasure (at other people's expense), is amusing to Higgins. Through Higgins' joking recommendation, Doolittle becomes a richly endowed lecturer to a moral reform society, transforming him from lowly dustman to a picture of middle class morality--he becomes miserable. Throughout, Alfred is a scoundrel who is willing to sell his daughter to make a few pounds, but he is one of the few unaffected characters in the play, unmasked by appearance or language. Though scandalous, his speeches are honest. At points, it even seems that he might be Shaw's voice piece of social criticism.

Mrs. Higgins

Professor Higgins' mother, Mrs. Higgins is a stately lady in her sixties who sees the Eliza Doolittle experiment as idiocy, and Higgins and Pickering as senseless children. She is the first and only character to have any qualms about the whole affair. When her worries prove true, it is to her that all the characters turn. Because no woman can match up to his mother, Higgins claims, he has no interest in dallying with them. To observe the mother of Pygmalion (Higgins), who completely understands all of his failings and inadequacies, is a good contrast to the mythic proportions to which Higgins builds himself in his self-estimations as a scientist of phonetics and a creator of duchesses.

Freddy Eynsford Hill

Higgins' surmise that Freddy is a fool is probably accurate. In the opening scene he is a spineless and resource less lackey to his mother and sister. Later, he is comically bowled over by Eliza, the half-baked duchess who still speaks cockney. He becomes lovesick for Eliza, and courts her with letters. At the play's close, Freddy serves as a young, viable marriage option for Eliza, making the possible path she will follow unclear to the reader.

Discussion of the play

1. In his preface to the play, Shaw writes that the figure of Henry Higgins is partly based on Alexander Melville Bell, the inventor of Visible Speech. How does Shaw utilize this idea of "Visible Speech"? Is it an adequate concept to use to approach people?

Through the concept of "Visible Speech," Shaw hits on the two aspects of theater that can make the greatest impression on an audience: sight and sound. Therefore, the transformation of Eliza Doolittle is most marked and obvious on these two scales. In regard to both these senses, Pygmalion stays faithful to the most clichéd formula of the standard rags-to-riches stories, in that the heroine changes drastically in the most external ways. However, while Eliza certainly changes in these blatant external ways, these changes serve as a mask for a more fundamental development of self-respect that Eliza undergoes. Because Higgins only ever charts "Visible Speech," it makes him liable to forget that there are other aspects to human beings that can also grow. But in the possible loss that Higgins faces in the final scene, and in is inability to recognize that loss as a possibility at all, the play makes certain that its audience sees the tension between

internal and external change, and that sight and sound do not become measures of virtue, personality, or internal worth.

2.It has been said that Pygmalion is not a play about turning a flower girl into a duchess, but one about turning a woman into a human being. Do you agree?

When Eliza Doolittle threatens Higgins that she will take his phonetic findings to his rival in order to support herself, art imitates life, and Shaw's literature echoes a significant episode from his own youth. As a boy, Shaw's mother was an accomplished singer who dedicated herself to the perfection of "The Method," her teacher George Vandeleur Lee's yoga-like approach to voice training. She went so far as to leave her husband to follow her teacher to London. However, upon realizing that Lee was concerned only about his appearances and the status of his street address, she left him and brought up her daughters by setting up shop herself, teaching "The Method" as if it were her own. Shaw could not have helped but be impressed and influenced by this courageous move on the part of his mother to strike out on her own and to create an independent life for herself. Thus, though Pygmalion shows a lot of sympathy for the flower girl who wants a higher station in life, it is even more concerned with the unloved, neglected woman who decides to make herself heard once and for all. The plays determination to have Eliza grow into a full human being with her own mind and will also explains why the play makes seemingly inexplicable structural moves like leaving out the climax, and carrying on for a further two acts after the climax. In other words, the superficial climax is not the real climax at all, and Shaw's project is deeper than that of a fairy godmother.

3.What is the Pygmalion myth? In what significant ways, and with what effect, has Shaw transformed that myth in his play?

The Pygmalion myth comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Pygmalion is a sculptor who creates a sculpture of a woman so perfectly formed that he falls in love with her. Aphrodite is moved by his love and touches the statue to life so that she becomes Galatea, and the sculptor can experience live bliss with his own creation. While Shaw maintains the skeletal structure of the fantasy in which a gifted male fashions a woman out of lifeless raw material into a worthy partner for himself, Shaw does not allow the male to fall in love with his creation. Right to the last act, Higgins is still quarrelsome and

derisive in his interaction with Eliza, and does not even think of her as an object of romantic interest. Shaw goes on to undo the myth by injecting the play with other Pygmalion figures like Mrs. Pearce and Pickering, and to suggest that the primary Pygmalion himself is incomplete, and not ideal himself. In transforming the Pygmalion myth in such a way, Shaw calls into question the ideal status afforded to the artist, and further exposes the inadequacies of myths and romances that overlook the mundane, human aspects of life.

Conclusion

What would happen to a myth like Pygmalion when re- introduced into the Victorian England? This is what Shaw does with the play *Pygmalion*. Through his version of the Pygmalion myth, Shaw does a number of things. Firstly, he deliberately twists the myth so that the play does not conclude as euphorically or conveniently, hanging instead in unconventional ambiguity. Secondly, he mires the story in the sordid and mundane whenever he gets a chance. Wherever he can, the characters are seen to be belabored by the trivial details of life like napkins and neckties, and of how one is going to find a taxi on a rainy night. These noisome details keep the story grounded and decidedly less romantic. Finally, and most significantly, Shaw challenges the possibly insidious assumptions that come with the Pygmalion myth, forcing us to ask the following: Is the male artist the absolute and perfect being who has the power to create woman in the image of his desires? Is the woman necessarily the inferior subject who sees her lover as her sky? Can there only ever be sexual/romantic relations between a man and a woman? Does beauty reflect virtue? Does the artist love his creation, or merely the art that brought that creation into being?

Famous for writing "talky" plays in which barely anything other than witty repartee takes center stage (plays that the most prominent critics of his day called non-plays), Shaw finds in *Pygmalion* a way to turn the talk into action, by hinging the fairy tale outcome of the flower girl on precisely how she talks. In this way, he draws our attention to his own art, and to his ability to create, through the medium of speech, not only Pygmalion's Galatea, but also Pygmalion himself. More powerful than Pygmalion, on top of building up his creations, Shaw can take them down as well by showing their faults and foibles. In this way, it is the playwright alone, and not some divine will, who breathes

life into his characters. While Ovid's Pygmalion may be said to have idolized his Galatea, Shaw's relentless and humorous honesty humanizes these archetypes, and in the process brings drama and art itself to a more contemporarily relevant and human level.

Questions

Short Answers

1. Write a short note on about Eliza Doolittle
2. Sketch the character of Alfred Doolittle
3. Analyze the character of Prof. Higgins
4. What is Col. Pickering's attitude towards Eliza? Is it the same from the beginning to the end?
5. How far do you think Prof. Higgins is successful in his attempt to make the flower girl refined?

Essays

1. How does Shaw re- work the myth of Pygmalion through his play *Pygmalion*?
2. Appreciate Shaw's *Pygmalion* bringing out its dramatic beauty
3. Do you feel that through Higgins' attempt to transform Eliza into a duchess, Shaw is mocking at the Victorian attitudes of respectability and prudery?
4. In his preface to the play, Shaw writes that the figure of Henry Higgins is partly based on Alexander Melville Bell, the inventor of Visible Speech. How does Shaw utilize this idea of "Visible Speech"? Is it an adequate concept to use to approach people?
5. Is it possible to change the innate qualities of a person through training? Elaborate your ideas contrasting the characters of Higgins and Ms. Doolittle

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UNIT III.2

THOMAS STERNS ELIOT: *MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL* (1935)

Biography of the author

T. S. Eliot (1888- 1965)

Thomas Sterns Eliot is considered one of the most controversial and influential literary personalities of the twentieth century. Eliot entered Harvard University in 1906 and graduated in three years. He received his Master's Degree in his fourth year at Harvard. While in school, he began his literary career by writing poems for the undergraduate literary magazine, "The Harvard Advocate." He also became the editor of the publication. During his undergraduate years, Eliot was deeply interested in literature, religion, and philosophy; he read extensively, especially the literature of the French poets. After graduation, he continued his study of philosophy and French literature. He attended the Sorbonne in Paris and Oxford in England. Although he wrote a dissertation for his Ph.D., he never received the degree.

After completing his studies, Eliot began to write. His first efforts were largely poetic. His early volumes of poetry include "Prufrock and Other Observations" (1917) and "Power" (1919). He started his own magazine, "The Criterion," which was published in London. His famous poem, " The Waste Land" first appeared in this magazine. Written in postwar disillusionment, "The Waste Land" portrayed Eliot's beginning search for his own religious faith. In 1925, he published another volume of poems entitled "The Hollow Men." In 1927, Eliot declared that he was a Catholic in religion, a classicist in literature, and a monarchist in politics.

General Information about the Play

Before going into the details, let us have some background information about the play and the genre to which it belongs.

Through this work Eliot has re- introduced the poetry form to the drama from the Shakespearean times. This was one of the revolutions that he single-handedly accomplished. But this was not achieved by mere imitation of Shakespearean style, but by going deep into the root of dramatic imagination-- religion, ritual, purgation, and renewal. Eliot has brought back the ritualistic tradition to the theatre. His play, *Murder In*

the Cathedral is about a situation, not a story. So it is very much like the *Everyman* plays that were prominent theatrical forms during the early days of English drama. The play also announces the arrival of plays like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, which is also about a situation, and not the story of a single man/ woman. The play written in verse form treats the much-celebrated martyrdom of Arch Bishop Thomas Becket form a different angle. It tells that Thomas give in to the temptation of begetting sainthood and martyrdom and thereby chooses to become a martyr to gain personal interests. So it is the temptation that wins against the suffering for God.

Background Information

Thomas Becket was born in Cheapside, London in 1118. He was of Norman descent on both sides and was proud of his heritage. He was educated at Mortar Priory, various other schools, and finally, in the School of Theology at Paris. He also learned law and practiced the use of sword and lance, traditional knightly exercises. His study of law helped him in his quarrels with the king. His expertise in the use of the sword and the lance helped him in the campaign of 1159-1160, when he defeated a French knight in a single combat.

In 1141, Theobald, the Archbishop of Canterbury, took Becket into his household. From then on, his rise was rapid. In 1154, he was ordained and appointed the Archdeacon of Canterbury. Henry II gained the throne in the same year, making Becket's future even brighter. Becket became Henry's favorite religious leader. Henry would often entertain Becket, as well as seek his advice. The King also increased Becket's importance. He first appointed Becket to the position of Chancellor. When Theobald died in 1162, Henry II appointed Becket the Archbishop of Canterbury.

After 1162, the relationship between Henry and Thomas Becket, both proud and men of strong character, became more and more bitter. Henry wanted to reduce the power of the clergy, and Becket fought fiercely against it. Henry wanted criminal priests to be tried in the civil courts while Becket wanted them to be tried in the ecclesiastical courts. The quarrel went on. In 1164, Henry, in the Constitution of Clarendon, tried to define the relationship between the Church and the State. Becket quibbled, quarreled, made promises he did not intend to keep, and sacrificed his principles to retain his power. To protect himself, Becket fled to France, forfeiting his worldly goods to the Crown.

Becket returned from his exile after seven years. Both the King and Becket tried to enlist the support of the Pope against each other. The turmoil and bitterness between them ended with the murder of Thomas Becket on December 29, 1170. Becket was canonized in 1184.

Chaucer in his "Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales* immortalized St. Thomas Becket in literature for the first time. In the first eighteen lines, Chaucer mentions that at the beginning of spring, people go on pilgrimages, particularly to Canterbury, to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket. The pilgrims seek to honor the holy blessed martyr who had helped them when they were sick.

In his play, T. S. Eliot portrays the struggle between the church and the state, depicted in the struggle between Becket and Henry II. In truth, King Henry's reign was a reign of terror, causing misery and ruin to the common citizens. This is depicted in the words of the chorus at the beginning of the play. The people found in Becket hope and sustenance. The king found this undesirable and got his supporters to tempt Becket with various baits. In fact, the knights come in and tempt Becket during the course of the play. When Becket refuses to be tempted, Henry II has him murdered in the cathedral.

Brief Summary of the Play

The play can be said to begin at the climax, for the tension and fear imposed by the state have reached the people at the lowest level. At the beginning of the play, there is a sense of doom that hangs heavy in the air. Everyone fears that Becket's return will result in tragedy, clearly foreshadowing the end of the play from the very beginning.

The plot centers on the changed friendship between King Henry II and Thomas Becket. Henry has raised Becket to the post of Chancellor and later makes him the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Chancellor's position is that of the first subject in the Kingdom, controlling the ecclesiastical patronage of the King. The post of Archbishop is the highest religious head, next to the Pope. After becoming the Archbishop, Becket stops supporting the radical changes the King wants to introduce in England. Becket opposes the King's thirst for power, as he tries to raise the standard of the Crown higher than that of the Pope. Before the play begins, Becket has undergone a transformation and has started living a very pious life, giving up all the enjoyment he previously shared with the King. When disputes develop between the two, Becket flees to France.

With this background, the play begins with the news of Becket's return to England after seven long years in France. The people of Canterbury are overjoyed to have him back, and their welcome to him, though a small one, is astonishing. England is eagerly waiting for their beloved religious head that has always strongly supported and guided the poor peasants and countrymen. As the people are busy meeting and welcoming the Archbishop, the three priests have an apprehension that Becket is not fully reconciled with the King. Both of them are proud and strong personalities; as a result, they may not be able to renew their old tie of friendship. The priests worry that the homecoming may cost Becket his life.

The women of Canterbury represent the simple folk of the town. They have lived a hard life, and they know that it is their fate to suffer and struggle whether the King rules or the barons' rule. During the seven years of Becket's exile, their lives have been even more painful. Now since Becket is back home, they are happy; but they feel a curious sense of doom. They gather outside the Cathedral and await Becket. They are asked to put on cheerful faces as Becket arrives. When Becket arrives, the priests greet him and apologize for their simple welcome. Becket informs them that spies have interrupted his letters and that his assassins have been waiting for an opportunity to kill him, like hungry hawks.

Detailed Analysis and Study of the Play

Setting of the Play

The play is set in two locations. In Part I, the scene is the Archbishop's hall, on Dec 2nd, 1170 and the second part happens in the Cathedral, on Dec 29th, 1170, as they existed in medieval England. There is an interlude in between the two parts, which is a sermon by the Archbishop in the Cathedral on the Christmas morning. The play opens at the point of Becket's arrival in Canterbury, at Christmas time, after seven years of sojourn in France.

List of Characters

Major Characters

Thomas Becket --The Archbishop of Canterbury and the protagonist of the play. His character is basically drawn from historical sources during the later part of twelfth century. Becket was close to King Henry II, but differences in their attitudes toward power drew them apart.

Henry II -- The King who is never presented on stage, but whose invisible presence towers over the entire proceedings of the play. He is omnipresent.

Minor Characters

The Women of Canterbury in the Chorus-- They represent the voice of the common person. They sum up the past, bring the situation into the present, and express a lurking fear of Becket's doom, which the audience shares.

The Three Priests --They are genuinely worried about Becket's well being. They hold Becket in great respect and fear for his life.

The Four Tempters --The most important minor characters. They throw sidelights on Becket's character. They fail to tempt him with any of their proposals.

The Four Knights--Reginald Fitz Urse, Sir High de Morville, William de Traci and Richard Brito: they play the role of assassins of Becket, and Reginald Fitz Urse assumes the leader's role among them.

The Messenger --He breaks the news of Becket's arrival back home.

Summaries with Analysis

PART 1

Lines 1 to 50

The play opens at the Cathedral of Canterbury in December 1170. A group of women have gathered near the Cathedral; they have heard that the Archbishop of Canterbury is soon to arrive after seven long years of absence. They look forward to his arrival, for they are always given strength and hope by the Archbishop's presence, these women form the chorus. As they sing, they express anxiety and fear of an unknown, evil force. They feel that they will soon witness death, and they foretell that it will come from the sea. While they wait, they recall the hardships and struggles of the past seven years. In Becket's absence, the rule of Henry II has been one of oppression and exploitation, causing them misery and helplessness. They have lived like sheep lost in the woods without a shepherd.

The women of the chorus comment that the months of October and November have passed and the activities in the fields are over, and the cold of December has come. People are waiting for Christmas, marking the birth of the Son of God and beginning the New Year, which brings hopes for a better future. Yet the women know that the hardships of the peasants will never end.

After the chorus, three priests enter to talk about the King and discuss Becket's return.

Analysis

The chorus commenced in Greek drama, originally as a group of singers or chanters. Later, a Greek playwright called Thespis introduced an actor on the stage who held a dialogue with the leader of the chorus. Playwrights like Aeschylus and Sophocles added a second and a third actor to interact with the chorus. Finally, the chorus took on the role of participants in the action and interpreters of what is happening on stage.

Eliot has based *Murder in the Cathedral* on the form of classic Greek tragedy. He uses the chorus to enhance the dramatic effect, to take part in the action of the play, and to perform the roles of observer and commentator. His chorus women represent the common people, who lead a life of hard work and struggles, no matter who rules. It is only their faith in God that gives them the strength to endure. These women are uneducated, country folk, who live close to the earth. As a result, they are in tune with the changing seasons and the moods of nature. At present, they have an intuition of death and evil. They fear that the New Year, instead of bringing new hope, will bring greater suffering.

The three priests have three different reactions to Becket's arrival. The first reacts with the fear of a calamity. The second is a little bold and says that there can hardly be any peace between a king who is busy in intrigue and an archbishop who is an equally proud, self-righteous man. The third priest feels that the wheel of time always moves ahead, for good or evil. He believes that a wise man, who cannot change the course of the wheel, lets it move at its own pace.

It should be noticed that the priests repeat some of the lines uttered by the chorus. For instance, "King rules or barons rule," it does not make any difference to the poor people of Canterbury. This repetition is to suggest that the priests echo the feelings and thoughts of the common people and that they too suffer at the hands of temporal power, even though they are under the protection of the church. However, they admonish the women for their pessimistic attitude and call them "croaking frogs on treetops." The priest tells the women to "put on pleasant faces," but from within, they too are nervous and anxious about Becket's fate. They know that Becket is like a "rock" of support against the eternal tide of political clashes. The imagery of the rock and the tide suggests

that life is like an ocean, full of waves of suffering and a spiritual head is the needed navigator to help them sail smoothly.

The mood of the chorus also changes like the tides. One moment they are rushed and worried, saying, "O late, late, late is the time, late too late, and rotten the year." Then they are seen with quiet resolution, as they chant, "Quickly. Quietly. Leave us to perish in quiet." Their mood then changes to total doom. "A doom on the house, a doom on yourself, a doom on the world." Their repetition creates a hypnotic effect as it creates a somber mood.

Lines 51 to 323

After the chorus, the three priests appear on the stage. The first priest is emotional when he says that seven long years have passed since Becket left for France. The people of Canterbury have suffered silently in his absence. The second priest recollects how during these years, the king was busy in political conspiracies and games. The third priest affirms this statement and says that the king and the barons have enjoyed great power and luxury at the cost of the poor, simple folk of England. He adds that no government has ever helped the people. It seems as if the exploitation of the common people is endless, the powerful have forgotten God, and there is no hope at all.

A messenger breaks the news that the Archbishop has arrived in England and will soon be in Canterbury Cathedral. The priests are happy, but they wonder whether Becket has made peace with the king or whether there will be war. They ask how could there be friendship between the hammer and the anvil or between two proud men. They wonder if Becket is coming home with full assurance of safety from the king.

The priests feel worried about Becket's safety. Yet they hope that since Becket is returning amongst them to dispel their doubt, there will be new hope and guidance. They trust he will stand by the people like a solid rock against the tides of political danger. If Becket gets the support of the King of France and of the Pope, he will give strength and courage to the common people. The priests are eager to see their Archbishop now. The third priest observes that they have waited for him patiently as if the wheel of time had stopped. Now, he says, let the wheel turn and their waiting come to an end, for good or for evil. The women of the chorus repeat their idea that they are sensing evil, this time more clearly. They wish that Becket would return to France for his own safety.

The messenger also shares his doubts. He narrates how the people of England are overjoyed to have their Archbishop returning home, how the roads of Canterbury are strewn with leaves and flowers, and how the streets are packed with common people eagerly waiting to give Becket a very warm welcome. With the support of the King, Becket had become a successful, prosperous, and proud man. When he became the Chancellor, he was flattered by the King and held the King's courtiers in awe. When he became the Archbishop, however, the courtiers felt that Becket changed. They believed that Becket started to look down upon them, acting superior to them as their spiritual head. In the process, he created enemies for himself. The messenger further reveals that when Becket went into exile in France, he told the King that they would not meet again. Like the chorus, he seems to be foreshadowing death and evil.

Becket enters and lets the women stay where they are. He believes that in their simplicity and innocence, they have sensed the design of God, foreshadowing his own death. The priests apologize to Becket for their simple welcome. Becket replies that he may not have adequate time to enjoy whatever comforts they try to give him. His enemies have been awaiting him like hungry hawks ready to pounce, and soon they would come to meet him. He seems to accept that his end is near.

As Becket speaks, the first tempter, uninvited, suddenly appears on stage. He reminds Becket of their old friendship. He tempts Becket by suggesting that Becket can continue to be with the King, with "wit and wine and wisdom." Becket replies that going back to such a life of luxury is not possible. The tempter argues that rejecting the King's favors would be a very proud act. He says that Becket must visit the King and have the best dinners once again. Becket again turns down the offer, and the tempter leaves.

Analysis

This section of the play develops the theme of suffering. The chorus women are suffering. They do not choose to gather at the Cathedral; some unknown force has drawn them, by fate or destiny. Together they talk about their suffering and foreshadow that more pain lies in the future. They will soon be suffering from Becket's death.

Suffering is also central to the character of a martyr. A proud man cannot be a martyr, for God will only choose a man for martyrdom who has humbled himself and follows God's will. If a person tries to act according to one's own will in defiance of

God's will the person is bound to suffer. Becket has learned this lesson well. When he followed his worldly desires rather than God's will, he became a proud man and was forced into exile in France. During his seven years of exile, he suffered greatly, knowing he had sinned and disappointed his followers. Now, he has turned away from pride, repented, and humbled himself. As a result, he can return and face his followers and accusers while accepting God's will, whatever it might be for him. Becket repeats the priest's image of the wheel in motion; life is a wheel of action leading to suffering, and suffering leads to further action, which leads to more suffering, in an endless circle. Only total trust in God can break the circle.

The image of the hungry hawk elaborately describes the behavior of those in power. Temporal power can be acquired only by oppression of the weak. In striking their victims, the powerful pretend to be guileless and innocent. Becket understands that those in power are waiting to strike him, for he now refuses to bow to temporal power. He will not put the Crown above the Pope. Instead, he has placed his faith in God's power for eternity.

The sudden entry of the tempters is strategic; it does not give Becket time to think. The friendly tone of the tempter makes him seem innocent; he tries to seduce Becket into a life of luxury and into the King's favor once again. Fortunately, Becket now has his priorities straight and easily resists the temptation.

Although the tempters appear as real characters on stage, they are really projections of Becket's own mind. Hence, upon his return to England, Becket mentally pictures the good time he could have again by becoming the King's friend; he could support Henry II, enjoy luxuries, avoid conflict, and live in outward peace. But Becket knows that this is not God's will for him. His dialogue with the tempter, thus, becomes a dialogue between his own self, the old Chancellor Becket, and the new transformed Becket, who is wholly devoted to the service of God.

Lines 323-- 474

Becket dismisses the First Tempter by saying that it is impossible to re- enact the past. The next moment, the Second Tempter enters. He reminds Becket that they have met at Clarendon and Northampton during the time of his Chancellorship. The Tempter remembers how all the people wanted Becket to be the head of State, realizing his

political efficiency. He says that Becket made a mistake by resigning the Chancellorship when he was made the Archbishop. The Tempter says that Becket has still got enough time to think and correct his mistake because by gaining power, one attains greater glory. Becket would be able to enjoy a life long possession and he can rule over the people in any way he likes. The Tempter reminds him that even after his death, people will worship him before his tomb. Thomas replies him that there is no gladness in all those things to a man of God. The Tempter says that sadness is the only thing that begets those who love God alone. The Tempter reminds him that he who has solid power and holiness shall not wander for anything. And he goes on describing the glory of Chancellorship and its power. There is no greater glory than to be a Chancellor beneath the throne of God. The Tempter advices Thomas that real power can be purchased at the cost of certain submission. He tells Thomas that his spiritual power is an earthly perdition and so he should yield his spiritual powers to obtain political power. Thomas replies that he is not a man who gets tempted with these kind of trivial things. He tells the Tempter that he has excommunicated Archbishop of York who infringed the rights of Archbishop of Canterbury by assisting the King in the coronation of his son, Henry. Again Thomas boasts that he who holds the keys of heaven and hell, he who has the power to bind and loose, would never be tempted by lesser powers. The Tempter then leaves Thomas's perdition into his fate and goes away.

After the Second Tempter leaves, Thomas tells that temporal power is good to put order in the world. But for those who put their faith in God, worldly order is not appealing. He says that those people, like King Henry, who believes in governing by man- made laws, who are confident in their ignorance, do not create a true order. They only succeed in putting brakes on disorder and starving it of opportunity. But in doing so they bred worse disorder unless they are controlled by the order of God, and they degrade justice and righteousness to a merely human conception, a thing for their convenience; Thomas feels that to serve the King's law would be a descent from the service of God's law that he has undertaken.

As soon as Thomas completes this monologue, the Third Tempter comes in announcing that he is an unexpected visitor. But Thomas comments that he expected the third one also. Thomas says that whatever be the Tempter's purpose is, it is not a surprise

to him. The Tempter begins his conversation by saying that he is not a trifler, not a politician, but he is one of the countrymen. He says that the barons are the backbone of the country and only they know what is good for the country. They care for the country and they are not mere parasites who plot against the King. Then Thomas asks him to be brief in his speech. The Tempter says that endurance of friendship depends on circumstances and not upon oneself. And the circumstances are not by chance, but made by those who want them. In due course of time, some unreal friendships may become real; but a real friendship ended at a particular point of time can never be mended. Again Thomas asks him top speak straight to the point. Then the Tempter tells him that Thomas has no hope of reconciling with the King and so he should join the barons to overthrow the King. He tries to convince Thomas telling him that he has a Norman lineage and only true English people know the real feelings of their country. The Tempter tells Thomas that by joining his side with the barons, Thomas would be able to end the tyranny of Henry II, and thereby end the rule of King over the Bishop's Court in Rome and the Baron's court in England. And for all these things, Thomas would have the blessings from the Pope.

Thomas outwits the Tempter's idea by asking that how can he trust the people who wants to overthrow the King, when he cannot trust even the King. The Tempter replies that if he cannot trust the throne, then he has good reasons to trust none other than God alone. Thomas tells the tempter that he knows the joys of ruling over people, as he has been the Chancellor for quite sometime. And he has seen many people waiting at his doors for his favours and supplication. Thomas says that he is not ready to become a wolf among the other wolves who wants to overthrow the king. He dismisses the Tempter asking him to continue his treacherous works on others; but Thomas will never make anyone say that he has betrayed the king. The Tempter leaves Thomas saying that he shall not wait at Thomas's door but he hopes that the King would show his favour on Thomas for his loyalty before next spring.

Analysis

In this section also, Thomas's suffering continues. The Second Tempter tempts Thomas with seductions of compromise, of sinking differences with the king so as to become, with him an all powerful diarchy of King and Chancellor, dispensing justice and creating

a sort of welfare state by which he would certainly thrive on earth, and perhaps in heaven as a reward. This temptation must have been powerful to Thomas who loved Henry. His friendship with Henry was split by the Constitutions of Clarendon and then at Northampton in the same year when the king had summoned him to render account for certain sums of money expended during his Chancellorship, but he never compromised with the King. The Second Tempter tells him that people who are close to God on earth will have only sorrows. They miss the substance of earthly power. Those people would be troubled with "deceitful shadows" like the ones by his First Tempter. The Second Tempter foresees a great temptation that is going to overcome Thomas, when he says

" No! Shall I, who keep the keys/ Of heaven and hell, supreme alone in England/ Who bind and loose, with the power from the Pope/ Descend to desire a punier power?" (376--380) Here Thomas is a bit arrogant and proud about his holiness and so he goes to the extent of saying that he holds the keys of heaven and hell in his hands and thereby he commits the sin of pride. Realizing this the Second Tempter uses the imagery of a falcon that soars up to the sun to compare Thomas's attitude. By using the imagery of a falcon, the Tempter recognizes the inevitable fall of Thomas over a greater sin and so he leaves his fall to his fate." Then I leave you to your fate/ Your sin soars upward, covering kings' falcons"(lines 383- 384)

The Third Tempter suggests that, as Thomas has no hope of reconciliation with the King, he should join the barons to usurp the King. At his heart of hearts Thomas wants to break power and assume leadership. But he feels that it would be only at the cost of his own destruction, similar to Samson who achieved his triumph over the Philistines. He knows very well that if he does something like that it would be like the attempt of a failing man. So Thomas says" To make, then break, this thought has come before,/ Samson in Gaza did no more/ But if I break, I must break myself alone" (lines 470- 474)

Lines 475- 707

Now the Fourth Tempter enters congratulating Thomas for his strong character, which did not give way to the earlier temptations and assumes that his company would be a relief for Thomas. Thomas is taken aback and tells the Fourth Tempter that he expected only three visitors, not four. The Tempter tells Thomas that he should not be surprised to

receive him. The Tempter tells Thomas that he always visits people unexpectedly. When Thomas enquires about his name, he tells that as he is unfamiliar to Thomas, he does not need a name, but he has come because Thomas knows him. Thomas might not have seen his face before, yet he knows him. The Tempter says that he has come at that time because the time was appropriate.

The Tempter tells Thomas that he knows about all the temptations that Thomas faced before. He derides each of the Tempters and reminds Thomas that there is no pleasure in kingly rule or the rule of men beneath the king when that is compared to the spiritual power. Thomas has the keys of heaven and hell and also the power to bind and loose. The Tempter asks Thomas to bind the King, Bishop, Baron and all the natural calamities with his power and hold the thread of eternal life and death. He asks Thomas to think of the times being the Supreme one in the land. When Thomas expresses his unawareness, he makes it explicit by asking him to think about the glory after death. When a King is dead, there comes another King and he will be forgotten, but saints and martyrs rule from their tombs. There would be pilgrims standing in line, and people bending knees for generations and generations and more over he would be able to perform miracles by the grace of God. Thomas admits that he has thought about these things before. The Tempter tells Thomas that thoughts have more power to compel people than Kings. Then he predicts that later in history, a time will come when all the martyrs would be reduced to mere historical figures. Though the Tempter makes a reference about the loss of the glories of martyrdom, again he tempts Thomas pointing out its benefits and urges Thomas to " Seek the way of martyrdom, make yourself the lowest/ On earth, to be high in heaven" (line 570). Thomas is tormented by the speech of the Tempter and he asks the Tempter, why is he being tempted by his own desires. The Tempter tells him that he has nothing new to offer like his other Tempters, but he offers what Thomas wants. Thomas replies that him that all the other temptations were real, but this one is only a dream that would lead him to damnation. Out of greater agony Thomas asks himself " Can sinful pride be driven out/ Only by more sinful? / Can I neither act nor suffer/ Without perdition? " (lines 589-590) The Tempter replies that Thomas know and do not know what is it to act or suffer. He tells Thomas that action is suffering and

suffering is action. The Tempter assures Thomas that the pattern of suffering may subsist so that the wheel may turn and be there forever.

Now the Chorus enters. It reflects the mental agony of Thomas saying that there is no rest in the house or in the street. And all the elements on earth and sky are tormenting them. They sense a sickly smell and have a feeling that earth is going to give birth to hell.

The Four Tempters now join together and talk about the unreality of human life. The Tempters talks about the fall of Thomas commenting on his self-destruction and tells that man becomes enemy of his society and oneself when he gets lost in wonder of his own greatness.

Then the Three Priests come and urge Thomas to fight against the temptations. Immediately after that, the Chorus, Priests and the Tempters speak about the impending disaster.

Again the Chorus comes in and talks about a terror that is going to befall their lives. They feel that no one is capable of helping them to come out of the trouble. They feel that God has deserted them. They appeal to Thomas top save himself and thereby save them too. They have sensed that Hell is very close to them and so they seek Thomas's help. They seem to tell him not to yield to the temptation that would be fatal to all of them.

Thomas enters and makes a soliloquy. From that it is clear that he has decided to become a martyr. He re- visits his past life and thinks about his deeds. He says that history of all times draws the strangest consequence from all times. And thus he yields to temptation.

Analysis

Here we can see that the worst temptation is coming to torment Thomas-- the temptation of being a martyr to attain personal glory. Thomas's shock on seeing the Fourth Tempter is to be noted. He tells him that he expected only three Tempters, not four. Here the allusion is to Jesus Christ's temptations in the desert that were only three in number. Through the Tempter's words the glory of martyrdom is exposed. But at a point the Tempter speaks about a time when all the shrines in England will be pillaged and Thomas will dwindle into a figure whom a few specialist historians would offer psychological explanations. The Fourth Tempter, despite his subtlety is a little inconsistent. By urging

Thomas to snatch martyrdom for his own glory and prophesying that there will be a time when there would be no glory of martyrdom to be snatched, he is presenting two deadly and different temptations. The first is the blasphemy of using martyrdom and its sanctity for personal glory and the second is to undermine the faith by prophesying a time when all faith would perish. Thomas succumbs to his temptation after long thought and his silence between the lines 600 and 665 expresses his thoughts.

Thomas knows that by yielding to the Fourth Tempter (after dismissing the temptations of power offered by Second and Third Tempters) he is choosing martyrdom instead, he is committing a greater sin of pride, the wish to be high in Heaven. The agony of Thomas is expressed in line 589 in which he asks, "Can I neither act nor suffer without perdition?" It was this thought that caused the fall of Lucifer and started off the great conflict of Good and Evil in Christian thought.

Later on the Four Tempters unites and presents a fifth temptation, which is the temptation of despair saying that everything is vanity and illusion. The Priests add their cowardly entreaties and there is a litany of apprehension and terror from the Chorus. The Tempters, Chorus and the Priests unite to press the fatal decision on Thomas. The Four Tempters step out of the twelfth century into the twentieth century for the benefit of the audience and tells them about the futility of unreal things and shocks them with the situation before them. They are putting the dejecting view that prizes are not worth winning and that hope of martyrdom is no better than hankering for the cat in the pantomime, which is not a real cat at all but a cheat. This view is presented to the audience. They also dismiss Thomas as a victim of childish illusions just like the Tempters.

As for Thomas, he sees that the martyrdom lies before him and he patiently accepts it. He reaches the conclusion that "…history at all time draws/ The strangest consequence from the remotest cause" (line 700) meaning God can draw good out of evil. The murder of Thomas is evil, yet its consequences will be good. Yet this does not mean that the sin of the Four Knights, their sacrilege will go unpunished. Towards the end Thomas has made perfect his will" to the sword's end (705) and he is therefore at peace within himself. So action and suffering are over for him at the end of first part of the play.

Interlude

This is a sermon by Thomas in the Cathedral on the Christmas Morning 1170. He tells the believers that he wants to give them a very short sermon about the need to meditate in their hearts about the deep meaning and mystery of Christian Masses of Christmas Day. He tells them that every Holy Mass enacts the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ. On the Christmas Day the Church celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. So in the Christmas Day Mass, both the Birth and Death of Lord Jesus is celebrated together. He tells them that in the eyes of the World it would be strange to celebrate the birth and death the same day. For the World joy would be overborne by mourning or mourning would be cast out by joy and so it is only Christian mysteries that one can rejoice and mourn for the same reason.

Then he talks about the word 'Peace' and its relevance. He tells them that it is strange on his part of the angels to announce Peace when all the promises to Christ were disappointments and cheat. He asks them to think about the Peace that our Lord offered. It was not the peace, as a layman would think. Christ gave his disciples His Peace. His disciples journeyed far and wide the world to receive torture, imprisonment, disappointment and death by martyrdom. But that was the peace that Christ gave them.

Then he speaks about the importance of the Feast of St. Stephen celebrated immediately after Christmas. He was the first martyr for Christ. Thomas tells them that just as the Church rejoices and mourns at once in the Birth and Passion of our Lord, at the Feast of St. Stephen the Church at once rejoice and mourn at the death of martyrs. The Church rejoices for another soul being added among the Saints in Heaven for the Glory of God and for salvation of man and mourns for the sins that resulted in their martyrdom. Then Thomas reminds the believers that Christian martyrdom is not an accident but it is always the design of God, for His love of men to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. Thomas tells them that a true martyr is an instrument of God who has lost his will in the will of God and he no longer desires anything, even the glory of being a martyr. Thus as the Church rejoices and mourns at once in a fashion, strange to the World, the Saints are viewed in Heaven in a particular way.

He concludes his sermons asking them to pray for the Archbishop Elphege of Canterbury and meditate on that Peace he brought by being a martyr. Thomas tells them that his sermon would be the last one and very soon they would receive another martyr.

Analysis

From the sermon it is clear that Thomas has decided to become a martyr. He is at peace with himself; but as he says it is not the Peace in the worldview. But he does not accept martyrdom in the way God wants, as he says in his sermon. i.e. by uniting his will with the will of God; he chooses martyrdom for his personal glory and that is the flaw I Thomas's character that Eliot projects through this poetic play.

Part II

Lines 1 to 204

Summary

The second part begins with the Chorus giving the audience a feel of the impending disaster. They do not feel the peace, though it is time of Christ's birth. The Chorus says that the peace of men is uncertain unless they keep the peace of God. They speak about a sour spring, a parched summer and an empty harvest that they are going to get. They say that the waiting for something. The time is very short but they feel that the waiting is long. The First Priest enters and announces the day of St. Stephen, the Second Priest enters and announces the day of St. John, and the third Priest comes with a banner of the Holy Innocents borne before him. The First Priest announces that it is the fourth day from Christmas and all Three Priests ask to rejoice and keep the holy day. The Third Priest says that no one is sure about what to hope on each day. Everyone should fear and hope from everyday; One can never know the plans of God.

As soon as the priest completes, the Knights appear saying that they are coming from France, and by King's order they have some urgent business with the Archbishop. The Priests invite them to have dinner with the Archbishop, but the First Knight tells them that they prefer to have their business done before dinner. The First Knight tells the Priests that they will roast their (Priests') pork and dine upon it later. The Knights declines the offer for dinner and wants to see the Archbishop immediately.

Thomas arrives and tells the Priests that he has to look in to some matters of urgency and welcomes the Knights. The Four Knights demand to talk with Thomas

alone. And the three knights announce the charge against Thomas by the King. They say that Thomas who was raised to power and honour by the King, revolted against him, swindled the money, cheated him and broke the oath and thereby he has betrayed the King. Thomas denies the charges saying that he was faithful from the beginning. The First Knight tells Thomas that let his Order save him. And all the three of them pray for Thomas. When Thomas asks them whether their urgent business with him is scolding and blasphemy, they reply that they are only doing their faithful duty to the King. Thomas tells them that if they want to allege any charge against him, they should do it in public and he is sure that the people would support him. But the four Knights say that they prefer to do it then and there. The Knights accuses him of misusing his powers to create enmity with the Kings of England and France and the Pope. He even dared to excommunicate the Archbishop who crowned the young Prince and thus mishandled his authority. He tried to overpower the King and Thomas is bound to answer the facts to them.

Thomas answers them that it was not his wish to uncrown the King's son or to go against the King. He tells the Knights that his power is not in his hands and they could go to the Pope for further clarifications. He tells the Knights that he has only bound to the decisions of the Pope and that he is innocent. The Knights tell him that it is the King's wish that Thomas and his servants should go in exile. Thomas replies that he had been away for seven long years that he would never get back and so he would not obey King's orders. The First Knight reminds him that by choosing to disobey the King, Thomas has insulted the King. Thomas replies that he is simply obeying the Law of Rome. The knights accuse him of treason and treachery and remind him that his life is in danger. Thomas again makes his stance clear saying that he would abide the judgment of Rome and if the Knights kill him, he would rise from the dead to prove his innocence before God. The Knights threaten to kill the Archbishop and leaves.

Analysis

The Chorus sets the scene for the death of Thomas by their anticipatory remarks about the troubled seasons and ill omens that they see in nature. The Three Priests come to show the passing of three days after Christmas. These three days are the days before the murder of Thomas. Their entry, one after another, each using the same formula of speech,

gives that sense of ritual which Eliot accepted as one of the tap- roots of drama. The Knights enter and they have planned to execute Thomas and it is explicit when the First Knight speaks about 'roasting your pork', the pork is none other than Thomas. Thomas is ready to accept martyrdom and this could be deduced from his words of confidence that he would rise from his tomb to submit his cause before God.

Lines 204-425

Summary

The Chorus speaks about death and crates a terrific, horror some atmosphere by the images of death. They say that the time is too late for contrition and they pray to Archbishop to forgive them for their bodies have dominated the spirit.

Thomas enters and offers them peace. He says that they should accept everything to make God's plan complete. He tells that they should remember these incidents always, as it is a part of their eternal burden.

The Priests ask Thomas to take refuge at the altar to escape the Knights. But Thomas refuses their offer and tells them that Death will embrace him when he is worthy and he would surrender to God's will. The Priests try to press him to change his decision, but he does not budge. He assures them that the Knights are in search of him only and there is no danger for his folk.

The Chorus informs that the death is near. The Priests drag Thomas into the Cathedral. The Priests lock the door and feel relieved that they are safe. But Thomas asks them to open the door saying that the Cathedral should be always open even to the enemies. The First Priest tells him that the Knights are not men, but maddened beasts. Again Thomas asks them to open the door. He tells them that he is ready to sacrifice his life to the Law of God, which is above the Law of Man. He tells them that they have to conquer the Knights not by suffering, but by fighting. He wants the victory of the Cross and he orders to open the door.

The Knights enter searching for Thomas. They bully him and insults him commenting on his humble origins. Thomas tells them that he is ready to suffer as a Christian. The Knights give Thomas a chance to repent and correct his mistakes by changing all the decisions he took against the King. Thomas tells them that he is ready to die so that the Church may have peace and liberty. And he tells them that they are free to

do anything with him, but they should not touch a single layman there. The Knights call him a traitor. Thomas calls one of the Knights named Reginald as thrice a traitor because he has cheated Thomas who is his temporal and spiritual lord and for desecrating the Church. Thomas recites a prayer and the Knights kill him. The Chorus adds to the fury and horror of the situation through lines loaded with death imagery.

Analysis

In the Chorus here, the images are chosen to suggest horror, nausea, hysteria, monstrousness, brute-beastliness; then death in things beautiful, corruption in food, the jungle and the sea- bottom. The effect is to extend the power of evil to universal dimensions, and not to simply limit it to a handful of rude and brawling knights with some shadowy King behind them. If the making of a martyr is a thing in which God directly acts, then the hosts of Hell may be imagined as rising up against it. The chorus here, as in the last part of Part I is the poetry of terror and disgust, intended to turn our stomach over. The Chorus' identification with the images of horror and its acknowledgement in the partaking of sin is a part of the ritual purgation of drama re-invented by Eliot in the play. The last lines of the chorus shows a reversal of the natural order taking place, and the spirit that should be acted on by the soul, and so act upon the body is in fact being acted on by bodily lust and so the soul is unable to act upon it. The lines uttered by the Chorus when the Archbishop is murdered are of importance. "Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take stone from stone and wash them./ The land is foul, the water is foul, our beasts and ourselves defiled with blood./ A rain of blood has blinded my eyes…" The Chorus expresses wild protest and amazement at the pollution of natural order, all sense of Time and Place is lost and the immensity of cosmic evil overwhelms the poor women of Canterbury, who are accustomed only to coping with their daily and parochial troubles. But what they now suffer is universal, an abomination beyond imagination, endurance and redress: the world itself is fouled, beyond anything that is possible for them to cleanse it; so they call for impossibilities such as cleaning the sky or washing the wing or the brain.

Lines 424- 650

Summary

After killing Thomas the Knights step out and addresses the audience. The First Knight, Reginald Fitz Urse justifies their action by telling the audience that they have got ample reasons for what they have done and so he asks them to patiently listen to what they say. He tells the audience that all of them are Englishmen who believe in Trail by jury and he appeals for their sense of honour and asks the eldest of the Knights, Baron William de Traci (Third Knight) to speak out.

Traci tells the audience that they were completely disinterested about what they have done. Killing the Archbishop does not profit them. They all are good Christians and it was very difficult for them to carry out the task. But they did that for the benefit of the State and the interest of the State was much higher as compared to their personal interests. He asks the audience to give the credit for they were disinterested in their action.

The Second Knight, Hugh de Morville comes forward and tells them that they should judge things with reason and not with emotion. He blames Thomas for not consenting to the King 's desire of uniting the country. He criticizes Thomas for resigning the Chancellorship and thereby offending the King. He comes to conclusion that by offending the King, Thomas went against the interests of the people and of the State and the Knights have been instrumental in bringing those affairs of State that the people would approve, by killing Thomas. And so he demands applause from the audience.

The Fourth Knight, Richard Brito accuses Thomas for expecting a death by martyrdom. He criticizes Thomas for not trying to unite the country after he became the Archbishop and he points out Thomas' insistence to keep the doors of the Cathedral open to all. Had the doors been closed, Brito tells, they would have gone back after sometime. Thus he convinces the audience that they have not done anything wrong. The First Knight asks the crowd to disperse quietly without causing any public outbreak.

The First Priest enters and he laments the death of Thomas saying that they have no one to guide them. The Third Priest consoles the First priest by saying that God would punish the murderers and they should take pleasure at their fate. The Priests make a

supplication to Thomas to pray for them. The Third Priest offers thanks to God who has given a saint to Canterbury.

The Chorus enters and thanks God for all his creations, and praises Him. They thank God for saving them by His blood, for providing a saint to Canterbury and asks him forgiveness fro their sins that has resulted in the agony and death of the martyrs and saints. They ask for God 's mercy and pray to Blessed Thomas.

Analysis

In this section from the lines 422- 580, the Knights address the audience. They use clichés like Trail by Jury etc. to convince the audience. They start by saying that they are all Englishmen and their sympathies would always lie with the under- dogs. But as the audience believes in honour and justice, they should arrive at a conclusion by analyzing both the sides. Thus they present their arguments to justify their action of killing the Archbishop. The play ends with the Chorus, which shows maturity towards the end. They are not ignorant women of Canterbury at the end, but who are fully aware of the intricacies of life and death. The play closes in a *Te Deum* by the Priests that sweeps both centuries together in an act of ritual worship and prayer

The Central Conflict as Dramatised by Eliot – Some Crucial Passages

Now let us examine some of the important lines from the play to have an insight into the central event in the play of the play i.e. Thomas' dilemma .

1. The last temptation is the greatest treason:
   To do the right deed for the wrong reason
   (I. 667-668)

Thomas speaks these words towards the end of the first part of the play. The Tempters have left him and the Priests and the Chorus, push Thomas to his decision to accept martyrdom. He has almost decided to do that. But in these lines he tells that the Fourth Tempter is the deadly one, because he asked Thomas to accept martyrdom for his own personal glory. Thomas knows that ho would be committing a greater sin by doing that. This idea is expressed in these lines. Choosing martyrdom is a right one for a good Christian, but it should be done for the greater glory of God not for one own personal glory. Thomas knows that he is cheating his Orders and God by accepting martyrdom for his personal veneration and to become great in Heaven. Thus Thomas' agony is evident in

these lines. These lines express the crux of the play. Eliot shows the Saint of Canterbury as a person who chose martyrdom for selfish reasons in the play.

2. Can I neither act nor suffer
   Without perdition? (I. 589)

Thomas expresses his dilemma through these lines. Though he had successfully resisted the temptations offered by the first three Tempters. But he is not able to deny the temptation of the Fourth one, as it was a dormant desire in his own heart. Thomas knows that by yielding to the fourth temptation he would be committing a grater sin of pride, the wish to be supreme in Heaven. So Thomas seems to be trapped and he has to find a way out of his own paradoxes. He knows that by choosing any of the temptations would be deadly; yet he chooses the most sinful one in the play.

3. To make, then break, this thought has come before,
   The desperate exercise of falling power
   (I.470-471)

Thomas knows very well that he has no hope of reconciliation with the King. The Third Tempter reminds him about that also asking him to join the barons. But Thomas resists that temptation. After the Tempter leaves, Thomas recollects that he had the desire to make, and then break the royal power. He admits in his mind that he had evil desires against the King. But he knows very well that under his present circumstances it is not very desirable to attempt something like that. He does not want to do that because like Samson who perished in his attempt to destroy the Philistines, he would perish. So as a failing man, he prefers to stay away from any such actions.

Some Significant Aspects of the Play

Character Analysis

Chorus

The Chorus consists of the poor women of Canterbury. In the beginning they are the wistful, leaderless women of Canterbury calling for spiritual guidance in their half- lived lives. They too inhabit the gloomy cycles of time; death bringing winter, ruinous spring, disastrous summer and barren autumn make somber their opening lament, that looks to a December happy only because the Son of Man was born. They need a leader and they wish for the return of Thomas from France. They sense a doom in which they will also be

involved and pray for Thomas' safe return. But in the middle of the play the Chorus serves as an agent to intensify the impending tragedy by the death imagery used in it. They are a part of the tragedy and those experiences transform them into a mature level. At the end of the play, we see that the Chorus has learned about the importance of action and suffering. They acquire a mature tone at the end. We see the chorus praising and thanking God for His wonderful creations and also asking forgiveness for their sins. The agony and joy of martyrdom is fully understood by the Chorus. In short one can say that the Chorus in *Murder In the Cathedral* learns new lessons of life and becomes more spiritually matured towards the end of the play.

Thomas Becket

Eliot has portrayed Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury as an ordinary man, who get tempted and who is weak willed in the play. The human aspects of Thomas are given prominence. Like ordinary human beings, he gets temptations and he succumbs to it knowing fully well that he would be damned. The Tempters are not real characters, but the projections of the desires of Thomas' mind. The four facets of Thomas' character are developed through the four Tempters. The first is the natural sensual man who loves pleasure, athletics, music, good company, luxurious fare, gaiety and romance. The second is the man who seeks the exercise of political power and so the Tempter rebukes Thomas for resigning the Chancellorship on becoming the Archbishop. The fourth is the man who wants power and who would have used the Church in secular ways by joining the barons. The fourth is the man who seeks the supreme glories of sainthood for the sake of satisfactions it would bring him, to be able to rule from the tomb and to be 'high in heaven'. The last one to which Thomas succumbs is pride and therefore a desire to be supreme in heaven-- a desire that caused the fall of Lucifer from heaven. With the appearance of the four Tempters it is evident that Thomas has a deep understanding of his own self.

Themes

Martyrdom

The major theme shows that it is a sin to seek Martyrdom. A martyr is born, per the will of God. A true martyr never wishes to be a martyr or acts to become one, but gives up his

life to God with total surrender of his will. Thomas Becket becomes aware that the sole purpose of his life is to be God's servant. However, to serve God in order to gain the glory of martyrdom is an act against the will of God, a sinful act. Becket refuses to struggle and become a martyr. As the Knights attack him, he does not resist, nor is he excited; he simply accepts the murder. But in his heart he muses over the greatness that would be achieved as a part of martyrdom. In this state of true acceptance of God's will lies his greatness. In becoming a martyr, Becket inspires his followers with strength and courage.

Conclusion

We have analyzed the play in detail and have seen that the protagonist is Thomas Becket, who represents the church and who resists Temptation. The play really opens at the true point of climax when the whole city of Canterbury is rejoicing, but the peasant women of the Chorus have a strange intuition of death. The conflict exists between the King and the Pope; that is between temporal power and spiritual power. Although the King of England and the Pope never appear on the stage, their forces clash throughout the play. In the course of the play, the climax of the action occurs with the temptation by the Four Tempters who offer Becket various items ranging from money to unlimited power. Becket resists the three of them, but succumbs to the Forth one, which is to accept martyrdom for his personal glory, not for the fulfillment of the will of God. The tension is accompanied by a feeling that death is unavoidable, and it is almost accepted by the Chorus and the priests. What is left is only the ritual of killing and the prayer thereafter. The play ends in tragedy with the murder of Thomas Becket.

Some probable passages for annotations

1. Peace, and be at peace with your thoughts and visions.
These things had to come to you and you accept them,
This is your share of eternal burden,
The perpetual glory. This is one moment,
But know that another
Shall pierce you with a sudden painful joy
When the figure of God's purpose is made complete.
You shall forget these things, toiling the household,

You shall remember them, droning by the fire,
When age and forgetfulness sweeten memory
Only like a dream that has often been told
And often been changed in the telling. They will seem unreal
Human kind cannot bear very much reality (II, 245-257)

Thomas, through these words consoles the women of Canterbury. When they sense the impending death, they cry out to Thomas to pray for them. He comforts them by telling them that they have to undergo all these pain because it is a part of their eternal burden of sin. But he assures them that amidst the pain and sorrow they would get a chance to rejoice because of his approaching martyrdom. Though he does not speak directly about the martyrdom in the lines, the hint could be traced when we read it together with the idea of rejoicing and mourning at the same time expressed by Thomas in his sermon.

2."Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take stone from stone and wash them.
The land is foul, the water is foul, our beasts and ourselves defiled with blood.
A rain of blood has blinded my eyes…
O far far far far in the past; I wander in a land of barren
boughs: if I break them, they bleed; I wander in a
land of dry stones: If I touch them they bleed. "(II.397-403)

These are the words of the **Chorus** after Thomas is murdered. The Chorus expresses wild protest and amazement at the pollution of natural order, all sense of Time and Place is lost and the immensity of cosmic evil overwhelms the poor women of Canterbury, who are accustomed only to coping with their daily and parochial troubles. But what they now suffer is universal, an abomination beyond imagination, endurance and redress: the world itself is fouled, beyond anything that is possible for them to cleanse it; so they call for impossibilities such as cleaning the sky or washing the wing or the brain. The repetition of words brings out the agony and despair of the Chorus.

3. Peace. And let them be, in their exaltation.
They speak better than they know and beyond our understanding.
They know and do not know, what is it to act or suffer.
They know and do not know, that action is suffering

And suffering is action…(I, 205--210)

Thomas tells the priests about the cry of the Chorus in these lines. When the priests scold the women for crying out in despair, Thomas tells them that they are not crying in vain. The Chorus speaks more than they know; i.e. they sense a great doom to fall upon them, and that is the death of Thomas. As it is the beginning of the play, the Chorus, the women of Canterbury are foolish and ignorant. But Thomas tells priests that they do not understand the complex meanings of action and suffering; yet they speak about an unknown terror. There is no point in scolding them, as they have a point in their wailing. Thomas realizes their foresight.

4. Man's life is a cheat and disappointment;
All things are unreal,
Unreal or disappointing:
The Catherine wheel, the pantomime cat,
The prizes given at the children's party,
The prize awarded for the English Essay,
The Scholar's degree, the statesman's decoration.
All things become less real, man passes
From unreality to unreality.
This man is obstinate, blind, intent
On self destruction,
Passing from destruction to deception,
From grandeur to final illusion,
Lost in wonder of his own greatness,
The enemy of society, the enemy of himself.

(I, 604- 618)

These are the words of the **Four Tempters** together. After they come and present the various temptations, they come forward and present the picture of life to the audience. Like the Knights they step out of their times and speak about the futility of human wishes. They seem to emphasize that everything that seems to be glorious in the eyes of human beings are unreal and there is no point in running after them. This is done to shock the audience about the senselessness of Thomas who has given in to the Fourth Tempter's

idea of martyrdom. They seem to say that by doing so, Thomas has invited eternal damnation. They want the audience to dismiss Thomas as a person who flees after childish illusions.

5. Then I leave it unto your fate.
Your sin soars sunward, covering kings' falcons (I.384-385)

These are the words of the **Third Tempter.** He utters these lines when he hears Thomas boasting about himself, as a person who holds the keys of Heaven and Hell in his hands. Thomas tells those words to dismiss the Tempter, but the Tempter senses a tint of pride and assumes that though Thomas successfully dismissed him, he is prone to higher temptations. So he tells Thomas that he has nothing more to tell him, but he leaves his future into the hands of fate. He reminds Thomas about his sin of pride that soars high like the eagles.

6….. ….. …….. All my life
I have waited. Death will come only when I am worthy,
And if I am worthy, there is no danger.
I have therefore only to make perfect my will.
(II, 260- 263)

Thomas speaks these priests when they tell him to take refuge in the Cathedral to escape from the Knights. He tells the priests that he has patiently waited for his time of suffering, and he assures them that death would embrace a person when he is worthy of it. He feels that his time has come and it is his privilege to perfect his will by uniting it with the will of God. Through these words Thomas asks the priests to be quiet and shows them a model of submission to the divine will.

As we have looked at the play in detail in every aspect, let us now assess our understanding of the play from an examination point of view.

Questions

Possible Annotations

1. "Clear the air! clean the sky! wash the wind! take stone from stone and wash them.
The land is foul, the water is foul, our beasts and ourselves defiled with blood.
A rain of blood has blinded my eyes…"(II.397-400)

2. Can sinful pride be driven out
   Only by more sinful? Can I neither act nor suffer
   Without perdition? (I. 589)

3. The last temptation is the greatest treason:
   To do the right deed for the wrong reason (I. 667-668)

4. To make, then break, this thought has come before,
   The desperate exercise of falling power (I.470-471)

5. Then I leave it unto your fate.
   Your sin soars sunward, covering kings' falcons (I.384-385)

6.No! shall I who keep the keys
  Of heaven and hell, supreme alone in England,
  Who bind and loose, with power of Pope,
  Descend to a punier power? (I. 376-380)

Essays

1. What is the function of the Chorus in *Murder In the Cathedral*?
2. Describe the four temptations of Thomas and its relevance in the play.
3. What is the sin committed by Thomas in *Murder In the Cathedral*?
4. Who are the Four Knights? What is the significance of the speech of the Knights after the murder of Thomas?
5. Write an essay on the significance of the interlude in *Murder In the Cathedral*?

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UNIT - IV

The following two plays will be studied in this section.

1. Samuel Beckett : *Waiting for Godot*
2. John Osborne : *Look Back in Anger*

UNIT IV.1

SAMUEL BECKETT: *WAITING FOR GODOT* (1948)

Biography of the author

Samuel Beckett (1906-- 1989)

Samuel Beckett was born near Dublin, Ireland, on April 13, 1906 into a Protestant, middle class home. Beckett is known to have commented, "I had little talent for happiness." This sense of depression would show up in much of his writing, especially in *Waiting for Godot* where it is a struggle to get through life.

Samuel Beckett moved to Paris in 1926 and met James Joyce. He soon respected the older writer so much that at the age of 23 he wrote an essay defending Joyce's magnum opus to the public. In 1927, one year later, he won his first literary prize for his poem entitled "Whoroscope." The essay was about the philosopher Descartes meditating on the subject of time and about the transiency of life. Beckett then completed a study of Proust that eventually led him to believe that habit was the "cancer of time." At this point Beckett left his post at Trinity College and traveled.

Beckett journeyed through Ireland, France, England, and Germany and continued to write poems and stories. It is likely that he met up with many of the tramps and vagabonds who later emerged in his writing, such as the two tramps Estragon and Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*. On his travels through Paris Beckett would always visit with Joyce for long periods.

Beckett permanently made Paris his home in 1937. Shortly after moving there, he was stabbed in the street by a man who had begged him for money. He had to recover from a perforated lung in the hospital. Beckett then went to visit his assailant, who remained in prison. When Beckett demanded to know why the man had attacked him, he replied "Je ne sais pas, Monsieur"(I don't know, Sir). This attitude about life comes across in several of the author's later writings.

During World War II Beckett joined the underground movement in Paris to resist the Germans. He remained in the resistance until 1942 when several members of his group were arrested. Beckett was forced to flee with his French-born wife to the unoccupied zone. He only returned in 1945 after Paris was liberated from the Germans. He soon reached the pinnacle of his writing career, producing *Waiting for Godot*, *Eleutheria, Endgame*, the novels *Malloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*, and *Mercier et Camier,* two books of short stories, and a book of criticism.

Samuel Beckett's first play was *Eleutheria* and involved a young man's efforts to cut himself loose from his family and social obligations. This has often been compared to Beckett's own search for freedom. Beckett's great success came on January 5, 1953, in *Waiting for Godot*. Although critics labeled the play "the strange little play in which 'nothing happens,'" it gradually became a success as reports of it spread through word of mouth. It eventually ran for four hundred performances at the Theatre de Babylone and was heralded with critical praise from dramatists such as Tennessee Williams, Jean Anouilh, Thornton Wilder, and William Saroyan. Saroyan even remarked that, "It will make it easier for me and everyone else to write freely in the theatre." An interesting production of *Waiting for Godot* took place when some actors from the San Francisco Actor's Workshop performed the play at the San Quentin penitentiary for over fourteen hundred convicts in 1957. The prisoners immediately identified with both Vladimir and Estragon about the pains of waiting for life to end, and the struggle of the daily existence. The production was perhaps the most successful ever. Beckett's second masterpiece. *Endgame,* premiered on April 3, 1957 at the Royal Court Theatre in London.

All of Beckett's major works were written in French. He believed that French forced him to be more disciplined and to use the language more wisely. However, *Beckett himself eventually translated Waiting for Godot into the English*.

Samuel Beckett also became one of the first absurdist playwrights to win international fame. His works have been translated into over twenty languages. In 1969 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, one of the few times this century that almost everyone agreed the recipient deserved it. He continued to write until his death in 1989, but towards the end he remarked that each word seemed to him "an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness." Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969.

General Information about the text

We have now read about the life and works of Beckett. Now let us learn about the genre and the text in general.

Genre

Waiting for Godot qualifies as one of Samuel Beckett's most famous works. Originally written in French in 1948, Beckett personally translated the play into English. The world premiere was held on January 5, 1953, in the Left Bank Theater of Babylon in Paris. The play's reputation spread slowly through word of mouth and it soon became quite famous. Other productions around the world rapidly followed. The play initially failed in the United States, likely as a result of being misbilled as "the laugh of four continents." A subsequent production in New York City was more carefully advertised and garnered some success.

Waiting for Godot incorporates many of the themes and ideas that Beckett had previously discussed in his other writings. The use of the play format allowed Beckett to dramatize his ideas more forcefully than before, and is one of the reasons that the play is so intense.

Beckett often focused on the idea of "the suffering of being." Most of the play deals with the fact that Estragon and Vladimir are waiting for something to alleviate their boredom. Godot can be understood as one of the many things in life that people wait for. The play has often been viewed as fundamentally existentialist in its take on life. The fact that none of the characters retain a clear mental history means that they are constantly struggling to prove their existence. Thus the boy who consistently fails to remember either of the two protagonists casts doubt on their very existence. This is why Vladimir demands to know that the boy will in fact remember them the next day.

Waiting for Godot is part of **the Theater of the Absurd.** This implies that it is meant to be irrational. Absurd theater does away with the concepts of drama, chronological plot, logical language, themes, and recognizable settings. There is also a split between the intellect and the body within the work. Thus Vladimir represents the intellect and Estragon the body, both of whom cannot exist without the other.

The Theatre of the Absurd

'The Theatre of the Absurd' is a term coined by the critic Martin Esslin for the work of a number of playwrights, mostly written in the 1950s and 1960s. The term is derived from an essay by the French philosopher Albert Camus. In his 'Myth of Sisyphus', written in 1942, he first defined the human situation as basically meaningless and absurd. The 'absurd' plays by Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter and others all share the view that man is inhabiting a universe with which he is out of key. Its meaning is indecipherable and his place within it is without purpose. He is bewildered, troubled and obscurely threatened. This refers to a kind of drama growing out of the philosophy of **Existentialism** and flourishing in Europe and America in the 1950s and 1960s. Absurdist dramas present characters struggling to find order and purpose in irrational and incomprehensible situations. In the plays of Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee and Arthur Kopit, characters find themselves buried in sand up to their armpits, submerged in a room full of proliferating furniture, standing interminably and for no purpose in a line, worked over by an interrogation team for no reason, or visited by friends who insist on staying with them indefinitely

The origins of the Theatre of the Absurd are rooted in the avant-garde experiments in art of the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, it was undoubtedly strongly influenced by the traumatic experience of the horrors of the Second World War, which showed the total impermanence of any values, shook the validity of any conventions and highlighted the precariousness of human life and its fundamental meaninglessness and arbitrariness. The trauma of living from 1945 under threat of nuclear annihilation also seems to have been an important factor in the rise of the new theatre.

One of the most important aspects of absurd drama was its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language had become a vehicle of conventionalised, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words failed to express the essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. The Theatre of the Absurd constituted first and foremost an onslaught on language, showing it as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. Absurd drama uses conventionalised speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon, which is distorts, parodies and breaks down. By

ridiculing conventionalised and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically. Conventionalised speech acts as a barrier between ourselves and what the world is really about: in order to come into direct contact with natural reality, it is necessary to discredit and discard the false crutches of conventionalised language. Objects are much more important than language in absurd theatre: what happens transcends what is being said about it. It is the hidden, implied meaning of words that assume primary importance in absurd theatre, over an above what is being actually said. The Theatre of the Absurd strove to communicate an undissolved totality of perception - hence it had to go beyond language.

Absurd drama subverts logic. It relishes the unexpected and the logically impossible. According to Sigmund Freud, there is a feeling of freedom we can enjoy when we are able to abandon the straitjacket of logic. In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language the absurd theatre is trying to shatter the enclosing walls of the human condition itself. Our individual identity is defined by language, having a name is the source of our separateness - the loss of logical language brings us towards a unity with living things. In being illogical, the absurd theatre is anti-rationalist: it negates rationalism because it feels that rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite. It offers intoxicating freedom, brings one into contact with the essence of life and is a source of marvellous comedy.

There is no dramatic conflict in the absurd plays. Dramatic conflicts, clashes of personalities and powers belong to a world where a rigid, accepted hierarchy of values forms a permanent establishment. Such conflicts, however, lose their meaning in a situation where the establishment and outward reality have become meaningless. However frantically characters perform, this only underlines the fact that nothing happens to change their existence. Absurd dramas are lyrical statements, very much like music: they communicate an atmosphere, an experience of archetypal human situations. The Absurd Theatre is a theatre of situation, as against the more conventional theatre of sequential events. It presents a pattern of poetic images. In doing this, it uses visual elements, movement, light. Unlike conventional theatre, where language rules supreme,

in the Absurd Theatre language is only one of many components of its multidimensional poetic imagery

The Theatre of the Absurd is totally lyrical theatre which uses abstract scenic effects, many of which have been taken over and modified from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning. Much of its inspiration comes from silent film and comedy, as well as the tradition of verbal nonsense in early sound film (Laurel and Hardy, W C Fields, the Marx Brothers). It emphasises the importance of objects and visual experience: the role of language is relatively secondary. It owes a debt to European pre-war surrealism: its literary influences include the work of Franz Kafka. The Theatre of the Absurd is aiming to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams.

Alfred Jarry is an important predecessor of the Absurd Theatre. His *UBU ROI* (1896) is a mythical figure, set amidst a world of grotesque archetypal images. Ubu Roi is a caricature, a terrifying image of the animal nature of man and his cruelty. (Ubu Roi makes himself King of Poland and kills and tortures all and sundry. The work is a puppet play and its décor of childish naivety underlines the horror.) Jarry expressed man's psychological states by objectifying them on the stage. Similarly, Franz Kafka's short stories and novels are meticulously exact descriptions of archetypal nightmares and obsessions in a world of convention and routine.

Existentialism

The thought of **Existentialism** became famous through the novels, plays and philosophical writings of **Jean Paul Sartre** and many others during the 1940s. It is a philosophy that focuses on the individual human being's experience of, recognition of, and triumph over the meaninglessness of existence. According to Sartre, human beings are born into a moral and metaphysical void. There is no plan for their lives, no definition for their essential being. They simply exist. This idea is well expressed by **Albert Camus** in his essay titled" The Myth of Sisyphus". Sisyphus was a character in Greek mythology who upset the gods with his extraordinary wisdom. According to the Greek myth, Sisyphus is condemned to roll a rock up to the top of a mountain, only to have the rock roll back down to the bottom every time he reaches the top. The gods were wise, Camus suggests, in perceiving that an eternity of futile labor is a hideous punishment. Camus

identifies Sisyphus as the archetypal absurd hero, and what fascinates Camus is Sisyphus's state of mind in that moment after the rock rolls away from him at the top of the mountain. As he heads down the mountain, briefly free from his labor, he is conscious, aware of the absurdity of his fate. His fate can only be considered tragic because he understands it and has no hope for reprieve. At the same time, the lucidity he achieves with this understanding also places him above his fate.

The concept of the absurd is born from what Camus sees as a fundamental contradiction in the human condition. On the one hand, we live with an inborn desire to find some sort of unity or reason in the universe. This desire to make sense of the universe makes us believe in a meaningful life or in God. On the other hand, the universe gives us no reason to believe that it contains any kind of reason or unity. Though we generally live with a sense of purpose born from our desire for unity, we may occasionally be struck by how senseless everything seems. We may see people riding up an escalator and imagine them as mindless robots, or we might look at a tree and see simply a "thing" that is not part of an ordered or natural universe. This feeling that strikes us occasionally is the feeling of absurdity, the awareness of the contradictory universe in which we live. The absurd man is someone who lives with the feeling of absurdity, who consciously maintains his awareness of the senselessness of everything around him.

The ideas that recur in the absurdist drama are the following:

1.) There is often no real story line; instead there is a series of "free floating images" which influence the way in which an audience interprets a play.

2.) There is a focus on the incomprehensibility of the world, or an attempt to rationalize an irrational, disorderly world.

3.) Language acts as a barrier to communication, which in turn isolates the individual even more, thus making speech almost futile. In other words, absurdist drama creates an environment where people are isolated, clown-like characters blundering their way through life because they don't know what else to do. Oftentimes, characters stay together simply because they are afraid to be alone in such an incomprehensible world.

Waiting for Godot presents the idea of absurdity of human life. With this brief introduction, let us now go to the play in detail.

Brief Summary of the Play

Two men, Vladimir and Estragon, meet near a tree. They converse on various topics and reveal that they are waiting there for a man named Godot. While they wait, two other men enter. Pozzo is on his way to the market to sell his slave, Lucky. He pauses for a while to converse with Vladimir and Estragon. Lucky entertains them by dancing and thinking, and Pozzo and Lucky leave.

After Pozzo and Lucky leave, a boy enters and tells Vladimir that he is a messenger from Godot. He tells Vladimir that Godot will not be coming tonight, but that he will surely come tomorrow. Vladimir asks him some questions about Godot and the boy departs. After his departure, Vladimir and Estragon decide to leave, but they do not move as the curtain falls.

The next night, Vladimir and Estragon again meet near the tree to wait for Godot. Lucky and Pozzo enter again, but this time Pozzo is blind and Lucky is dumb. Pozzo does not remember meeting the two men the night before. They leave and Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait.

Shortly after, the boy enters and once again tells Vladimir that Godot will not be coming. He insists that he did not speak to Vladimir yesterday. After he leaves, Estragon and Vladimir decide to leave, but again they do not move as the curtain falls, ending the play.

Detailed Analysis and Study of the Play

List of Characters

Vladimir- One of the two main characters of the play. Estragon calls him Didi, and the boy addresses him as Mr. Albert. He seems to be the more responsible and mature of the two main characters.

Estragon - The second of the two main characters. Vladimir calls him Gogo. He seems weak and helpless, always looking for Vladimir's protection. He also has a poor memory, as Vladimir has to remind him in the second act of the events that happened the previous night.

Pozzo - He passes by the spot where Vladimir and Estragon are waiting and provides a diversion. In the second act, he is blind and does not remember meeting Vladimir and Estragon the night before.

Lucky - Pozzo's slave, who carries Pozzo's bags and stool. In Act I, he entertains by dancing and thinking. However, in Act II, he is dumb.

Boy - He appears at the end of each act to inform Vladimir that Godot will not be coming that night. In the second act, he insists that he was not there the previous night.

Godot - The man for whom Vladimir and Estragon wait unendingly. Godot never appears in the play. His name are character are often thought to refer to God, changing the play's title and subject to Waiting for Godot.

Setting

The setting is in the evening on a country road with a single tree present. Estragon is trying to pull off his boot, but without success. Vladimir enters and greets Estragon, who informs him that he has spent the night in a ditch where he was beaten. With supreme effort Estragon succeeds in pulling off his boot. He then looks inside it to see if there is anything there while Vladimir does the same with his hat.

Act I: Introduction & Pozzo and Lucky's Entrance

Summary

Estragon is trying to take off his boot when Vladimir enters. The two men greet each other; Vladimir examines his hat while Estragon struggles with his boot. They discuss the versions of the story of the two thieves in the Gospels, and Vladimir wonders why one version of the story is considered more accurate than the others.

Estragon wants to leave, but Vladimir tells him that they cannot because they are waiting for Godot, who they are supposed to meet by the tree. They wonder if they are waiting in the correct spot, or if it is even the correct day.

Estragon falls asleep, but Vladimir wakes him because he feels lonely. Estragon starts to tell Vladimir about the dream he was having, but Vladimir does not want to hear his "private nightmares." Estragon wonders if it would be better for them to part, but Vladimir insists that Estragon would not go far. They argue and Vladimir storms off the stage, but Estragon convinces him to come back and they make up.

They discuss what to do next while they wait, and Estragon suggests hanging themselves from the tree. However, after a discussion of the logistics, they decide to wait and see what Godot says. Estragon is hungry, and Vladimir gives him a carrot. They

discuss whether they are tied to Godot when they hear a terrible cry nearby and huddle together to wait for what is coming.

Analysis

The beginning of the play establishes Vladimir and Estragon's relationship. Vladimir clearly realizes that Estragon is dependent on him when he tells Estragon that he would be "nothing more than a little heap of bones" without him. Vladimir also insists that Estragon would not go far if they parted. This dependency extends even to minute, everyday things, as Estragon cannot even take off his boot without help from Vladimir.

The beginning of the play makes Vladimir and Estragon seem interchangeable. For example, one of the characters often repeats a line that the other has previously said. This happens in the very beginning when the two characters switch lines in the dialogue, with each asking the other, "It hurts?" and responding, "Hurts! He wants to know if it hurts!" In addition to demonstrating the way that the two characters can be seen as interchangeable, this textual repetition will be found throughout the play as an indicator of the repetitiveness of life in general for Vladimir and Estragon.

Vladimir's discussion of the story of the two thieves brings up the question of textual uncertainty. He points out that the four gospels present entirely different versions of this story, and wonders why one of these versions is accepted as definitive. This question about the reliability of texts might cause the reader (or audience) of this play to question the reliability of this particular text. Also, the repetition of the story by the four gospels might allude to the repetitiveness of the action of the play.

The repetitiveness of the play is best illustrated by Estragon's repeated requests to leave, which are followed each time by Vladimir telling him that they cannot leave because they are waiting for Godot. The exact repetition of the lines each time this dialogue appears, including the stage directions, reinforces the idea that the same actions occur over and over again and suggests that these actions happen more times than the play presents.

In this beginning section we get the only clue of the nature of Vladimir and Estragon's relationship with Godot. They mention that they asked Godot for "a kind of prayer...a vague supplication," which he is currently considering. This creates a parallel between Godot and God, also suggested by their similar names, and it seems that

Vladimir and Estragon do consider Godot a kind of religious figure when they mention coming in on their hands and knees.

Act I: Pozzo and Lucky Scene

Summary

Pozzo enters, driving Lucky ahead of him by a rope around his neck. Vladimir and Estragon wonder if Pozzo is Godot, but he tells them that he is Pozzo and asks if they have heard of him. They tell him that they have not. Pozzo commands Lucky to put down his stool, and sits down and begins to eat some chicken. While he eats, Vladimir and Estragon circle around Lucky, inspecting him. They notice a sore on his neck and begin to ask him a question, but Pozzo tells them to leave him alone. Estragon asks Pozzo if he can have the bones from his chicken, and Pozzo tells him that Lucky gets priority over them. Estragon asks Lucky if he wants the bones, but he does not reply, and Pozzo tells Estragon that he can have the bones. He comments that he has never known Lucky to refuse a bone and hopes that he is not sick.

Vladimir suddenly explodes with anger at Pozzo's treatment of Lucky, but then seems embarrassed at his outburst. Pozzo decides to go, but then decides to stay and smoke another pipe. Vladimir wants to leave, but Pozzo reminds him of his appointment with Godot.

Estragon begins to wonder aloud why Lucky does not put down his bags. Pozzo begins to answer the question, after much preparation involving his vaporizer spray, but gives a convoluted and contradictory response. Vladimir asks Pozzo if he wants to get rid of Lucky; Pozzo responds that he does and is taking him to the fair to sell him.

Lucky begins to cry, and Pozzo hands Estragon a handkerchief to wipe away his tears. Estragon approaches Lucky, but Lucky kicks him in the shins. Pozzo tells Vladimir and Estragon that he has learned a lot from Lucky, and that Lucky has been serving him for nearly sixty years. Vladimir becomes angry that Pozzo is going to get rid of Lucky after so much time, and Pozzo gets upset. Vladimir then gets angry at Lucky for mistreating Pozzo.

Pozzo calms down, but he realizes that he has lost his pipe and begins to get upset again. While Estragon laughs at Pozzo, Vladimir exits, apparently to go to the bathroom. He returns, in a bad mood, but soon calms down. Pozzo sits down again and begins to

explain the twilight. When he finishes, he asks them to evaluate his performance and then offers to have Lucky perform for them. Estragon wants to see Lucky dance, while Vladimir wants to hear him think, so Pozzo commands him to dance and then think.

Lucky dances, and Estragon is not very impressed. Pozzo tells them that he used to dance much better. Vladimir asks him to tell Lucky to think, but Pozzo says that he cannot think without his hat. Vladimir puts Lucky's hat on his head and he begins to think aloud, spouting a long stream of words and phrases that amount to gibberish. As he goes on, the other three suffer more and more and finally throw themselves on him and seize his hat to make him stop. Pozzo tramples on the hat, and the men help Lucky up and give him all the bags.

Pozzo is about to leave, but finds that he cannot. He decides that he needs a running start, so he starts from the opposite end of the stage and drives Lucky across as they exchange good-byes.

Analysis

Pozzo's statement about his pipe, that the second pipe is never as "sweet" as the first, can apply to experience in general—it suggests that feelings and events dull with repetition.

Repetition of events in the play is emphasized by further textual repetition. When Vladimir and Estragon alternate short lines back and forth, Estragon often repeats himself at the end of a string of lines. This occurs for the first time in this exchange: "Estragon: The circus. Vladimir: The music hall. Estragon: The circus." This same trope will recur several times in a row at the beginning of the second act, always with Estragon repeating himself.

We see here that Vladimir supports Estragon after Estragon is kicked by Lucky: when he cries that he cannot walk, Vladimir offers to carry him, if necessary. This illustrates Vladimir's attempt to protect and take care of Estragon.

Vladimir is often very quick to change his mind. When he learns of Lucky's long term of service to Pozzo, he becomes angry with Pozzo for mistreating his servant. However, when Pozzo gets upset and says that he cannot bear it any longer, Vladimir quickly transfers his anger to Lucky, whom he reproaches for mistreating his master after so many years. This illustrates how Vladimir's opinion can be easily swayed by a change in circumstances.

In this section we see the first suggestions that Vladimir and Estragon might represent all of humanity. When Pozzo first enters, he notes that Vladimir and Estragon are of the same species as he is, "made in God's image." Later, when Pozzo asks Estragon what his name is, he replies "Adam." This comparison of Estragon to Adam, the first man, suggests that he may represent all of mankind; and this link between Estragon and Adam also relates to the idea of Godot as God.

Pozzo's inquiry about how Vladimir and Estragon found him suggests that Pozzo is giving a performance. This notion is reinforced when he has Lucky perform for them. It seems that Pozzo and Lucky appear primarily to entertain Vladimir and Estragon—after Pozzo and Luck leave, the other two men comment that their presence helped the time pass more rapidly.

Pozzo's failure to depart anticipates the way that Vladimir and Estragon remain waiting at the end of each of the acts, after saying they will depart. However, even after saying, "I don't seem to be able to depart," Pozzo does actually manage to leave. Pozzo moves on while Vladimir and Estragon remain fixed even as the curtain falls at the end of each act.

Act I: Pozzo and Lucky's Exit to Conclusion

Summary

After Pozzo and Lucky depart, Vladimir once again tells Estragon that they cannot leave because they are waiting for Godot. They argue about whether Pozzo and Lucky have changed, and Estragon suddenly complains of pain in his other foot.

A boy enters timidly, saying that he has a message from Mr. Godot. Estragon bullies the boy, who reveals that he has been waiting a while but was afraid of Pozzo and Lucky. When Estragon shakes the boy, badgering him to tell the truth, Vladimir yells at him and sits down and begins to take off his boots.

Meanwhile, Vladimir talks to the boy. He asks him if he is the one who came yesterday, but the boy tells him that he is not. The boy tells Vladimir that Mr. Godot will not come this evening, but that he will surely come tomorrow. Vladimir then asks the boy if he works for Mr. Godot, and the boy tells him that he minds the goats. The boy says that Mr. Godot does not beat him, but that he beats his brother who minds the sheep.

Vladimir asks the boy if he is unhappy, but the boy does not know. He tells the boy that he can go, and that he is to tell Mr. Godot that he saw them. The boy runs off the stage and, as he goes, it suddenly becomes night.

Estragon gets up and puts his boots down at the edge of the stage. Vladimir tells him that the boy assured him that Godot will come tomorrow. He tries to drag Estragon offstage to shelter, but Estragon will not go. Estragon wonders if they should part, but they decide to go together. As the curtain falls, they remain still.

Analysis

This section begins with the most commonly repeated dialogue in the play, in which Estragon wants to go and Vladimir tells him that they are waiting for Godot. This section provides evidence for a religious reading of the play as Estragon compares himself to Christ when he decides to go barefoot. When Vladimir tells him not to compare himself to Christ, Estragon responds that "all my life I've compared myself to him."

Vladimir's statement that he pretended not to recognize Pozzo and Lucky suggests that he has met them before. This indicates that the actions presented in the first act of the play may have happened before, calling attention to events that occur outside the frame of the play. The same thing occurs when Vladimir asks the boy if he came yesterday, revealing that they were waiting yesterday with the same result. This suggests that the same events have been going on for some time; the two acts of the play are merely two instances in a long pattern of ceaselessly repeating events.

The end of Act I establishes Vladimir and Estragon's hopelessness. Even when they both agree to go, and Vladimir says "Yes, let's go," the two men do not move. Even their resolution to go is not strong enough to produce action. This inability to act renders Vladimir and Estragon unable to determine their own fates. Instead of acting, they can only wait for someone or something to act upon them.

Act II: Introduction & Pozzo and Lucky's Entrance

Summary

Act II takes place the next evening, at the same time and place. The tree now has four or five leaves on it. Estragon's boots and Lucky's hat remain onstage when Vladimir enters, looks around, and begins to sing. Estragon enters and suggests that Vladimir

seemed happier without him. He says that he does not know why he keeps returning to Vladimir, since he too is happier alone, but Vladimir insists that it's because Estragon does not know how to defend himself. Vladimir suggests that things have changed since yesterday, but Estragon does not remember yesterday. Vladimir reminds him about Pozzo and Lucky, and they begin to argue about whether Estragon has ever been in the Macon country. Estragon once again says that it would be better if they parted, but Vladimir reminds him that he always comes crawling back. They decide to converse calmly but soon run out of things to say, and Vladimir grows uncomfortable with the silence.

Vladimir looks at the tree and notices that it is now covered with leaves, although yesterday it was bare. Estragon says that it must be spring, but also insists that they were not here yesterday. Vladimir reminds him of the bones that Pozzo gave him and the kick that Lucky gave him and shows him the wound on his leg. He asks Estragon where his boots are and—when Estragon replies that he must have thrown them away—points out the boots on the stage triumphantly. Estragon, however, examines the boots and says that they are not his. Vladimir reasons that someone must have come by and exchanged his boots for Estragon's.

Vladimir gives Estragon a black radish, but since he only likes the pink ones, he gives it back. Estragon says he will go and get a carrot, but he does not move. Vladimir suggests trying the boots on Estragon, and they fit, but Estragon does not want them laced. Estragon sits down on the mound and tries to sleep. Vladimir sings him a lullaby, and he falls asleep, but soon wakes up from a nightmare.

Vladimir is pleased to find Lucky's hat on the ground because he believes it confirms that they are in the correct place. He puts on Lucky's hat and hands his to Estragon, who takes off his hat and hands it to Vladimir. This switch occurs several times until once again Vladimir wears Lucky's hat, and Estragon wears his own hat. Vladimir decides that he will keep Lucky's hat, since his bothered him. They begin to play Pozzo and Lucky's roles, with Vladimir imitating Lucky and telling Estragon what to do to imitate Pozzo. Estragon leaves, but quickly returns because he hears someone coming. Vladimir is sure that Godot is coming, and Estragon hides behind the tree. He realizes that he is not hidden and comes out, and the two men begin a watch with one stationed on each side of the stage. When they both begin to speak at once, they get angry and begin

insulting each other. After they finish their insults, they decide to make up and embrace. They briefly do some exercises and then do "the tree," staggering around on one foot.

Analysis

Vladimir's song about the dog that stole a crust of bread repeats itself perpetually. The two verses follow each other in succession so that it can be sung forever, although here Vladimir only sings each verse twice. This song is a representation of the repetitive nature of the play as a whole and of Vladimir and Estragon's circular lives. Like the verses of the song, the events of their lives follow one after another, again and again, with no apparent beginning or end.

The hat-switching incident is another illustration of the endless, often mindless, repetition that seems to characterize the play. Like Vladimir's song at the beginning of Act II, the hat switching could go on perpetually and only stops when Vladimir decides arbitrarily to put an end to it.

Vladimir and Estragon's discussion about the noise made by "all the dead voices" brings back the theme of Estragon repeating himself to end a string of conversation. Three times in a row, Estragon repeats his phrase, with silence following each repetition. Estragon's repetition of the phrases "like leaves" and "they rustle" emphasizes these phrases, especially since Estragon comes back to "like leaves" in the third part of their discussion.

In this section we see again Vladimir's desire to protect Estragon. He believes that the primary reason Estragon returns to him every day, (despite his declarations that he is happier alone) is that he needs Vladimir to help him defend himself. Whether or not Vladimir actually does protect Estragon, Vladimir clearly feels that this duty and responsibility defines their relationship.

Estragon's statement that he will go and get a carrot, followed by the stage directions "he does not move," recalls their immobility in Act one's conclusion, and is another illustration of the way that the characters do not act on their words or intentions. Vladimir recognizes this problem after he decides that they should try on the boots; he says impatiently, "let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget." Vladimir's clear awareness of his own problem makes his inability to solve it—to act and to move—seem even more frustrating and unfathomable.

Act II: Pozzo and Lucky Scene

Summary

While Vladimir and Estragon stagger about pitying themselves, Pozzo and Lucky enter. Pozzo is blind and runs into Lucky, who has stopped at the sight of Vladimir and Estragon. They fall, along with all the baggage. Vladimir welcomes their arrival since it will help to pass the time. Pozzo calls for help while Vladimir and Estragon discuss asking him for another bone. Vladimir decides that they should help him, but first he and Estragon discuss how they have kept their appointment.

Pozzo continues to cry for help, and eventually Vladimir tries to assist him. However, he falls also while trying to pull up Pozzo. Estragon threatens to leave, but Vladimir begs him to help him up first, promising that they will leave together afterward. Estragon tries to help him up, but ends up falling as well.

All four men now lie on the ground, and Vladimir and Estragon begin to nap. They are woken shortly by Pozzo's shouting, and Vladimir strikes Pozzo to make him stop. Pozzo crawls away, and Vladimir and Estragon call to him. He does not respond, and Estragon decides to try other names. He calls out "Abel," and Pozzo responds by crying for help. He wonders if the other one is called Cain, but Pozzo responds to that name as well, and Estragon decides that he must be all of humanity.

Vladimir and Estragon decide to get up, which they do with ease. They help Pozzo up and hold him, and Pozzo tells them that he does not recognize them since he is blind. They tell him that it is evening, and then begin to question him about the loss of his sight. He tells them that it came upon him all of a sudden and that he has no notion of time.
upon him all of a sudden and that he has no notion of time.

Pozzo asks the men about his slave, and they tell him that Lucky seems to be sleeping. They send Estragon over to Lucky, and Estragon begins kicking Lucky. He hurts his foot and goes to sit down. Vladimir asks Pozzo if they met yesterday, but Pozzo does not remember. Pozzo prepares to leave, and Vladimir asks him to have Lucky sing or recite before they leave. However, Pozzo tells him that Lucky is dumb. They exit, and Vladimir sees them fall offstage.

Analysis

Here again Vladimir seems to recognize the problem of inaction when he decides that they should help Pozzo. He becomes suddenly vehement and shouts, "Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! Let us do something, while we have the chance!" This call to action seems like an urgent rally against the trend of inaction he and Estragon have been following throughout the play; however, Vladimir still takes plenty of time to begin to help Pozzo to his feet. This suggests that, even with good intentions and resolution, the habit of inaction cannot be broken immediately.

In this speech Vladimir also declares that at this point, "all mankind is us, whether we like it or not." This continues the theme of Vladimir and Estragon's representation of mankind as a whole and shows that Vladimir is himself aware of this comparison. Estragon also illustrates the parallel between the two men and the rest of humanity when he tells Vladimir that "billions" of people can also claim that they have kept their appointment. In this case Vladimir attempts to distinguish them from the rest of mankind, but Estragon insists that they are actually the same.

Another biblical allusion is presented here through the comparison of Pozzo and Lucky to Cain and Abel. However, when Pozzo responds to the names Cain and Abel, Estragon decides, "he's all humanity." This suggestion indicates once more that the characters in the play represent the human race as a whole.

Vladimir's need of Estragon's help in order to get up is somewhat of a role reversal. For a brief exchange, Estragon holds the power in the relationship as Vladimir calls to him for help. However, when Estragon does finally stretch out his hand to help Vladimir up, he only falls himself. This seems to indicate that Estragon does not belong in this position of power and responsibility and cannot act to fulfill it.

Act II: Pozzo and Lucky's Exit to Conclusion

Summary

After Pozzo and Lucky leave, Vladimir wakes Estragon. Estragon is upset at being woken up, but Vladimir tells him that he was lonely. Estragon gets up, but his feet hurt, so he sits down again and tries to take off his boots. Meanwhile, Vladimir reflects upon the events of the day. Estragon dozes off again after unsuccessfully struggling with his boots. The boy enters and calls to Vladimir. Vladimir recognizes the routine and knows

what the boy is going to say before he says it. They establish that the boy was not there yesterday, but that he has a message from Mr. Godot saying that he will not come this evening, but definitely tomorrow.

Vladimir asks the boy what Mr. Godot does, and the boy replies that he does nothing. Vladimir asks the boy about his brother, and the boy tells him that his brother is sick. Vladimir asks if Mr. Godot has a beard and what color it is. The boy asks Vladimir what he should tell Mr. Godot, and Vladimir tells him that he should say that he saw him. The boy runs away as Vladimir springs toward him.

The sun sets. Estragon wakes up, takes off his boots, and puts them down at the front of the stage. He approaches Vladimir and tells him that he wants to go. Vladimir tells him that they cannot go far away, because they have to come back tomorrow to wait for Godot. They discuss hanging themselves from the tree, but find that they do not have any rope. Estragon says that they can bring some tomorrow. Estragon tells Vladimir that he can't go on like this, and Vladimir tells him that they will hang themselves tomorrow, unless Godot comes. Vladimir tells Estragon to pull up his trousers, which have fallen down when he removed the cord holding them up in order to determine whether it would be suitable for hanging. They decide to go, but once again do not move as the curtain falls.

Analysis

By this point in the play, the dialogue about waiting for Godot has been repeated so many times that even Estragon knows it. Every time he asked Vladimir to go previously, they went through the entire dialogue about why they could not go. However, this time, Estragon goes through a miniature version of this dialogue by himself: "Let's go. We can't. Ah!" It seems that the numerous repetitions of this dialogue have finally impressed its hopeless resolution upon Estragon's mind.

Similarly, by the time the boy arrives in Act II, Vladimir already knows what he will say, and the boy does not have to tell him anything. This suggests that this dialogue has occurred many times before and furthers the indication that the play is just a representative sample of the larger circle that defines Vladimir and Estragon's lives.

The play's conclusion echoes the end of Act I. Even the stage directions reflect this similarity: after boy's exit and the moonrise, the stage directions read, "as in Act I,

Vladimir stands motionless and bowed." While a live audience would not read these directions, they serve to emphasize the parallel between the two acts for readers and for actors performing the play.

The repetition of the final two lines from the previous act at the play's conclusion shows the continued importance of repetition and parallelism in Waiting for Godot. However, the characters have switched lines from the previous act, suggesting that ultimately, despite their differences, Vladimir and Estragon are really interchangeable after all.

Discussion of some significant aspects

Godot

The play deals with a hope for a change and a chance to be saved. But all along every expression of hope is defeated. One of the characters is Godot, someone who never shows up. The reader finds out about him only through the conversations in the play. Although Godot is never physically present on stage, his presence is everywhere. The whole play, including all the actions and the theme itself, is affected by the mention of Godot.

No one in the play ever really saw him, or ever will. His appearance is not as important as a belief in him. The two friends, Estragon and Vladimir spend their lives waiting for this one person to show up, this one miracle to happen. It never does, but as Vladimir says, "It passes the time." It might appear surprising that the lives of two people can be based on the life of a third one, whom they never actually met. But in reality, they do not need him as a person. All they need is something to believe in, something to wait for.

Most people spend their lives waiting for something, but they are not sure of what exactly. Vladimir and Estragon can consider themselves lucky. They know specifically what, or rather whom, they are waiting for: Godot. This faceless character affects their lives. He is a reason they are still alive. Every day, Estragon wants to kill himself, but not only is there not enough rope, but there is also a hope that maybe, just maybe, Godot will appear the next day and everything will be different. Interestingly enough, Godot is also the one who keeps two friends coming back to the same spot, instead of wandering off

and looking for a better place to live. Because of the endless promise that this one person will actually come, they do not leave the place.

Whether or not Godot exists does not make any difference. The belief in him keeps two people from killing themselves, yet living in a ditch. It keeps them away from the places where they want to go and at the same time, it keeps them together. This belief serves the most important function: it gives purpose to their lives.

Estragon and Vladimir are homeless, old and weary, and maybe they are right in thinking that they'd be better off being dead. Certainly Godot can be looked at as death itself, and that's what the two friends are waiting for. Still, death is considered to be a change and that's what Vladimir and Estragon want. And Godot, no matter what/who he is, is the one who can give them this change that they so desperately need.

The theme of Hope

Waiting for Godot is a play about the repetitiveness and the meaninglessness of life. But it is also about a hope that instills a desire in human beings to survive in the absurd world. The theme of hope is presented through the characters Vladimir and Estragon, who is waiting for another character Godot. No where in the play it is mentioned, whether Godot will ever come or not. But Vladimir and Estragon are sure that one day he will come and solve all their problems. In Act one, they decide to commit suicide due to boredom, but they are unable to decide that who should go first. And they fear that if one dies, the other friend will be alone. So they make their mind up to wait for Godot and consult him. Like that through out the play they survive in the hope that Godot would come and it is that hope which moves them on and on. Amidst the meaningless life, we can see a ray of hope that helps human beings to endure the hardships and live in this world. There is interplay of hope and hopelessness in the play.

Conclusion

We have seen the main aspects of the play *Waiting for Godot* by Beckett. It projects the meaninglessness of life and the chaos that rules the world through Vladimir and Estragon who is endlessly waiting for Godot, who may or may not come. What remains archetypal in Godot concerning the absurdist metaphor is the way in which each character relies on the other for comfort, support, and most of all, meaning. Vladimir and Estragon desperately need one another in order to avoid living a lonely and meaningless life. The

two functions as a metaphor for survival. Like the characters who proceed and follow them, they feel compelled to leave one another, but at the same time compelled to stay together. The characters are thrown into perpetual agony and chaos from which they are not able to come out on their own. Thus the play can be considered a **tragedicomedy,** though it has comic scenes in between. This makes us think about the purposelessness of human life.

Let us now test our understanding of the play by trying to answer some questions.

Questions

Short Notes

1.Write short notes on a) Vladimir

b) Estragon

2. Who is Godot in the play?

3. The theme of Existentialism in *Waiting for Godot*

4. The theme of hope in *Waiting for Godot*

5. Comment on the relationship of Lucky and Pozzo

Essays

1. Appreciate the play *Waiting for Godot* bringing out the central themes in the play.

2. Write an essay on "the theatre of the absurd" with special focus on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*

3. How does the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon compare with the relationship between Pozzo and Lucky? What is the effect created by the contrast between these two pairs of characters? Is it significant that the characters appear in pairs, rather than alone?

4. Beckett called his play a "tragicomedy." Do you agree with this classification? If not, how would you classify the play? Do you think the play contains more elements of tragedy or comedy?

5.Comment on the scenes that get repeated throughout the play. What do you think Beckett is trying to achieve by the repetition of situations and characters?

6. Which are the predominant aspects of 'absurd drama' you find in *Waiting for Godot*?

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UNIT IV.2

JOHN JAMES OSBORNE: *LOOK BACK IN ANGER* (1956)

Biography of the author

John James Osborne (1929 –1994)

A British playwright, the first of the 'Angry Young Men' of the 1950s. He was born in London, the son of a copywriter. He was educated at Belmont College, Devon but was expelled after attacking the headmaster. He became involved in theatre, as a stage manager and then as an actor. He tried his hand at writing plays and two of them (The Devil Inside Her and Personal Enemy) were staged in regional theatres before he submitted *Look Back in Anger* to the newly formed English Stage Company at London's Royal Court Theatre. The company, led by artistic director George Devine, saw in the play a ferocious and scouring articulation of a new post-war spirit and chose the play as the third production to enter repertory. Reviews were mixed, but Kenneth Tynan - the most influential critic of the age - praised it to the skies: 'I could not love anyone who did not wish to see *Look Back in Anger*,' he wrote, 'It is the best young play of its decade'. The play went on to be an enormous commercial success, transferring to the West End and to Broadway, and was later filmed with Richard Burton in the leading role. His next work was *The Entertainer* (1957), also at the Royal Court and starring Laurence Olivier. It was a Brecht-inspired (though he always denied this) piece that uses the metaphor of the dying music hall tradition to comment on the moribund state of the British Empire, something flagrantly revealed during the Suez crisis of November 1956, which elliptically forms the backdrop to the play. *Luther* (1961) and Inadmissible Evidence (1964) were powerful pieces, using Osborne's characteristically soaring rhetorical venom to powerful effect, but lacing their stories with complexity, ambiguity and richness. *A Patriot for Me* (1965) was a tale of turn-of-the-century homosexuality and was instrumental in putting the boot in to the eighteenth-century system of theatrical censorship under the Lord Chamberlain. *A Hotel in Amsterdam* (1968) was much underrated because, perhaps, of its apparent conventionality, while *A Sense of Detachment* (1972) was very unconventional, but, for pressing the new avant-garde's techniques into the service of Osborne's by now unfashionable social vision, it was also

derided. Osborne's work was no longer produced by the Royal Court in the 1970s and it faded in quality as the decade wore on. His last play was *Deja Vu* (1991) a sequel to *Look Back in Anger* and has some force, but seems self-absorbed and grouchy, lacking the fire of the first play. As well as plays he also wrote a number of screenplays, mainly adaptations of his own works; he also won an Oscar for his 1963 adaptation of Tom Jones. He acted in a few films, including Get Carter (1971), Tomorrow Never Comes (1978) and Flash Gordon (1980). In the last decade of his life, Osborne received most praise (and vilification) for the two volumes of autobiography he produced*, A Better Class of Person* (1981) and *Almost a Gentleman* (1991), which used that familiar acidity of language to lay low all his enemies, whether in the theatre, his family, or society at large. These included his ex-wife, actress Jill Bennett. Osborne's work transformed British theatre. He helped to make it artistically respected again, throwing off the formal constraints of the former generation, and turning our attention once more to language, theatrical rhetoric, and emotional intensity.

General Information about the text

We have now read about the life and works of Osborne. Now let us learn about the genre and text in general.

Genre

Look Back in Anger came to exemplify a reaction to the affected drawing-room comedies of Noel Coward, Terrence Rattigan and others, which dominated the West End stage in the early 1950s. Coward et al wrote about an affluent bourgeoisie at play in the drawing rooms of their country homes, or sections of the upper middle class comfortable in suburbia. Osborne and the writers who followed him were looking at the working class or the lower middle class, struggling with their existence in bed sits or terraces. The "kitchen sink" dramatists—as their style of domestic realism became to be known—sought to convey the language of everyday speech, and to shock with its bluntness.

Kitchen Sink Drama

Kitchen sink realism was a recognizable English cultural movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was seen in the theatre, in art, in novels, in film and in television plays. The term "kitchen sink" derived from an expressionist painting by John Bratby, which contained an image of a kitchen sink. The critic David Sylvester wrote an article in 1954

about trends in recent English art, calling his article "The Kitchen Sink" in reference to Bratby's picture. Sylvester argued that there was a new interest among young painters in domestic scenes, with stress on the banality of life. Bratby painted several kitchen subjects, often turning practical utensils such as sieves and spoons into semi-abstract shapes. He also painted bathrooms, and made three paintings of toilets. Other artists associated with the "kitchen sink" style include Derrick Greaves, Edward Middleditch and Jack Smith. The term was quickly applied to a new style of drama, the hallmark of which was a more realistic representation of social life; country houses and tennis courts were out; ironing boards and minor domestic squalor were in, as in John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* with ironing as a piece of stage business. This was a reaction against the Noel Coward/Terence Rattigan style of dramatic setting. Another factor particularly notable in the films and novels of the time is the use of North of England situations, accents and themes (for example Rugby League, the iconic sport of Lancashire and Yorkshire). This combined with frankness about sex, and a more political content (sometimes descending to rants), to mark a rather clean break with the assumptions of 1950 in the arts generally. Kitchen sink realism is sometimes conflated with the rise of the Angry Young Men. It was in fact more substantive, less driven by journalistic excess, and is more properly its successor.

Angry Young Men

'Angry Young Men' (or Angries for short) is a journalistic catch phrase applied to a number of British playwrights and novelists from the mid-1950s. Their political views were seen as radical, sometimes even anarchic, and they described social alienation of different kinds. They also often expressed their critical views on society as a whole, criticizing certain behaviors or groups in different ways. On television, their writings were often expressed in plays in anthology drama series such as Armchair Theatre (ITV, 1956-68) and The Wednesday Play (BBC, 1964-70); this leads to a confusion with the kitchen sink drama category of the early 1960s.As a catchphrase, the term was applied to a large, incoherently-defined group, and was rejected by most of the writers to whom it was applied; see for instance "Answer to a Letter from Joe" by John Wain (Essays on Literature and Ideas, 1963). Some commentators, following publisher Tom Maschler,

who edited a collection of political-literary essays by the "Angries" (Declaration, 1957), divided them into three groups:

1. The New University Wits (a term applied by William Van O'Connor in his 1963 study The New University Wits and the End of Modernism), Oxbridge malcontents who explored the contrast between their upper-class university privilege and their middle-class upbringings. They included Kingsley Amis, Philip Larkin, and John Wain, all of whom were also part of the poetic circle known as The Movement.

2. Writers mostly of lower-class origin concerned with their political and economic aspirations. Some of these were left wing and some were right wing. They included John Osborne (whose play *Look Back in Anger* is a basic "Angries" text), Harold Pinter, John Braine, and Alan Sillitoe. William Cooper, the early model AYM, though Cambridge-educated was a "provincial" writer in his frankness and material and is included in this group.

3. A small group of young existentialist philosophers led by Colin Wilson and also including Stuart Holroyd and Bill Hopkins. Friendships, rivalries, and acknowledgments of common literary aims within each of these three groups could be intense (the relationship between Amis and Larkin is considered one of the great literary friendships of the 20th century). But the writers in each group tended to view the other groups with bewilderment and incomprehension, and observers could find no common thread among them all except that they were contemporaries who were not of the upper-class establishment or protégés of existing literary circles (thus the perception of them as "angry" outsiders) who tended to avoid radical experimentalism in their literary style. Kitchen sink realism was a recognizable English cultural movement in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was seen in the theatre, in art, in novels, in film and in television plays.

Look Back In Anger by Osborne is a typical example of "kitchen - sink" realism in English drama. With this brief Introduction, let us now go to the summary of the play.

Brief Summary of the Play

Look Back In Anger is a three-act play. The Scene is the living room of Jimmy Porter and Alison. The three-act play takes place in a one-bedroom flat in the Midlands. Jimmy Porter, lower middle-class, university-educated, lives with his wife Alison, the daughter

of a retired Colonel in the British Army in India. His friend Cliff Lewis, who helps Jimmy run a sweet stall, lives with them. Jimmy, intellectually restless and thwarted, reads the papers, argues and taunts his friends over their acceptance of the world around them. He rages to the point of violence, reserving much of his bile for Alison's friends and family. The situation is exacerbated by the arrival of Helena, an actress friend of Alison's from school. Appalled at what she finds, Helena calls Alison's father to take her away from the flat. He arrives while Jimmy is visiting the mother of Hugh Tanner and takes Alison away. As soon as she has gone, Helena moves in with Jimmy. Alison returns to visit, having lost Jimmy's baby. Helena can no longer stand living with Jimmy though she says that she loves him, and leaves. Finally Alison returns to Jimmy and his angry life.

List of Characters

Jimmy Porter-- The hero, and the angry young man in the play. He is educated but has no decent job of his own. He runs a sweet shop with Cliff. He is disgusted with life and gets angry at anything and everything in life. He has revolutionary ideas and his wife cannot understand him.

Alison-- Wife of Jimmy Porter. She comes from a civilized, and rich family. Though she is married to Jimmy, she never understands Jimmy's working class behavior.

Cliff-- Jimmy's friend who stays with him and Alison. A happy go lucky character who loves Jimmy very much.

Helena-- Alison's friend who comes and stays with the Porters for sometime. She is in love with Jimmy, though she cannot stand his rough behavior. After living with Jimmy for a few days, she goes off.

Colonel Redfern-- Alison's father, who was a Colonel working in India. He is tormented inside because everything is changing. A character who could be contrasted with Jimmy in his attitudes.

Mrs. Tanner-- Hugh Tanner's mother. Jimmy is very fond of her, considers her as a mother figure

Hugh Tanner-- Jimmy's childhood friend who shares his revolutionary ideas. He does not appear as a character, but only through the memoirs of Alison.

Act wise Analysis

Summary

Act One, Scene One

The plot of *Look Back in Anger* is driven almost entirely by the tirades of Jimmy Porter rather than outside forces. The play is set in a one-room attic apartment in the Midlands of England. This large room is the home of Jimmy Porter, his wife Alison, and his partner and friend Cliff Lewis, who has a separate bedroom across the hall.

The play opens with Alison at the ironing board and Jimmy and Cliff in easy chairs reading the Sunday papers. Jimmy complains that half the book review he is reading in his "posh" paper is in French. He asks Alison if that makes her feel ignorant and she replies that she was not listening to the question. Immediately one of the main themes is introduced, Jimmy's railing against the inertia of Alison and the inertia of the whole middle-class of England. Jimmy teases Cliff about being uneducated and ignorant and Cliff good-naturedly agrees with him. Jimmy says that Alison hasn't had a thought of his agony, but she gets used to things around her very fast and this irritates Jimmy. Jimmy insults Alison's family members and friends. According to Jimmy, the only word that suits Alison's non- attached attitude towards everything is 'pusillanimous'. He calls her "a monument of non- attachment" and tells Cliff that pusillanimous is the only right word available to sum her up. Alison who is used to his carefully rehearsed attacks keeps quiet. When Jimmy gets tired of his routine outbursts, he goes inside. Alison talks with Cliff, and they are very good friends. Cliff wonders how long could he stay with Alison and Jimmy, watching them quarrel like that. Alison tells Cliff that she is pregnant and that she has not informed Jimmy so far. Cliff tells her that she should inform Jimmy. When Cliff goes out to buy cigars, Alison and Jimmy are together. Though they do not get into arguments, she does not inform him about her pregnancy. They play the game of squirrel and bear (Alison is the squirrel to Jimmy and he plays the bear) and they are happy. Cliff enters and tells them that Alison has got a phone call. She comes back and informs that her school friend, Helena Charles is coming to stay with them. Jimmy is disgusted hearing that, and he tells that he does not believe the excuses Helena makes to be with them. Alison asks him to shut up. Then Jimmy tells her that it is high time that

she should wake up from her beauty sleep and start understanding people. For her to learn people, something should happen-- such as losing her child and whether she endures that shock, she would become a recognizable human being herself. But he says he is not sure about a change in Alison's attitudes. Alison's mouth remains open and trembling, but she does not say anything. Cliff just looks on, without saying anything.

Analysis

This act gives the readers an idea about the life of Porters. We come to know about the violent outbursts of Jimmy for each and everything in life. Alison, his wife is just the opposite of Jimmy. As she comes form a rich and genteel family, she has a scorn for Jimmy's attitudes and they are in two different worlds. Cliff, Jimmy's friend is a comfort to Alison as a good friend. We are not told specifically about Jimmy's problem, and the audience is shocked at his ruthless remarks about his wife and her family. The language, too, still has the power to shock, such as when Jimmy, unaware of Alison's pregnancy, says to her:" If only something—something would happen to you, and wake you out of your beauty sleep! If you could have a child, and it would die. Let it grow, let a recognisable human face emerge from that little mass of India rubber and wrinkles. Please—if only I could watch you face that. I wonder if you might even become a recognisable human being yourself. But I doubt it.” These words almost come true towards the end of the play.

Summary

Act Two, Scene One

It is two weeks later, and Alison is making tea while Jimmy practices his trumpet offstage. Helena enters, attractive and dressed expensively, carrying a large colander. She works in the theater, and is a friend of Alison's from her life prior to Jimmy. The women discuss Helena's help during the week and the two men. Helena asks Alison, how she could manage the house with two men, who practically do nothing. Alison is disturbed with Jimmy's trumpet. Helena tells her that she has sensed a hatred for her in Jimmy. When Helena asks Alison about her relationship with Cliff, she tells that they are good

friends and there is nothing more between them. As they talk, Alison tells Helena how difficult it was for her to get adjusted to the life with Jimmy in the first days of their marriage. They had to spend their wedding night in Hugh Tanner's house at Poplar because Jimmy was unemployed and they had no house of their own. Alison remembers that she felt isolated in the company of Hugh and Jimmy. Both of them had similar revolutionary ideas and for her it was like a nightmare, living in a jungle. Jimmy never cared for her agony of separation from her family. She realizes that her quarrels with her parents to marry Jimmy were foolish. To Alison who hails from a rich family, the behavior of Jimmy and Hugh seemed ruthless. She remembers how her mother had warned her when she wanted to marry Jimmy. Alison recollects that life with Tanners was frightening with Hugh who could bag a first prize for ruthlessness. She feels that Hugh and Jimmy treated her as a hostage from a certain section of the society on which they had declared a war. Alison tells Helena that due to the lack of money, they had to visit her relatives uninvited. She recalls that all her friends and relatives were good to them, or at least they were sympathetic with her in her pitiful situation.

When Helena asks Alison about the reason why she had married Jimmy, she says that she could give six different answers. She met Jimmy at a party and she found him very different. She could feel a violent energy within him, but she knew that it would be difficult for her to adjust with a person like Jimmy. Yet she chose to marry him. But she found Jimmy as a knight in shining armour, like in the good old stories and the only difference was that his armour was not shining.

Hugh and Jimmy broke away when Hugh went to China leaving his mother behind. Though Jimmy has never told her, Alison feels that at his heart of hearts Jimmy feels her responsible for that. Alison believes that even Mrs. Tanner has a feeling like that. Helena advises Alison to make up her problems with Jimmy as they are going to have a baby. Alison has not told Jimmy about that, and Helena feels that if Jimmy continues his attitudes even after informing him about the baby, it is better for Alison to leave the place. At Helena's observation that Jimmy does not know the meaning of love, Alison points at a chest in the drawer, that contains a squirrel and a bear and tells her about the game that they play. She admits that she is quite mad, but tells Helena that it is easy to

live and love like poor little animals that have no brains, only emotions. Helena gives an opinion that Alison has to fight out things with Jimmy soon or she would have to leave the place, which is a better option.

Cliff enters and Alison asks him to call Jimmy. He is surprised to learn that Alison and Helena are going to church. He declines the invitation to join them. Jimmy enters complaining that no one in his house has an ear for music. He makes satirical remarks about the posh newspapers and also about Alison's family. Jimmy insults Alison calling her a 'chocolate meringue' which is sweet and sticky outside, but messy and disgusting inside. Tired of the sarcasm, Helena asks Jimmy that why does he try so hard to be unpleasant always. Jimmy is happy that he could get some response from one of them. Helena reminds him that he has no business to be so offensive, and on hearing that Jimmy tells her that she has under estimated him. When he asks Alison where she was going, she simply tells him that she was going out. This evasive reply infuriates Jimmy and he starts bullying Alison, throwing abusive comments on Alison's mother. Alison keeps mum, and Jimmy continues his rhetoric. Helena asks him whether he has a feeling that the world has treated him badly. On hearing that Alison ironically tells Helena, not to take away Jimmy's agony and suffering from him, as he survives with those. Jimmy enquires Helena the reason for her long stay with them; she replies that Alison wanted her to stay over. Then Jimmy accuses them of plotting something against him. Alison loses her control, and tells him that she is sick of his 'why' s from the every first day of their marriage. Jimmy tells her that as long as she is with him, he will use it. Insatiated by this, he insults Helena also. Helena wants to slap Jimmy, but she does not. Jimmy gets tormented as he remembers his father's last days and tells them that from a very young age he learned what is it to be angry and helpless. Jimmy gets more agitated when he feels that no one is able to feel his pain. When Helena tells Alison that it is time for them to leave, Jimmy comments that Helena is like a Judas who is taking away Alison from him. Alison, on hearing this takes her cup and breaks it. She looks at the broken pieces and Jimmy. Suddenly she feels giddy, and she says that all she wants is some peace. Jimmy is infuriated hearing Alison wishing for peace amidst his pain and agony without caring for him. He tells that Alison has never understood him. He gets angry and

recollects the phrases people use to describe him; "poor chap" or "what an objectionable young man". He says that either Alison or he is crazy. He wonders whether it is he who is standing in agony or is it Alison who is calmly sitting on the bed and putting on her shoes. He tells her that he would wait foe a day when she would come back to him and he wants to standup in her tears and be with her.

Helena comes with the prayer books and informs Jimmy that he has got a phone call from a hospital. Helena cannot comprehend the reason for Jimmy's anger and she says that she feels like pulling his hair out of his head. Helena remarks that men do not do anything other than simply sitting and reading newspapers. Cliff agrees to her comment with his usual sense of humor. Cliff tells Helena that he pities the situation in the house and recollects that things were much better before Helena's arrival and they were happy though the house was always a battle field. He tells Helena that he has no specific role in the problems between Alison and Jimmy, but he loves them. Helena remarks that both Jimmy and Cliff do not know how to behave in a decent and civilized manner. She informs Alison that she has sent a wire asking Alison's father to come and take Alison home. She tells Alison that she has not mentioned anything about the problems in the house. Alison thanks her. Helena hopes that Jimmy would regain his senses when Alison goes away.

Jimmy enters saying that Hugh's mother had a stroke and she is sinking. Cliff offers to accompany Jimmy, but he declines that and asks him to arrange a taxi. Jimmy wants Alison to be with him. He is in much pain and sorrow at the condition of Mrs. Tanner. But Alison does not pay heed to him and goes out to church with Helena. Jimmy collapses in to the bed unable to believe Alison's behaviour.

Analysis

In this scene, we get an idea about the life of Porters from the early days of their marriage. It is evident that they got married expecting a lot form each other, but when they do not get that, they regrets their wedding itself from the very first day. Alison finds it difficult to adjust with the character of Jimmy. As she comes from a rich family and a

different class in the society, she gets irritated with the behaviour of Jimmy. Jimmy suffers from an inferiority complex of being a part of the lower class and he tries to get over it by insulting Alison and her family constantly. Their emotional detachment is widened when Alison does not even bother to accompany or to comfort Jimmy on hearing the sad news of Mrs. Tanner.

Cliff is the only character who is not very energetic and moody in the play. He is a silent spectator to all the problems of the Porters. He foresees the dominating nature of Helena and tells her frankly that her presence has made the things worse with the Porters. He is a good friend of the Porters and always wishes their good.

Helena comments that she cannot comprehend the reason for Jimmy's tirades. Though it is the class conflict that is tormenting him, the playwright does not explicitly tell it. Helena's confusion about the reasons for Jimmy's outrageous behavior is the same with the reader too. This incoherence in Jimmy's rage is both strength and a limitation to the play. Helena's character is a dominating one. She goes to the extent of asking Alison's father to take her home, without even consulting Alison. Through out the play, her domineering presence could be felt.

Act two, Scene Two

Summary

Alison is seen sitting with her father in Porter's flat. Alison tells he father that Jimmy has gone to hospital to visit Mrs. Tanner who is like a mother to him. Colonel tells her that he hopes that Mrs. Tanner would not be as ruthless as her son, Hugh. Alison tells him that Tanner belongs to the group of people whom Jimmy addresses as the 'working class'. When Colonel remark that a sweet shop is not a respectable business for an educated young man like Jimmy, Alison shrugs it off saying that the sweet shop was the last resort of Jimmy who has failed in journalism, advertising, and so many other endeavors. Colonel asks Alison that why she never bothered to write to them much about her social life or her living conditions. Then she replies that it was not easy for her to sent letters. Colonel feels that they should not have been so cruel towards Jimmy when Alison chose to marry him. He feels guilty for their conduct and asks Alison about Jimmy's attitude

towards them. Alison tells him that Jimmy has no great malice towards Colonel, but he hates her mother. When she recollects some phrases that Jimmy use to address her mom, Colonel remarks that Jimmy has a good turn of phrase.

Colonel is confused and asks Alison why did Jimmy marry her if he cannot stand the people who belong to her class. She says that it must have been for revenge. On hearing this, her father is totally confused about the man- woman relationship. Alison tells him that with some people like Jimmy and herself, it would be like that. Alison compares Jimmy to Shelly for his rebellious attitudes and comments that neither was she a Mary nor her father, a William Godwin for Jimmy to marry her. She remembers that till the age of twenty-one, before she met Jimmy, the "spiritual barbarian" she led a peaceful life. Alison informs Colonel that she has decided to leave Jimmy and to return to her own house with him. Helena comes in and excuses herself from accompanying Alison telling her that she has a job appointment. Cliff enters and Alison tells him her decision to leave. He says it would be better if she could wait for Jimmy and tell him directly. She says that she is not waiting for him and requests Cliff to handover a letter to Jimmy on behalf of her. Cliff tells Alison that her ways are rather conventional, and she admits that comment about her. Alison asks Cliff to take care of Jimmy and she leaves. Cliff gets irritated with Helena's curios questions about Jimmy, and leaves the room asking her to pass on Alison's letter to Jimmy.

Jimmy enters. He is all tormented. He is in anguish and he is disgusted with the rude behavior of the taxi driver. Helena gives him the letter and he gets angry on reading the loving words written by Alison. He says that he feels like puking when he sees them. Helena informs him that Alison is pregnant. Jimmy tells her that he does not feel anything for a girl who does not even care for the sick and dying Mrs. Tanner who is like a mother to him. Mrs. Tanner died and Jimmy was alone with her in her last moments. He calls Alison "a cruel and stupid girl" and says that he does not have any feelings for her. Helena suddenly gets up from the chair and slaps savagely on his face and Jimmy stands in disbelief. He puts his hand over his head and cries in agony. Then Helena kisses him passionately and draws him down beside her.

Analysis

Colonel Redfern represents the martyred expressions of the British ruling class and their “white man's burden”. He is the contrast of Jimmy, as it is well expressed through Alison's words: "You're hurt because everything is changed. Jimmy is hurt because everything is the same. And neither of you can face it. Something's gone wrong somewhere, hasn't it?” Colonel is unable to comprehend the agony of Jimmy. The admiration of Colonel Redfern for Jimmy's principles and his amusement at Jimmy's description of Mrs. Redfern as “an overfed, over privileged old bitch”, are set against his total lack of comprehension of what Jimmy's life actually means. The class conflict is well expressed through Alison who tells her father that she thinks that Jimmy married her to take revenge on her. This implies how remote their mindset and ideas are. In the previous act Alison tells Helena that Jimmy and Hugh treated her as a hostage during the early days of their marriage. With those statements, she proves that she has not understood Jimmy at all.

. Alison's attitude infuriates Jimmy. She does not even care to send some flowers for Mrs. Tanner according to the normal custom. This shows her attitude towards the class of people like the Tanners. She does not consider them important as to notice their sufferings. This is evident in her mentioning that the Tanners belong to the 'working class'. Jimmy, who is totally shattered by the death of Mrs. Tanner goes to the extent of telling that she does not care for Alison, though he comes to know that she is pregnant.

Helena's intentions are quite evident towards the end of this scene. She has a love - hate relationship with Jimmy. She loves him and at the beginning she expresses it in the form of hatred towards him. Once Alison goes away, she makes use of the opportunity.

Act Three, Scene One

Summary

The setting is the same. It is after a couple of months. Helena has started living with Jimmy. The scene is similar to the first one. Helena is busy wit the ironing board and Jimmy and Cliff on their respective armchairs reading paper. As usual Jimmy

monopolizes the conversation. On seeing a newspaper article, Jimmy recollects how Alison's mother used to take revenge on him: by stabbing his wax statue with hatpins. Helena tells him that he can also invent something like that. Then Jimmy tells that he would prefer to start it by roasting Cliff on a gas stove. They continue their discussion on the newspaper articles and Helena tells them that she has started getting used to Jimmy and his ways. Jimmy plans for an outing in the evening. He asks whether Helena has a guilty feeling of living with him. She urges him not to speak on religion and politics at least for a day. For quite some time, all three of them are happy and later they get in to argument. Cliff pushes jimmy violently and he falls over the ironing board. Jimmy tells Cliff that he does not know how to behave decently. Helena irons Cliff's shirt that got creased. Jimmy tells Helena that he is sick of seeing her behind the ironing board all the time. She apologizes and informs him that Cliff is planning to leave them. Jimmy says that Cliff has a big heart though he is a bit sloppy. As they talk, Helena tells him that she has always loved him and they kiss each other. Helena goes inside to change her dress and Alison walks in. Jimmy calls out to Helena and tells her that she has a visitor-- one of her old friends.

Analysis

In this scene that happens after some months, we see that life goes on smoothly for Jimmy, Helena and Cliff. The scene is similar to the first scene. In this scene Cliff makes a strong decision to leave Jimmy. And we do not see Jimmy much troubled by Cliff's decision. He just remarks that Cliff is a very good person at heart. Alison comes towards the end and we should note that Jimmy addresses her as Helena's friend. He does not even acknowledge her as an old acquaintance. The scene is a prelude to the action that is going to happen in the last scene.

Act Three, Scene Two

Summary

Jimmy is playing his jazz trumpet from Cliff's room. Alison is sitting on a chair, and Helena walks in, picks up Jimmy's pipe saying that she has got used to his habits. Alison tells Helena that she is sorry to have come there. Helena tells her that she has every right to come there, as she is Jimmy's wife. Alison, in her conversation quotes Jimmy very

often. Helena admits that she is in love with jimmy. She tells Alison that as far as she has understood; the problem with Jimmy is that he is not living in his present. He thinks that he is living in the middle of French Revolution and has no idea about where he is or what he is doing. She tells Alison that it is because of that he is futile and a misfit in the present society. Helena tells that she and Jimmy are in two different worlds, and she is planning to leave him. She informs Alison that her decision is not because Alison has come back. Alison remarks that though both of them love Jimmy, they are not the right companions for Jimmy. She says that a mixture of Cleopatra, Boswell, a henchwoman and a Greek courtesan would be ideal for him. Helena calls Jimmy. Though he is reluctant to come at first, as Alison is there, he comes later. When Helena starts telling him about Alison's health, He says that there is no need to explain anything to her as he can assume everything from her haggard look. He says that he too has a sense of loss, though it is not for the first time in his life to lose a child. Then Alison tells him that it was her first loss. Alison is tormented. Amidst this, Helena announces her decision to leave by the evening train, and tells Jimmy that Alison has no role the present turn of events. Helena tells Jimmy that she has always loved him, and can never love anyone better than him, but she cannot be a part of his suffering. Jimmy does not show much reaction, but simply nods his head. Helena is about to leave and the sound of her things swept away from the table by Jimmy stops her. He is in agony and empties her wardrobe and gives everything to Helena. He makes a statement that one can never try to fool oneself about love without dirtying the hands. He is shaken and avoids Alison's eyes. Unable to bear his pain and agony, Alison plans to leave. But Jimmy's voice pulls her up. Jimmy accuses her for leaving him alone for Mrs. Tanner's funeral. He tells her that he never found that strength of hers to relax, after their wedding, though it was that quality of hers that attracted him at the first sight. Hearing these words Alison says that she no longer wants to be a saint, but want to be corrupt and futile. She says that she learned what is pain when she lost her child. She thought that the child was her responsibility and it was safe and secure in her womb, but she lost it. And in that pain she thought about him and wanted to be with him. She could only think of him. She thought that he would like her to see her feeling the pain and agony because he used to complain about her emotional numbness towards his agony. She collapses to the floor saying these, and

Jimmy bends down, takes her in her arms and comforts her. They go back to their world of squirrels and bears (The game they used to play) with tender ironic statements and the play ends.

Analysis

In this scene we see that Alison has come back to Jimmy, understanding his feelings to an extent**.** What Jimmy unknowingly tells her in the first act about the loss of her child, comes true and she is transformed. Helena finds out a logical reasoning for Jimmy's behaviour after her life with him for a few months. To an extent her contention is true that Jimmy is unable to come into terms with his present. Alison's realization that both Helena and herself are not the right companions for Jimmy is also true. The readers get an idea about the reasons for Jimmy's tirades in this scene. Alison's transformation into a person who can feel the emotions is remarkable and it solves most of the problems with the Porters. But the class conflict, which is the root cause of Jimmy's agony is not solved towards the end of the play.

Discussion of some significant aspects

Themes

Class Conflict

This is the main theme of Osborne's play *Look Back In Anger.* Through Jimmy and his violent outbursts Osborne portrays the emotions of the "angry young men" of the 1950s in England. The fact that Jimmy comes from a lower class background and Alison from an upper class society irritates him. Alison's recollection about their life with Mrs. Tanner is an example of what she feels to be with the so-called 'working class' people. She describes those times as a nightmare. Jimmy takes pleasure in insulting Alison and her family members for their pithy concerns and posh attitudes. The conflict between Alison and Jimmy is a never-ending one. Jimmy is enraged at Alison's frozen mind-set towards everything. He wants her to show some enthusiasm and concern in matters that affect him. As she is unaware of the pain and agony, she fails to reach up to Jimmy's expectations. And this results in their troubled family life. Through the agonized hero, Osborne exposes the class conflict that was so far un- explored by the English dramatists.

Characters

Alison

Alison, who has grown up with the one attitude but has been forced by her situation into the other. She is portrayed as the woman who tolerates Jimmy's invective, living constantly with the threat of something erupting in front of her. She belongs to the upper strata of the society and is unable to understand Jimmy's concerns. But she loves Jimmy very much and returns to him. The class conflict, which is the root cause of Jimmy's agony, is evident from his relationship with Alison. Though they love each other, their worlds are different. Alison's non- caring attitude towards Mrs. Tanner is an example of her class-consciousness. She realizes the agony of pain, and then she returns to Jimmy.

Jimmy

In Jimmy Porter, Osborne created what came to be seen as a model of the "angry young man"—railing at the lack of passion of his age, entreating Alison and Cliff to show some enthusiasm. He is marvelously, unreasonably idealistic in a wildly unfocussed way. It is clear from Osborne's script that there was no lack of a sense of life's difficulties around at the time. But the emphasis had shifted from the martyred expressions of the British ruling class and their "white man's burden", as represented in Colonel Redfern, to a more serious appraisal of life for those outside that ruling class. Helena tells Alison that as far as she has understood; the problem with Jimmy is that he is not living in his present. He thinks that he is living in the middle of French Revolution and has no idea about where he is or what he is doing. She tells Alison that it is because of that he is futile and a misfit in the present society. Helena tells Alison about Jimmy "He was born out of his time...there's no place for people like that any longer-- in sex, politics or anything. That's why he's so futile" and it is true with Jimmy. This goes hand-in-hand with Jimmy's statement that "people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer.... There aren't any good, brave causes left." Through Jimmy Osborne portrays the concerns of the revolutionary "Angry young men "in England in the 1950s. Jimmy Porter represents the dismay of many young Britons, who came of age under a Socialist government, yet found, that the class system is intact.

Cliff

He is the only truly sympathetic character in the play. From his role as Jimmy's foil in the early exchanges, to appearing as Alison's real friend, to the point when he decides

that he does not want to stay in the flat, Osborne gives a magnificent portrayal of solidness. Whilst Alison is forced to accept Jimmy's rages because her family background has robbed her of any other viable option, Cliff keeps the peace by hiding his real character—by playing along with all the games only because he loves Jimmy and Alison.

Conclusion

We have now seen the main aspects of the play by John Osborne in which Jimmy represents the 'angry young men' of England who were disillusioned by the failure of the Socialist Movement of the 1950s. The impact Osborne had on British theatre is incalculable. With *Look Back in Anger* he brought class as an issue before British audiences. And thus he set a different trend of drama on the English stage that seriously addressed the domestic concerns of people rather than musing over unreal, and superfluous plots.

Let us now evaluate ourselves with some questions

Questions

Short Notes

1. Sketch the character of Jimmy
2. Compare and contrast Alison and Helena
3. Contrast the character of Cliff with Jimmy
4. The theme of class conflict in *Look Back In Anger*
5.Kitchen sink Drama

Essays

1. How successfully has Osborne portrayed the class Conflict through Jimmy Porter in *Look Back In Anger?*
2. *Look Back In Anger* is an example of "Kitchen Sink Realism" in English drama. Do you agree?
3. Does Jimmy Porter represent the "Angry Young Men" of 1950s in England?
4. Analyze the relationship between Alison and Jimmy. How does Helena turn the action of the play? What role does Cliff play in the *Look Back In Anger?*

UNIT - V

In this unit we have the following two plays for study.

1. Edward Bond : *Lear*
2. Harold Pinter : *The Birthday party*

UNIT V.1

EDWARD BOND: *LEAR* (1971)

Biography of the author

Edward Bond (1934--

Edward Bond was born on 18th July 1934 as the third child of a working class parents in the North London Halloway. Till his fourteen Bond had a very little education in Halloway. The economic disparities pulled him out of his academic stream and he was compelled to work for his family. He later joined the army and served his country for two years. He married Elizabeth Puble in 1971. He was a member of writers group of the Royal Court Theatre, London.

Bond received many honours and awards like George Devine Award in 1968 and John Whiting Award in 1969. His school trip to see Donal Wolfit in Macbeth left a deep impact on him. Bond's memory of Wolfit's Macbeth, the sudden renaissance of British Drama in the late 1950's and mind that thought of in terms of confrontations and speeches were the influences that set him writing plays. He continues to live in London at present.

Bond's Works are written in between 1962-1979 and these were altogether twenty-one plays written by him. The following is the list of his plays with their year of publication. *The Pope's Wedding* (1962), *Saved* (1965), *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1966), *Three Sisters* (1967), *Narrow Road to the deep south* (1968), *Passion (*1970), *Black Mass* (1970), *Lear* (1971), *The Sea* (1973), *Spring Awakening* (1974), *The Fool* (1975), *Stone* (1976), *Welcome To The River* (1976), *The White Devil* (1976), *A.A. America* (1976), *The Bundle* (1978), *The Woman* (1976). *The Word* (1979), *Orphans* (1979).

General Information about the Play

Genre

Edward Bond's *Lear* is a re- working of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in a postmodernist angle. Bond uses the Shakespearean play as base material to his works. A few modifications in terms of characters, situations and backgrounds to Shakespearean play contribute to the construction of Bond's play. It was first produced at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1971. The postmodern dramatists subvert the traditional concepts about the number of acts, and scenes etc. in a play. Moreover, Edward Bond's version of Lear's story embraces myth, superstition and reality to reveal the endemic violence of a rancorous society. These are some of the major concerns of postmodernist writers: a) They re- visits the past not with a sense of nostalgia, but with irony, b) they foreground the 'inter textual elements' in literature, such as parody, pastiche, allusion etc. c) they mix several literary genres in a work of art (the thriller, the detective story, the myths etc) and d) they celebrate fragmented structures of narratives and challenges the established literary canons. Some of these aspects could be found in Bond's *Lear* that makes it a postmodernist play. The major tenets of theory of postmodernism developed only in the beginnings of the 1980s. So Bond attempt could be considered as an early attempt in the postmodern theatre.

About the Play

The Lear legend has been reworked by dramatists many times. This latest one by Edward Bond rewrites the tragedy in contemporary terms. In the Shakespearean version there is the predominance of the tragic element. The concepts of good and evil are dramatized by Shakespeare as meeting in a state of conflict. Thus the play acknowledges the existence of two sharply distinguished binaries – good and evil. In Bond's world the two are not opposites, they coexist in the same person at the same moment. This makes the play complex and problematises the very notion of right and wrong. Lear is a power-mad tyrant who realizes at the end of the play that he has erred. Therefore he begs Cordelia not to commit the same errors of tyranny. He continues his plea with the statement that Cordelia will commit the same errors and suffer in the same way before she ripens into wisdom.

Brief Summary of the Play

Let us now go to the brief summary of the play before going into a detailed analysis.

In Bond's play *Lear,* Lear is a paranoid autocrat, building a wall to keep out imagined "enemies". His daughters Bodice and Fontanelle rebel against him, causing a bloody and atrocity-ridden war. Lear becomes their prisoner and goes on a journey of self-revelation. He is blinded and haunted by the ghost of a Gravedigger's Boy, whose kindness towards the old King led to his murder. Eventually Lear, after becoming a prophet reminiscent of Leo Tolstoy, makes a gesture towards dismantling the wall he began. This gesture leads to his death, which offers hope as an example of practical activism. The play also features a character called Cordelia, wife of the murdered Gravedigger's Boy who becomes a Bolshevik-type dictator herself. *Lear* features some punishing scenes of violence, including knitting needles being plunged into a character's eardrum, a bloody on-stage autopsy and a machine that sucks out Lear's eyeballs. However, it is often lyrical and features some densely packed metaphoric language.

Detailed Analysis of the Play

List of Characters

Lear-- The protagonist of the play

Bodice -- The eldest daughter of Lear

Fontanelle -- the second daughter of Lear

The Duke of North -- Bodice's husband

The Duke of Cornwall-- Fontanelle's husband

Warrington-- the army chief

Gravedigger boy-- The boy who takes care of Lear for sometime and it leads to his death

Cordelia-- The Gravedigger boy's wife, who later becomes an autocrat

Brief Analysis of the Play

Bond's *Lear* has three acts and eighteen scenes. The opening scene of the first act of Lear introduces almost all the important characters in the play i.e. Lear, Bodice and Fontanelle (Who stand in Goneril and Regan though their names are changed here) and Warrington. Cordelia comes much in later in the play. In fact her true identity is not revealed to the audience till the seventh scene of Act 1. Lear gives utmost importance to build the wall whereas Fontanelle and Bodice were not convinced with Lear and his plans. They wish to

go against Lear and marry Lear's enemies. Lear immediately dismisses them as his daughters. A severance in father – daughter relationship in Lear occurs when they argue about the very presence of the wall. Lear curses his daughters in wrath as. "I know you were malicious, I built my wait against you as well as my enemies …… your husbands are impotent ….. you have perverted lusts …… The people will judge between you and me ……

The soldiers and labourers in the first scene of the play are part of machinery created by Lear to protect his Kingdom from enemies attack. Lear enslaves them removing them from their homes, families and livelihoods and enlists them to build the wall. The readers get a negative image of Lear with his killing of innocent soldiers.

Lear's own daughters Bodice and Fontanelle, who find intolerable his merciless deeds, plot against him. They plan to attack Lear with the help of their husbands namely the Duke of North and the Duke of Cornwall. Warrington, the army chief, detects the evil plot of Bodice and Fontanelle and makes Lear aware of this. Both Bodice and Fontanelle involve themselves in their plans to marry Warrington and rule the Kingdom. Lear's third daughter Cordelia is introduced much later in the play. In the beginning she lives in the woods under a self imposed exile. As Warrington proves himself loyal to Lear and does not assist his daughters, the Duke of North and Cornwall win the battle against the expectations of Bodice and Fontanelle. Bodice and Fontanelle take Warrington captive, torture him brutally and he is thrown out of castle. Both Lear and Warrington are out of their castles and officialdom. They meet twice and on both occasions the blinded Warrington attempts to wound the tyrant Lear. At last Warrington dies, falling into a well. Lear witnesses the soldiers of Bodice and Fontanelle killing the Gravedigger boy who takes care of Lear for few days, and raping his wife Cordelia.

Lear is taken as a prisoner and in the court Bodice and Fontanelle try to prove Lear a mad man. Lear meets the ghost of the Gravedigger Boy in prison whom he allows to sleep with him in the cell.

Cordelia on the other hand turns into a rebel against the political system. She succeeds in capturing both the sisters and takes the power into her hands. The carpenter then was given charge to sentence the prisoners i.e. Bodice, Fontanelle and Lear. The carpenter orders that Fontanelle should immediately be shot. She was shot in front of

Lear and her dead body was dissected. Soon Bodice too is killed. The carpenter punishes Lear by blinding him. Thus the whole family undergoes tortures and sufferings. Lear when reaches the wall with the help of the ghost, he is reminded of his rural act of killing innocent people for no valid reason and repents for it deeply.

The ghost leads Lear to the house of Gravedigger Boy and Lear is taken care of by Thomas, John and Susan. Lear is now transformed into a new man. He meets the common peasant folk and impresses upon them the dangers of violence. His sincerity and rhetoric win the hearts of the people. In this section of the play, Lear is gradually transformed into a messianic figure. Lear criticizes Cordelia's government and so he receives a warning from her not to comment on her government in public. Thomas, Susan and Lear are scattered when the pigs are attacked. But the ghost being wounded most dies at the feet of Lear. It is the ghost that advises Lear to destroy the wall in order to be free from the responsibility of his earlier wickedness.

In the final scene Susan leads Lear to the wall and he asks her to fetch him a tool. As soon as he gets a shovel he climbs up the wall the starts digging it. A junior officer, who was informed of Lear's attempt to destroy the wall, visits the sight. When Lear disobeys his command, the officer shoots him repeatedly and Lear dies immediately. Though Lear dies uncared for by his family, he dies with a deep understanding of life, purged of his own destructive tendencies. In short he dies a great man.

Discussion of some significant aspects

Themes

I Violence

In Bond's play *Lear,* violence is explicit and prominent. The opening scene of *Lear* reveals the readers the physical violence embedded in Lear's character. *Lear* opens with the death of an innocent worker. In *Lear* it is Bodice and Fontanelle function as the characters punishing Warrington who proves his loyalty towards Lear. As soldier 'A' sets about kicking's and punching Warrington, Bodice sets herself on to her riding stick and begins to knit. Fontanelle leaps around the torturer and the victim like a demented schoolgirl saying. "Do something don't let him get way with it. Oh god, why did I cut, his tongue out? I want to hear him scream…"(*Lear*, Act I, scene iv), She makes Warrington deaf by testing her knitting needles into his ears. While Warrington is

gradually destroyed the scene progresses like a disturbing comedy of menace. In Bond's *Lear,* the king's physical suffering is more explicit. In *Lear,* it is the carpenter character that may be pointed as pivotal force that causes enormous torture and violence to Lear's daughter before their death. In *Lear* the sisters do not kill each other, but Cordelia's government punishes them. Fontanelle, in spite of her attempt to escape death from the soldiers of Cordelia, is shot dead by them. Her body was subject to autopsy through which Bond introduces the unbearable and heart moving violence for quartering the body and in fact realizing the grotesque act. The death of Bodice too, is a death without any significance. She is treated like a stray dog and is kicked, bayoneted and is thrown to the ground repeatedly. The violence embedded in her death, her witching, and the bayoneting of the soldier disturbs the audience. On the other hand the death of Warrington in *Lear* is associated with greater violence and misery. Warrington pays for his loyalty towards Lear. He was tortured brutally in the hands of Fontanelle and Regan. His tongue was cut and he was made deaf and he was thrown out of the castle. Being in exile or being banished from one country or land may also be looked at as a kind of violence. Exile imposes alienation n the individual and the exiled leaves his land and people with a stigma on his character for exile is the punishment that pronounces judgment on the individual as unworthy of redressed in his own land. Wherever the wall comes in the play there come death or violence which affect the lives of people. Lear's daughter i.e. Bodice and Fontanelle do not want the construction of the wall but Lear being firm on the presence of the wall, continues to built it. As the wall grows, the sufferings of Lear too begin.

In Bond's *Lear* the violence through nature is conveyed through some of the elements of nature. i.e. Through the animals that appear in the play. When his daughters throw him out of office, a great transformation takes place in Lear. Plunged into an agony of self-appraisal, he beings to see himself as an animal. His self-images are pitying as:" I am a famished dog that sits on the earth and howls…"(*Lear*, Act I, scene vii)."My daughters turned a dog out of it's kennel because it got fond of its sack"(*Lear*, Act I, scene vii). In this attempt to understand what has happened to himself, Lear uses desperate little parables in which animal appears as victims in landscape of fear. He says: "The mouse comes out of its hole and stare; the giant wants to eat the dragon, but the

dragon has grabbled the carving knife…" (*Lear*, Act I, scene vi) Lear's consciousness in this passage is at its most self-dramatizing and melodramatic moment. The imagery he adopts here matches with the views of terror, death, and emptiness. He adds; "The wolf crawls away in terror and hides with the rats.. I slept in the morning because all the birds were dead…."(*Lear*, Act I, scene vi)

The animal imagery is associated again with the violence. In the trial scene the king brings in the image of a wounded animal as: "There is a poor animal with blood on its head and tears running down it's face.. Is it a bird or a horse? Who broke it's wings…on the glass"(*Lear*, *Act* II, scene i). Perhaps Lear sees himself associated with the animal he mentions here as well as the horse. In the third scene of the final act, the ghost asks him if he can hear the sound of the owl. The owl is a conventional symbol of death. Lear's statement that:" I see my life a black tree by a pool – the branches are covered with tears. The tears are shining with light. The wind blows the tears in the sky. And my tears fall down upon me…." Has the image of circularity of tears. The tears blowing into air and falling back on him may be symbolizing the sorrows that surround him from time to time. Thus the natural elements associated with Lear and hits state of mind have violence and bloodshed embedded within them.

Thus we can say that as compared to Shakespeare's *King Lear* that focuses more on the psychological trauma of Lear, Bond's *Lear* focuses on the physical violence and bloodshed. The violence as portrayed in almost every scene of the play is a major aspect of the play.

II Filial Relationship

The father - daughter relationship in *Lear* is an important aspect of the play. Like in *King Lear* the eldest daughters of Lear go against his wishes. Bodice and Fontanelle do not agree with their father in the issue of their marriage also, and marry their father's enemies, Duke of North and Duke of Cornwall. They are against their father's idea to build a wall around his kingdom to show his power. Bodice says: "Wall, wall, wall! This wall must be pulled down"(*Lea*r, Act I, scene i). Fontanelle, supporting her sister says. "Certainly. My husband insists on that as part of the marriage contact…."Again these two daughters differ with their father in disobeying Lear's commands to shoot the soldier. The traditional notions of love and relationship between parents and children are toppled

here. Lear's third daughter Cordelia is in a self imposed exile. She is caring to her father when he reaches the woods inhabited by her. Though she loves him, she fears that Lear's presence would corrupt the tranquility of the woods if he stays there for long. Her fears come true, and her family is destroyed and it results in her transformation. She becomes a tyrant and adopts her father's ideas and Lear criticizes her decision to build the wall. Bond portrays two versions of Cordelia-- a self-sacrificing daughter in the beginning and a tyrant and rebel in the end.

Lear's relationship with his daughters is also problematic. From his words we can trace the incestuous relationship he had with his daughter's at their adolescence. Fontanelle's body is subject to autopsy in front of Lear. Despite the fact that he is her father, Lear does not attempt to prevent the autopsy of his daughter. He watches the gruesome scene and asks: "Where is the breast? The blood is still as a lake. Where... Where…"“The things are so beautiful. I am astonished I have never seen anything so beautiful. If I had known this beauty and patience and care; How I could have loved her ……"These utterances of Lear remind the readers of his sexually perverted mind.

In the play, Bond subverts the traditional myths of father- daughter relationship and filial love by portraying the problematic relationship with Lear and his children.

Character Analysis

Lear

Bond's Lear is an autocrat who metes out cruel punishments to his subjects in the beginning of the play. He kills people for simple reasons and demands bonded labour from them to make his kingdom secure. He kills many people during the construction of the wall. But when his daughters turn against him and brand him as mad, he gets transformed. When Lear reaches the wall with the help of the ghost, is reminded of his cruel act of killing innocent people for no valid reason and repents for it deeply. The ghost leads Lear to the house of Gravedigger Boy and Lear is taken care of by Thomas, John and Susan. Lear is now transformed into a new man. He meets the common peasant folk and impresses upon them the dangers of violence. His sincerity and rhetoric win the hearts of the people. In this section of the play, Lear is gradually transformed into a messianic figure. When he realizes the futility of building up powerful kingdom from his

own experience, Lear criticizes Cordelia's government as she follows his path as an autocrat. So he receives a warning from her not to comment on her government in public. Thomas, Susan and Lear are scattered when the pigs are attacked. But the ghost being wounded almost dies at the feet of Lear. It is the ghost that advises Lear to destroy the wall in order to be free from the responsibility of his earlier wickedness. In the final scene Susan led Lear to the wall and he asks her to fetch him a tool. As soon as he gets a shovel he climbs up the wall the starts digging it. A junior officer, who was informed of Lear's attempt to destroy the wall, visits the sight. When Lear disobeys his command, the officer shoots him repeatedly and Lear dies immediately. Though Lear dies uncared for by his family, he dies with a deep understanding of life, purged of his own destructive tendencies. In short he dies a great man.

Cordelia

She is presented as a victim of the violence of the external world. In *King Lear* Cordelia under goes death ideologically. The gentle, innocent and harmless Cordelia in *Lear* turns quite the opposite and turning a guerilla leader, she also becomes a dictator. This ideological metamorphosis of Cordelia can be termed as the death of Cordelia. The reason behind the disturbing transformation, as Bond implies, is the violence caused to her and her family. She chooses the path of violence against the violence caused to her. Shakespeare's Cordelia on the contrary dies an innocent death as a result of Edmund's violent diplomacy. Thus these two deaths too are caused by the violence that pervades these plays. Bond's presentation of Cordelia is not as traditional as that of Shakespeare. She is a bold woman who rebels against her sisters and takes up power. She has a fondness to the carpenter in the play too. In *Lear* Bond portrays the relationship between the Cordelia and the Gravedigger boy at great length. From their dialogues one may arrive at the conclusion that they share a strong emotional binding. However Bond's intention behind introducing the exchange of views between the carpenter and the wife is not very clear. The carpenter brings a cradle made by him. He gives two different replies: to the Boy and his wife when they ask him about it. When the boy asks him "What is that?"

He says 'Something I made". But for the same question put by Cordelia he replies:" a cradle"

At the end of the play through the carpenter's words it is revealed that Cordelia has married him after the death of the Boy. The carpenter tells Lear: "We came to talk to you, not listen. My wife wants to tell you something". Even when the Boy is alive the carpenter and Cordelia seems to have share the emotional attachment with each other, this is clear when the carpenter hands over the cradle to Cordelia saying: "A cradle' (Hands over to her) "He does not mind". The boy too knows that the carpenter is in love with his wife but he remains indifferent. The Boy introduces the carpenter to Lear as: "Village carpenter. He makes coffins and cradles. …He's very good …… always hanging round he is in love with my wife..."(Lear, Act I, scene vii). Her relationship with her father is also problematic. Unlike Shakespeare's Cordelia, Bond's Cordelia goes against her father's wish towards the end of the play and becomes instrumental in her father's death as her soldiers shoot him during his attempt to destroy the wall.

The Wall as a symbol of violence

It stands both as metaphor and as a physical presence. The wall is associated with violence. In fact the very first scene, where a soldier was shot for no valid reason, is set near the wall, wherever wall comes in the play there comes a death or violence caused to the lives of people. Lear's daughter i.e. Bodice and Fontanelle do not want the construction of the wall but Lear being firm on the presence of the wall, continues to built it. As the wall grows, the sufferings of Lear too begin. In fact Bond, through the death of an innocent soldier wants to convey the violence that is going to prevail through out the play. The very construction of the wall symbolizes the violence. The laborers who are working for the wall are not voluntary, but forced labour. They were threatened to work. In the beginning of the play it is under Lear's supervision that the wall is built but later on it is Cordelia who stands firm in building the wall.

When Lear is blinded the ghost leads him towards the wall. When he reaches the wall he is reminded of the violence he caused to the lives of the people who worked for it. He says.

"I am the King! I kneel by this wall. How many lives have I ended here? Go away. Go anywhere. Go far away. Run I will not move till you go…"(*Lear*, Act II, scene vii)

Lear is reminded of the violence he cause dot the people only when he was tortured and subject to violence. Perhaps through this, Bond may be implying that it is through violence that one becomes aware of the self-deeds. Even at the end of the play the wall stands as a symbol of violence. Lear meets his death when he starts dragging down the wall. He is shot down miserably for not obeying the commands of Cordelia's government. It is the wall that leads the movement of the play. It also symbolizes power and authority.

In the beginning Lear longs for it but at the end it is Cordelia who stresses on the presence of the wall. Lear becomes a victim of violence and self-imposed ideology. Cordelia always tried to be away from the 'wall' but the metamorphosis that she undergoes brings her back to the wall and she, instead of Lear, stands form on building the wall. However Bond associates the wall with death. In the beginning it is the death of an innocent soldier and at the end it is with the death of Lear himself at the wall.

How *Lear* becomes a reworking of *King Lear*

Bond's *Lear* is a postmodern reworking of Shakespeare's *King Lear.* Though both the plays have the lust for power leading to the tragic fate of an old King and his daughters, the way in which both the dramatists structure the tragic end is different. Bond's modification of *King Lear* is not only in terms of theme and such internal aspects of the play but is also in terms of the number of acts and scenes in it. *King Lear* has five acts and twenty-eight scenes whereas Bond's *Lear* has three acts and eighteen scenes. Bond deliberately breaks the traditional mode of presenting a play in five acts. He also conceals the aspect of double plot in *Lear*. Shakespeare, in following the patterns of five act plays, also developed various types of scenic order, the most important of which was the alternation of public and private action. With a few exceptions he arranged his plays into sequences of many scenes (at least fifteen in number). On the other hand Bond cuts down the number of acts and the scenes with in them in his plays. Bond does not explicitly bring out a parallel and similar plot as Shakespeare does in the case of *King Lear*. Shakespeare's usage of sub-plot as a dramatic device to support the main plot is not present in Bond's *Lear*. Thus Bond in Lear does not use the sub-plot that becomes a dramatic device in the Shakespearean play.

Another aspect found in Bond's play is the appearance of supernatural elements that is not found in Shakespeare's *King Lear.* Bond introduces a ghost, the ghost of the Gravedigger boy that comes as a parallel to the Fool in *King Lear.* As the Fool plays a great part in the transformation of Lear in the Shakespearean play, the ghost plays a major role in bringing a change in the character of the King in *Lear.* The Fool's remarks in *King Lear* aggravate Lear's mental anguish but in Bond's play, the ghost and the king share a special relationship. Bond's bringing in of supernatural element like the ghost has it's own significance as far as the dramatic devices and techniques are concerned. The ghost makes a sudden appearance in Lear's cell and Lear speaks to the ghost like any other human being. The ghost appears when Lear finds himself helpless in a pathetic condition. Bond describes it as: "the ghost of the Gravedigger's Boy appears. His skin and clothes are faded. There is old, drive blood on them." (*Lear*--Act II, scene ii). When Lear is blinded the ghost leads him towards the wall. When he reaches the wall he is reminded of the violence he caused to the lives of the people who worked for it. He says. "I am the King! I kneel by this wall. How many lives have I ended here? Go away. Go anywhere. Go far away. Run I will not move till you go…"*(Lear,* act II, scene vii). Lear is reminded of the violence he cause dot the people only when he was tortured and subject to violence.

Further, the ghost makes two more ghosts appear before Lear. The ghosts of Bodice and Fontanelle too speak to Lear and there is a reminiscence of their childhood and their mother. After some time Bodice suddenly says: "mother's dead. I must serve tea. They're ringing the bell." (*Lear*-Act II, scene ii) The ghost then says that Bodice and Fontanelle must go away. Bond foretells the death of Bodice and Fontanelle through these incidents in *Lear*.

Bond's presentation of the ghost seems closer to human being in *Lear.* Lear treats the ghost as his fellow companion. For Bond death seems no barrier for companionship. This view may be explained in terms of the conversation between Lear and the ghost. The ghost tells him, "Let me stay with you Lear. When I died I went somewhere. I don't know where it was. I waited and nothing happened. ….. look my arms ! feel how thin I am …….. Are you afraid to touch me?" (*Lear*- Act II, Scene iii) Lear's mode of speaking

with the ghost sounds more humanistic when the ghost asks whether he can sleep with him. And Lear agrees, "Yes, yes poor boy. Lie down by me. Here. I'll hold you. We'll help each other. Cry while I sleep and I'll cry and watch you while you sleep. We'll take turns the sound of human voice will comfort us"(*Lear*- Act II, Scene iii). Here Lear shares his views and difficulties with a supernatural being. Bond, through this scene may be conveying the fact that Lear could no longer afford to stay with his fellow human beings, but then he relies more on a ghost than o his kith and kin. When Lear decides to write to Cordelia the ghost realizes that his anger, as part of Lear's range of options, is coming to an end.

The ghost in *Lear* functions not only as a supernatural element but also as a substitute to the Fool's character in Lear. The fool in *King Lear* remains a close companion to the king for a considerably long time in the play. In Lear the ghost appears in the beginning of Act II and remains with Lear almost till the end of the play.

In *King Lear*, the Fool is next to Kent the King's most faithful companion on his way into powerlessness and isolation and he has an important share in the gradual wakening of his self-awareness. The close associating of Lear and the Fool is a memorable dramatic device to make king aware of his folly and loss of authority. It also demonstrates that there is still some loyalty left and that the king is more and more prepared to listen to the voice of foolish wisdom. In contrast Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are not even able to communicate with the fool. The close companionship of Lear and fool in Bond's *Lear* is explicitly stated in the conservation between the ghost and Lear in Act II.

The ghost: "…. see how thing I am, look at my legs. I think my chest's empty inside. Where have you been?"

Lear: " Some men look us out…And brought us back again. I was lonely without you and worried but I knew I'd find you." (They lean against each other) (*Lear*-- Act II, scene ii). Shakespeare's Fool is attributed with a lot of wit and wisdom. Bond's ghost does not have such intellectual elements I it. But the ghost in Lear enjoys more intimacy with Lear than the fool with the King in King Lear. Lear sys to the god "…You are like my soon now. I wish I'd been your father. I'd have looked after you so well…"(*Lear*--Act II.

Scene ii). But the ghost undergoes a miserable death as the pigs in the farm attack him. Lear, instead of saving him says: "No, too late. You were killed long ago! You must die! I love you, I will always remember you. But I can't help you, die, for your own sake ……" (*Lear*--Act III, scene iii). This is the exit of ghost in *Lear,* but the fool's role in the Shakespeare's play ends much earlier i.e. with Act III. Scene vi. He goes off when he accompanies Lear and the others into Gloucester's farmhouse. There the Fool makes one or two remarks that, how ever, do not show his wit or wisdom and almost fall flat.

The storm scene in *King Lear* is an instance where Shakespeare includes nature parallel to the psychological state of the characters in the play. The storm in *King Lear* is the externalization of the inner storm in Lear's mind. It is the storm that is blowing in the heart and soul of Lear. It is Nature's cruelty, aggravating the cruelty of the Lear's elder daughter. The three storms scenes being located in the middle of the play, constitutes its mechanical center. In Act II scene-I, a gentleman describes to Kent the pitiable state of Lear who is contending with the fretful elements and is bidding the wind blow the earth into the sea. In the second scene Lear addresses the forces of nature and in the final scene here refers to the storm that is blowing within him. Bond on the other hand does not introduce any such of symbolic storm in his play. But Bond's mention of destructions of the wall in Lear has parallels with the storm scene in *King Lear*. The storm scene in *King Lear* brings about a climax to Lear's sufferings. The madness represents the climax of his sufferings from which he will eventually emerge as a redeemed man. It is near the wall in (Act-II Scene -vii) that Lear realizes his guilt in constructing the wall and causing misery to the lives of the labourers. He feels pity for them poor as: "I've heard your voice. I'd never seen a poor man! You take too much pity out of me, if there's no pity I shall die of this grief".(*Lear*-- Act I. scene vii).The same kind of feeling enter king Lear's mined during the storm scene. There he too pities the poor as;

"you houseless poverty,-
Nay, get thee in. I'll pray and then I'll sleep
Poor O naked wretches, where so're you are
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides…
…O! I have ta'en

Too little care of this…" (*King Lear*-- Act III, scene iv)

Thus there's similar ideological echoing of Lear in these plays. If the storm in *King Lear* brings climax to his suffering, it is Lear's death in *Lear* that concludes his sufferings. Thus the destruction of the wall and vicinity of Lear to the wall that brings parallel to the storm scenes in *King Lear*.

Though there are many similarities between *Lear* and *King Lear*, the former differs drastically from the latter in terms of its modernity. Bond in fact rewrites *King Lear* and presents in the post – modern context as *Lear.* The modification of *King Lear* includes the elements like introduction of dark humour overemphasis of violence and meaninglessness of the world. In Bond's *Lear* the soldiers use guns and pistols, the modern devices of warfare. Human relations portrayed by Bond in *Lear* subvert the norms commonly understood to be natural and common. The humour presented by the Bond in *Lear* occurs when characters in the play undergo brutal torture and sufferings. For instance when Lear's eyes plucked out, the fourth prisoner says:

" With this device you extract the eye undamaged and then it can be put to good use. It is based on a scouting gadget I had as a boy." He continues, "This is not an instrument of torture, but a scientific device. See how tit clips the lid back to leave it and marked…" (*Lear*-- Act II, scene vi)

A similar kind of dark humour is presented when the autopsy of Fontanelle's body take place. The humour in Lear includes violence and suffering. Fontanelle's body is subject to autopsy in front of Lear. Despite the fact that he is her father, Lear does not attempt to prevent the autopsy of his daughter. He watches the gruesome scene and asks: "Where is the breast? The blood is still as a lake. Where... Where…""The things are so beautiful. I am astonished I have never seen anything so beautiful. If I had known this beauty and patience and care; How I could have loved her …" (*Lear*--Act II, scene vi). These utterances of Lear remind the readers of his sexually perverted mind.

Apart from these elements the very title of the play *Lear* sounds modern to the Shakespearean title *King Lear*. Bond in this process make the king an ordinary human being; Lear is no more a king but just Lear. Lear is based ion the principle of violence and nothing else. Bond himself in his Preface to *Lear* explicitly states this. He openly

states thus: “I write about violenc”. Thus the play does not include a moral or ethical subtext. On the other hand it breaks such conventions and values.

Bond uses the ordinary and colloquial language in contrast to the high sounding and poetic language of Shakespeare. Bond attributes a specific dialect to his soldiers in Lear. For example: the speech of the soldiers D, E and F in Act 1. Scene vii as

Soldier D: ‘E’d avet’ use a carrot

Soldier F: ‘E’ would, the dirty ol’ toe rag’.

Bond’s language is prosaic through out the play except one instance in Act II, Scene-ii, wherein Lear narrates a story to the people gathered around him to listen to his story.

Thus Bond reconstructs the story of *King Lear* into the postmodern times thereby making changes in the structure of plot, the language used and dramatic techniques.

Conclusion

We have now seen a postmodern dramatist who has reworked the much-celebrated tragedy of Shakespeare, *King Lear.* The characters in Bond's *Lear* have parallels with the characters in the Shakespearean play. But as in the Shakespearean play, there is no sub-plot that runs parallel to Lear's story in *Lear.* The play unlike the Shakespearean version gives importance to the physical violence and torture, rather than the psychological trauma of the father figure. Cordelia in both the versions are gentle and caring, but *Lear* shows her as a victorious woman who captures the power from her sisters and a rebel who goes against her father's decisions towards the end. If Shakespeare's Lear dies by praising Cordelia's virtue, Bond's Lear criticizes her and dies at the hands of the soldiers. Edmund and Gloucester in the Shakespearean version is replaced by a single character named Warrington, who is the army chief of Lear and he suffers a tragic death at the hands of Bodice and Fontanelle for not budging into their evil desires and for helping their father. Thus Bond has successfully transplanted the sixteenth century version of Shakespeare's story of Lear into the contemporary times.

Let us now test our understanding of the play by trying to answer some questions.

Questions

Short Notes

1. The theme of violence in *Lear*
2. Cordelia
3. Character of Lear
4. Father-daughter relationship in *Lear*
5. The importance of the wall in *Lear*

Essays

1. Compare and contrast *King Lear* and *Lear*
2. What is the role of Cordelia in the play? Does she become instrumental in her father's death as her sisters?
3. What are the main themes that are found in Bond's *Lear?*
4. How is the contemporary version of the Lear legend different from the earlier one?
5. What role does the ghost play in *Lear?*
6. How does Lear get transformed into a messianic figure in *Lear*?

UNIT V.2

HAROLD PINTER: *THE BIRTHDAY PARTY* (1958)

Biography of the Author

Harold Pinter (1930---)

Playwright Harold Pinter was born in Hackney, London, on 10 October 1930. He was educated at Hackney Downs Grammar School and trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and Central School of Speech and Drama. His plays include *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1958), *The Dumb Waiter* (1959), *The Caretaker* (1960), *The Lover* (1962), *The Homecoming* (1965), *No Man's Land* (1975), *Mountain Language* (1988), *Moonlight* (1993), *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) and *Celebration* (2000), first performed with *The Room* at the Almeida Theatre in London. His adaptation of Marcel Proust's novel Remembrance of Things Past was performed at the National Theatre in London in 2000. He has adapted many of his stage plays for radio and television and he has written the screenplays to a number of films including The Servant (1963), The Quiller Memorandum (1965), The Go-Between (1970), The Last Tycoon (1974) and The Comfort of Strangers (1989), adapted from Ian McEwan's novel. He has directed many productions of his own plays as well as plays by other writers, including James Joyce, Noel Coward, Tennessee Williams, David Mamet and Simon Gray, and has acted on stage, film, television and radio.

He was awarded a CBE in 1966, the German Shakespeare Prize in 1970, the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 1973 and the David Cohen British Literature Prize in 1995, and holds honorary degrees from the Universities of Reading, Glasgow, East Anglia and Bristol, among others. In 2001 he was awarded the S.T. Dupont Golden PEN Award by the English Centre of International PEN. His most recent publication, *War* (2003), is a collection of eight poems and one speech inspired by the subject of conflict. Harold Pinter is married to the writer Lady Antonia Fraser and lives in London.

General Information about the text

Genre

Pinter is credited with the invention of a new dramatic style known as the comedy of menace, and his name has been adopted as descriptive of a type of theatre under the blanket term **"Pinteresque".** They often take an apparently innocent situation, and reveal it as a threatening and absurd one because of characters acting in ways which may seem inexplicable both to the audience and, at times, to other characters. Pinter's work was marked by the influence of Samuel Beckett from the earliest works. Pinteresque theatre has often been described as belonging to the **theatre of the absurd**. It is a kind of psychological drama in which supposedly secure space is contested by characters who may or may not be the embodiment of each other's fears, insecurities or latent sexuality. The themes of frangible identity, uncertain menace and vulnerable space can be traced in the major plays. *The Birthday Party, The Dumbwaiter, The Caretaker* etc. belong to this category. There are elements of **Existentialism** also in the play. Existential dilemma of Stanley, his purposelessness, hopelessness, and search for meaning of life is the central focus of the play. Pinter emphasizes man's anxiety and suffering in his plays.

The Theatre of the Absurd

'The Theatre of the Absurd' is a term coined by the critic Martin Esslin for the work of a number of playwrights, mostly written in the 1950s and 1960s. The term is derived from an essay by the French philosopher Albert Camus. In his 'Myth of Sisyphus', written in 1942, he first defined the human situation as basically meaningless and absurd. The 'absurd' plays by Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter and others all share the view that man inhabits a universe with which he is out of key. Its meaning is indecipherable and his place within it is without purpose. He is bewildered, troubled and obscurely threatened. This refers to a kind of drama growing out of the philosophy of **Existentialism** and flourishing in Europe and America in the 1950s and 1960s. Absurdist dramas present characters struggling to find order and purpose in irrational and incomprehensible situations. In the plays of Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee and Arthur Kopit, characters find themselves buried in sand up to their armpits, submerged in a room

full of proliferating furniture, standing interminably and for no purpose in a line, worked over by an interrogation team for no reason, or visited by friends who insist on staying with them indefinitely

The origins of the Theatre of the Absurd are rooted in the avant-garde experiments in art of the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, it was undoubtedly strongly influenced by the traumatic experience of the horrors of the Second World War, which showed the total impermanence of any values, shook the validity of any conventions and highlighted the precariousness of human life and its fundamental meaninglessness and arbitrariness. The trauma of living from 1945 under threat of nuclear annihilation also seems to have been an important factor in the rise of the new theatre.

One of the most important aspects of absurd drama was its distrust of language as a means of communication. Language had become a vehicle of conventionalized, stereotyped, meaningless exchanges. Words failed to express the essence of human experience, not being able to penetrate beyond its surface. The Theatre of the Absurd constituted first and foremost an onslaught on language, showing it as a very unreliable and insufficient tool of communication. Absurd drama uses conventionalized speech, clichés, slogans and technical jargon, which is distorts, parodies and breaks down. By ridiculing conventionalized and stereotyped speech patterns, the Theatre of the Absurd tries to make people aware of the possibility of going beyond everyday speech conventions and communicating more authentically. Conventionalized speech acts as a barrier between ourselves and what the world is really about: in order to come into direct contact with natural reality, it is necessary to discredit and discard the false crutches of conventionalized language. Objects are much more important than language in absurd theatre: what happens transcends what is being said about it. It is the hidden, implied meaning of words that assume primary importance in absurd theatre, over an above what is being actually said. The Theatre of the Absurd strove to communicate an undissolved totality of perception - hence it had to go beyond language.

Absurd drama subverts logic. It relishes the unexpected and the logically impossible. According to Sigmund Freud, there is a feeling of freedom we can enjoy when we are able to abandon the straitjacket of logic. In trying to burst the bounds of logic and language the absurd theatre is trying to shatter the enclosing walls of the human

condition itself. Our individual identity is defined by language, having a name is the source of our separateness - the loss of logical language brings us towards a unity with living things. In being illogical, the absurd theatre is anti-rationalist: it negates rationalism because it feels that rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite. It offers intoxicating freedom brings one into contact with the essence of life and is a source of marvellous comedy.

There is no dramatic conflict in the absurd plays. Dramatic conflicts, clashes of personalities and powers belong to a world where a rigid, accepted hierarchy of values forms a permanent establishment. Such conflicts, however, lose their meaning in a situation where the establishment and outward reality have become meaningless. However frantically characters perform, this only underlines the fact that nothing happens to change their existence. Absurd dramas are lyrical statements, very much like music: they communicate an atmosphere, an experience of archetypal human situations. The Absurd Theatre is a theatre of situation, as against the more conventional theatre of sequential events. It presents a pattern of poetic images. In doing this, it uses visual elements, movement, light. Unlike conventional theatre, where language rules supreme, in the Absurd Theatre language is only one of many components of its multidimensional poetic imagery

The Theatre of the Absurd is totally lyrical theatre which uses abstract scenic effects, many of which have been taken over and modified from the popular theatre arts: mime, ballet, acrobatics, conjuring, music-hall clowning. Much of its inspiration comes from silent film and comedy, as well as the tradition of verbal nonsense in early sound film (Laurel and Hardy, W C Fields, the Marx Brothers). It emphasizes the importance of objects and visual experience: the role of language is relatively secondary. It owes a debt to European pre-war surrealism: its literary influences include the work of Franz Kafka. The Theatre of the Absurd is aiming to create a ritual-like, mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams.

Alfred Jarry is an important predecessor of the Absurd Theatre. His *Ubu Roi* (1896) is a mythical figure, set amidst a world of grotesque archetypal images. Ubu Roi is a caricature, a terrifying image of the animal nature of man and his cruelty. (Ubu Roi

makes himself King of Poland and kills and tortures all and sundry. The work is a puppet play and its décor of childish naivety underlines the horror.) Jarry expressed man's psychological states by objectifying them on the stage. Similarly, Franz Kafka's short stories and novels are meticulously exact descriptions of archetypal nightmares and obsessions in a world of convention and routine.

Existentialism

The thought of **Existentialism** became famous through the novels, plays and philosophical writings of **Jean Paul Sartre** and many others during the 1940s. It is a philosophy that focuses on the individual human being's experience of, recognition of, and triumph over the meaninglessness of existence. According to Sartre, human beings are born into a moral and metaphysical void. There is no plan for their lives, no definition for their essential being. They simply exist. People can passively remain in that condition, hardly aware of anything, taking the path of least resistance. Or they can face themselves and the awful absurdity of their predicament, recognizing that they are alone, that there are no rules and no one to tell them what to do. It is important from the existentialist viewpoint that human awareness to this situation goes beyond mere intellectual comprehension. People have to feel the horror of meaninglessness. The anxiety (angst) produced by this awareness may lead to despair, but it can also make people recognize that they are responsible for shaping their own essential being, for creating their own authentic character. Angst can lead people to exercise their wills in acts of engagement that will give meaning to their lives. An act of engagement can be a commitment to social and political action, or it can be a blind leap of faith.

This idea is well expressed by **Albert Camus** in his essay titled" The Myth of Sisyphus". Sisyphus was a character in Greek mythology who upset the gods with his extraordinary wisdom. According to the Greek myth, Sisyphus is condemned to roll a rock up to the top of a mountain, only to have the rock roll back down to the bottom every time he reaches the top. The gods were wise, Camus suggests, in perceiving that an eternity of futile labor is a hideous punishment. Camus identifies Sisyphus as the archetypal absurd hero, and what fascinates Camus is Sisyphus's state of mind in that moment after the rock rolls away from him at the top of the mountain. As he heads down the mountain, briefly free from his labor, he is conscious, aware of the absurdity of his

fate. His fate can only be considered tragic because he understands it and has no hope for reprieve. At the same time, the lucidity he achieves with this understanding also places him above his fate.

Camus identifies Sisyphus as the archetypal absurd hero, both for his behavior on earth and for his punishment in the underworld. He displays scorn for the gods, a hatred of death, and a passion for life. His punishment is to endure an eternity of hopeless struggle.

We are not told how Sisyphus endures his punishment in the underworld: that much is left to our imagination. Camus suggests that Sisyphus might even approach his task with joy. The moments of sorrow or melancholy come when he looks back at the world he's left behind, or when he hopes or wishes for happiness. When Sisyphus accepts his fate, however, the sorrow and melancholy of it vanish. Camus suggests that acknowledging, "crushing truths" like the eternity and futility of his fate is enough to render them less crushing. He refers to Oedipus, who, having suffered so much, is able to "conclude that all is well." Happiness and the absurd are closely linked, suggests Camus. They are both connected to the discovery that our world and our fate is our own, that there is no hope and that our life is purely what we make of it. As he descends the mountain, Sisyphus is totally aware of his fate. Camus concludes: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

We react to Sisyphus's fate with horror because we see its futility and hopelessness. Of course, the central argument of this essay is that life itself is a futile struggle devoid of hope. However, Camus also suggests that this fate is only horrible if we continue to hope, if we think that there is something more that is worth aiming for. Our fate only seems horrible when we place it in contrast with something that would seem preferable. If we accept that there is no preferable alternative, then we can accept our fate without horror. Only then, Camus suggests, can we fully appreciate life, because we are accepting it without reservations. Therefore, Sisyphus is above his fate precisely because he has accepted it. His punishment is only horrible if he can hope or dream for something better. If he does not hope, the gods have nothing to punish him with. The theory of tragedy is a vast and complicated subject beyond the scope of this commentary, but a brief discussion of Camus's angle on tragedy may be valuable. Camus tells us that the moment Sisyphus

becomes aware of his fate, his fate becomes tragic. He also alludes to Oedipus, who becomes a tragic figure only when he becomes aware that he has killed his father and married his mother. He also remarks that both Sisyphus and Oedipus are ultimately happy, that they "conclude that all is well." Tragedy, Camus seems to be suggesting, is not pessimistic. On the contrary, it represents the greatest triumph we are capable of as human beings. So long as Sisyphus and Oedipus continue to hope and to deceive themselves, they are not heroic. With tragic recognition comes a full acknowledgment of our fate and our limitations, and with that acknowledgment comes an acceptance of who we are and what we are capable of. Tragic fate only seems horrible in contrast to the hope for something more. In accepting their fate, Sisyphus and Oedipus have abandoned hope, and so their fate does not seem horrible to them. On the contrary, they have finally found the only genuine happiness.

Camus concludes his essay by arguing that happiness and absurd awareness are intimately connected. We can only be truly happy, he suggests, when we accept our life and our fate as entirely our own—as the only thing we have and as the only thing we will ever be. The final sentence reads: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." But why must we imagine Sisyphus happy? Camus's wording suggests that we have no choice in the matter. But is there an alternative? Sisyphus is the absurd hero, the man who loved life so much that he has been condemned to an eternity of futile and hopeless labor. And yet he is above that fate precisely because he is aware of it. If Sisyphus is not happy in this awareness, then absurd awareness does not bring happiness. It would then follow that happiness is only possible if we evade absurd awareness, if we leap into hope or faith.

If the leap into hope or faith represents an attempt to escape from the reality of our fate, and if happiness is only possible through such a leap, then happiness would essentially be an escape. Life itself would be inherently unhappy and happiness would be a sham born out of denial. We must imagine Sisyphus happy if we want to believe in genuine happiness. Though this is the last sentence of the essay, we might see it as the initial premise that starts Camus's reasoning. Because Camus essentially believes in the idea that individual human experience is the only thing that is real, if he wants to show that happiness is real he must show that individual humans can truly be happy based on their experiences, not on their denial of experience. If happiness is real, we must be able to

find happiness without relying on hope, faith, or anything else that goes beyond immediate experience. "The Myth of Sisyphus" is essentially an elaborate attempt to show that this is possible, and it concludes with its starting premise: if genuine happiness is possible, then Sisyphus must be happy.

The concept of the absurd is born from what Camus sees as a fundamental contradiction in the human condition. On the one hand, we live with an inborn desire to find some sort of unity or reason in the universe. This desire to make sense of the universe makes us believe in a meaningful life or in God. On the other hand, the universe gives us no reason to believe that it contains any kind of reason or unity. Though we generally live with a sense of purpose born from our desire for unity, we may occasionally be struck by how senseless everything seems. We may see people riding up an escalator and imagine them as mindless robots, or we might look at a tree and see simply a "thing" that is not part of an ordered or natural universe. This feeling that strikes us occasionally is the feeling of absurdity, the awareness of the contradictory universe in which we live. The absurd man is someone who lives with the feeling of absurdity, who consciously maintains his awareness of the senselessness of everything around him.

The ideas that recur in the absurdist drama are the following:

1.) There is often no real story line; instead there is a series of "free floating images" which influence the way in which an audience interprets a play.

2.) There is a focus on the incomprehensibility of the world, or an attempt to rationalize an irrational, disorderly world.

3.) Language acts as a barrier to communication, which in turn isolates the individual even more, thus making speech almost futile. In other words, absurdist drama creates an environment where people are isolated, clown-like characters blundering their way through life because they don't know what else to do. Oftentimes, characters stay together simply because they are afraid to be alone in such an incomprehensible world.

Brief Summary of the Play

The play is set in the seaside boarding house kept by a childless couple, Petey and Meg. Petey has the most mundane of jobs and he is a deckchair attendant. Meg lives in terror of the wheelbarrow in which, one day, she will be trundled away to a waiting van. Meanwhile, she mothers their one boarder, Stanley, an exhausted, out-of-work concert-party pianist. The routine which these three have achieved is shattered by the arrival of two other guests, Goldberg and McCann, a Jewish business man and his Irish man, who, under the pretext of throwing a birthday party for Stanley, break down his personality and lead him to commit a symbolic murder. The play ends when these two lead off Stanley, dressed now in a bowler hat and striped pants like Goldberg, to be psychologically reconstituted by their friend Monty. And Meg is left romanticizing her memories of the weird party - 'I know I was the belle of the ball'.

List of characters

Petey -- Meg's husband; an ardent lover of Chess

Meg -- A lady of about sixty years, Stanley's landlady

Stanley Webber -- A pianist who leads an isolated life in a secluded house on the seaside

Lulu -- A prostitute who stays next door to Stanley

Goldberg -- A Jew; the visitor who comes to Meg's place in search of Stanley

McCann-- Irish; the visitor who comes to Meg's place in search of Stanley.

Setting

The Birthday Party uses a single setting, the living-dining room of a seaside boarding house somewhere on the coast of England. Its anonymity contributes to a sense of place as symbol, especially in allegorical interpretations of the play. Although doors permit characters to enter and exit the room, there are features suggesting that the room is isolated from the world outside. The wall separating the room from the kitchen has a hatch allowing characters in the kitchen to peer into the room, like jailors peering into a prison cell. There are also windows that permit characters to see into the room but give no real glimpse of what lies beyond them. References to the outside world beyond the room offer virtually no clues to time or place. Petey reads a newspaper (which McCann

later destroys), but the information he relates from it is trivial. Names and places alluded to be either of little help or simply misleading.

Act wise Analysis

Act I

Summary

The Birthday Party opens in the living-dining area of a sordid rooming house at an unnamed seaside resort in England. Petey and Meg Boles, the proprietors, converse while she prepares his breakfast and he reads the newspaper. Their talk is inane, centering on their tenant, Stanley Webber. Petey also tells her of two strangers who might come to rent a room. Meg decides to wake Stanley for breakfast and goes to his room. Unshaven and half dressed, Stanley comes downstairs and sits at the table to eat. After Petey goes off to work, Stanley teases Meg about her "succulent" fried bread, but when she becomes affectionate, he gets irritated and complains that her tea is "muck" and the place is a "pigsty." Meg tells Stanley about the two men who may be new tenants. At first he is worried but then shrugs the information off as a ‘‘false alarm.’’ When Meg asks him to play the piano, he speaks about how he was insulted at a concert at Lowe Edmonton. Stanley leads a secluded life. When Lulu, the girl next door asks him to go out for a walk with her, he declines. Stanley becomes restless on having the arrival of the guests. He paces in the room, grinds his cigarette and is totally restless. He tries to send them away by acting as Meg's manager and telling them that there are no rooms available. But he fails. And McCann and Goldberg stay with them. By flattering Meg, Goldberg gathers all the information about Stanley. Meg, with great authority announces that they are celebrating Stanley's birthday that evening. Goldberg offers to throw a party for Stanley.

Analysis

This part of the play introduces the characters and gives an insight about the situation of the play. Stanley's isolated behaviour is of special attention. His eagerness to send away the guests suggests that he has something to hide from them. But we are not told anything about the past life of Stanley except his experience at Lowe Edmonton that he narrates to Meg. Meg's approach to Stanley is confusing. At times she behaves as a mother and at times a lover. But Stanley is not interested to make any relationships with any of the women in the play. He declines the advances made by Lulu also.

Goldberg's dark, double-breasted suit, white shirt and silk tie, suggest the attire of an undertaker. Stocky McCann, in cords, emerald green waistcoat, and cloth tie and check jacket sends an altogether different signal to the audience. Once he removes the jacket, unbuttons the waistcoat and rolls up his shirtsleeves, we sense he is ready for business. It is the double-act routine performed between (Jewish) Goldberg and (Irish) McCann that provide both humour and tension throughout the play.

Act II

Summary

The second act is devoted to the birthday party. All are present except Petey who is very particular about his Chess club. Lulu comes to the party with a gift. And Meg announces that it is her gift for Stanley. When he opens it, it is a boy's drum. When Meg and Lulu appear on the stage, they encourage Goldberg's flirtations and he goes to the extent of seducing Lulu. Goldberg cross-examines Stanley with a number of questions as why did he leave the organization, why did he kill his wife etc. Stanley tries to convince him that he is not the person they are in search of. But he fails. This increases his mental torture. When the tension builds up, Stanley takes the drum and starts beating it violently.

The play reaches its climax when the game of blind man's buff is suggested. Stanley with his eyes bandaged begins to beat the drum. McCann breaks Stanley's glasses in the game. Stanley catches Meg in the tension and tries to strangle her. At this point the light goes off, only Lulu's screaming is heard as if she is experiencing a sharp pain. McCann lights the torch only to be shocked by the scene of Lulu, lying spread eagled on the table and Stanley bending over her. Stanley giggles and flatters himself against the wall when Goldberg and McCann move towards him menacingly.

The next morning Meg goes out to buy food. Petey is troubled to know about the torturing of Stanley in the party. Lulu complaints to McCann about Goldberg seducing her, but McCann threatens her. The intruders take away Stanley telling him that he needs a psychological treatment by Monty, one of Goldberg's friends. They take away Monty, despite Petey's protests. Meg comes back and starts conversation with Petey about the previous night's party unaware of the absence of Stanley, McCann and Goldberg. She goes on talking about how she was the attraction in the party.

Analysis

The act shows the climax of the action of the play. The action starts with Meg's announcement of birthday and it end with the shattering of Stanley, psychologically and intellectually. Despite Stanley's protests that it is not his birthday, Meg, McCann and Goldberg throw him a party. Meg's present to Stanley shows her attitude towards him. She treats him as a baby by gifting him a boy's drum just because he does not own a piano.

McCann and Goldberg intentions are not revealed anywhere in the play. They torture Stanley and he is at a verge of shock. They agitate him asking questions like "Why did you leave the organization? Where is your wife? Where is your old man…Do you recognize external force? Is the number 846 possible or necessary?" etc. And Stanley is unable to answer those questions. His inability to talk or move tells the reader emphatically of his shattered condition and his state of being. McCann behaves cruelly to Stanley. He says that he feels like sticking needles into Stanley's eyes when he does not speak or move. McCann deliberately breaks Stanley's glasses during the game. Pinter does not reveal their intentions when they announce that Stanley has a nervous break down and he will get a good treatment by Monty, one of Mc Cann's friends. Despite Petey's protest and assurance that they can find a doctor for Stanley, they take him away.

Stanley is reduced to a person who has completely surrendered his will. He does not speak a word to Petey at the end. He simply follows the instructions of Goldberg and McCann. Stanley's stillness in *The Birthday Party* increases the dramatic tension. Here is a man whose day-to-day life is shattered by the unexpected arrival of the sinister duo Goldberg and McCann. It is left to the audience to assume that McCann and Goldberg could be a part of some mysterious association in which Stanley worked before or anything else. The play does not provide any answers. Where we might expect physical resistance from Stanley we are presented with an often-static figure who becomes increasingly disorientated by a constant stream of questions and the exchange of knowing banter. His blood is indeed 'jarred' by events and as a result his brief bursts of activity are viewed as the acts of a desperate man.

Meg is portrayed as a mother figure whose actions become fatal to Stanley. Towards the end of the play, she is seen displaying an advertisement in he hand and

saying that they no longer need it. So we can reach a conclusion that it was Meg who informed Mc Cann and Goldberg about Stanley's presence or so. The play offers multiple readings and it ends without informing anything about the future of Stanley.

Discussion of some significant aspects

Themes

Absurdity

As in many absurdist works, *The Birthday Party* is full of disjointed information that defies efforts to distinguish between reality and illusion. For example, despite the presentation of personal information on Stanley and his two persecutors, who or what they really are remains a mystery. Goldberg, in particular, provides all sorts of information about his background, but he offers only oblique clues as to why he has intruded upon Stanley's life. What has Stanley done to deserve persecution? The facts of his past are so unclear that his claim to be a pianist may even be false. *The Birthday Party* influences the audience to doubt anything with certainty, which as it does in Kafka's work, intensifies the dreadful angst experienced by the protagonist. This effect is achieved through truncated dialogue, by Pinter's deliberate failure to provide conclusive or consistent information, and by his use of ambiguity. The dramatist is not interested to tell us a complete story. He presents certain disjointed information and we should draw conclusions out of it. Thus the play offers multiple readings.

Characters

Meg Boles

Petey's wife, Meg Boles is a good-natured, comically scatty woman in her sixties. If only from a lack of any reference to offspring of her own, it is implied that she and Petey are childless, thus she fills a void in her life by turning the Boles's boarding-house tenant, Stanley Webber, into a kind of surrogate child. She insists on calling him "boy" and mothering him. She even takes liberties appropriate to a parent—though not to the landlady of an adult roomer—by invading his privacy to fetch him down to breakfast. At the same time, Meg flirts with Stanley, trying to fill a second void in her life. Her marriage to Petey has settled into mechanical routine, as their listless and inane dialogue that opens the play reveals. Meg tries to win Stanley's approval of her as a woman,

shamelessly fishing for compliments. Stanley, in his mildly perverse manner, responds playfully to her advances.

When Goldberg and McCann arrive, she flirts with them also. She is a woman prone to flattery and Goldberg squeezes out all the information from her by simply flattering her. Thus she unknowingly does harm to Stanley. The audience is not sure whether Meg has informed Goldberg and McCann about Stanley. One can suspect that also when Meg is seen discarding an advertisement after Stanley leaves. She is least bothered about Stanley's fate, but muses over her flirtations in the birthday party.

Pinter's mother figures are always a subversion of the traditional self-sacrificing mother figures. They are all shown as monsters who devour their children in one-way or the other. For example, Meg's actions become fatal to Stanley. Her gift reduces Stanley to a baby and later he is totally shattered. She could be considered as an indirect cause for Stanley's pathetic condition at the end.

Petey

Petey is Meg's husband. He is a man who is devoted to Chess. He is not present in the play, except in the first and the last scenes. He has sympathy towards Stanley and he is fond of him. When Goldberg informs Petey about their plan to take away Stanley for treatment, he offers to find a doctor for Stanley. He even goes to the extent of insisting that Stanley could stay with them. This shows his eagerness to rescue Stanley from the hands of McCann and Goldberg. Through out the play Petey radiates humanity and warmth. He is shown as a mature person in contrast with the playful nature of Meg.

Stanley

Stanley is the protagonist in the play. No information is provided about his identity or past life. His claim that he is a pianist is doubtful. We can guess that he has a shady past from his alienated and isolated life. He gets worried about the visitors of Meg and tries his best to avoid them. His mental conflict is expressed through the hide and seek game he plays to avoid Goldberg and McCann. Stanley is a character through which Pinter exposes how an individual is oppressed by the society and how the society makes him depress by subjugating him. His shock at the questioning of McCann and Goldberg shows that he has some connection with them, but it is not revealed. Pinter displays

through Stanley, man's quest for identity and his alienation. Stanley is the pivot on whom the play revolves. Stanley represents the helplessness of man thrown into the meaningless and absurd world. He is presented as a condemned and isolated human being in the play. Even at the end of the play, not much is told about his future. The questions about his past, his present and his future are left in limbo. Stanley's existential dilemma is well expressed by the least resistance that he offers to his counterparts. He is not even uttering a single word or a jester to prevent from being taken away by Goldberg and McCann. May be, he considers himself responsible for his pathetic condition and is unable to come out of it.

Conclusion

Pinter is celebrated for possessing an ear for everyday speech. Instead of merely reproducing such speech, however, Pinter shapes it and makes poetry out of it. As he does so, he imbues this language with a deep meaning, which can be read as representing two fundamental facets of the human condition. The first of these is the inevitability of non-communication. Many of Pinter's characters, while exchanging remarks apparently on a common topic, and using mutually comprehensible vocabulary, are revealed as experiencing a profound failure to communicate with one another. The second is our capacity to fail to say certain things to one another: this unspoken substance comes across as a raw animal struggle for power. Personal violence rather than public politics is a theme that runs through the early plays. Typically, these power struggles and feats of non-communication take place in enclosed spaces, detached from the real world. Pinter's most characteristic stage represents a shabby retreat, vulnerable to the arrival of an alien, threatening presence. His is the theatre of sad boarding houses and strangely located rooms. In much of the more overtly political work of his later years, however, more clues are given, as the source of the violence that hovers in the wings of most of his plays is transferred from the interior lumber-room of the psyche to the exterior world of totalitarian politics. The themes of frangible identity, uncertain menace and vulnerable space can be traced in the major plays.

The Birthday Party a play in which a game of blind man's buff turns into a disorienting, violent, sexually frenzied nightmare**.** The play upholds the elements of

Existentialism that believes in the responsibility of man for the life he leads. According to the philosophy of Existentialism thought and reason are not enough to cope up with the enigma of existence. It focuses on the despair and anguish of man in a meaningless world. Stanley in the play is an example for the meaningless life of man. We saw how he becomes a victim in the hands of two intruders and how his birthday party results in his intellectual and psychological disorientation. *The Birthday Party* is a classic example of absurd plays of the 1950s.

Let us now evaluate ourselves with some questions.

Questions

Short Notes

1. Existentialism
2. Character of Stanley.
3. Sketch the character of Meg.
4. Pinteresque
5. Theatre of the absurd

Essays

1. Write an essay on the play *The Birthday Party* bringing out the elements of existentialism?
2. Describe how the birthday party becomes fatal to Stanley in the play?
3. What are the features that make *The Birthday Party* an absurd play?
4. Do you consider Stanley as an existential hero? Elaborate the idea based on Albert Camus' essay "The Myth of Sisyphus".

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