# ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA

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# SYLLABUS

## Enlish Renaissance Drama

***Objectives:***

- To enable the learners to identify the major themes and concerns of literature in the eighteenth century.
- To enable the learners to relate biographical information about authors to the works by these authors.
- To introduce the learners to the selected British dramatists and plays.
- To develop a thinking and receptive leader.

| **Sr. No.** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| **1** | Literary Terms: Classical and Aristotle's Concept of Tragedy and Tragic Hero |
| **2** | Literary Terms: Problem Play, Kitchen Sink Drama, and Angry Young Man. |
| **3** | Literary Terms: Comedy of Manners, Absurd Theatre, and Existentialism |
| **4** | Shakespeare: *Macbeth* – Introduction to the Author and the Text; Detailed Analysis of the Text; Concept of Tragedy of Aristotle and its Application on Macbeth, Poetic Tragedy and Motifs; Characterization and Superstition; Plot Construction and Themes; Macbeth: History and its Impact on 18th and 19th Century |
| **5** | *Doctor Faustus*: Morality Play; Plot Construction Including Detailed Analysis of Sub Plot and Theme; Detailed Analysis of Seven Deadly Sins; Characterization and Faustus Character; Doctor Faustus: A Tragedy and all Concepts of Tragedy |

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# Unit 1: Literary Terms: Classical and Aristotle's Concept of Tragedy and Tragic Hero

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the classical concept of tragedy and tragic hero;
- Illustrate the Aristotle's views on the concept of tragedy and tragic hero;
- Elaborate the development of classical tragedy;
- Define the terms classical tragedy and tragic hero.
- Enumerate the characters of tragic hero.

## Introduction

Literature is the art of written works. It may be divided into three major literary forms, viz. poetry, fiction, and drama. Poetry is usually categorized into three main types: epic, dramatic and lyric. All three subtypes share common traits, including specific patterns of rhythm and syntax, frequent use of figurative language, and emphasis on the way that words are arranged on the page.

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Fiction is, in general, any narrative about invented characters and events, whether in verse or prose. The narrower meaning of the term, however, refers to works written in prose. The major genres of fiction are the novel, the short story, and the novella.

Drama differs from poetry and fiction in that it is usually intended for performance. The form may be divided into the broad categories of comedy and tragedy. A third and smaller category, tragicomedy, combines features of each of those major genres.

Genre is an important word in the English class. We teach different genres of literature such as poetry, short stories, myths, plays, non-fiction, novels, mysteries, and so on. When we speak about a kind of literature we are really speaking about a genre of literature. So when someone asks you what genre of literature you like, you might answer, poetry, novels, comics, and so on. On the other hand literary terms are words used in, and having specific meaning in discussion, review, criticism and classification of genres. Words that are used frequently for the purposes described above are recognized as literary terms. For example, personification, simile, hyperbole, metaphor, tragedy, and tragic hero are used to describe various forms of writing by an author. Here in this unit we will explain the terms tragedy and tragic hero. More emphasis will be given on the classical and Aristotle's concept of tragedy and tragic hero.

*Example*: The word "personification" is a word or a literary term. The definition of personification is an object, thing, or nonhuman character having human traits. Writers/Authors may use examples of personification in their writings. An example of personification used may be "The wind howled through the trees." The wind is the nonhuman and the howling is something that a human may do. Thus, the wind has a human characteristic or is an example of personification.

## 1.1 Classical and Aristotle's Concept of Tragedy

**Tragedy** (Ancient Greek: *tragoidia*, "the-goat-song") is a form of art based on human suffering that offers its audience pleasure. Though throughout the world most cultures have developed forms that provoke this paradoxical response, tragedy refers to a specific tradition of drama that has played a unique and important role historically in the self-definition of Western civilization. That tradition has been multiple and discontinuous, yet the term has often been used to invoke a powerful effect of cultural identity and historical continuity—"the Greeks and the Elizabethans, in one cultural form; Hellenes and Christians, in a common activity." From its obscure origins in the theatres of Athens 2,500 years ago, from which there survives only a fraction of the work of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, through its singular articulations in the works of Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Racine, and Schiller, to the more recent naturalistic tragedy of Strindberg, Beckett's modernist meditations on death, loss and suffering, and Müller's postmodernist reworkings of the tragic canon, tragedy has remained an important site of cultural experimentation, negotiation, struggle, and change. A long line of philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Voltaire, Hume, Diderot, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Benjamin, Camus, Lacan, and Deleuze have analysed, speculated upon, and criticised the tragic form. In the wake of Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 BCE), tragedy has been used to make genre distinctions, whether at the scale of poetry in general (where the tragic divides against epic and lyric) or at the scale of the drama (where tragedy is opposed to comedy). In the modern era, tragedy has also been defined against drama, melodrama, the tragicomic, and epic theatre.

*Notes* In the theatre, a play dealing with a serious theme, traditionally one in which a character meets disaster as a result either of personal failings or circumstances beyond his or her control. Historically the classical view of tragedy, as expressed by the Greek tragedians Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, and the Roman tragedian Seneca, has been predominant in the Western tradition.

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*Did u know?* The tragedies of English dramatist William Shakespeare and his contemporaries tend to involve wasted potential, for example in a man's power (*Macbeth*, 1605–06, *King Lear*, 1605–06), or in love (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1594–95, *Othello*, 1604–05).

The word tragedy literally means "goat song," probably referring to the practice of giving a goat as a sacrifice or a prize at the religious festivals in honour of the god Dionysos. Whatever its origins, tragedy came to signify a dramatic presentation of high seriousness and noble character which examines the major questions of human existence: Why are we here? How can we know the will of the gods? What meaning does life have in the face of death? In tragedy people are tested by great suffering and must face decisions of ultimate consequence. Some meet the challenge with deeds of despicable cruelty, while others demonstrate their ability to confront and surpass adversity, winning our admiration and proving the greatness of human potential.

## 1.1.1 Origin of Classical Tragedy

Tragedy's origins are obscure, but it apparently started with the singing of a choral lyric (called the *dithyramb*) in honour of Dionysus. It was performed in a circular dancing-place (*orchestra*) by a group of men who may have impersonated satyrs by wearing masks and dressing in goat-skins. In the course of time, the content of the *dithyramb* was widened to any mythological or heroic story, and an actor was introduced to answer questions posed by the choral group. The Greek word for actor is *hypokrites*, which literally means "answerer." It is the source for our English word "hypocrite." Tragedy was recognized as an official state cult in Athens in 534 BC. According to tradition, the playwright Aeschylus added a second actor and Sophocles added a third.

In Greece, tragedies were performed in late March/early April at an annual state religious festival in honor of Dionysus. The presentation took the form of a contest between three playwrights, who presented their works on three successive days. Each playwright would prepare a trilogy of three tragedies, plus an unrelated concluding comic piece called a *satyr* play. Often, the three plays featured linked stories, but later writers like Euripides may have presented three unrelated plays. Only one complete trilogy has survived, the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. The Greek theatre was in the open air, on the side of a hill, and performances of a trilogy and satyr play probably lasted most of the day. Performances were apparently open to all citizens, including women, but evidence is scanty. The presentation of the plays probably resembled modern opera more than what we think of as a "play." All of the choral parts were sung (to flute accompaniment) and some of the actors' answers to the chorus were sung as well. The play as a whole was composed in various verse meters. All actors were male and wore masks, which may have had some amplifying capabilities. A Greek chorus danced as well as sang. No one knows exactly what sorts of steps the chorus performed as it sang. But choral songs in tragedy are often divided into three sections: *strophe* ("turning, circling"), *antistrophe* ("counter-turning, counter-circling") and *epode* ("after-song"). So perhaps the chorus would dance one way around the *orchestra* ("dancing-floor") while singing the *strophe*, turn another way during the *antistrophe*, and then stand still during the *epode*.

*Notes* The Greek word *choros* means "a dance in a ring."

## 1.1.2 Definition of Classical Tragedy

Tragedy depicts the downfall of a noble hero or heroine, usually through some combination of *hubris*, fate, and the will of the gods. The tragic hero's powerful wish to achieve some goal inevitably

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encounters limits, usually those of human frailty (flaws in reason, *hubris*, society), the gods (through oracles, prophets, fate), or nature. Aristotle says that the tragic hero should have a flaw and/or make some mistake (*hamartia*). The hero need not die at the end, but he/she must undergo a change in fortune. In addition, the tragic hero may achieve some revelation or recognition (*anagnorisis*—"knowing again" or "knowing back" or "knowing throughout" ) about human fate, destiny, and the will of the gods. Aristotle quite nicely terms this sort of recognition "a change from ignorance to awareness of a bond of love or hate."

### Elements of Classical Tragedy

According to Aristotle who first defined tragedy using the Greek plays (*Death of a Salesman*) that were available to him, tragedy is "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself." Tragedy typically includes "incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish the catharsis of such emotions." The elements of a classical tragedy include:

- The tragic hero who, though not perfect, is certainly in some way morally superior to most of the audience (and who is nearly always upper class), but also exhibits
- "*Hamartia*," the tragic flaw (literally, it translates as "error of judgement") which is often
- *hubris*, loosely translated as arrogance, that causes the hero to believe he can outwit fate or violate a moral law, which leads in turn to
- some kind of *catastrophe*, which results in
- *peripeteia* or a complete reversal of fortune from happiness to disaster

How this relates to *Death of a Salesman*:

Although there are aspects of classical tragedy here, in fact *Salesman* is far closer in genre to the 18 c "bourgeois" or "domestic" tragedy, wherein an ordinary person suffers a rather commonplace disaster.

Willy Loman is not a *classical* tragic hero, given the definition above. Rather, he is what's known as an "antihero." This is a more common figure in modern tragedy, since the modern age tends to lack clear-cut ethics and morals by which to judge its heroes.

- The antihero, instead of manifesting dignity, power, and heroism, tends to manifest passivity and ineffectualness. This is not altogether the case with Willy—he has, in spite of his unexalted nature, a certain innate dignity about him.
- Willy does, however, have a tragic flaw—and it relates directly to *hamartia* as an "error of judgement"—what is Willy's error? (that style can get you farther than either hard work or skill)
- This ties into the idea of *hubris* in a bit of a skewed way. Ordinarily, *hubris*, because it results from a kind of arrogance, is a conscious attempt to outwit fate or transcend moral law. In Willy's case, this is not really conscious—that is, he attempts to break a moral law, but one that he doesn't really recognize as moral. The moral law he consciously breaks leads not to his own downfall so much as the downfall of Biff.
- One other typically modern feature of this play is that it does not, as classical tragedies do, move the hero from an exalted position to an abased one. Rather, the hero is already near the bottom of the wheel of fortune when the play begins.

### Definition

Tragedy is a process of imitating an action which has serious implications, is complete, and possesses magnitude; by means of language which has been made sensuously attractive, with each of its

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varieties found separately in the parts; enacted by the persons themselves and not presented through narrative; through a course of pity and fear completing the purification (*catharsis*, sometimes translated "purgation") of such emotions."

(a) **Imitation (*mimesis*):** Contrary to Plato, Aristotle asserts that the artist does not just *copy* the shifting appearances of the world, but rather imitates or *represents* Reality itself, and gives form and meaning to that Reality. In so doing, the artist gives shape to the *universal*, not the *accidental*. Poetry, Aristotle says, is "a more philosophical and serious business than history; for poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars."

(b) **An action with serious implications:** *serious* in the sense that it best raises and purifies pity and fear; serious in a moral, psychological, and social sense.

(c) **Complete and possesses magnitude:** not just a series of episodes, but a whole with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The idea of *imitation* is important here; the artist does not just slavishly *copy* everything related to an action, but *selects* (represents) only those aspects which give form to universal truths.

(d) **Language sensuously attractive...in the parts:** language must be appropriate for each part of the play: choruses are in a different meter and rhythm and more melodious than spoken parts.

(e) Tragedy (as opposed to epic) relies on an enactment (dramatic performance) not on "narrative" (the author telling a story).

(f) **Purification (*catharsis*):** tragedy first raises (it does not create) the emotions of pity and fear, then purifies or purges them. Whether Aristotle means to say that this purification takes place only within the action of the play, or whether he thinks that the audience *also* undergoes a cathartic experience, is still hotly debated. One scholar, Gerald Else, says that tragedy purifies "whatever is 'filthy' or 'polluted' in the *pathos*, the tragic act". Others say that the play arouses emotions of pity and fear in the *spectator* and then purifies them (reduces them to beneficent order and proportion) or purges them (expels them from his/her emotional system).

*Task* "Tragedy first raises the emotions of pity and fear, then purifies or purges them." Illustrate this statement taking an example of Shakespearean tragedy.

## 1.1.3 Aristotle's Definition of Classical Tragedy

In fourth century BC, Aristotle, in his work the *Poetics*, gave Western civilization a definition of tragedy which has greatly influenced writers of tragedy and the form of tragedy over twenty-four centuries.

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.

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*Did u know?* 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.

Aristotle begins his analysis of tragedy with this famous definition: *Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of an action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation for these emotions.*

Collectively, throughout the *Poetics*, Aristotle divides his analysis into six basic parts: plot-making, character delineation, speech (diction), thought and language, spectacle, and song (melody). Aristotle confined most of his analysis to play-making, mentioning the final three merely as components of the whole. Therefore, to understand Aristotle's definition of tragedy more clearly, consider the following facets of his analysis:

1. The writer of tragedy imitates a serious and complete action, of a certain magnitude, represented by what characters on stage say and do.
2. "Action" is the motivation from which deeds emanate, or the rational purpose of the play.
3. The element of pathos is essential to the whole.
4. Plot is the arrangement of carefully selected, carefully sequenced, tragic incidents to represent one complete action.
5. The plot consists of parts or types of incidents in the beginning, middle and end of the play.
   (a) Quantitative parts: Prologos (introduction to the play), Parados (Chorus, in unison, tells us what has happened before the beginning of the action of the play), Episodes (The sections of storytelling within the play, usually characterized by what information is revealed in them), Choric Odes (Chorus speaks about something connected with the theme of the story, but not necessarily about the story itself, and Exodus (As or after the characters leave, the chorus tells us what we have learned from the story).
   (b) Organic Parts: Reversal of the situation—a change by which the situation turns around toward its opposite.
      (1) Recognition—a change from ignorance to knowledge.
      (2) Pathos (or scene of suffering)—a moment of passion which may be aroused by spectacular means, or may also result from the inner structures of the play.
6. Plots vary in kind:
   (a) Complex versus simple—Complex plots include reversal and recognition; simple plots do not include these elements.
   (b) Ethically motivated versus pathetically motivated.
7. The story must seem probable.
8. Plot is divided into two main parts.
   (a) Complication—the part of the play which extends from the Prologos to the turning point.
   (b) Unraveling or Denouement—The part of the play which extends from the turning point to the end.
9. A play can be unified only if it represents one action, and the best plays are unified by a single plot and a single catastrophe.

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10. A central action of the play springs from character and thought, manifested in the dialogue.
11. The chorus most directly represents the action (or purpose) of the play.
12. Characters should be carefully delineated to contrast sharply with one another, should be full of life individually, should vary ethically, should be probable, consistent, and should reflect the central action of the play in the development of character.
13. The tragic hero should be a ruler or leader, whose character is good and whose misfortune is brought about by some error or frailty.
14. Language should be elevated and in verse (which in fifth century BC was reminiscent of our blank verse today) and should reflect rhetorical strategies of persuasion (primarily represented in the Episodes and Choric Odes).
15. The special quality of man's pleasure in tragedy comes from the purgation of the passions of fear and pity felt by the audience as they watch the fate of the tragic hero unfold, recognizing in it the universal human lot.

## Parts of a Tragedy

Every tragedy as mentioned above must have six basic parts. They may be explained as below:

### *Plot*

Of the six elements of tragedy as distinguished by Aristotle, plot is the most important. The best tragic plot is single and complex, rather than double ("with opposite endings for good and bad" — a characteristic of comedy in which the good are rewarded and the wicked punished). All plots have some pathos (suffering), but a complex plot includes reversal and recognition.

(a) **"Reversal" (peripeteia):** occurs when a situation seems to developing in one direction, and then suddenly "reverses" to another. For example, when Oedipus first hears of the death of Polybus (his supposed father), the news at first seems good, but then is revealed to be disastrous.

(b) **"Recognition" (anagnorisis or "knowing again" or "knowing back" or "knowing throughout"):** a change from ignorance to awareness of a bond of love or hate. For example, Oedipus kills his father in ignorance and then learns of his true relationship to the King of Thebes.

Recognition scenes in tragedy are of some horrible event or secret, while those in comedy usually reunite long-lost relatives or friends. A plot with tragic reversals and recognitions best arouses pity and fear.

(c) **"Suffering" (pathos):** Also translated as "a calamity," the third element of plot is "a destructive or painful act." The English words "sympathy," "empathy," and "apathy" (literally, absence of suffering) all stem from this Greek word.

### *Character*

Character has the second place in importance and 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.

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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).

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. The meaning of the Greek word is closer to "mistake" than to "flaw," and I believe 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.

### *Thought*

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*

Diction is fourth in importance and is "the expression of the meaning in words" which is 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*

Song or melody is fifth in importance 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*

Spectacle is sixth in importance and 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 Tragedy—Catharsis*

The end of the tragedy is a catharsis (purgation, cleansing) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear. It 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.

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However, it is uncharacteristic of Aristotle to define tragedy in terms of audience psychology; throughout the Poetics he focuses on dramatic form, not its effects on viewers. Therefore, commentators such as Else and Hardison prefer to think of catharsis not as the effect of tragedy on the spectator but as the resolution of dramatic tension within the plot. The dramatist depicts incidents which arouse pity and fear for the protagonist, and then during the course of the action, he resolves the major conflicts, bringing the plot to a logical and foreseeable conclusion.

This explanation of catharsis helps to explain how an audience experiences satisfaction even from an unhappy ending. Human nature may cause us to hope that things work out for Antigone, but, because of the insurmountable obstacles in the situation and the ironies of fate, we come to expect the worst and would feel cheated if Haemon arrived at the last minute to rescue her, providing a happy but contrived conclusion. In tragedy things may not turn out as we wish, but we recognize the probable or necessary relation between the hero's actions and the results of those actions, and appreciate the playwright's honest depiction of life's harsher realities.

*Notes* Aristotle's definition does not include an unfortunate or fatal conclusion as a necessary component of tragedy. Usually we think of tragedy resulting in the death of the protagonist along with several others. While this is true of most tragedies (especially Shakespeare), Aristotle acknowledges that several Greek tragedies end happily.

*Caution* We should remember that Aristotle's theory of tragedy, while an important place to begin, should not be used to prescribe one definitive form which applies to all tragedies past and present.

### 1.1.4 Development of Classical Tragedy

The Greek view of tragedy was developed by the philosopher Aristotle, but it was the Roman Seneca (whose works were probably intended to be read rather than acted) who influenced the Elizabethan tragedies of the English dramatists Marlowe and Shakespeare. French classical tragedy developed under the influence of both Seneca and an interpretation of Aristotle which gave rise to the theory of unities of time, place, and action, as observed by Racine, one of its greatest exponents. In Germany the tragedies of Goethe and Schiller led to the exaggerated melodrama (*Sturm und Drang*), which replaced pure tragedy.

Tragedy was always intended to have a beneficial effect on its audience. The classical catharsis (the audience's experience of emotional purification when watching tragedy) was replaced by Brecht's concept of alienation, in which the audience is intellectually (as opposed to emotionally) involved. Brecht's contention was that an emotional audience accepts what happens as inevitable, whereas they should be angered and leave the theatre bent on preventing such tragedies happening again. Despite the general division of tragedies into classical (dealing with noble characters) and modern (dealing with ordinary people), there has been a consistent, but less well known, genre of tragedy that has dramatised contemporary events. Even the Elizabethan theatre staged works inspired by contemporary events. The German dramatist Piscator dramatized German political controversies between World War I and II. Thus the genre moved from the merely sensational to the realm of agitprop.

Notes

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Plot is the arrangement of carefully
   (a) emanating the rational purpose of the play
   (b) selected and sequenced tragic incidents to represent one complete action
   (c) imitating a serious and complete action
   (d) represents the action (or purpose) of the play.
2. Drama differs from poetry and fiction in that
   (a) it is only tragedy and meant for stage play
   (b) it is divided into comedy and tragedy and intended for performance
   (c) it is only comedy and not for performance
   (d) it is divided into comedy and tragedy and not intended for performance.
3. Choral songs in a tragedy are often divided into three sections as
   (a) strophe, turning and circling
   (b) circling, epode, and counter-circling
   (c) strophe, antistrophe and epode
   (d) After song, epode, and turning.
4. All plots have some pathos but a complex plot also includes
   (a) recognition
   (b) reversal
   (c) peripeteia
   (d) both reversal and recognition.
5. The end of a tragedy is
   (a) catharsis
   (b) Spectacle
   (c) melody
   (d) plot.

Fill in the blanks:

6. The finest tragedy is ..... rather than simple.
7. Tragedy is a representation of terrible and ..... events.
8. Song or melody is the ..... of the chorus.
9. The end of the tragedy is a ..... of the tragic emotions of pity and fear.
10. Suffering, the third element of plot is a destructive or ..... act.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

11. Aristotle indicated that the medium of tragedy is drama.
12. Plot most likely generate horrer and terror in the audience.

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13. In an ideal tragedy, the protagonist will mistakenly bring about his own downfall.
14. The term hamartia is more closer to flaw than to mistake.
15. Aristotle gave more emphasis on the inner structure of the play rather than spectacle to arouse pity and fear.

## 1.2 Classical and Aristotle's Concept of Tragic Hero

A tragic hero is the main character (or "protagonist") in a tragedy. Tragic heroes appear in the dramatic works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Seneca, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Webster, Marston, Corneille, Racine, Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, Strindberg, and many other writers.

The tragic hero is "a great man who is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real badness or wickedness but because of some mistake."

Aristotle indicates the kind of hero who should serve as the main character, but first, he tells us the kind of hero who does not qualify for service as a "main character," or "tragic hero." He tells us that, for tragedy, we can't have:

- A good man falling from happiness to misfortune (this will only inspire revulsion, not pity or fear)
- An evil man rising from ill fortune to prosperity (that won't inspire sympathy, so it can't arouse pity or fear)
- A wicked man falling from prosperity into misfortune (that might inspire sympathy, but not pity or fear, because (1) pity can't be felt for a person whose misfortune is deserved, and (2) if we don't identify with the character's wickedness, we won't be afraid of his fate falling on us).

The appropriate tragic hero, then, is the character who sits between these extremes. He's not "preeminent in virtue and justice," but on the other hand, he isn't guilty of "vice or depravity," just some "mistake." He is a person of some importance, from a "highly renowned and prosperous place," a king, like Oedipus.

The hero of tragedy is not perfect, however. To witness a completely virtuous person fall from fortune to disaster would provoke moral outrage at such an injustice. Likewise, the downfall of a villainous person is seen as appropriate punishment and does not arouse pity or fear. The best type of tragic hero, according to Aristotle, exists "between these extremes . . . a person who is neither perfect in virtue and justice, nor one who falls into misfortune through vice and depravity, but rather, one who succumbs through some miscalculation".

Aristotle explains that with regard to the tragic hero there are four things, viz. goodness, appropriateness, lifelike, and consistency to aim at. These are mentioned below:

### Goodness

They should reveal through speech and action what their moral choices are, and a "good character will be one whose choices are good." Any "class of person" may be portrayed as "good"—even women and slaves, though on the whole women are "inferior" and slaves are "utterly base."

### Appropriateness

Men can be domineering or "manly" but for a woman to appear formidable would be inappropriate. Oedipus shows the appropriate stateliness and intelligence you would expect from the ruler of a great city.

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### Lifelike

Aristotle means lifelike "believable" or "true to life" that means the tragic hero should not be godlike, not like the mythical heroes of legend, but like real human beings. Oedipus is obviously human. He has human strengths and weaknesses. There's nothing supernatural about him.

### Consistency

Once a character is established as having certain traits, these shouldn't suddenly change. Oedipus' character traits, revealed throughout the play, remain consistent. He's a truth-seeker, a riddle solver; he's questing after self-knowledge; he wants to be a savior; he's also very proud, a little arrogant, and he has a real temper.

## 1.2.1 Definition of Tragic Hero

A tragic hero in a literary work can be defined as someone who is endowed with a tragic fatal flaw that dooms him to make a serious error in judgment. As a result of this error in judgment, the hero falls from great heights or from high esteem, realizes that he has made an irreversible mistake, then faces and accepts a tragic death with honor, evincing pity or fear in the audience.

The fatal flaw is an essential element in the tragic hero, being the pivotal condition that causes his downfall. The concept of the fatal flaw derives from the Greek word "hamartia," which is a word used frequently throughout the New Testament and is usually translated there as "sin" or "missing the mark" ("Hamartia"). The tragic hero is in effect compelled to sin because of his fatal flaw; he cannot escape it. The great tragedians, such as Sophocles, identify the tragic hero as one who is destined to fall because he carries the evil seed of a fatal flaw that at some point in the play springs up into a full-grown flaw that causes him to commit a fatal and irreversible mistake. The audience watching the tragic hero is touched with pity or fear, watching the downfall of the mighty from such a relatively small factor as a little flaw.

*Example*: The characters Troy Maxson of "*Fences*" and Oedipus of "*Oedipus the King*" serve as good examples of characters that can be analyzed, compared, and contrasted to determine whether they fit the classical concept of tragic hero.

## 1.2.2 Characteristics of Tragic Hero

Aristotle gave the following characteristics of tragic hero.

- A great man, usually of noble birth: "one of those who stand in great repute and prosperity, like Oedipus and Thyestes: conspicuous men from families of that kind." The hero is neither a villain nor a model of perfection but is basically good and decent.
- Hamartia (mistake)—a.k.a. the tragic flaw that eventually leads to his downfall. The term hamartia, which Golden translates as "miscalculation," literally means "missing the mark," taken from the practice of archery. This Greek word, which Aristotle uses only once in the *Poetics*, has also been translated as "flaw" or as "error." The great man falls through—though not entirely because of—some weakness of character, some moral blindness, or error. We should note that the gods also are in some sense responsible for the hero's fall.

  Much confusion exists over this crucial term. Critics of previous centuries once understood hamartia to mean that the hero must have a "tragic flaw," a moral weakness in character which inevitably leads to disaster. This interpretation comes from a long tradition of dramatic criticism which seeks to place blame for disaster on someone or something: "Bad things don't just happen

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to good people, so it must be someone's fault." This was the "comforting" response Job's friends in the Old Testament story gave him to explain his suffering: "God is punishing you for your wrongdoing." For centuries tragedies were held up as moral illustrations of the consequences of sin.

*Caution* Given the nature of most tragedies, however, we should not define hamartia as tragic flaw. While the concept of a moral character flaw may apply to certain tragic figures, it seems inappropriate for many others.

*Example*: There is a definite causal connection between Creon's pride which precipitates his destruction, but can Antigone's desire to see her brother decently buried be called a flaw in her character which leads to her death? Her stubborn insistence on following a moral law higher than that of the state is the very quality for which we admire her.

Most of Aristotle's examples show that he thought of hamartia primarily as a failure to recognize someone, often a blood relative. In his commentary Gerald Else sees a close connection between the concepts of hamartia, recognition, and catharsis. For Aristotle the most tragic situation possible was the unwitting murder of one family member by another. Mistaken identity allows Oedipus to kill his father Laius on the road to Thebes and subsequently to marry Jocasta, his mother; only later does he recognize his tragic error. However, because he commits the crime in ignorance and pays for it with remorse, self-mutilation, and exile, the plot reaches resolution or catharsis, and we pity him as a victim of ironic fate instead of accusing him of blood guilt.

While Aristotle's concept of tragic error fits the model example of Oedipus quite well, there are several tragedies in which the protagonists suffer due to circumstances totally beyond their control. Hamartia plays no part in these tragedies.

*Example*: In the *Oresteia* trilogy, Orestes must avenge his father's death by killing his mother. Aeschylus does not present Orestes as a man whose nature destines him to commit matricide, but as an unfortunate, innocent son thrown into a terrible dilemma not of his making. In *The Trojan Women* by Euripides, the title characters are helpless victims of the conquering Greeks; ironically, Helen, the only one who deserves blame for the war, escapes punishment by seducing her former husband Menelaus. Heracles, in Euripides' version of the story, goes insane and slaughters his wife and children, not for anything he has done but because Hera, queen of the gods, wishes to punish him for being the illegitimate son of Zeus and a mortal woman.

Searching for the tragic flaw in a character often oversimplifies the complex issues of tragedy. For example, the critic predisposed to looking for the flaw in Oedipus' character usually points to his stubborn pride, and concludes that this trait leads directly to his downfall. However, several crucial events in the plot are not motivated by pride at all: (1) Oedipus leaves Corinth to protect the two people he believes to be his parents; (2) his choice of Thebes as a destination is merely coincidental and/or fated, but certainly not his fault; (3) his defeat of the Sphinx demonstrates wisdom rather than blind stubbornness. True, he kills Laius on the road, refusing to give way on a narrow pass, but the fact that this happens to be his father cannot be attributed to a flaw in his character. Furthermore, these actions occur prior to the action of the play itself. The central plot concerns Oedipus' desire as a responsible ruler to rid his city of the gods' curse and his unyielding search for the truth, actions which deserve our admiration rather than contempt as a moral flaw. Oedipus falls because of a complex set of factors, not from any single character trait.

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*Notes* The misunderstanding over the term hamartia can be corrected if we realize that Aristotle discusses hamartia in the Poetics not as an aspect of character but rather as an incident in the plot. What Aristotle means by hamartia might better be translated as "tragic error". Caught in a crisis situation, the protagonist makes an error in judgment or action, "missing the mark," and disaster results.

- Peripeteia—a reversal of fortune brought about by the hero's tragic flaw.
- His actions result in an increase of self- awareness and self-knowledge.
- The audience must feel pity and fear for this character.
- His downfall is usually due to excessive pride (hubris).
- He is doomed from the start, he bears no responsibility for possessing his flaw, but bears responsibility for his actions.
- He has discovered fate by his own actions, and not by things happening to him.
- He is usually a king, a leader of men—his fate affects the welfare of a whole nation or number of people. Peasants do not inspire pity and fear as great men do. The sudden fall from greatness to nothing provides a sense of contrast.
- The suffering of the hero must not be senseless: it must have meaning!
- The hero of classical tragedies is almost all male: one rare exception is Cleopatra, from *Antony and Cleopatra*.

*Task* The heros of all classical tragedies are almost all male, elaborate this statement citing some examples of dramatic works where tragic hero appears.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

16. Tragic hero, does not appear in which of the following dramatist's works
    (a) P.B. Shelley
    (b) Aeschylus
    (c) Seneca
    (d) Shakespeare.

17. According to Aristotle, the tragic hero who should serve as the main character may not be
    (a) a good man falling from prosperity to misfortune as it will inspire revulsion
    (b) a good man falling from happiness to misfortune as it will inspire revulsion, not pity or fear
    (c) a wicked man rsising from ill fortune to prosperity
    (d) an evil man falling from prosperity to misfortune.

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18. Which of the following statements about hamartia is not correct?
    (a) It is translated as miscalculation
    (b) Literally, it means missing the mark
    (c) Aristotle uses this term in his poetics translated as success
    (d) Aristotle translated it as flaw or as error.

19. The great tragedians, such as Sophocles, identify the tragic hero as one
    (a) who is destined to rise
    (b) who carries the evil seed of fatal flaw
    (c) who destined to commit a reversible mistake
    (d) who destined to commit a fatal and irreversible mistake.

20. A good man falling from happiness to misfortune may not be tragic hero because
    (a) it will only inspir revulsion, not pity or fear
    (b) it will inspire sympathy, so can't arouse pity or fear
    (c) it will inspire sympathy, but not pity or fear
    (d) it will inspire revulsion and also pity or fear.

Fill in the blanks:

21. The tragic hero is a great man who is not a paragon of virtue and .....
22. The fall from fortune to disaster of a completely virtuous person would provoke moral ..... at such an injustice.
23. The tragic hero is in effect compelled to sin because of his .....; he cannot escape it.
24. Tragic hero is a great man, usually of noble birth who stand in ..... and prosperity.
25. Aristotle thought of hamarti primarily as a failure to recognize someone, often a .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

26. A wicked man falling from prosperity to misfortune may not a tragic hero as it may not inspire pity or fear.
27. The downfall of a villainous person is considered as an appropriate tragedy.
28. The fatal flaw is an essential element in the tragic hero, being the pivotal condition that causes his downfall.
29. The concept of hamartia as tragic flaw may not apply to all tragic figures.
30. Most critics understood hamartia to mean that the hero must have a tragic flaw.

## 1.3 Summary

- Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude.
- Every tragedy must have six elements which determine its quality, namely, plot, characters, diction, thought, spectacle, and melody.
- The end of the tragedy is catharsis (purgation, cleansing) of the tragic emotions of pity and fear.
- In catharsis, tragedy first raises (it does not create) the emotions of pity and fear, then purifies or purges them. Whether the purification takes place only within the action of the play, or the

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audience *also* undergoes a cathartic experience, is still hotly debated. One scholar, Gerald Else, says that tragedy purifies "whatever is 'filthy' or 'polluted' in the *pathos*, the tragic act". Others say that the play arouses emotions of pity and fear in the *spectator* and then purifies them.

- Plot is the most important element of tragedy. The best tragic plot is single and complex, rather than double, but a complex plot includes reversal and recognition.
- A tragic hero is the main character in a tragedy. He is a great man who is neither a paragon of virtue and justice nor undergoes the change to misfortune through any real badness or wickedness but because of some mistake.
- The tragic hero is a character of noble stature and has greatness. This should be readily evident in the play. The character must occupy a "high" status position but must also embody nobility and virtue as part of his/her innate character.
- Though the tragic hero is pre-eminently great, he/she is not perfect. Otherwise, the rest of us--mere mortals--would be unable to identify with the tragic hero. We should see in him or her someone who is essentially like us, although perhaps elevated to a higher position in society.
- The hero's downfall, therefore, is partially her/his own fault, the result of free choice, not of accident or villainy or some overriding, malignant fate. In fact, the tragedy is usually triggered by some error of judgment or some character flaw that contributes to the hero's lack of perfection. This error of judgment or character flaw is known as hamartia and is usually translated as "tragic flaw" (although some scholars argue that this is a mistranslation). Often the character's hamartia involves hubris (which is defined as a sort of arrogant pride or over-confidence).
- The hero"s misfortunate is not wholly deserved. The punishment exceeds the crime.
- The fall is not pure loss. There is some increase in awareness, some gain in self-knowledge, some discovery on the part of the tragic hero.
- Though it arouses solemn emotion, tragedy does not leave its audience in a state of depression. Aristotle argues that one function of tragedy is to arouse the "unhealthy" emotions of pity and fear and through a catharsis (which comes from watching the tragic hero's terrible fate) cleanse us of those emotions. It might be worth noting here that Greek drama was not considered "entertainment," pure and simple; it had a communal function—to contribute to the good health of the community. This is why dramatic performances were a part of religious festivals and community celebrations.

## 1.4 Keywords

***Catharsis*** **:** An emotional discharge that brings about a moral or spiritual renewal or welcome relief from tension and anxiety. According to Aristotle, catharsis is the marking feature and ultimate end of any tragic artistic work. He writes in his *Poetics* (*c.* 350 BCE): "Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; . . . through pity [*eleos*] and fear [*phobos*] effecting the proper purgation [*catharsis*] of these emotions."

***Character*** **:** A person who is responsible for the thoughts and actions within a story, poem, or other literature. Characters are extremely important because they are the medium through which a reader interacts with a piece of literature. Every character has his or her own personality, which a creative author uses to assist in forming the plot of a story or creating a mood. The different attitudes, mannerisms, and even appearances of characters can greatly influence the other major elements in a literary work, such as theme, setting, and tone.

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***Denouement*** : Literally meaning the action of untying, a denouement is the final outcome of the main complication in a play, as of a drama or novel. Usually the climax (the turning point or "crisis") of the work has already occurred by the time the denouement occurs. It is sometimes referred to as the explanation or outcome of a drama that reveals all the secrets and misunderstandings connected to the plot.

***Diction*** : It is the expresion of the meaning in words which is proper and appropriate to the plot, characters, and end of the tragedy.

***Enhanced Language*** : It refers to the fact that all plays at the time were written in poetic verse rather than language of everyday speech.

***Genre*** : A type of literature. We say a poem, novel, story, or other literary work belongs to a particular genre if it shares at least a few conventions, or standard characteristics, with other works in that genre. For example, works in the Gothic genre often feature supernatural elements, attempts to horrify the reader, and dark, foreboding settings, particularly very old castles or mansions.

***Hamartia*** : (from Greek hamartanein, "to err"), inherent defect or shortcoming in the hero of a tragedy, who is in other respects a superior being favoured by fortune or the flaw or error in character which leads to the downfall of the protagonist in a tragedy.

***Magnitude*** : It refers to the appropriate length of a production.

***Melody*** : Also known as song is the musical element of the chorus.

***Motif*** : A recurring object, concept, or structure in a work of literature. A motif may also be two contrasting elements in a work, such as good and evil.

***Pathos*** : The third element of plot, is a destructive or painful act.

***Peripeteia*** : It is a condition whn a situation seems to developing in one direction, and then suddenly reverses to another .

***Point of view*** : A way the events of a story are conveyed to the reader, it is the "vantage point" from which the narrative is passed from author to the reader. The point of view can vary from work to work.

***Protagonist*** : A protagonist is considered to be the main character or lead figure in a novel, play, story, or poem. It may also be referred to as the "hero" of a work. Over a period of time the meaning of the term protagonist has changed. The word protagonist originated in ancient Greek drama and referred to the leader of a chorus. Soon the definition was changed to represent the first actor onstage. In some literature today it may be difficult to decide who is playing the role of the protagonist.

***Recognition*** : Also means knowing again or knowing back or knowing throughout, is a chance from ignorance to awareness of a bond of love or hate.

***Tragedy*** : It depicts the downfall of a noble hero or heroine, usually through some combination of hubris, fate, and the will of the gods.

## 1.5 Review Questions

1. Define tragedy.
2. Mention any two qualities of Aristotle's tragedy.
3. What is meant by tragic hero?
4. Write short notes on the following terms:
   (a) Plot (b) Character (c) Melody

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5. Write the two characters each of
   (a) Tragic hero (b) Character (c) Melody
6. Explain the relation among the concepts of hamartia, recognition and catharsis.
7. What are the six elements of tragedy as distinguished by Aristotle?
8. What are the inclusions of a complex plot?
9. Explain the term hamartia in terms of character of a tragic hero.
10. Write short notes on the folowing terms:
    (a) Consistency (b) Appropriateness (c) Peripeteia
11. Illustrate that catharsis is the end of a tragedy.
12. Elaborate the role of plot in a tragedy.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (b) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. (d) | 5. (a) | 6. complex |
| 7. piteous | 8. musical element | 9. katharsis |
| 10. painful | 11. True | 12. False |
| 13. True | 14. False | 15. True |
| 16. (a) | 17. (b) | 18. (c) |
| 19. (d) | 20. (a) | 21. justice |
| 22. outrage | 23. fatal flaw | 24. great repute |
| 25. blood relative | 26. True | 27. False |
| 28. True | 29. True | 30. True |

## 1.6 Further Readings

*Books*

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*Online links*

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# Unit 2: Literary Terms: Problem Play, Kitchen Sink Drama, and Angry Young Man

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the literary term problem play;
- Understands kitchen sink drama;
- Elaborate the meaning and origin of the term angry young man;
- Elucidate that the term kitchen sink drama was enacted for the dramas related to family tensions;
- Illustrate that angry young man were a new breed of intellectuals of working class or of lower middle-class origin.

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## Introduction

Literary terms are words used in, and having specific meaning in discussion, review, criticism and classification of literary works such as stories, poetry, drama, and essays. In 19th century a wave of writing on social issues has emerged. The driving force behind this wave is the exploration of social problems, like alcoholism or prostitution. A new term—problem play was given to such writings. It deals with contentious social issues through debates between the characters on stage, who typically represent conflicting points of view within a realistic social context. In most cases tragedy springs from the individual's conflict with the laws, values, traditions, and representatives of society.

Another term kitchen sink drama was also enacted for the dramas related to family tensions with realistic conflict between husband and wife, parent and child, between siblings and with the wider community. The family may also pull together in unity against outer forces that range from the rent-collector to rival families.

Various British novelists and playwrights who emerged in the 1950s and expressed scorn and disaffection with the established sociopolitical order of their country. Their impatience and resentment were especially aroused by what they perceived as the hypocrisy and mediocrity of the upper and middle classes. They were a new breed of intellectuals who were mostly of working class or of lower middle-class origin. They shared an outspoken irreverence for the British class system and their writings frequently expressed raw anger and frustration as the postwar reforms failed to meet exalted aspirations for genuine change.

These words are used frequently for the purposes described above come to be recognized as literary terms. Here in this unit we will explain these terms—problem play, kitchen sink drama, and angry young man. More emphasis will be given on their critical analysis.

## 2.1 Problem Play

The problem play is a form of drama that emerged during the 19th century as part of the wider movement of realism in the arts. It deals with contentious social issues through debates between the characters on stage, who typically represent conflicting points of view within a realistic social context.

The critic F. S. Boas adapted the term to characterise certain plays by Shakespeare that he considered to have characteristics similar to Ibsen's 19th-century problem plays. Boas's term caught on, and Measure for Measure, The Merchant of Venice, Timon of Athens, Troilus and Cressida, and All's Well That Ends Well are still referred to as "Shakespeare's problem plays".

*Notes* The term problem play is used more broadly and retrospectively to describe pre-19th-century, tragicomic dramas that do not fit easily into the classical generic distinction between comedy and tragedy.

While social debates in drama were nothing new, the problem play of the 19th century was distinguished by its intent to confront the spectator with the dilemmas experienced by the characters. The earliest forms of the problem play are to be found in the work of French writers such as Alexandre Dumas, fils, who dealt with the subject of prostitution in *The Lady of the Camellias* (1852). Other French playwrights followed suit with dramas about a range of social issues, sometimes approaching the subject in a moralistic, sometimes in a sentimental manner.

The most important exponent of the problem play, however, was the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen, whose work combined penetrating characterisation with emphasis on typical social issues,

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usually concentrated on the moral dilemmas of a central character. In a series of plays Ibsen addressed a range of problems, most notably the restriction of women's lives in *A Doll's House* (1879), sexually-transmitted disease in *Ghosts* (1882) and provincial greed in *An Enemy of the People* (1882). Ibsen's dramas proved immensely influential, spawning variants of the problem play in works by George Bernard Shaw and other later dramatists.

*Did u know?* The earliest form of problem play are found in the work of French writers such as Alexandre Dumas, who dealt with the subject of prostitution in *The Lady of the Camellias* in 1852.

### 2.1.1 Origin of Problem Play

The problem play (also called "thesis play," "discussion play," and "the comedy of ideas") is a comparatively recent form of drama. It originated in nineteenth-century France but was effectively practised and popularized by the Norwegian playwright Ibsen. It was introduced into England by Henry Arthur Jones and A. W. Pinero towards the end of the nineteenth century. G. B. Shaw and Galsworthy took the problem play to its height in the twentieth century. H. Granvi lie-Barker was the last notable practitioner of this dramatic type. Thus the problem play flourished in England in the period between the last years of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth.

The concept of problem plays arose in the 19th century, as part of an overall movement known as realism. Prior to the 19th century, many people turned to art as a mode of escape which allowed them to look outside the world they lived in. In the 19th century, however, art began to take on a more introspective, realistic air, with a conscious focus on ongoing issues such as the social inequalities exacerbated by the Industrial Revolution.

Although the idea of creating problem plays was popularized in the 19th century, numerous works have been retroactively termed problem plays. Several Greek playwrights, for example, addressed ongoing social issues like war, in the case of *Lysistrata*, by Aristophanes. Several works of Shakespeare are also considered to be problem plays, like *Measure for Measure*, which has very Biblical themes of justice and truth, or *Troilus and Cressida*, which confronts viewers with infidelity, sexuality, and betrayal.

Many people regard Henrik Ibsen as a master of the problem play, along with authors like George Bernard Shaw and some 19th century French playwrights, many of whom were also authors. Problem plays can cover a wide variety of topics, ranging from women's rights to greed and inequality, and they can tell their stories in a wide variety of ways. For example, it is common to have a tragic protagonist who ultimately suffers as a result of his or her refusal to confront social problems.

*Notes* Essentially, problem plays are a form of commentary on the societies they are performed in. Because social problems are often universal across cultures and eras, many people find something to appreciate in problem plays, whether they are contemporary or not, and such plays tend to be popular in performance. They can also be difficult to watch, as many people find something of themselves in the characters, and struggle with this revelation.

Far from being plays with fatal flaws, as one might imagine from the name, problem plays are actually plays which are designed to confront viewers with modern social problems. Typically, the theme of the play is socially relevant, and the characters confront the issue in a variety of ways, presenting viewers with different approaches and opinions. After seeing a problem play, one is supposed to be filled with interest in the topic at hand, and hopefully inspired to enact social change.

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### 2.1.2 Definition of Problem Play

According to Henrik Ibsen, a problem play is a type of drama that presents a social issue in order to awaken the audience to it. These plays usually reject romantic plots in favor of holding up a mirror that reflects not simply what the audience wants to see but what the playwright sees in them. Often, a problem play will propose a solution to the problem that does not coincide with prevailing opinion. The term is also used to refer to certain Shakespeare plays that do not fit the categories of tragedy, comedy, or romance.

### 2.1.3 Shakespearean Problem Play

In Shakespeare studies, the term problem plays normally refers to three plays that William Shakespeare wrote between the late 1590s and the first years of the seventeenth century: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*, although some critics would extend the term to other plays, most commonly *The Winter's Tale*, *Timon of Athens*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. The term was coined by critic F. S. Boas in Shakespeare and his Predecessors (1896), who lists the first three plays and adds that "*Hamlet*, with its tragic close, is the connecting-link between the problem plays and the tragedies in the stricter sense." The term can refer to the subject matter of the play, or to a classification "problem" with the plays themselves.

The term derives from a type of drama that was popular at the time of Boas' writing. It was most associated with the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. In these problem plays the situation faced by the protagonist is put forward by the author as a representative instance of a contemporary social problem. For Boas this modern form of drama provided a useful model with which to study works by Shakespeare that had previously seemed to be uneasily situated between the comic and the tragic, though nominally the three plays identified by Boas are all comedies. For Boas, Shakespeare's "problem plays" set out to explore specific moral dilemmas and social problems through their central characters. Boas writes, throughout these plays we move along dim untrodden paths, and at the close our feeling is neither of simple joy nor pain; we are excited, fascinated, perplexed, for the issues raised preclude a completely satisfactory outcome, even when, as in *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure*, the complications are outwardly adjusted in the fifth act. In *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet* no such partial settlement of difficulties takes place, and we are left to interpret their enigmas as best we may. Dramas so singular in theme and temper cannot be strictly called comedies or tragedies. We may therefore borrow a convenient phrase from the theatre of to-day and class them together as Shakspere's problem plays.

The problem plays are characterised by their complex and ambiguous tone, which shifts violently between dark, psychological drama and more straightforward comic material; *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* have happy endings that seem awkward, artificial and perfunctory, while *Troilus* ends with neither a tragic death, nor a happy ending. Boas used the term for plays in which the resolution of the themes and debates seems inadequate, and in the final act the deliverance of justice and completion one expects does not occur. Other definitions have followed, but all center on the fact that the plays cannot be easily assigned to the traditional categories of comedy or tragedy. The three plays are also referred to as the dark comedies, since despite ending on a generally happy note for the characters concerned, the darker, more profound issues raised cannot be fully resolved or ignored.

*Task* Boas used the term problem play for plays in which the resolution of the themes and debates seems inadequate and in the final act the deliverance of justice and completion, one expects does not occur. Keeping in view this, explain the concept of problem play.

Notes

Many critics have suggested that this sequence of plays marked a psychological turning point for Shakespeare, during which he lost interest in the romantic comedies he had specialized in and turned towards the darker worlds of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. The term has also been applied to other odd plays from various points in his career, as the term has always been somewhat vaguely defined and is not accepted by all critics.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The problem play is a form of drama that emerged during
   (a) during 19th century as part of the wider movement of realism
   (b) during 19th century emanating the rational purpose of the play
   (c) during 19th century imitating a serious and complete action
   (d) during 19th century as selected and sequenced tragic incidents.
2. While social debattes in drama were nothing new, the problem play of the 19th century was distinguihsed by
   (a) its content and are meant for stage play
   (b) its intent to confront the spectator with the dilemmas experienced by the characters
   (c) its character of comedy and not for performance
   (d) its contents of social issues not intended for stage play.
3. The problem plays are characterised by their complex and ambiguous tone, which shifts violently between
   (a) dark, psychological drama and more straightforward tragic material
   (b) tragic, psychological drama and more straightforward comic material
   (c) dark, psychological drama and more straightforward comic material
   (d) comic, psychological drama and more straightforward tragic material.

Fill in the blanks:

4. According to Henrik Ibsen, a problem play is a type of drama that presents a ..... in order to awaken the audience to it.
5. The problem plays are characterised by their ..... and ambiguous tone.
6. The concept of problem plays arose in the 19th century, as part of an overall movement known as .....
7. The term derives from a type of drama that was popular at the time of .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. The term problem play is also used to refer to certain Shakespeare plays that do not fit the categories of tragedy, comedy, or romance.
9. The problem plays usually reject romantic plots in favor of holding up a mirror that reflects simply what the audience wants to see and not what the playwright sees in them.

Notes

10. The problem play is also called as thesis play, discussion play, and the comedy of ideas.

## 2.2 Kitchen Sink Drama

Kitchen sink drama also known as kitchen sink realism is a term coined to describe a British cultural movement which developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s in theatre, art, novels, film and television plays, whose 'heroes' usually could be described as angry young men. It used a style of social realism, which often depicted the domestic situations of working-class Britons living in rented accommodation and spending their off-hours drinking in grimy pubs, to explore social issues and political controversies.

The films, plays and novels employing this style are set frequently in poorer industrial areas in the North of England, and use the rough-hewn speaking accents and slang heard in those regions. The film *It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947) is a precursor of the genre, and the John Osborne play *Look Back in Anger* (1956) is thought of as the first of the idiom.

*Example*: The gritty love-triangle plot of *Look Back in Anger* is centred on a cramped, one-room flat in the English Midlands. The conventions of the genre have continued into the 2000s, finding expression in such television shows as *Coronation Street* and *Eastenders*.

### Antecedents and influences

The cultural movement was rooted in the ideals of social realism, an artistic movement, expressed in the visual and other realist arts, which depicts working class activities. Many artists who subscribed to social realism were painters with socialist political views. While the movement has some commonalities with Socialist Realism, the "official art" advocated by the governments of the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries, the two had several differences.

Unlike Socialist realism, social realism is not an official art produced by, or under the supervision of the government. The leading characters are often 'anti-heroes' rather than part of a class to be admired, as in Socialist realism. Typically, they are dissatisfied with their lives and the world—rather than being idealised workers who are part of a Socialist utopia (supposedly) in the process of creation. As such, social realism allows more space for the subjectivity of the author to be displayed.

Partly, social realism developed as a reaction against Romanticism, which promoted lofty concepts such as the "ineffable" beauty and truth of art and music, and even turned them into spiritual ideals. As such, social realism focused on the "ugly realities of contemporary life and sympathized with working-class people, particularly the poor."

The kitchen-sink drama is placed in an ordinary domestic setting and typically tells a relatively mundane family story. Family tensions often come to the fore with realistic conflict between husband and wife, parent and child, between siblings and with the wider community. The family may also pull together in unity against outer forces that range from the rent-collector to rival families. Examples of kitchen sink drama are *Look Back in Anger*, *A Taste of Honey*, and *The Glass Menagerie*.

### 2.2.1 Definition of the Term Kitchen Sink Drama

Genre of British drama which depicts the real and often sordid quality of family life. The plays are socially and politically motivated, seeking to focus attention on the destruction of moral values caused by consumerism and the break down of community. Writers include Arnold Wesker and John Osborne. Kitchen-sink drama is related to the kitchen-sink movement in art, a loose-knit group of British painters, active in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

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## Discussion

Kitchen sink dramas can be rather dismal and unrelentingly negative, so what is their value? Perhaps they may resonate with us as they remind us of our own humdrum lives. Perhaps they will wake us up and prod us to get out of the rut and see a wider world. May be they will make us grateful that we do not have to live in such social squalor.

Kitchen sink dramas may also framed as 'serious art', intending to impress rather than entertain. They may capture social setting for posterity and gain admiration in later days by students of history. They may even be a cathartic act by their authors, expunging the traumas of a deprived childhood.

*Notes* This is a genre in which the British seem to specialize. Americans prefer their soaps and dramas to be a bit less dismal. There was in particularly a group of 'angry young men' in the 1960s UK playwright scene that specialised in such plays.

### 2.2.2 Origin of the Term Kitchen Sink Drama

The 1950's through the 1970's saw the rise of one of the most important movements in modern British theater: the Kitchen Sink drama. These types of plays had several characteristics that distinguished them as a break from the forms of theater before them. They can be compared against theatrical movements such as Avant Garde Theater, or the theater of the absurd, characterized by the plays of authors such as Samuel Beckett.

In UK, the term "kitchen sink" derived from an expressionist painting by John Bratby, which contained an image of a kitchen sink. 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. The term was then applied to a then-emerging style of drama, which favoured a more realistic representation of working class life. The term was adopted in the United States to refer to the live television dramas of the 1950s by Paddy Chayefsky and others. As Chayefsky put it, this "drama of introspection" explored "the marvelous world of the ordinary."

*Did u know?* 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.

Before the 1950s, the United Kingdom's working class were often depicted stereotypically in Noel Coward's Drawing room comedies and British films. It was also seen as being in opposition to the 'well-made play', the kind which theatre critic Kenneth Tynan once denounced as being set in 'Loamshire', of dramatists like Terence Rattigan. The works of the 'kitchen sink' were created with the intention of changing all this. Their political views were initially labeled as radical, sometimes even anarchic.

John Osborne's play *Look Back In Anger* (1956) showed Angry Young Men not totally dissimilar to the film and theatre directors of the movement; the hero is a graduate, but working in a manual occupation. It dealt with social alienation, the claustrophobia and frustrations of a provincial life on low incomes.

The impact of this work inspired Arnold Wesker and Shelagh Delaney, among numerous others, to write plays of their own. The English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, headed by George Devine, and Theatre Workshop organised by Joan Littlewood were particularly prominent in bringing these plays to the public's attention. Critic John Heilpern wrote that *Look Back in Anger* expressed such "immensity of feeling and class hatred" that it altered the course of English theater.

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This was all part of the British New Wave—a transposition of the concurrent *Nouvelle Vague* film movement in France, some of whose works, such as *The 400 Blows* of 1959, also emphasized the lives of the urban proletariat. British filmmakers such as Tony Richardson and Lindsay Anderson channelled their vitriolic anger into film making. Confrontational films such as *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960) and *A Taste of Honey* (1962) were noteworthy films in the genre.

Later, as many of these writers and directors diversified, kitchen sink realism was taken up by television. The singe play was then a staple of the medium, and *Armchair Theatre* (1956-68), produced by the ITV contractor ABC, *The Wednesday Play* (1964-70) and *Play for Today* (1970-84), both BBC series, contained many works of this kind. Jeremy Sandford's television play *Cathy Come Home* or instance, addressed the then-stigmatized issue of homelessness.

### 2.2.3 Characteristics of Kitchen Sink Drama

1. Perhaps the first, and most notable, characteristic of these Kitchen Sink dramas was the way in which they advanced a particular social message or ideology. This ideology was most often leftist. The settings were almost always working class. The previous trend in Victorian theater had been to depict the lives of the wealthy members of the ruling classes. These classes of people were often conservative in their politics and their ideologies. This was not the case for Kitchen Sink Theater. The Kitchen Sink drama sought, instead, to bring the real lives and social inequality of ordinary working class people to the stage. The lives of these people were caught between struggles of power, industry, politics, and social homogenization.
2. Another chief characteristic of the Kitchen Sink drama was the way in which its characters expressed their unvarnished emotion and dissatisfaction with the ruling class status quo. This can be seen clearly in the play considered to be the standard bearer of this Kitchen Sink genre: John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. In Osborne's play, Jimmy Porter plays the role of the Angry Young Man. He is angry and dissatisfied at a world that offers him no social opportunities and a dearth of emotion. He longs to live a "real life." He feels, however, that the trappings of working class domesticity keep him from reaching this better existence. His anger and rage are thus channeled towards those around him. Osborne's play is a study in how this pent up frustration and social anger can wreak havoc on the ordinary lives of the British people.

### 2.2.4 Criticism of Kitchen Sink Drama

Some critics have noted the irony in the term Kitchen Sink drama. The domestic world during this time was believed to be the domain of the feminine. Almost all of the major Kitchen Sink works which take place in the mid-twentieth century, however, are centered around a masculine point of view. These plays rarely centered around the emotions and tribulations of its women characters. The power dynamic between male and female often assumed to be masculine and is an unexamined critical component in many of these plays. Women are often assumed to serve the men of their household and, when conflicts do arise, it is often the man who is portrayed as the suffering protagonist. Women's suffering is always a result of the suffering of the male.

Though Kitchen Sink dramas gained notoriety in twentieth century British culture for their unflinching anger and criticism directed towards the social, political, and economic establishment, the plays were also significant for the way they depicted the most intimate aspects of domestic life. This was in stark contrast to popular classical or Victorian dramas and comedies which largely centered around the public lives of socially established characters. Before the Kitchen Sink dramas, commentators have noted that in the mid-twentieth century, British theater still produced plays as if it were the nineteenth century. The Kitchen Sink drama, in contrast, moved the action and emotion of the theater from depictions of the public space of people's lives into the most intimate of settings. The kitchen was considered to be the realm of the domestic, of females and servants, and Victorian drama often excluded any mention of it. Kitchen Sink dramas, however, turned this notion around

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and made the kitchen the center of familial and social life. In the case of the Porter's attic apartment, the kitchen and living spaces were all one room on the stage. The boundaries of intimate domestic life and public life were blurred and created a realism not seen before in British theater.

Whether social or domestic, the Kitchen Sink drama changed the trajectory of British theater. Though many of the authors considered to have written in this genre such as Osborne, Arnold Wesker, Shelagh Delaney, and John Arden never claimed the title of Kitchen Sink dramatist, these authors's plays contained themes of common life that deeply resonated with British culture of the period. These types of plays signaled a resolute shift of British theater into the 20th century.

## 2.2.5 Examples of Kitchen Sink Drama

English social realist movies, kitchen sink dramas (a term derived from a painting by John Bratby), the angry young men—whatever you want to call them, you can't deny the power that a brace of plays, books and films produced in the 50s and 60s continues to exert to this very day. Certainly, the influence of movies like *A Taste of Honey*, *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*, *A Kind of Loving*, *Look Back in Anger* and *Billy Liar* can be seen in everything from the music of Morrissey to the kind of dialogue you see in *Coronation Street*, Britain's longest running and arguably most popular soap.

### A Taste of Honey

Adapted from a landmark play written by 18 year old Shelagh Delaney, *A Taste of Honey* has stood the test of time better than many of its contemporaries. With a plotline that has been pillaged and plagiarised by just about every soap ever (young neglected girl finds love in the arms of a stranger and is left holding the baby), the movie is characterised by a clutch of terrific performances. Music fans may also care to note that *A Taste of Honey* featured the first solo work by then young Beatle, Paul McCartney, as well as a whole host of lines later stolen virtually wholesale by Morrissey.

### The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner

Adapted from his own book by Alan Silitoe and directed by Tony Richardson, a key figure in the British Social Realist movement who would later go on to direct John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* to great acclaim, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* is an exemplar in kitchen sink drama: there is a central sympathetic, albeit mildly ambiguous, central character played by Tom Courtnenay; a bruising, uncomfortable home life; petty crime; redemption offered in the form of a love that doesn't work out; and, finally, cathartically, a conclusion that leaves our awkward protagonist where he feels he needs to be. Beautifully shot, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* is a stone classic.

### A Kind of Loving

As kitchen sink as kitchen sink drama ever got, A Kind of Loving follows the fortunes of Vic Brown (played in perfect dour Northern bloke fashion by Alan Bates) as he takes up with a typist Ingrid (played with a sort of wounded chagrin by June Ritchie) in the factory where he works as a draftsmen. There is an unsatisfactory one-night stand that leaves him wanting no more to do with her—until he learns she is pregnant and 'does the right thing'. Which is where Ingrid's mother Mrs Rothwell (a vengeful and mean-spirited Thora Hird) comes in, piling misery on top of misery until Vic and Ingrid agree to make do with the eponymous 'kind of loving'. As with *Saturday Night Sunday Morning*, *A Kind of Loving* is all about reflecting life as it truly was—and a marvellous job it does.

### Up the Junction

Unlike the great majority of social realist movies (your *Taste of Honey*, *Saturday Night Sunday Morning*, *Billy Liar*, *A Kind of Loving* etc), *Up the Junction* is based in London—in Clapham to be

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exact—and is as much about celebrating the time in which it was set (1968) as it was about saying, ah well, life can be a bit grim sometimes, can't it? Adapted from a groundbreaking novel by Nell Dunn, the film concerns a girl (played by Suzy Kendall) who gives up a privileged life in Chelsea to work in a factory in Battersea, where she takes up with a young Dennis Waterman and comes to learn just how hard life can be. Admirably unsentimental, *Up the Junction* is a rare gem, a film that has until recent years been languishing awaiting a reappraisal that the current reissue should go some way towards delivering.

### Billy Liar

Billy Fisher is a dreamer. He has a whole country in his head, a place he goes to when grim reality proves too much. And reality, in *Billy Liar*, doesn't come much grimmer: there is his home life, where his mum and dad perpetually grind on about how it's time for him to grow up; there is work, in the funeral parlour under Leonard Rossitter's malevolent Mr Shadrach; and, for Billy, there are women—Rita, a shrewish blonde played by Gwendolyn Watts, Barbara, a mumsy housewife type played by Helen Fraser, and Liz played— in a career-defining performance—by Julie Christie. Pinging from one setback to another like a pinball, Billy's problems are all largely of his own making but that doesn't stop you siding with him every time he takes up his imaginary machine-gun.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. Kitchen sink drama also known as kitchen sink realism is a term coined to describe a
    (a) British cultural movement
    (b) British socialist realism
    (c) British working class people
    (d) British cultural movement against romanticism.
12. Social realism developed as a reaction against
    (a) British working class
    (b) romanticism
    (c) British aristocratic class
    (d) British family tensions.
13. Kitchen Sink dramas gained notoriety in twentieth century British culture for their unflinching anger and criticism directed towards
    (a) the social establishment
    (b) the political establishment
    (c) the economic establishment
    (d) the social, political, and economic establishment.

Fill in the blanks:

14. Kitchen sink drama also known as kitchen sink realism is a term coined to describe a British .....
15. The cultural movement was rooted in the ideals of ....., an artistic movement, expressed in the visual and other realist arts.
16. The domestic world during mid-twentieth century was believed to be the domain of the.....

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17. The Kitchen Sink Drama were significant for the way they depicted the most intimate aspects of .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. Whether social or domestic, the Kitchen Sink drama changed the trajectory of British theater.

19. The chief characteristic of the Kitchen Sink drama was the way in which its characters expressed their unvarnished emotion and dissatisfaction with the working class.

20. The kitchen-sink drama is placed in an ordinary domestic setting and typically tells a relatively mundane family story.

## 2.3 Angry Young Men

### 2.3.1 Meaning

The term Angry Young Man often applied to the British 'kitchen sink' playwrights of the 1950s and also anyone, particularly young men obviously, who rails against the establishment.

Angry Young Men were various British novelists and playwrights who emerged in the 1950s and expressed scorn and disaffection with the established sociopolitical order of their country. Their impatience and resentment were especially aroused by what they perceived as the hypocrisy and mediocrity of the upper and middle classes.

The Angry Young Men were a new breed of intellectuals who were mostly of working class or of lower middle-class origin. Some had been educated at the postwar red-brick universities at the state's expense, though a few were from Oxford. They shared an outspoken irreverence for the British class system, its traditional network of pedigreed families, and the elitist Oxford and Cambridge universities. They showed an equally uninhibited disdain for the drabness of the postwar welfare state, and their writings frequently expressed raw anger and frustration as the postwar reforms failed to meet exalted aspirations for genuine change.

### 2.3.1 Origin

The term was applied most notably to John Osbourne and it was from comments about his *Look Back in Anger*, first performed in 1956, that the phrase became known. That wasn't its first use though. In 1941, the writer Rebecca West used it in her *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: the Record of a Journey through Yugoslavia in 1937*.

*Example*: Their instinct is to brace themselves against any central authority as if it were their enemy. The angry young men run about shouting.

West wasn't using the phrase in the quite specific way it became used in the 1950s. She was just referring to young men who were angry.

John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* was first performed in 1956. The term doesn't appear in the play but it was in the reporting of it later that it became known. In October 1957 George Fearon, Press Officer for the Royal Court Theatre, wrote this piece for the *Daily Telegraph*: "I had read John Osborne's play. When I met the author I ventured to prophesy that his generation would praise his play while mine would, in general, dislike it... 'If this happens,' I told him, 'you would become known as the Angry Young Man.' In fact, we decided then and there that henceforth he was to be known as that."

Notes

The angry young men were a group of mostly working and middle class British playwrights and novelists who became prominent in the 1950s. The group's leading members included John Osborne and Kingsley Amis. The phrase was originally coined by the Royal Court Theatre's press officer to promote John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. It is thought to be derived from the autobiography of Leslie Paul, founder of the Woodcraft Folk, whose Angry Young Man was published in 1951. Following the success of the Osborne play, the label was later applied by British newspapers to describe young British writers who were characterised by disillusionment with traditional English society. The term, always imprecise, began to have less meaning over the years as the writers to whom it was originally applied became more divergent, and many of them dismissed the label as useless.

The trend that was evident in John Wain's novel *Hurry on Down* (1953) and in *Lucky Jim* (1954) by Kingsley Amis was crystallized in 1956 in the play *Look Back in Anger*, which became the representative work of the movement. When the Royal Court Theatre's press agent described the play's 26-year-old author John Osborne as an "angry young man," the name was extended to all his contemporaries who expressed rage at the persistence of class distinctions, pride in their lower-class mannerisms, and dislike for anything highbrow or "phoney." When Sir Laurence Olivier played the leading role in Osborne's second play, *The Entertainer* (1957), the Angry Young Men were acknowledged as the dominant literary force of the decade.

Their novels and plays typically feature a rootless, lower-middle or working-class male protagonist who views society with scorn and sardonic humour and may have conflicts with authority but who is nevertheless preoccupied with the quest for upward mobility.

Among the other writers embraced in the term are the novelists John Braine (*Room at the Top,* 1957) and Alan Sillitoe (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,* 1958) and the playwrights Bernard Kops (*The Hamlet of Stepney Green,* 1956) and Arnold Wesker (*Chicken Soup with Barley,* 1958). Like that of the Beat movement in the United States, the impetus of the movement was exhausted in the early 1960s.

*Did u know?* On May 8, 1956, a new play called *Look Back in Anger* opened at the Royal Court Theatre in Sloane Square. The author was a young actor/stage manager named John Osborne, and the play was actually a blast of rage directed at his ex-wife, actress Pamela Lane, from whom he had separated rather painfully. Osborne was working-class; Pamela was middle-class, and they had married secretly; however, her parents had learned about the wedding and came all the same—an episode that forms the subject of one of the play's best-known tirades.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

21. The angry young man were a group of mostly
    (a) working and middle class British playwrights
    (b) novelists who became prominent in the 1980s.
    (c) middle and high class British playwrights
    (d) high and aristocratic class British playwrights.

22. The term Angry Young Man often applied to
    (a) anyone who rails for the establishment
    (b) British 'kitchen sink' playwrights of the 1950s

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(c) the social class playwrights

(d) the high class playwrights.

23. The Angry Young Men were a new breed of intellectuals who were

(a) 1940s working class playwrights

(b) mostly of lower middle-class or of high class origin

(c) mostly of working class or of lower middle-class origin

(d) mostly of working class or of lower high class origin.

Fill in the blanks:

24. Angry Young Men were various ..... and playwrights who emerged in the 1950s.

25. The angry young men were a group of mostly ..... and middle class British playwrights.

26. The term angry young men was applied most notably to .....

27. John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* was first performed in .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

28. The angry young men group's leading members included John Osborne and Kingsley Amis.

29. Among the other writers embraced in the term angry young men are the novelists John Braine, Alan Sillitoe, and the playwrights George Bernard Shaw.

30. The angry young men shared an outspoken irreverence for the British social system.

## 2.4 Summary

- The problem play is a form of drama that emerged during the 19th century as part of the wider movement of realism in the arts.
- It deals with contentious social issues through debates between the characters on stage, who typically represent conflicting points of view within a realistic social context.
- The critic F. S. Boas adapted the term to characterise certain plays by Shakespeare that he considered to have characteristics similar to Ibsen's 19th-century problem plays.
- While social debates in drama were nothing new, the problem play of the 19th century was distinguished by its intent to confront the spectator with the dilemmas experienced by the characters.
- The most important exponent of the problem play, however, was the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen, whose work combined penetrating characterisation with emphasis on typical social issues, usually concentrated on the moral dilemmas of a central character.
- The earliest form of problem play are found in the work of French writers such as Alexandre Dumas, who dealt with the subject of prostitution in *The Lady of the Camellias* in 1852.
- The problem play (also called "thesis play," "discussion play," and "the comedy of ideas") is a comparatively recent form of drama. It originated in nineteenth-century France but was effectively practised and popularized by the Norwegian playwright Ibsen.
- The concept of problem plays arose in the 19th century, as part of an overall movement known as realism.
- According to Henrik Ibsen, a problem play is a type of drama that presents a social issue in order to awaken the audience to it.

Notes

- Kitchen sink drama also known as kitchen sink realism is a term coined to describe a British cultural movement which developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s in theatre, art, novels, film and television plays, whose 'heroes' usually could be described as angry young men.
- It used a style of social realism, which often depicted the domestic situations of working-class Britons living in rented accommodation and spending their off-hours drinking in grimy pubs, to explore social issues and political controversies.
- The films, plays and novels employing this style are set frequently in poorer industrial areas in the North of England
- The cultural movement was rooted in the ideals of social realism, an artistic movement, expressed in the visual and other realist arts, which depicts working class activities.
- Unlike Socialist realism, social realism is not an official art produced by, or under the supervision of the government. The leading characters are often 'anti-heroes' rather than part of a class to be admired, as in Socialist realism.
- The kitchen-sink drama is placed in an ordinary domestic setting and typically tells a relatively mundane family story.
- Kitchen sink drama is a genre of British drama which depicts the real and often sordid quality of family life. The plays are socially and politically motivated, seeking to focus attention on the destruction of moral values caused by consumerism and the break down of community.
- The 1950's through the 1970's saw the rise of one of the most important movements in modern British theater: the Kitchen Sink drama.
- The term Angry Young Man often applied to the British 'kitchen sink' playwrights of the 1950s and also anyone, particularly young men obviously, who rails against the establishment.
- Angry Young Men were various British novelists and playwrights who emerged in the 1950s and expressed scorn and disaffection with the established sociopolitical order of their country. Their impatience and resentment were especially aroused by what they perceived as the hypocrisy and mediocrity of the upper and middle classes.
- The Angry Young Men were a new breed of intellectuals who were mostly of working class or of lower middle-class origin. Some had been educated at the postwar red-brick universities at the state's expense, though a few were from Oxford.
- The term was applied most notably to John Osbourne and it was from comments about his *Look Back in Anger*, first performed in 1956, that the phrase became known.

## 2.5 Keywords

***Criticism*** : Literary criticism is a type of critical theory that interprets a text by focusing on recurring myths and archetypes.

***Character*** : A person who is responsible for the thoughts and actions within a story, poem, or other literature. Characters are extremely important because they are the medium through which a reader interacts with a piece of literature. Every character has his or her own personality, which a creative author uses to assist in forming the plot of a story or creating a mood. The different attitudes, mannerisms, and even appearances of characters can greatly influence the other major elements in a literary work, such as theme, setting, and tone.

***Genre*** : A type of literature. We say a poem, novel, story, or other literary work belongs to a particular genre if it shares at least a few conventions, or standard characteristics, with other works in that genre. For example, works in the Gothic genre often feature supernatural elements, attempts to horrify the reader, and dark, foreboding settings, particularly very old castles or mansions.

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***Stories*** : A narrative, either true or fictitious, in prose or verse, designed to interest, amuse, or instruct the hearer or reader; tale.

***Poetry*** : The art of rhythmical composition, written or spoken, for exciting pleasure by beautiful, imaginative, or elevated thoughts.

***Drama*** : A composition in prose or verse presenting in dialogue or pantomime a story involving conflict or contrast of character, especially one intended to be acted on the stage; a play.

***Prostitution*** : The act or practice of engaging in sexual intercourse for money.

***Traditions*** : The handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice.

***Sociopolitical*** : Pertaining to, or signifying the combination or interaction of social and political factors.

***Hypocrisy*** : A pretense of having a virtuous character, moral or religious beliefs or principles, etc., that one does not really possess.

***Intellectuals*** : A person possessing or showing intellect or mental capacity, especially to a high degree.

***Frustration*** : A feeling of dissatisfaction, often accompanied by anxiety or depression, resulting from unfulfilled needs or unresolved problems.

## 2.6 Review Questions

1. Define problem play.
2. Mention any two qualities of kitchen sink drama.
3. What is meant by angry young men?
4. Write short notes on the following terms:
   (a) Problem play (b) Kitchen sink drama (c) Angry young men
5. Write the two characters each of
   (a) Problem play (b) Kitchen sink drama (c) Angry young men
6. Explain the relation among the concepts of kitchen sink drama and family values.
7. What are the elements of problem play?
8. Give some examples of kitchen sink drama.
9. Illustrate that angry young men is a group of middle class playwrights.
10. Elaborate the role of kitchen sink drama in depicting the family values of British class.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. social issue | 5. complex | 6. realism |
| 7. Boas' writing | 8. True | 9. False |
| 10. True | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. cultural movement | 15. social realism |
| 16. feminine | 17. domestic life | 18. True |

Notes

19. False
20. True
21. (a)
22. (b)
23. (c)
24. British novelists
25. working
26. John Osbourne
27. 1956
28. True
29. False
30. False

## 2.7 Further Readings

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# Unit 3: Literary Terms: Comedy of Manners, Absurd Theatre, and Existentialism

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Elaborate the literary term comedy of manners;
- Explain the term absurd theatre;
- Understands the techniques, characters, language and plot in absurd theatre;

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- Enumerate the literary term existentialism, its concepts and themes used in it;
- Explain the origin and meaning of the literary terms comedy of maners, absurd theatre, and existentialisms.

## Introduction

During the Restoration period in English history, litrature thrived as the monarchy patronised the literateurs. Restoration period is the reestablishment of the monarchy on the accession (1660) of Charles II after the collapse of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate. In English literature the Restoration period is commonly viewed as extending from 1660 to 1700. The writings of this period were lighter, defter, and more vivacious in tone. In the event of such circumstances, literary terms—comedy of manners, absurd theatre and existentialism are set in the world of the upper class.

Comedies of manners were usually written by sophisticated authors for members of their own social class, and they typically are concerned with social usage and the ability or inability of certain characters to meet social standards, which are often exacting but morally trivial. It involves the conventions or manners of artificial and sophisticated society. Its notable exponents include William Congreve, Oliver Goldsmith, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, and Noel Coward.

The Theatre of the Absurd is 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 *Myth of Sisyphus* written by the French philosopher Albert Camus in 1942. He first defined the human situation as basically meaningless and absurd.

Existentialism has its roots in the writings of several nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers. The philosophy is by most standards a very loose conglomeration of perspectives, aesthetics, and approaches to dealing with the world and its inherent difficulties. There are therefore countless permutations and flavors of existentialism which cross disciplinary lines and modes of inquiry. In the most general sense, existentialism deals with the recurring problem of finding meaning within existence.

This unit deals with these terms in detail. More emphasis is given on the origin, concept, theories and critical analysis of these terms.

## 3.1 Comedy of Manners

The comedy of manners is a genre of comedy, play/television/film that flourished on the English stage during the Restoration period. Plays of this type are typically set in the world of the upper class, and ridicule the pretensions of those who consider themselves socially superior, deflating them with satire. With witty dialogue and cleverly constructed scenarios, comedies of manners comment on the standards and mores of society and explore the relationships of the sexes. Marriage is a frequent subject. Typically, there is little depth of characterization; instead, the playwrights used stock character types—the fool, the schemer, the hypocrite, the jealous husband, the interfering old parents—and constructed plots with rapid twists in events, often precipitated by miscommunications.

### 3.1.1 Origin of the Comedy of Manners

The roots of the comedy of manners can be traced back to Moliere's seventeenth-century French comedies and to the "humours" comedy of Ben Johnson; indeed, certain characteristics can be found as far back in time as ancient Greek plays. The propounder of the comedy of manners in British literature were George Etherege (1635-1692), William Wycherley (1640-1716), John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), William Congreve (1670-1729), and George Farquhar (1678-1707). Etherege's *The Comical*

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*Revenge*; or, *Love in a Tub* (1664) and *She Would If She Could* (1668) are often seen as inaugurating the genre of the comedy of manners, and his characters, including Sir Frederick Frollick and Sir Fopling Flutter, were favorites with audiences and became standard character types.

The Restoration period heralded an exciting and boisterous period in theatre after theatres were closed by the Puritans and Commonwealth government between 1642 and 1660 (due to Cromwell). Charles II was a fun loving, woman loving and theatre loving king and it was under his reign that drama flourished once more. Audiences were predominately from aristocratic backgrounds. The Restoration period was noted for its comedies although more serious drama was produced by writers such as John Dryden and Thomas Otway.

The comedy of manners can be witnessed in ancient form in the plays of Menander from the New Comedy of the Greek theatre in the fourth century BC and then in the work of Roman writers Plautus and Terence.

The English comedy of manners began with Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and then can be seen at its best in Restoration comedy and in the work of Wilde, Shaw and Pinero. In more recent times, work by Coward, Orton and Rattigan encaptured the elements whilst in more modern day drama, Neil Simon and Edward Albee provide worthwhile examples.

### 3.1.2 Definition of the Comedy of Manners

The comedy of manners is a style of comedy that reflects the life, ideals and manners of upper class society in a way that is essentially true to its traditions and philosophy. The players must strive to maintain the mask of social artifice whilst revealing to the audience what lies behind such manners. In other words it is to make: *The real artificial and the artificial real.* It is characterised by a flamboyant display of witty, blunt sexual dialogue, boudoir intrigues, sensual innuendos, and rakish behaviour. The following conventions governed the comedy of manners in restoration period:

- Constancy in love (especially in marriage) was boring;
- Sex should be tempting;
- Love thrived on variety;
- Genuine sexual feelings had no place on stage;
- Characters clashed with each other in situations of conflicting love entanglements and intrigues
- Country life was considered boring;
- Clergy and professional men were treated with indifference or condescension.

*Did u know?* In modern day sit-coms The Comedy of Manners include the English shows, *Keeping up Appearance*, *Steptoe and Son*, *Fawlty Towers* (Sybil), *Birds of a Feather* (Dorian), *Men Behaving Badly*, *Ab Fab*. From the US notable shows include The *Odd Couple and Frasier*.

A *Comedy of Manners* is a play concerned with satirizing society's manners. A manner is the method in which everyday duties are performed, conditions of society, or a way of speaking. It implies a polite and well-bred behavior. Comedy of Manners is known as high comedy because it involves a sophisticated wit and talent in the writing of the script. In this sense it is both intellectual and very much the opposite of slapstick, which requires little skill with the script and is largely a physical form of comedy. In a Comedy of Manners however, there is often minimal physical action and the play may involve heavy use of dialogue.

A Comedy of Manners usually employs an equal amount of both satire and farce resulting in a hilarious send-up of a particular social group. Most plays of the genre were carefully constructed

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to satirize the very people watching them. This was usually the middle to upper classes in society, who were normally the only people wealthy enough in the first place to afford going to the theatre to see a comedy of manners. The playwrights knew this in advance and fully intended to create characters that were sending up the daily customs of those in the audience watching the play. The satire tended to focus on their materialistic nature, never-ending desire to gossip and hypocritical existence.

### 3.1.3 Development of the Comedy of Manners

Newell W. Sawyer has traced the development of the genre and relates it to the changes occurring in society at large. The comedy of manners was first developed in the new comedy of the Ancient Greek playwright Menander. His style, elaborate plots, and stock characters were imitated by the Roman playwrights Plautus and Terence, whose comedies were widely known and copied during the Renaissance. The best-known comedies of manners, however, may well be those of the French playwright Moliere, who satirized the hypocrisy and pretension of the ancient regime in such plays as *L'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*, 1662), *Le Misanthrope* (*The Misanthrope*, 1666), and most famously *Tartuffe* (1664).

In England, William Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* might be considered the first comedy of manners, but the genre really flourished during the Restoration period. Restoration comedy, which was influenced by Ben Johnson's comedy of humours, made fun of affected wit and acquired follies of the time. The masterpieces of the genre were the plays of William Wycherley (*The Country Wife*, 1675) and William Congreve (*The Way of the World*, 1700). In the late 18th century Oliver Goldsmith (*She Stoops to Conquer*, 1773) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (*The Rivals*, 1775; *The School for Scandal*, 1777) revived the form.

The tradition of elaborate, artificial plotting and epigrammatic dialogue was carried on by the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). In the 20th century, the comedy of manners reappeared in the plays of the British dramatists Noel Coward (*Hay Fever*, 1925) and Somerset Maugham and the novels of P.G. Wodehouse, as well as various British sitcoms.

Modern television sitcoms that use the mockumentary format, such as *The Office and Modern Family*, use slightly altered forms of the comedy of manners to represent the daily and work lives of the average people.

*Notes* The Carry On films are direct descendant of the comedy of manners style.

### 3.1.4 Examples of Comedy of Manners

1. Congreve is considered by many critics to have been the greatest wit of the dramatists writing in this vein; with his dialogue brilliant and his style perfect. The *Old Bachelour* (1693) was a great popular success, as was *Love for Love* (1695). His last comedy, *The Way of the World* (1700), is now considered his masterpiece but was not successful upon its premier. Although marriage is at its center, the preoccupation is with contracts and negotiation of terms, not passionate love.
2. Vanbrugh's *The Relapse*: Or *Virtue in Danger* (1696) has two plots, only slightly connected, and includes seduction, infidelity, impersonation, and the attempt to gain another's fortune.
3. Farquhar's comedies were written at the end of the Restoration period and serve as a transition to later comedies, noticeable in their greater sensitivity to characters as individuals rather than

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types. *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) makes fun of some of the foibles of military heroes, while *The Beaux' Stratagem* (1707) includes a remarkably modern-style divorce, due to the couple failing to make each other happy.

Notes Vanbrugh's masterwork, *The Provoked Wife* (1697), became notorious because it was given special attention by critic Jeremy Collier in his case against the immorality of the stage. In keeping with the plays of the time, the names of the characters often reflect their type: Heartfree, Sir John Brute, Constant, Lady Fanciful, and Colonel Bully.

4. Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith while wrote in the latter portion of the eighteenth century, after the Restoration period, and after sentimental comedy had become the dominant comedic form, they composed plays that revived and renewed the comedy of manners genre. Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777) and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), in particular, received popular and critical acclaim when first produced, and have been continuously staged to the present day.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The comedy of manners is a genre of comedy, play/television/film that flourished on the English stage during
   (a) Restoration period
   (b) industrial revolution
   (c) class transformation
   (d) 18th century.
2. Plays of the type of comedy of manners are typically set in the world of the
   (a) lower middle class
   (b) upper middle class
   (c) high class
   (d) both lower middle and high class.
3. The roots of the comedy of manners can be traced back to
   (a) ancient Greek plays
   (b) 16th century Shakespearean plays
   (c) Moliere's seventeenth-century French comedies
   (d) 19th century playwrighters.

Fill in the blanks:

4. With witty dialogue and cleverly ....., comedies of manners comment on the standards and mores of society.
5. Congreve is considered by many critics to have been the greatest wit of the dramatists writing of .....
6. Newell W. Sawyer has traced the ..... of the comedy of manners and relates it to the changes occurring in society at large.

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7. In England, William Shakespeare's ..... might be considered the first comedy of manners.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Marriage is a frequent subject in the plays of comedy of manners.
9. In the 20th century, the comedy of manners reappeared in the plays of the British dramatists Noel Coward.
10. A Comedy of Manners is a play concerned with satirizing society's manners.

## 3.2 Absurd Theatre

### 3.2.1 Introduction and Definition

The Theatre of the Absurd (French: Théâtre de l'Absurde) is a theatrical style originating in France in the late 1940's. It relies heavily on existential philosophy, and is a category for plays of absurdist fiction, written by a number of playwrights from the late 1940s to the 1960s, as well as the theatre which has evolved from their work. It expresses the belief that, in a godless universe, human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down. Logical construction and argument give way to irrational and illogical speech and as its ultimate conclusion, silence.

Often Absurdist works utilise theatrical conventions such as— but not limited to—Mime, Gibberish, Heightened Language, Codified Language and Vignette. The pieces generally lack conflict, and involve high levels of contrast, alienation, and irony, for example, a funeral scene performed by actors happily, or a birthday scene performed somberly.

A form of drama that emphasizes the absurdity of human existence by employing disjointed, repetitious, and meaningless dialogue, purposeless and confusing situations, and plots that lack realistic or logical development.

The Absurd Theatre is a designation for particular plays that expressed the belief that, in a godless universe, human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down. Logical construction and argument gives way to irrational and illogical speech and to its ultimate conclusion, silence.

### 3.2.2 Origin of the Absurd Theatre

Martin Esslin coined the term "*Theatre of the Absurd*" in his 1960 essay and, later, book of the same name. He related these plays based on a broad theme of the Absurd, similar to the way Albert Camus uses the term in his 1942 essay, "*The Myth of Sisyphus*". The Absurd in these plays takes the form of man's reaction to a world apparently without meaning, and/or man as a puppet controlled or menaced by invisible outside forces. Though the term is applied to a wide range of plays, some characteristics coincide in many of the plays: broad comedy, often similar to Vaudeville, mixed with horrific or tragic images; characters caught in hopeless situations forced to do repetitive or meaningless actions; dialogue full of clichés, wordplay, and nonsense; plots that are cyclical or absurdly expansive; either a parody or dismissal of realism and the concept of the "well-made play".

*Notes* Playwrights commonly associated with the Theatre of the Absurd include Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee, Boris Vian, and Jean Tardieu.

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*Did u know?* A British scholar Martin Esslin, in his critical study of Samuel Beckett and French playwrights Eugène Ionesco, Jean Genet and Arthur Adamov, first used the term "Theatre of the Absurd".

### 3.2.3 Techniques in Absurd Theatre

As an experimental form of theatre, Theatre of the Absurd employs techniques borrowed from earlier innovators. Writers and techniques frequently mentioned in relation to the Theatre of the Absurd include the 19th-century nonsense poets, such as Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear; Polish playwright Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz; the Russians Daniil Kharms, Nikolai Erdman, Mikhail Volokhov and others; Bertolt Brecht's distancing techniques in his "Epic theatre"; and the "dream plays" of August Strindberg.

### 3.2.4 Theatrical Features in Absurd Theatre

Plays within this group are absurd in that they focus not on logical acts, realistic occurrences, or traditional character development; they, instead, focus on human beings trapped in an incomprehensible world subject to any occurrence, no matter how illogical. The theme of incomprehensibility is coupled with the inadequacy of language to form meaningful human connections. According to Martin Esslin, Absurdism is "the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose" Absurdist drama asks its viewer to "draw his own conclusions, make his own errors". Though Theatre of the Absurd may be seen as nonsense, they have something to say and can be understood". Esslin makes a distinction between the dictionary definition of absurd ("out of harmony" in the musical sense) and drama's understanding of the Absurd: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose.... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, and useless".

#### Characters

The characters in Absurdist drama are lost and floating in an incomprehensible universe and they abandon rational devices and discursive thought because these approaches are inadequate. Characters are frequently stereotypical, archetypal, or flat character types as in *Commedia dell'arte*.

The more complex characters are in crisis because the world around them is incomprehensible. Many of Pinter's plays, for example, feature characters trapped in an enclosed space menaced by some force the character can't understand. Pinter's first play was *The Room*—in which the main character, Rose, is menaced by Riley who invades her safe space though the actual source of menace remains a mystery—and this theme of characters in a safe space menaced by an outside force is repeated in many of his later works. In Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* the main character, Alfred, is menaced by Claire Zachanassian; Claire, richest woman in the world with a decaying body and multiple husbands throughout the play, has guaranteed a payout for anyone in the town willing to kill Alfred. Characters in Absurdist drama may also face the chaos of a world that science and logic have abandoned. Ionesco's recurring character Berenger, for example, faces a killer without motivation in *The Killer*, and Berenger's logical arguments fail to convince the killer that killing is wrong. In *Rhinoceros*, Berenger remains the only human on Earth who hasn't turned into a rhinoceros and must decide whether or not to conform. Characters may find themselves trapped in a routine or, in a metafictional conceit, trapped in a story; the titular characters in Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*, for example, find themselves in a story (Hamlet) in which the outcome has already been written.

#### Language

Despite its reputation for nonsense language, much of the dialogue in Absurdist plays is naturalistic. The moments when characters resort to nonsense language or clichés—when words appear to have

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lost their denotative function, thus creating misunderstanding among the characters, making the Theatre of the Absurd distinctive. Language frequently gains a certain phonetic, rhythmical, almost musical quality, opening up a wide range of often comedic playfulness. Jean Tardieu, for example, in the series of short pieces *Theatre de Chambre* arranged the language as one arranges music. Distinctively Absurdist language will range from meaningless clichés to Vaudeville-style word play to meaningless nonsense. *The Bald Soprano*, for example, was inspired by a language book in which characters would exchange empty clichés that never ultimately amounted to true communication or true connection. Likewise, the characters in *The Bald Soprano*—like many other Absurdist characters—go through routine dialogue full of clichés without actually communicating anything substantive or making a human connection. In other cases, the dialogue is purposefully elliptical; the language of Absurdist Theater becomes secondary to the poetry of the concrete and objectified images of the stage. Many of Beckett's plays devalue language for the sake of the striking tableau. Harold Pinter—famous for his "*Pinter pause*"—presents more subtly elliptical dialogue; often the primary things characters should address is replaced by ellipsis or dashes. Much of the dialogue in Absurdist drama reflects this kind of evasiveness and inability to make a connection. When language that is apparently nonsensical appears, it also demonstrates this disconnection.

### Plot

Plots can consist of the absurd repetition of cliché and routine, as in *Godot* or *The Bald Soprano*. Often there is a menacing outside force that remains a mystery.

*Example*: *In The Birthday Party*, Goldberg and McCann confront Stanley, torture him with absurd questions, and drag him off at the end, but it is never revealed why. In later Pinter plays, such as *The Caretaker* and *The Homecoming*, the menace is no longer entering from the outside but exists within the confined space.

*Notes* Traditional plot structures are rarely a consideration in the theatre of the absurd.

Absence, emptiness, nothingness, and unresolved mysteries are central features in many Absurdist plots: for example, in *The Chairs* an old couple welcomes a large number of guests to their home, but these guests are invisible so all we see is empty chairs, a representation of their absence. Likewise, the action of *Godot* is centered around the absence of a man named Godot, for whom the characters perpetually wait. In many of Beckett's later plays, most features are stripped away and what's left is a minimalistic tableau: a woman walking slowly back and forth in Footfalls, for example, or in *Breath* only a junk heap on stage and the sounds of breathing.

The plot may also revolve around an unexplained metamorphosis, a supernatural change, or a shift in the laws of natural science. For example, in Ionesco's *Amedee*, or *How to Get Rid of It*, a couple must deal with a corpse that is steadily growing larger and larger; Ionesco never fully reveals the identity of the corpse, how this person died, or why it's continually growing, but the corpse ultimately—and, again, without explanation—floats away. In Jean Tardieu's "*The Keyhole*" a lover watches a woman through a keyhole as she removes her clothes and then her flesh.

Plots are frequently cyclical: for example, Endgame begins where the play ended—at the beginning of the play, Clov says, "Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished"—and themes of cycle, routine, and repetition are explored throughout.

## Self Assessment

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Multiple Choice Questions:

11. The Theatre of the Absurd is a theatrical style originating in
    (a) France
    (b) Italy
    (c) Greeks
    (d) Britains.

12. Often Absurdist works utilise theatrical conventions such as
    (a) Mime, Gibberish
    (b) Mime, Gibberish, Heightened Language, Codified Language and Vignette
    (c) Codified Language and Vignette
    (d) Gibberish, Heightened Language, .

13. Absurd theatre is a form of drama that emphasizes the absurdity of human existence by employing
    (a) logical arguments
    (b) illogical arguments
    (c) disjointed, repetitious, and meaningless dialogue
    (d) irrational and logical speech.

Fill in the blanks:

14. The Absurd Theatre is a designation for particular plays that expressed the belief that, in a godless universe, ..... has no meaning.

15. Theatre of the Absurd employs techniques borrowed from earlier .....

16. Absence, emptiness, nothingness, and ..... are central features in many Absurdist plots.

17. Absurdist drama reflects this kind of ..... and inability to make a connection.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. Martin Esslin coined the term Theatre of the Absurd in his 1960 essay.

19. Absurdist Plays are absurd in that they focus not on illogical acts, urealistic occurrences, or traditional character development.

20. The characters in Absurdist drama are lost and floating.

## 3.3 Existentialism

### 3.3.1 Introduction and Definition

Existentialism is the philosophy that places emphasis on individual existence, freedom, and choice. It stresses the individuality of existence, and the problems that arise with said existence. Because there is so much diversity in the philosophy of existentialism, a concrete definition is hard to put

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down. Certain themes are common to almost all existential writing, which helps mark the writing as such. The term itself suggests one major theme, the stress on concrete, individual existence, and on subjectivity, individual freedom and choice.

*Notes* The idea of the highest ethical good can be found in philosophy since the days of Socrates and Plato. It was generally held that this good was the same for everybody; as a person approached this moral perfection, she/he became morally like the next person approaching this moral perfection.

*Example*: Kierkegaard wrote that it was up to the individual to find his or her own moral perfection and his or her own way there. "I must find the truth that is the truth for me. . .the idea for which I can live or die.". It means one must choose one's own way, make their own individual paths without the aid of universal ideas or guidance.

Subjectivity is also important to Existentialism. Passionate choices and actions are important. Personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential to arriving at personal truths. A better understanding of a situation is gained when one is in the middle then watching from the sidelines with a detached view.

*Caution* Systematic reasoning and acting is avoided at all costs in Existential thought.

Choice is also very important. One learns from making choices and committing to those choices. According to Existentialists, humanity's primary distinction is its freedom to choose. There is no fixed instinct that drives humanity to do what it does. Choice is inescapable; not making choices is choosing to not choose.

*Notes* Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are noted for their random, unsystematic way of exploring their ideas, using many different literary styles to express themselves.

Existentialism is the term applied to the work of a number of philosophers since the 19th century who, despite large differences in their positions, generally focused on the condition of human existence, and an individual's emotions, actions, responsibilities, and thoughts, or the meaning or purpose of life. Existential philosophers often focused more on what they believed was subjective, such as beliefs and religion, or human states, feelings, and emotions, such as freedom, pain, guilt, and regret, as opposed to analyzing objective knowledge, language, or science.

### Definition of Existentialism

Existentialism, a difficult term to define and an odd movement. Odd because most thinkers whom the intellectual world categorizes as existentialists are people who deny they are that. And, two of the people whom nearly everyone points to as important to the movement,

*Caution* Soren Kierkegaard and Fredrich Nietzsche, are both too early in time to be in the group of existentialists, thus are usually called "precursorers," but studied and treated as members of the group.

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However, certain characterists that most existentialists seem to share may help understand this term. There are certain questions that everyone must deal with—death, the meaning of human existence, the place of God in human existence, the meaning of value, interpersonal relationship, the place of self-reflective conscious knowledge of one's self in existing. By and large existentialists believe that life is very difficult and that it doesn't have an "objective" or universally known value, but that the individual must create value by affiriming it and living it, not by talking about it.

However, in general the Existentialists recognize that human knowledge is limited and fallible. One can be deeply committed to truth and investigation and simply fail to find adequate truth, or get it wrong. Further, unlike science, which can keep searching for generations for an answer and afford to just say: We don't know yet, in the everyday world, we often simply must do or not do. The moment of decision comes. For the Existentialist one faces these moments of decision with a sense of fallibility and seriousness of purpose, and then risks. Sartre is extremely harsh on this point. At one place he says: When I choose I choose for the whole world. What can this mean? Sartre may mean by it that first of all when I choose and act, I change the world in some iota. This note gets written or it doesn't. That has ramifications. It commits one to say what one is saying. It may change someone who may be affected by these remarks. Others can be too if they hear or read them. And so on. The ripples of actions are like ripples on the sea, they go on and on and on.

### 3.3.2 Origin of Existentialism

The term "existentialism" seems to have been coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel in the mid-1940s and adopted by Jean-Paul Sartre who, on October 29, 1945, discussed his own existentialist position in a lecture to the Club Maintenant in Paris. The lecture was published as *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, a short book which did much to popularize existentialist thought.

The label has been applied retrospectively to other philosophers for whom existence and, in particular, human existence were key philosophical topics. Martin Heidegger had made human existence (Dasein) the focus of his work since the 1920s, and Karl Jaspers had called his philosophy "Existenzphilosophie" in the 1930s. Both Heidegger and Jaspers had been influenced by Soren Kierkegaard. He was the first to explicitly make existential questions a primary focus in his philosophy. In retrospect, other writers have also implicitly discussed existentialist themes throughout the history of philosophy and literature. Due to the exposure of existentialist themes over the decades, when society was officially introduced to existentialism, the term became quite popular almost immediately.

### 3.3.3 History of Existentialism

The early 19th century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard is regarded as the father of existentialism. He maintained that the individual is solely responsible for giving his or her own life meaning and for living that life passionately and sincerely, in spite of many existential obstacles and distractions including despair, angst, absurdity, alienation, and boredom. Another notable proponent of existentialism was Friedrich Nietzsche.

In the 20th century, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger influenced other existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus. Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Franz Kafka also described existentialist themes in their literary works. Although there are some common tendencies amongst "existentialist" thinkers, there are major differences and disagreements among them; not all of them accept the validity of the term as applied to their own work.

### 3.3.4 Concepts of Existentialism

#### Focus on Concrete Existence

Existentialist thinkers focus on the question of concrete human existence and the conditions of this existence rather than hypothesizing a human essence, stressing that the human essence is determined

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through life choices. However, even though the concrete individual existence must have priority in existentialism, certain conditions are commonly held to be "endemic" to human existence.

What these conditions are is better understood in light of the meaning of the word "existence," which comes from the Latin "existere," meaning "to stand out." Humans exist in a state of distance from the world that they nonetheless remain in the midst of. This distance is what enables humans to project meaning into the disinterested world of in-itselfs. This projected meaning remains fragile, constantly facing breakdown for any reason—from a tragedy to a particularly insightful moment. In such a breakdown, humans are put face to face with the naked meaninglessness of the world, and the results can be devastating.

*Notes* In respect to the devastating awareness of meaninglessness, Albert Camus claimed that "there is only one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide" in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

**Existence Precedes Essence**

A central proposition of existentialism is that existence precedes essence, which means that the actual life of the individual is what constitutes what could be called his or her "essence" instead of there being a predetermined essence that defines what it is to be a human. Thus, the human being—through their own consciousness—creates their own values and determines a meaning to their life. Although it was Sartre who explicitly coined the phrase, similar notions can be found in the thought of many existentialist philosophers, from Mulla Sadra, to Kierkegaard, to Heidegger.

It is often claimed in this context that a person defines him or herself, which is often perceived as stating that they can "wish" to be something—anything, a bird, for instance—and then be it. According to most existentialist philosophers, however, this would constitute an inauthentic existence. Instead, the phrase should be taken to say that the person is (1) defined only insofar as he or she acts and (2) that he or she is responsible for his or her actions. For example, someone who acts cruelly towards other people is, by that act, defined as a cruel person. Furthermore, by this action of cruelty such persons are themselves responsible for their new identity (a cruel person). This is as opposed to their genes, or 'human nature', bearing the blame.

As Sartre puts it in his *Existentialism is Humanism*: "man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards." Of course, the more positive, therapeutic aspect of this is also implied: A person can choose to act in a different way, and to be a good person instead of a cruel person. Here it is also clear that since humans can choose to be either cruel or good, they are, in fact, neither of these things essentially.

### 3.3.5 Themes in Existentialism

Some themes are found throughout the existentialism as mentioned below:

(1) **Freedom:** The existentialist concept of freedom is often misunderstood as a sort of *liberum arbitrium* where almost anything is possible and where values are inconsequential to choice and action. This interpretation of the concept is often related to the insistence on the absurdity of the world and the assumption that there exist no relevant or absolutely good or bad values. However, that there are no values to be found in the world in-itself does not mean that there are no values: We are usually brought up with certain values, and even though we cannot justify them ultimately, they will be "our" values.

*Example*: In Kierkegaard's *Judge Vilhelm's* account in *Either/Or*, making choices without allowing one's values to confer differing values to the alternatives, is, in fact, choosing not to

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make a choice—to flip a coin, as it were, and to leave everything to chance. This is considered to be a refusal to live in the consequence of one's freedom; an inauthentic existence.

(2) **Angst:** Also called as fear or dread, anxiety or even anguish is a term that is common to many existentialism thinkers. It is not directed at any specific object, it's just there. Anguish is the dread of the nothingness of human existence, the meaningless of it. According to Kierkegaard, anguish is the underlying, all-pervasive, universal condition of man's existence. It is generally held to be a negative feeling arising from the experience of human freedom and responsibility. The archetypal example is the experience one has when standing on a cliff where one not only fears falling off it, but also dreads the possibility of throwing oneself off. In this experience that "nothing is holding me back", one senses the lack of anything that predetermines one to either throw oneself off or to stand still, and one experiences one's own freedom.

*Notes* One of the most extensive treatments of the existentialist notion of Angst is found in Soren Kierkegaard's monumental work *Begrebet Angest*.

(3) **Absurdity:** "Granted I am my own existence, but this existence is absurd." Everybody is here, everybody exists, but there is no reason as to why. We're just here, that's it, no excuses. The notion of the absurd contains the idea that there is no meaning to be found in the world beyond what meaning we give to it. This meaninglessness also encompasses the amorality or "unfairness" of the world. This contrasts with "karmic" ways of thinking in which "bad things don't happen to good people"; to the world, metaphorically speaking, there is no such thing as a good person or a bad thing; what happens, and it may just as well happen to a "good" person as to a "bad" person.

Because of the world's absurdity, at any point in time, anything can happen to anyone, and a tragic event could plummet someone into direct confrontation with the Absurd. The notion of the absurd has been prominent in literature throughout history.

*Notes* Soren Kierkegaard, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and many of the literary works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus contain descriptions of people who encounter the absurdity of the world. Albert Camus studied the issue of "the absurd" in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

(4) **Nothingness:** There is nothing that structures this world's existence, man's existence, or the existence of my computer. There is no essence that these things are drawn from, since existence precedes essence, then that means there is nothing.

(5) **Death:** The theme of death follows along with the theme of nothingness. Death is always there, there is no escaping from it. To think of death, as everybody does sooner or later, causes anxiety. The only sure way to end anxiety once and for all is death.

(6) **Facticity:** A concept defined by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* as that "*in-itself*" of which humans are in the mode of not being. This can be more easily understood when considering it in relation to the temporal dimension of past: One's past is what one is in the sense that it co-constitutes oneself. However, to say that one is only one's past would be to ignore a large part of reality (the present and the future), while saying that one's past is only what one was would entirely detach it from them now. A denial of one's own concrete past constitutes an inauthentic lifestyle, and the same goes for all other kinds of facticity (having a body (e.g. one that doesn't allow a person to run faster than the speed of sound), identity, values, etc.).

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Facticity is both a limitation and a condition of freedom. It is a limitation in that a large part of one's facticity consists of things one couldn't have chosen (birthplace, etc.), but a condition in the sense that one's values most likely will depend on it.

*Example*: Consider two men, one of whom has no memory of his past and the other remembers everything. They have both committed many crimes, but the first man, knowing nothing about this, leads a rather normal life while the second man, feeling trapped by his own past, continues a life of crime, blaming his own past for "trapping" him in this life. There is nothing essential about his committing crimes, but he ascribes this meaning to his past.

(7) **Authenticity:** The theme of authentic existence is common to many existentialist thinkers. It is often taken to mean that one has to "find oneself" and then live in accordance with this self. A common misunderstanding is that the self is something one can find if one looks hard enough, that one's true self is substantial.

What is meant by authenticity is that in acting, one should act as oneself, not as One acts or as one's genes or any other essence require. The authentic act is one that is in accordance with one's freedom. Of course, as a condition of freedom is facticity, this includes one's facticity, but not to the degree that this facticity can in any way determine one's choices. The role of facticity in relation to authenticity involves letting one's actual values come into play when one makes a choice, so that one also takes responsibility for the act instead of choosing either-or without allowing the options to have different values.

(8) **Inauthenticity:** The inauthentic is the denial to live in accordance with one's freedom. This can take many forms, from pretending choices are meaningless or random, through convincing oneself that some form of determinism is true, to a sort of "mimicry" where one acts as "One should." How "One" should act is often determined by an image one has of how one such as oneself acts. This image usually corresponds to some sort of social norm, but this does not mean that all acting in accordance with social norms is inauthentic: The main point is the attitude one takes to one's own freedom and responsibility, and the extent to which one acts in accordance with this freedom.

(9) **Despair:** Commonly defined as a loss of hope, Despair in existentialism is more specifically related to the reaction to a breakdown in one or more of the defining qualities of one's self or identity. If a person is invested in being a particular thing, such as a bus driver or an upstanding citizen, and then finds their being-thing compromised, they would normally be found in state of despair—a hopeless state. For example, an athlete who loses his legs in an accident may despair if he has nothing else to fall back on, nothing on which to rely for his identity. He finds himself unable to be that which defined his being.

What sets the existentialist notion of despair is that existentialist despair is a state one is in even when they aren't overtly in despair. So long as a person's identity depends on qualities that can crumble, they are considered to be in perpetual despair. And as there is, in Sartrean terms, no human essence found in conventional reality on which to constitute the individual's sense of identity, despair is a universal human condition. As Kierkegaard defines it in his *Either/Or*: "Any life-view with a condition outside it is despair." In other words, it is possible to be in despair without despairing.

(10) **Reason:** Emphasizing action, freedom, and decision as fundamental, existentialists oppose themselves to rationalism and positivism. That is, they argue against definitions of human beings as primarily rational. Rather, existentialists look at where people find meaning. Existentialism asserts that people actually make decisions based on the meaning to them rather than rationally. The rejection of reason as the source of meaning is a common theme of

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existentialist thought, as is the focus on the feelings of anxiety and dread that we feel in the face of our own radical freedom and our awareness of death. Kierkegaard saw strong rationality as a mechanism humans use to counter their existential anxiety, their fear of being in the world: "If I can believe that I am rational and everyone else is rational then I have nothing to fear and no reason to feel anxious about being free." However, Kierkegaard advocated rationality as means to interact with the objective world (e.g. in the natural sciences), but when it comes to existential problems, reason is insufficient: "Human reason has boundaries".

*Notes* Existentialism is sometimes referred to as a continental philosophy, referring to the continental part of Europe, as opposed to that practiced in Britain at that time, which was called analytic philosophy, and mostly dealt with analyzing language.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

21. Existentialism is the philosophy that places emphasis on
    (a) individual existence, freedom, and choice
    (b) individual existence and freedom
    (c) freedom and choice
    (d) individual existence and choice.

22. Which of the following is important to existentialism?
    (a) Subjectivity and actions
    (b) Subjectivity, passionate choice and actions
    (c) Subjectivity and passionate choice
    (d) Passionate choice and actions.

23. A central proposition of existentialism is that
    (a) essence preceded existence
    (b) existence preceeds self
    (c) existence precedes essence
    (d) existence preceeds both self and essence.

Fill in the blanks:

24. The theme of ..... is common to many existentialist thinkers.
25. Despair in ..... is more specifically related to the reaction to a breakdown in one or more of the defining qualities of one's self.
26. The inauthentic is the denial to live in accordance with one's.....
27. The theme of death follows along with the theme of .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

28. Humans exist in a state of distance from the world that they nonetheless remain in the midst of.

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29. The theme of authentic existence is rare to many existentialist thinkers.
30. Anguish is the dread of the presence of human existence.

## 3.4 Summary

- The comedy of manners is a genre of comedy, play/television/film that flourished on the English stage during the Restoration period.
- Plays of comedy of manners are typically set in the world of the upper class, and ridicule the pretensions of those who consider themselves socially superior, deflating them with satire.
- The roots of the comedy of manners can be traced back to Moliere's seventeenth-century French comedies and to the "humours" comedy of Ben Johnson; indeed, certain characteristics can be found as far back in time as ancient Greek plays.
- The propounder of the comedy of manners in British literature were George Etherege (1635-1692), William Wycherley (1640-1716), John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), William Congreve (1670-1729), and George Farquhar (1678-1707).
- The Restoration period heralded an exciting and boisterous period in theatre after theatres were closed by the Puritans and Commonwealth government between 1642 and 1660.
- The comedy of manners can be witnessed in ancient form in the plays of Menander from the New Comedy of the Greek theatre in the fourth century BC and then in the work of Roman writers Plautus and Terence.
- The comedy of manners is a style of comedy that reflects the life, ideals and manners of upper class society in a way that is essentially true to its traditions and philosophy.
- Newell W. Sawyer has traced the development of the genre and relates it to the changes occurring in society at large. The comedy of manners was first developed in the new comedy of the Ancient Greek playwright Menander.
- The Theatre of the Absurd is a theatrical style originating in France in the late 1940's. It relies heavily on existential philosophy, and is a category for plays of absurdist fiction, written by a number of playwrights from the late 1940s to the 1960s, as well as the theatre which has evolved from their work.
- The Theatre of the Absurd expresses the belief that, in a godless universe, human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down.
- Often Absurdist works utilise theatrical conventions such as—but not limited to—Mime, Gibberish, Heightened Language, Codified Language and Vignette.
- Absurdist drama is a form of drama that emphasizes the absurdity of human existence by employing disjointed, repetitious, and meaningless dialogue, purposeless and confusing situations, and plots that lack realistic or logical development.
- The Absurd Theatre is a designation for particular plays that expressed the belief that, in a godless universe, human existence has no meaning or purpose and therefore all communication breaks down.
- Martin Esslin coined the term "*Theatre of the Absurd*" in his 1960 essay and, later, book of the same name.
- As an experimental form of theatre, Theatre of the Absurd employs techniques borrowed from earlier innovators. Writers and techniques frequently mentioned in relation to the Theatre of the Absurd include the 19th-century nonsense poets, such as Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear; Polish playwright Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz; the Russians Daniil Kharms, Nikolai

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Erdman, Mikhail Volokhov and others; Bertolt Brecht's distancing techniques in his "Epic theatre"; and the "dream plays" of August Strindberg.

- Existentialism is the philosophy that places emphasis on individual existence, freedom, and choice. It stresses the individuality of existence, and the problems that arise with said existence.
- Subjectivity is also important to Existentialism. Passionate choices and actions are important. Personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential to arriving at personal truths.
- Existentialism is the term applied to the work of a number of philosophers since the 19th century who, despite large differences in their positions, generally focused on the condition of human existence, and an individual's emotions, actions, responsibilities, and thoughts, or the meaning or purpose of life.
- Existentialism, a difficult term to define and an odd movement. Odd because most thinkers whom the intellectual world categorizes as existentialists are people who deny they are that. And, two of the people whom nearly everyone points to as important to the movement,
- The term "existentialism" seems to have been coined by the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel in the mid-1940s and adopted by Jean-Paul Sartre who, on October 29, 1945, discussed his own existentialist position in a lecture to the Club Maintenant in Paris.
- The early 19th century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard is regarded as the father of existentialism.
- Existentialist thinkers focus on the question of concrete human existence and the conditions of this existence rather than hypothesizing a human essence, stressing that the human essence is determined through life choices.

## 3.5 Keywords

***Seduction*** : An act or instance of seducing, especially sexually.

***Infidelity*** : Lack of religious faith, especially Christian faith. Or a breach of trust or a disloyal act; transgression.

***Impersonation*** : To assume the character or appearance of; pretend to be. Or to mimic the voice, mannerisms, etc.

***Comedy*** : A play, movie, etc., of light and humorous character with a happy or cheerful ending; a dramatic work in which the central motif is the triumph over adverse circumstance, resulting in a successful or happy conclusion.

***Tragicomedy*** : A dramatic or other literary composition combining elements of both tragedy and comedy.

***Essence*** : The basic, real, and invariable nature of a thing or its significant individual feature or feature.

***Freedom*** : The state of being free or at liberty rather than in confinement or under physical restraint.

***Guilt*** : The fact or state of having committed an offense, crime, violation, or wrong, especially against moral or penal law; culpability.

***Despair*** : Someone or something that causes hopelessness.

***Alienation*** : The state of being withdrawn or isolated from the objective world, as through indifference or disaffection.

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*Reason* : A statement presented in justification or explanation of a belief or action. Or the mental powers concerned with forming conclusions, judgments, or inferences.

## 3.6 Review Questions

1. Define comedy of manners.
2. Mention any two qualities of absurd theatre.
3. What is meant by Existentialism?
4. Write short notes on the following terms:
   (a) Comedy of manners (b) Absurd theatre (c) Existentialism
5. Write the two characters each of
   (a) Nothingness (b) Death (c) Angst
6. Explain the themes in existentialism.
7. What are the theatrical features in Absurd theatre?
8. What are the characteristics of comedy of manners?
9. Illustrate the development of comedy of manners.
10. Elaborate origin of absurd theatre.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. constructed scenarios | 5. comedy of manners | 6. development |
| 7. *Much Ado about Nothing* | 8. True | 9. True |
| 10. True | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. human existence | 15. innovators |
| 16. unresolved mysteries | 17. evasiveness | 18. True |
| 19. False | 20. True | 21. (a) |
| 22. (b) | 23. (c) | 24. authentic existence |
| 25. existentialism | 26. freedom | 27. nothingness |
| 28. True | 29. False | 30. False |

## 3.7 Further Readings

*Books*

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Martin Esslin. 1965. *Introduction to Penguin Plays – Absurd Drama*. Penguin.

M. Esslin. 1962. *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

Bennett, Michael Y. 2011. *Reassessing the Theatre of the Absurd: Camus, Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and Pinter*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Earnshaw, Steven. 2007. *Existentialism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Continuum, UK.

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*Online links*

http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/362554/comedy-of-manners

http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/trsanders/units/comedy/comedyofmanners.html

http://www.samuel-beckett.net/AbsurdEsslin.html

http://www.wisedude.com/art_music/theatre_absurd.htm

http://classiclit.about.com/od/existentialism/Existentialism_Literary_Theory.htm

http://www.webster.edu/~corbetre/philosophy/existentialism/whatis.html

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# Unit 4: Shakespeare: Macbeth—Introduction to the Author and the Text

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Elaborate the fact that Shakespeare was a celebrated writer;
- Explain that Shakespeare was a successful actor;
- Understand the text of Macbeth;
- Enumerate the the sources of the text of Macbeth.

## Introduction

The *Tragedy of Macbeth* (commonly called Macbeth) is a play by William Shakespeare about a regicide and its aftermath. It is Shakespeare's shortest tragedy and is believed to have been written sometime between 1603 and 1607. The earliest account of a performance of what was probably Shakespeare's play is April 1611, when Simon Forman recorded seeing such a play at the Globe Theatre. It was first published in the Folio of 1623, possibly from a prompt book for a specific performance.

Shakespeare's source for the tragedy are the accounts of King Macbeth of Scotland, Macduff, and Duncan in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), a history of England, Scotland and Ireland familiar to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. However, the story of Macbeth as told by Shakespeare bears

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little relation to real events in Scottish history, as Macbeth was an admired and able monarch.

In the backstage world of theatre, some believe that the play is cursed, and will not mention its title aloud, referring to it instead as "the Scottish play". Over the course of many centuries, the play has attracted some of the greatest actors in the roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. It has been adapted to film, television, opera, novels, comic books, and other media.

Here in this unit a detail lifesketch of Shakespeare and brief introduction of the text of the Macbeth have been given. The literary works of Shakespeare and the sources of the text of Macbeth has also been dealt with in this unit.

## 4.1 Shakespeare: Introduction

William Shakespeare scarcely needs an introduction. Born in 1564, he was an English playwright, poet, actor, favorite dramatist of queens and kings, inventor of words, master of drama, and arguably the most famous writer of all time. In his 36 plays and 154 sonnets, he left behind the evidence of a brilliant mind, a wicked sense of humor, a deep sensitivity to human emotions, and a rich classical education. We know all about his work. But what do we know about the man?

In the 400 or so years since Shakespeare died on his 52nd birthday in 1616, there have been plenty of rumors about the Bard and the personal experiences that may have inspired his works. Some of these explanations may well be true; others are pure falsehood. We don't know much about Shakespeare's inner world—he left behind no tell-all confessionals—but we know a lot about his outer world, and that is perhaps even more important to understanding his genius. Shakespeare came of age during the Renaissance, a flourishing of arts, culture, and thought that took place in the middle of the last millennium. All across Western Europe, ideas on everything from God to the nature of the universe were shifting. In England, it was a time of great literary and dramatic achievement, encouraged by Queen Elizabeth I and her successor James I. It was the perfect environment for a gifted dramatist to thrive.

Shakespeare changed the English language, inventing dozens of new words we still use today. His plays have been translated into more than 80 other tongues and performed in dozens of countries, where diverse audiences all still recognize the timeless elements of the human experience as depicted by a young Englishman 400 years ago. And if you are somehow one of the last two people in the literate world who know Shakespeare but still fail to see the Bard's relevance? Well, then, a pox on both your houses.

Shakespeare lived during a time when the middle class was expanding in both size and wealth, allowing its members more freedoms and luxuries as well as a louder voice in local government. He took advantage of the change in times and in 1557 became a member of the Stratford Council. This event marked the beginning of his illustrious political career. By 1561, he was elected one of the town's fourteen burgesses and subsequently served successively as constable, one of two chamberlains, and alderman. In these positions, he administered borough property and revenues. In 1567, he became bailiff—the highest elected office in Stratford and the equivalent of a modern-day mayor.

In the mid-sixteenth century, William Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, moved to the idyllic town of Stratford-upon-Avon. There, he became a successful landowner, moneylender, glove-maker, and dealer of wool and agricultural goods.

### 4.1.1 Biography

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon to John and Mary Arden Shakespeare. The fourth of the Shakespeares' eight children shares a birthday with St. George, the patron saint of England. Though April 23, 1564 is commonly accepted as Shakespeare's birthday, it's impossible to know the exact date he was born. It was 450 years ago, people. Just go with it.

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## Childhood

Town records indicate that William Shakespeare was John and Mary's third child. His birth is unregistered, but legend pins it on April 23, 1564, possibly because it is known that April 23 is the day on which he died 52 years later. In any event, his baptism was registered with the town on April 26, 1564. Little is known about his childhood, although it is generally assumed that he attended the local grammar school, the King's New School. The school was staffed by Oxford-educated faculty who taught the students mathematics, natural sciences, logic, Christian ethics, and classical language and literature.

*Did u know?* Who begat whom, again?

**Father:** John Shakespeare (1530-1601)
**Mother:** Mary Arden Shakespeare (?-1608)
**Sister:** Joan Shakespeare (1558)
**Sister:** Margaret Shakespeare (1562-1563)
**Brother:** Gilbert Shakespeare (1556-1612)
**Sister:** Joan Shakespeare Hart (1569-1646)
**Sister:** Anne Shakespeare (1571-1579)
**Brother:** Richard Shakespeare (1574-1613)
**Brother:** Edmund Shakespeare (1580-1607)
**Wife:** Anne Hathaway (1556-1623)
**Daughter:** Susanna Shakespeare Hall (1583-1649)
**Son:** Hamnet Shakespeare (1585-1596)
**Daughter:** Judith Shakespeare Quiney (1585-1662)

## Education

In 1569, Shakespeare enters King's New School, an excellent grammar school in Stratford attended by the sons of civil servants like his father. Boys typically enter the school around the age of five, but since no official records survive its impossible to know exactly when Shakespeare starts his education. Other than the dates of his marriage and children's births, little is known about Shakespeare's life before 1592—a period known as the Lost Years.

Shakespeare did not attend university, which was not at all unusual for the time. University education was reserved for wealthy sons of the elite, mostly those who wanted to become clergymen. The numerous classical and literary references in Shakespeare's plays are a testament; however, to the excellent education he received in grammar school.

*Notes* The most impressive fact about Shakespeare is the wealth of general knowledge exhibited in his works rather than his formal education.

## Marriage

In 1582, at the age of eighteen, William Shakespeare married the twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway. Their first daughter, Susanna, was baptized only six months later—a fact that has given rise to speculation concerning the circumstances surrounding their marriage. In 1585, Anne bore twins, baptized Hamlet and Judith Shakespeare. Hamlet died at the age of eleven, by which time Shakespeare was already a successful playwright.

*Did u know?* Around 1589, Shakespeare wrote his supposed first play, Henry VI, Part 1. Sometime between his marriage and writing this play, he moved to London, where he pursued a career as a playwright and actor.

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### Death

William Shakespeare lived until 1616. His wife Anna died in 1623 at the age of 67. He was buried in the chancel of his church at Stratford.

## 4.1.2 Work Experience

Although many records of Shakespeare's life as a citizen of Stratford—including marriage and birth certificates—have survived, very little information exists about his life as a young playwright. Legend characterizes Shakespeare as a roguish young man who was once forced to flee London under suspect circumstances perhaps having to do with his love life. But the little written information we have of his early years does not necessarily confirm this characterization.

In any case, young Will was not an immediate and universal success. The earliest written record of Shakespeare's life in London comes from a statement by the rival playwright Robert Greene. In his Groatsworth of Witte (1592), Greene calls Shakespeare an "upstart crow... [who] supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you." While this is hardly high praise, it does suggest that Shakespeare rattled the London theatrical hierarchy even at the beginning of his career. It is natural, in retrospect, to attribute Greene's complaint to jealousy of Shakespeare's ability, but of course we can't be sure.

### Playwright

In 1594, Shakespeare returned to the theater and became a charter member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men—a group of actors who changed their name to the King's Men when James I ascended to the throne. By 1598, he was the "principal comedian" for the troupe; by 1603, he was "principal tragedian." He remained associated with the organization until his death. Although acting and playwriting were not considered noble professions at the time, successful and prosperous actors were relatively well respected. Shakespeare's success left him with a fair amount of money, which he invested in Stratford real estate. In 1597, he purchased the second largest house in Stratford—the New Place—for his parents. In 1596, Shakespeare applied for a coat of arms for his family, in effect making himself a gentleman. Consequently, his daughters made "good matches," marrying wealthy men.

Shakespeare had been working as an actor and dramatist for a few years already when theaters and other public spaces were ordered closed in January 1593 due to an outbreak of the plague. Shakespeare used the break to compose two long poems, "*Venus and Adonis*," based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and "*The Rape of Lucrece*," based on a Roman myth. The two poems were celebrated for their beauty and lyricism. Both were dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, the Third Earl of Southampton, whom Shakespeare was fortunate enough to have adopted as a patron. "The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end," Shakespeare wrote in the dedication to "*The Rape of Lucrece*." "The warrant I have of your honorable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours."[4] Scholars also believe that Southampton is the "fair youth" mentioned in Shakespeare's sonnets, an unnamed male character of whom Shakespeare sometimes seems to speak erotically.

In 1594, the theaters reopened. Shakespeare joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a theater troupe sponsored by a baron named Henry Carey, a.k.a. Lord Chamberlain. Shakespeare also purchased shares in the company, making him a manager and co-owner. Over the next few years, with Shakespeare as chief dramatist, the Chamberlain's Men became one of the most popular theater companies in London and a favorite of Queen Elizabeth. We don't have a precise timeline for when Shakespeare wrote each of his plays; in most cases, the best evidence comes from outside references to the productions. In 1598, the critic Francis Meres penned a review in which he wrote that

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"Mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare" was "the most excellent in both kinds [comedy and tragedy] for the stage." The plays listed in Meres's review—indicating that Shakespeare had already completed them—included *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Love's Labors Lost*, *Richard II*, and *Titus Andronicus*. "I say that the Muses would speak with Shakespeare's fine filed phrase," Meres concluded, "if they would speak English." In 1599, Shakespeare enjoyed what seems to have been an explosively productive year, with *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* all likely penned in that one year.

### Globe Theatre

The Chamberlain's Men performed for the queen in the royal court, but they also performed for the middle-class public. In 1599 the company finished construction on the Globe Theatre, a wooden, open-air playhouse designed with the stage in the center and the audience arranged in tiers that rose up from the polygon-shaped floor. Many of Shakespeare's best-known plays premiered here, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Twelfth Night*.

### Literary Works

With Richard III, Henry VI, The Comedy of Errors, and Titus Andronicus under his belt, Shakespeare was a popular playwright by 1590. The year 1593, however, marked a major leap forward in his career. By the end of that year, he secured a prominent patron in the Earl of Southampton and his Venus and Adonis was published. It remains one of the first of his known works to be printed and was a huge success. Next came, The Rape of Lucrece. Shakespeare had also made his mark as a poet and most scholars agree that the majority of Shakespeare's sonnets were probably written in the 1590s.

The same year that he joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, along with *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and several other plays. Two of his greatest tragedies, *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*, followed around 1600. *Hamlet* is widely considered the first modern play for its multi-faceted main character and unprecedented depiction of his psyche.

The first decade of the seventeenth century witnessed the debut performances of many of Shakespeare's most celebrated works, including many of his so-called history plays: *Othello* in 1604 or 1605, *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1606 or 1607, and *King Lear* in 1608. The last play of his to be performed was probably *King Henry VIII* in either 1612 or 1613.

#### *Tragedy*

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

#### *History*

*Henry IV*, part 1, *Henry IV*, part 2, *Henry V*, *Henry VI*, part 1, *Henry VI*, part 2, *Henry VI*, part 3, *Henry VIII*, *King John*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*

#### *Comedy Tragedy*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *As You Like It*, *Cymbeline*, *Loves Labours Lost*, *Measure for Measure*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Winter's Tale*

#### *Poem*

*A Lover's Complaint*, *Sonnets*, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Venus and Adonis*

## Self Assessment

Notes

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. William Shakespeare was born in
   (a) Stratford-upon-Avon
   (b) Hempshire
   (c) Ireland
   (d) New South Wales.
2. Which of the folowing was not a creation of Shakespeare?
   (a) *Love's Labour's Lost*
   (b) The *Roots*
   (c) *Hamlet*
   (d) *King Henry VIII*.
3. Which of the following play of Shakespeare was not performed at Globe Theatre?
   (a) *King Lear*
   (b) *Twelfth Night*
   (c) *Romeo and Juliet*
   (d) *Othello*.

Fill in the blanks:

4. The same year that he joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare wrote .....
5. Venus and Adonis was one of the first of Shakespeare known works to be .....and was a huge success.
6. In 1569, Shakespeare enters King's New School, an excellent ..... in Stratford.
7. Shakespeare did not attend university because university education was reserved for ..... of the elite.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Town records indicate that William Shakespeare was John and Mary's third child.
9. Shakespeare's first daughter, Susanna, was baptized only six months his marriage.
10. Shakespeare's life as a citizen of Stratford.

## 4.2 Macbeth: Introduction to the Text

### 4.2.1 Introduction

Legend says that Macbeth was written in 1605 or 1606 and performed at Hampton Court in 1606 for King James I and his brother-in-law, King Christian of Denmark. Whether it was first performed at the royal court or was premiered at the Globe theatre, there can be little doubt that the plays were intended to please the King, who had recently become the patron of Shakespeare's theatrical company. We note, for example, that the character of Banquo—the legendary root of the Stuart family tree—is depicted very favorably. Like Banquo, King James was a Stuart. The play is also

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quite short, perhaps because Shakespeare knew that James preferred short plays. And the play contains many supernatural elements that James, who himself published a book on the detection and practices of witchcraft, would have appreciated. Even something as minor as the Scottish defeat of the Danes may have been omitted to avoid offending King Christian.

### 4.2.2 Sources of the Text

The material for Macbeth was drawn from Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1587). Despite the play's historical source, however, the play is generally classified as tragedy rather than a history. This derives perhaps from the fact that the story contains many historical fabrications—including the entire character of Banquo, who was invented by a 16th-century Scottish historian in order to validate the Stuart family line. 0In addition to such fictionalization, Shakespeare took many liberties with the original story, manipulating the characters of Macbeth and Duncan to suit his purposes. In Holinshed's account, Macbeth is a ruthless and valiant leader who rules competently after killing Duncan, whereas Duncan is portrayed as a young and soft-willed man. Shakespeare draws out certain aspects of the two characters in order to create a stronger sense of polarity. Whereas Duncan is made out to be a venerable and kindly older king, Macbeth is transformed into an indecisive and troubled young man who cannot possibly rule well.

Macbeth is certainly not the only play with historical themes that is full of fabrications. Indeed, there are other reasons why the play is considered a tragedy rather than a history. One reason lies in the play's universality. Like Hamlet, Macbeth speaks soliloquies that articulate the emotional and intellectual anxieties with which many audiences identify easily. For all his lack of values and "vaulting ambition," Macbeth is a character who often seems infinitely real to audiences. This powerful grip on the audience is perhaps what has made Macbeth such a popular play for centuries of viewers.

*Caution* Macbeth is a play with historical themes but rather than illustrating a specific historical moment, it presents a human drama of ambition, desire, and guilt.

Given that Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's shortest plays, some scholars have suggested that scenes were excised from the Folio version and subsequently lost. There are some loose ends and non-sequiturs in the text of the play that would seem to support such a claim. If scenes were indeed cut out, however, these cuts were most masterfully done. After all, none of the story line is lost and the play remains incredibly powerful without them. In fact, the play's length gives it a compelling, almost brutal, force. The action flows from scene to scene, speech to speech, with a swiftness that draws the viewer into Macbeth's struggles. As Macbeth's world spins out of control, the play itself also begins to spiral towards to its violent end.

Macbeth is a tragedy by William Shakespeare written around 1606. The only Shakespearean drama set in Scotland, Macbeth follows the story of a Scottish nobleman (Macbeth) who hears a prophecy that he will become king and is tempted to evil by the promise of power. Macbeth deals with the themes of evil in the individual and in the world more closely than any of Shakespeare's other works. Shakespeare draws on Holinshed's Chronicles as Macbeth's historical source, but he makes some adjustments to Holinshed's depiction of the real-life Macbeth. Holinshed's Macbeth was a soldier, and not much more; he was capable, and not too thoughtful or self-doubting. In Shakespeare's Macbeth, it is the internal tension and crumbling of Macbeth, entirely Shakespeare's inventions, that give the play such literary traction.

Macbeth is also unique among Shakespeare's plays for dealing so explicitly with material that was relevant to England's contemporary political situation. The play is thought to have been written in the later part of 1606, three years after James I, the first Stuart king, took up the crown of England.

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James I was the son of Mary, Queen of Scots (cousin to Elizabeth I) and this less-than-direct connection meant that James was eager to assert any legitimacy he could over his right to the English throne (even though he was a Scot).

Shakespeare's portrayal of Banquo as one of the play's few unsoiled characters (in Holinshed's Chronicles, Banquo helps Macbeth murder the King) is a nod to the Stuart political myth. King James traced his lineage to Banquo, who is thought to be the founder of the Stuart line. In Act I, scene iii, the witches predict that Banquo's heirs will rule Scotland and later, the witches conjure a vision of Banquo's descendants—a line of eight kings that culminates in a symbolic vision of King James, who was crowned King of Scotland and England (and also claimed to be king of France and Ireland).

Shakespeare, whose theater company (the Lord Chamberlain's Men) became the King's Men under James's rule, seems intent on flattering the King. Shakespeare also dramatizes one of the king's special interests: witchcraft. In Macbeth the three "weird sisters" feature centrally in the plot. They show Macbeth visions of the future and manipulate his murderous ambition in a play full of dark forces and black magic. Witchcraft was a hot topic in England at the time and James even published his own treatise on the subject in 1597, entitled Daemonologie. As James's court play-maker, Shakespeare would've known that inclusion of the dark arts would interest the King.

Beyond the abstract of evil, James was also the target of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, where a group of rebel Catholics tried to blow up the King and Parliament (this is the historical version of Guy Fawkes, that guy in V for Vendetta). Macbeth's murder of King Duncan, then, would have struck a sensitive chord with the play's audience. There's also another allusion to the Gunpowder plot during the Porter's infamous comic routine in Act II, scene iii. The Porter refers to Catholic "equivocators," which is a reference to Jesuit Henry Garnet, a man who was tried and executed for his role in the Gunpowder Plot. Garnet wrote "Treatise on Equivocation," a document that encouraged Catholics to speak ambiguously or, "equivocate" when they were being questioned by Protestant inquisitors (so they wouldn't be persecuted for their religious beliefs).

Why Should I Care?

Macbeth is a story about power struggles among the elite. What makes Macbeth great is its incredible insights into what the lure of power can do, and how blind it can make a person to moral reason and common sense. By studying men (and one woman) of great power, we get a glimpse into their minds. As it turns out, they're not as infallible as we sometimes think they are. They suffer the same feelings that all regular people suffer.

*Task* Discuss the extent to which Macbeth fits into the genre of "tragedy."

It isn't just power politics, but human emotion that Macbeth focuses on. These things still influence the world. For example, Angelina Jolie has the power inspire you to listen up about genocide or human rights. Macbeth is no less subject to sticky human emotions, especially as they apply to the realm of attraction – just check out Macbeth's interaction with his wife as she inspires, or shames, him to action. Lady Macbeth constantly references his manhood, which is tied to his emotional state, but also plays out in his physical courage. Many critics contend that the seat of Lady Macbeth's power is not only her sharp mind, but her sexual appeal. Just imagine Lady Macbeth as Angelina Jolie. She's giving the speech about how she'd dash out her child's brains while it suckled at her breast. You kind of see why Macbeth is so messed up, right?

Power is attractive, and you can't deal with Macbeth without getting into the individual psyche (mind) of a man. Macbeth is at first determined to not murder Duncan (the King), is convinced by his wife to kill the King, and then is so destroyed by the consequences that he seems to be numb when Lady Macbeth dies. Let's not beat around the bush – the man is whipped, but he's also just a man.

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So read Macbeth. Once you crack the tough language, you'll get a glimpse into the raunchy, grotesque, beautiful human emotions that are timeless and universal.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. Macbeth was written in 1605 or 1606 and performed at
    (a) Hampton Court
    (b) Globe Theatre
    (c) Lord Chamberlain's Men Theatre
    (d) Earl of Southampton.
12. The material for Macbeth was drawn from
    (a) Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England
    (b) Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland
    (c) Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of Scotland
    (d) Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of Ireland.
13. What proves that Macbeth is one of the shortest plays?
    (a) characters are poor
    (b) scenes were excised form the folio version
    (c) scenes were lost
    (d) action flows from scene to scene.

Fill in the blanks:

14. Despite the Macbeth's historical source, the play is generally classified as ..... rather than a history.
15. Macbeth was written performed at Hampton Court in 1606 for King James I and his brother-in-law,.....
16. Macbeth is certainly not the only play with .....that is full of fabrications.
17. Macbeth follows the story of a Scottish nobleman (Macbeth) who hears a .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. Macbeth is also unique among Shakespeare's plays for dealing so explicitly with material that was relevant to England's contemporary political situation.
19. Shakespeare's portrayal of Banquo as one of the play's few unsoiled characters is a nod to the Stuart political myth.
20. Macbeth is a story about power struggles among the middle class.

## 4.3 Summary

- William Shakespeare born in 1564, was an English playwright, poet, actor, favorite dramatist of queens and kings, inventor of words, master of drama, and arguably the most famous writer of all time.
- In his 36 plays and 154 sonnets, he left behind the evidence of a brilliant mind, a wicked sense of humor, a deep sensitivity to human emotions, and a rich classical education.

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- In the 400 or so years since Shakespeare died on his 52nd birthday in 1616, there have been plenty of rumors about the Bard and the personal experiences that may have inspired his works.
- Shakespeare changed the English language, inventing dozens of new words we still use today. His plays have been translated into more than 80 other tongues and performed in dozens of countries, where diverse audiences all still recognize the timeless elements of the human experience as depicted by a young Englishman 400 years ago.
- Shakespeare lived during a time when the middle class was expanding in both size and wealth, allowing its members more freedoms and luxuries as well as a louder voice in local government.
- William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon to John and Mary Arden Shakespeare. The fourth of the Shakespeares' eight children shares a birthday with St. George, the patron saint of England.
- Town records indicate that William Shakespeare was John and Mary's third child.
- In 1569, Shakespeare enters King's New School, an excellent grammar school in Stratford attended by the sons of civil servants like his father.
- In 1582, at the age of eighteen, William Shakespeare married the twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway.
- William Shakespeare lived until 1616. His wife Anna died in 1623 at the age of 67.
- Legend says that Macbeth was written in 1605 or 1606 and performed at Hampton Court in 1606 for King James I and his brother-in-law, King Christian of Denmark.
- The material for Macbeth was drawn from Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1587).
- Despite the play's historical source, however, the play is generally classified as tragedy rather than a history. This derives perhaps from the fact that the story contains many historical fabrications—including the entire character of Banquo, who was invented by a 16th-century Scottish historian in order to validate the Stuart family line.
- Macbeth is certainly not the only play with historical themes that is full of fabrications. Indeed, there are other reasons why the play is considered a tragedy rather than a history. One reason lies in the play's universality.
- Given that Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's shortest plays, some scholars have suggested that scenes were excised from the Folio version and subsequently lost. There are some loose ends and non-sequiturs in the text of the play that would seem to support such a claim.
- Macbeth is also unique among Shakespeare's plays for dealing so explicitly with material that was relevant to England's contemporary political situation.

## 4.4 Keywords

***Chamberlains*** : An official charged with the management of the living quarters of a sovereign or member of the nobility.

***Alderman*** : A member of a municipal legislative body, especially of a municipal council.

***Bailiff*** : The highest elected office in Stratford and the equivalent of a modern day mayor.

***Banquo*** : A character, the legendary root of the stuart family tree in the play Macbeth and is a historical fabrication.

***Baptism*** : A ceremonial immersion in water, or application of water, as an initiatory rite or sacrament of the Christian church.

***Roguish young man*** : Legend characterizes Shakespeare as a roguish young man who was once forced to flee London under suspect circumstances.

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## 4.5 Review Questions

1. Where was Shakespeare born.
2. How many plays and sonnets did Shakespeare write?
3. Give a brief biosketch of Shakespeare?
4. Write short notes on the following:
   (a) Globe Theatre (b) Shakespeare's poems (c) Shakespeare's plays
5. Explain that Shakespeare was a celebrated writer.
6. Elaborate that Shakespeare was a successful actor.
7. Illustrate that Macbeth was shortest play.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. *Romeo and Juliet* | 5. printed | 6. grammar school |
| 7. wealthy sons | 8. True | 9. True |
| 10. True | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. tragedy | 15. King Christian |
| 16. historical themes | 17. prophecy | 18. True |
| 19. True | 20. False | |

## 4.6 Further Readings

*Books*

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Coursen, H. R. 1997. *MACBETH A Guide to the Play*. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, London.

*Online links*

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http://www.shmoop.com/macbeth/

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http://dramamacbeth/macbethplotact.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature

# Unit 5: Macbeth: Detailed Analysis of the Text

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyse the various scenes in five acts of Macbeth;

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- Illustrate the state of minds of various characters specially Macbeth and Lady Macbeth;
- Explain the moral of the story;
- Elaborate the fact that the course of fate can not be changed;
- Illustrate that the play ends as it began.

## Introduction

*Macbeth* was written in 1605 or 1606 and performed at Hampton Court in 1606 for King James I and his brother-in-law, King Christian of Denmark. Whether it was first performed at the royal court or was premiered at the Globe theatre, there can be little doubt that the play were intended to please the King, who had recently become the patron of Shakespeare's theatrical company. The play is quite short, perhaps because Shakespeare knew that James preferred short plays. The material for Macbeth was drawn from Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1587). Despite the play's historical source, however, the play is generally classified as tragedy rather than a history. This derives perhaps from the fact that the story contains many historical fabrications—including the entire character of Banquo, who was invented by a 16th-century Scottish historian in order to validate the Stuart family line. The play is divided into 5 Acts. Here in this unit a detailed analysis of the text of of all the acts i Macbeth has been given.

## 5.1 Act 1

### 5.1.1 Scenes 1-7

#### Scene 1

On a heath in Scotland, three witches, the Weird Sisters, wait to meet Macbeth amidst thunder and lightning. Their conversation is filled with paradox and equivocation: they say that they will meet Macbeth "when the battle's lost and won" and when "fair is foul and foul is fair".

#### Scene 2

The Scottish army is at war with the Norwegian army. Duncan, king of Scotland, meets a captain returning from battle. The captain informs them of Macbeth and Banquo's bravery in battle. He also describes Macbeth's attack on the castle of the treacherous Macdonald, in which Macbeth triumphed and planted Macdonald's head on the battlements of the castle. The Thanes of Ross and Angus enter with the news that the Thane of Cawdor has sided with Norway. Duncan decides to execute the disloyal thane and give the title of Cawdor to Macbeth.

#### Scene 3

The Weird Sisters meet on the heath and wait for Macbeth. He arrives with Banquo, repeating the witches' paradoxical phrase by stating "So foul and fair a day I have not seen". The witches hail him as "Thane of Glamis" (his present title), "Thane of Cawdor" (the title he will soon receive officially), and "king hereafter". Their greeting startles and seems to frighten Macbeth. When Banquo questions the witches as to who they are, they greet him with the phrases "Lesser than Macbeth and greater," "Not so happy, yet much happier," and a man who "shall get kings, though [he] be none".

When Macbeth questions them further, the witches vanish into thin air. Almost as soon as they disappear, Ross and Angus appear with the news that the king has granted Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth and Banquo step aside to discuss this news; Banquo is of the opinion that the title of Thane of Cawdor might "enkindle" Macbeth to seek the crown as well. Macbeth questions why such happy news causes his "seated heart [to] knock at [his] ribs/against the use of

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nature," and his thoughts turn immediately and with terror to murdering the king in order to fulfill the witches' second prophesy. When Ross and Angus notice Macbeth's distraught state, Banquo dismisses it as Macbeth's unfamiliarity with his new title.

### Scene 4

Duncan demands to know whether the former Thane of Cawdor has been executed. His son Malcolm assures him that he has witnessed the former Thane's becoming death. While Duncan muses about the fact that he placed "absolute trust" in the treacherous Thane, Macbeth enters. Duncan thanks Macbeth and Banquo for their loyalty and bravery. He consequently announces his decision to make his son Malcolm the heir to the throne of Scotland (something that would not have happened automatically, since his position was elected and not inherited). Duncan then states that he plans to visit Macbeth at his home in Inverness. Macbeth leaves to prepare his home for the royal visit, pondering the stumbling block of Malcolm that now hinders his ascension to the throne. The king follows with Banquo.

### Scene 5

At Inverness, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth that describes his meeting with the witches. She fears that his nature is not ruthless enough— he's "too full o' th' milk of human kindness" - to murder Duncan and assure the completion of the witches' prophesy. He has ambition enough, she claims, but lacks the gumption to act on it. She then implores him to hurry home so that she can "pour [her] spirits in [his] ear" - in other words, goad him on to the murder he must commit. When a messenger arrives with the news that Duncan is coming, Lady Macbeth calls on the heavenly powers to "unsex me here" and fill her with cruelty, taking from her all natural womanly compassion. When Macbeth arrives, she greets him as Glamis and Cawdor and urges him to "look like the innocent flower, / but be the serpent under't". She then says that she will make all the preparations for the king's visit and subsequent murder.

### Scene 6

Duncan arrives at Inverness with Banquo and exchanges pleasantries with Lady Macbeth. The king inquires after Macbeth's whereabouts and she offers to bring him to where Macbeth awaits.

### Scene 7

Alone on stage, Macbeth agonizes over whether to kill Duncan, recognizing the act of murdering the king as a terrible sin. He struggles in particular with the idea of murdering a man—a relative, no less—who trusts and loves him. He would like the king's murder to be over and regrets the fact that he possesses "vaulting ambition" without the ruthlessness to ensure the attainment of his goals.

As Lady Macbeth enters, Macbeth tells her that he "will proceed no further in this business". But Lady Macbeth taunts him for his fears and ambivalence, telling him he will only be a man when he carries out the murder. She states that she herself would go so far as to take her own nursing baby and dash its brains if necessary. She counsels him to "screw [his] courage to the sticking place" and details the way they will murder the king. They will wait until he falls asleep, she says, and thereafter intoxicate his bodyguards with drink. This will allow them to murder Duncan and lay the blame on the two drunken bodyguards. Macbeth is astonished by her cruelty but resigns to follow through with her plans.

## 5.1.2 Analysis

### Fate, Prophecy, and Equivocation

The play figures equivocation as one of its most important themes, just as the Porter in Act 2 extemporizes about the sin of equivocation. Starting from the Weird Sisters' first words that open

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the play, audiences quickly ascertain that things are not what they seem. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word "equivocation" has two different meanings - both of which are applicable to this play.

*Example*: The using (a word) in more than one sense; ambiguity or uncertainty of meaning in words; also misapprehension arising from the ambiguity of terms.

This definition as simple verbal ambiguity is the one that audiences are most familiar with—and one that plays an important role in the play. The Porter's speech on equivocation in Act 2, however, refers to a more active type of equivocation.

This kind of equivocation is similar to lying; it is intentionally designed to mislead and confuse. The intentional ambiguity of terms is what we see in the prophesies of the Weird Sisters. Their speech is full of paradox and confusion, starting with their first assertion that "fair is foul and foul is fair". The witches' prophesies are intentionally ambiguous. The alliteration and rhymed couplets in which they speak also contributes to the effect of instability and confusion in their words. For many readers, more than one reading is required to grasp a sense of what the witches mean. It is not surprising, therefore, that these "imperfect speakers" can easily bedazzle and confuse Macbeth throughout the course of the play.

Just as their words are confusing, it is unclear as to whether the witches merely predict or actually affect the future. Banquo fears, for example, that the witches' words will "enkindle [Macbeth] unto the crown"—in other words, that they will awaken in Macbeth an ambition that is already latent in him. His fears seem well-founded: as soon as the witches mention the crown, Macbeth's thoughts turn to murder. The witches' power is thus one of prophecy, but prophecy through suggestion. For Macbeth, the witches can be understood as representing the final impetus that drives him to his pre-determined end. The prophecy is in this sense self-fulfilling.

The oracular sisters are in fact connected etymologically to the Fates of Greek mythology. The word "weird" derives from the Old English word "word," meaning "fate." And not all fate is self-fulfilling. In Banquo's case, in contrast to Macbeth's, the witches seem only to predict the future. For unlike Macbeth, Banquo does not act on the witches' prediction that he will father kings—and yet the witches' prophesy still comes true. The role of the weird sisters in the story, therefore, is difficult to define or determine. Are they agents of fate or a motivating force? And why do they suddenly disappear from the play in the third act?

The ambiguity of the Weird Sisters reflects a greater theme of doubling, mirrors, and schism between inner and outer worlds that permeates the work as a whole. Throughout the play, characters, scenes, and ideas are doubled.

The dramatic irony of Duncan's trust is realized only later in the play. Similarly, the captain in Scene 2 makes a battle report that becomes in effect a prophecy.

The passage can be interpreted as follows: Macbeth "disdains fortune" by disregarding the natural course of action and becomes king through a "bloody execution" of Duncan; Macduff, who was born from a Caesarian section and who neither "ne'er shook hands nor bade farewell" decapitates Macbeth and hangs his head up in public.

As in all Shakespearean plays, mirroring among characters serves to heighten their differences. Thus Macbeth, the young, valiant, cruel traitor/king has a foil in Duncan, the old, venerable, peaceable, and trusting king. Lady Macbeth, who casts off her femininity and claims to feel no qualms about killing her own children, is doubled in Lady Macduff, who is a model of a good mother and wife. Banquo's failures to act on the witches' prophesy is mirrored in Macbeth's drive to realize all that the witches foresee.

Similarly, much of the play is also concerned with the relation between contrasting inner and outer worlds. Beginning with the equivocal prophecies of the Weird Sisters, appearances seldom align with reality. Lady Macbeth, for example, tells her husband to "look like the innocent flower, / but

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be the serpent under't". Macbeth appears to be a loyal Thane, but secretly plans revenge. Lady Macbeth appears to be a gentle woman but vows to be "unsexed" and swears on committing bloody deeds. Macbeth is also a play about the inner world of human psychology, as will be illustrated in later acts through nightmares and guilt-ridden hallucinations. Such contrast between "being" and "seeming" serves as another illustration of equivocation.

### The Macbeths and the Corruption of Nature

One of the most ambiguous aspects of the play is the character of Macbeth himself. Unlike other Shakespearean villains like Iago or Richard III, Macbeth is not entirely committed to his evil actions. When he swears to commit suicide, he must overcome an enormous resistance from his conscience. At the same time, he sees as his own biggest flaw not a lack of moral values but rather a lack of motivation to carry out his diabolical schemes. In this he resembles Hamlet, who soliloquizes numerous times about his inaction. But unlike Hamlet, Macbeth does not have a good reason to kill, nor is the man he kills evil - far from it. And finally, while Macbeth becomes increasingly devoted to murderous actions, his soliloquies are so full of eloquent speech and pathos that it is not difficult to sympathize with him. Thus at the heart of the play lies a tangle of uncertainty.

If Macbeth is indecisive, Lady Macbeth is just the opposite—a character with such a single vision and drive for advancement that she brings about her own demise. And yet her very ruthlessness brings about another form of ambiguity, for in swearing to help Macbeth realize the Weird Sisters' prophecy, she must cast off her femininity. In a speech at the beginning of Scene 5, she calls on the spirits of the air to take away her womanhood.

Lady Macbeth sees "remorse" as one of the names for feminine compassion—of which she must rid herself. Thus she must be "unsexed." This does not mean, however, that in rejecting her femininity she becomes manly. Instead, she becomes a woman devoid of the sexual characteristics and sentimentality that make her a woman. She becomes entirely unnatural and inhuman. Like the supernatural Weird Sisters with their beards, Lady Macbeth becomes something that does not fit into the natural world.

The corruption of nature is a theme that surfaces and resurfaces in the same act. When Duncan greets Macbeth, for example, he states that he has "begun to plant thee and will labor / to make thee full of growing". Following the metaphor of the future as lying in the "seeds of time," Macbeth is compared to a plant that Duncan will look after. By murdering Duncan, then, Macbeth perverts nature by severing himself effectively from the very "root" that feeds him. For this reason, perhaps, the thought of murdering Duncan causes Macbeth's heart to "knock at [his] ribs / against the use of nature". Just as the Weird Sisters pervert the normal course of nature by telling their prophecy, Macbeth upsets the course of nature by his regicide.

Reflecting the disruption of nature, the dialogue between Macbeth and Lady in the scene following the murder becomes heavy, graceless, and almost syncopated.

The repetition of the phrase "thou wouldst," in all its permutations, confounds the flow of speech. The speech is clotted with accents, tangling meter and scansion, and the alliteration is almost tongue—twisting, slowing the rhythm of the words. Just as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have corrupted nature, the language Shakespeare uses in these scenes disrupts the flow of his usually smoothly iambic meter.

Yet another part of the theme of corruption of nature lies in the compression of time that occurs throughout the act. When Lady Macbeth reads Macbeth's letter, she states: These letters have transported me beyond / this ignorant present, and I feel now / the future in the instant". By telling the future to Macbeth and Banquo, the Weird Sisters upset the natural course of time and bring the future to the present. Thus when Macbeth vacillates over whether or not to kill Duncan, he wants to leap into the future: "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well / It were done quickly". He wants the murder to be over quickly—indeed so quickly that it is over before the audience even

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registers it. Just as equivocation twists the meaning of words, Macbeth's murderous desires twist the meaning of time.

*Notes* Thus beginning with the Weird Sisters, equivocation in all its permutations is threaded throughout the fabric of the first act. Over the course of the play, the breach between the worlds of reality and illusion that is the core of equivocation grows ever wider.

## 5.2 Act 2

### 5.2.1 Scenes

**Scene 1**

Banquo, who has come to Inverness with Duncan, wrestles with the witches' prophecy. He must restrain himself the "cursed thoughts" that tempt him in his dreams. When Banquo raises the topic of the prophecy as Macbeth enters the scene, Macbeth pretends that he has given little thought to the witches' prophesy. After Banquo and his son Fleance leave the scene, Macbeth imagines that he sees a bloody dagger pointing toward Duncan's chamber. Frightened by the apparition of a "dagger of the mind," he prays that the earth will "hear not [his] steps" as he completes his bloody plan. The bell rings—a signal from Lady Macbeth—and he sets off toward Duncan's room.

**Scene 2**

Lady Macbeth waits fitfully for Macbeth to return from killing Duncan. Upon hearing a noise within, she worries that the bodyguards have awakened before Macbeth has had a chance to plant the evidence on them.

Macbeth enters, still carrying the bloody daggers with which he killed Duncan. He is deeply shaken: as he entered Duncan's chamber, he heard the bodyguards praying and could not say "Amen" when they finished their prayers. Lady Macbeth's counsels to think "after these ways" as "it will make [them] mad". Nonetheless, Macbeth also tells her that he also thought he heard a voice saying, "'sleep no more, / Macbeth does murder sleep. . . Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more". Lady Macbeth again warns him not to think of such "brain-sickly of things" and tells him to wash the blood from his hands. Seeing the daggers he carries, she chastises him for bringing them in and tells him to plant them on the bodyguards according to the plan. When Macbeth, still horrified by the crime he has just committed, refuses to reenter Duncan's chamber, Lady Macbeth herself brings the daggers back in.

While she is gone, Macbeth hears a knocking and imagines that he sees hands plucking at his eyes. He is guilt-stricken and mourns: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood / clean from my hand?"? When Lady Macbeth hears his words upon reentering, she states that her hands are of the same color but her heart remains shamelessly unstained. "A little water," she continues, "will clear [them] of th[e] deed". As the knocking persists, the two retire to put on their nightgowns so as not to arouse suspicion when others arrive.

**Scene 3**

In a scene of comic relief, the Porter hears knocking at the gate and imagines that he is the porter at the door to Hell. He imagines admitting a farmer who has committed suicide after a bad harvest, an "equivocator" who has committed a sin by swearing to half-truths, and an English tailor who stole cloth to make fashionable clothes and visited brothels. Since it is "too cold for hell" at the gate, he opens the door instead of continuing with a longer catalogue of sinners. Outside stand Macduff and

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Lennox, who scold him for taking so long to respond to their knowcking. The Porter claims that he was tired after drinking until late and delivers a short sermon on the ills of drink.

Macbeth enters and Macduff asks him whether the king is awake yet. On hearing that the king is still asleep, Macduff leaves to wake him. While he is gone, Lennox tells Macbeth that the weather by night was full of strange events: chimneys were blown down, birds screeched all night, the earth shook, and ghostly voices were heard prophesying ominously. A stunned Macduff returns with the news that the king is dead. He tells them to go see for themselves and calls to the servants to ring the alarm bell.

Lady Macbeth and Banquo enter and Macduff informs them of the king's death. Macbeth and Lennox return and Macbeth laments the king's death, proclaiming that he wishes he were dead instead of the king. When Malcolm and Donalbain arrive, Lennox blames the regicide on the guards by pointing to the incriminating bloody evidence. Macbeth states that he has already killed the bodyguards in a grief-stricken rage. At this point, Lady Macbeth feigns shock and faints. Aside, Malcolm and Donalbain confer and decide that their lives may be at risk and that they should flee Scotland. As Lady Macbeth is being helped off-stage, Banquo counsels the others to convene and discuss the murder at hand. Left behind on stage, Malcolm decides that he will flee to England while Donalbain will go to Ireland.

### Scene 4

Ross and an old man discuss the unnatural events that have taken place recently: days are as dark as nights, owls hunt falcons, and Duncan's horses have gone mad and eaten each other. When Macduff enters, Ross asks whether the culprit has been discovered. Macduff tells him that the bodyguards killed the king. The hasty flight on the part of Malcolm and Donalbain, however, has also cast suspicion on the two sons as well. Ross comments that Macbeth will surely be named the next king, to which Macduff responds that he has already been named and has gone to Scone to be crowned. Ross leaves for Scone to see the coronation while Macduff heads home to Fife.

## 5.2.2 Analysis

Macbeth's famous soliloquy at the beginning of this act introduces an important theme: visions and hallucinations caused by guilt. The "dagger of the mind" that Macbeth sees is not "ghostly" or supernatural so much as a manifestation of the inner struggle that Macbeth feels as he contemplates the regicide. It "marshal[s] [him] the way [he] was going," leading him toward the bloody deed he has resolved to commit, haunting and perhaps also taunting him. The same can be said for the ghostly voice that Macbeth hears after he kills Duncan, as well as the ghost of Banquo that appears in Act 3. Indeed, almost all the supernatural elements in this play could be—and often are—read as psychological rather than ghostly occurrences.

*Notes* But if this is the case, one also wonders about the witches: are they, too, products of Macbeth's fevered mind? The fact that merely gives voice to the Macbeth's dormant ambitions would seem to confirm this idea, but this is countered by the fact that Banquo also sees the same witches and hears them speak.

The "dagger of the mind" is only one of many psychological manifestations in the play. As the bodyguards mutter "God bless us" in their drunken stupor, Macbeth finds that he is unable to utter the prayer word "Amen." A psychological literary analyst may perceive this as a physical inability to speak, caused by Macbeth's paralyzing doubt about the correctness of the murder. The inner world of the psyche thus imposes itself on the physical world. The same can be said for the voice that Macbeth hears crying "Macbeth shall sleep no more". An overwhelming sense of guilt will

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prevent "innocent sleep" from giving Macbeth respite from his tormented conscience. While he has consigned Duncan to eternal rest, he himself lives now in eternal anxiety.

In addition to his troubled existence, Macbeth's perturbed sleep can also be read as a metaphor for the troubled state of the country. In Macbeth—as with many other Shakespearean plays—there is a close and mirrored relationship between king and the country. In scene 4, for example, Ross reports that "by the clock 'tis day, / And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp". This image of the darkness strangling the light of day is a meteorological manifestation of the murder of Duncan; the light of nature is suffocated just as Duncan's life is extinguished. Victorian writer John Ruskin called such mirroring of a character's psychological state in inanimate natural objects "pathetic fallacy." In animate natural objects too, a similar mirroring occurs. The old man describes Duncan's noble horses eating each other and an owl eating a falcon—events that echo the slaughter of Duncan by Macbeth. Thus the unnatural death of Duncan plunges the country into both physical and spiritual turmoil.

The image of an owl hunting a falcon is part of a greater framework of symbolism surrounding birds in the play. When Duncan approaches Inverness in Act 1, for example, he comments on the martlets that he sees nesting on the castle walls. He takes this as a good sign—martlets are lucky birds. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, mentions earlier in this scene that there are ravens croaking on the battlements. She takes this as a harbinger of Duncan's death. Duncan, the trusting optimist, sees lucky birds, whereas Lady Macbeth sees ominous ones. One sign does not exclude the other: for Duncan, "fair" becomes "foul" as the lucky martlets metamorphose into the deadly ravens.

In Act 2, characters discuss or see birds in almost every scene. While Lady Macbeth is waiting for Macbeth to finish killing Duncan, for example, she hears an owl hooting and calls the owl a "fatal bellman"—a bird whose call is like a bell tolling for Duncan's death. The owl could also be "fatal" as an instrument of Fate, just as Macbeth is in some ways an instrument of Fate through the intervention of the Weird Sisters (keeping in mind that "wyrd" derives from the Old English word for "fate"). In this respect, one observes a mirroring between Macbeth and the owl: both hunt at night; the owl is observed killing a falcon, just as Macbeth kills Duncan.

Over the course of Macbeth, dreams, symbols, fantasy, and visions impinge upon the "real world." The witches' fantastic prophecy is realized. The "dagger of the mind" points the way to a murder committed with a real dagger. And in the Porter scene, the Porter imagining that he guards the gate to Hell ironically creates a gate of "real" hell caused by regicide. When the Porter opens the gate for the thanes, he mentions that he and his friends were out "carousing till the second cock". This statement calls to mind the cock that crows in the New Testament after Peter betrays Jesus by denying knowledge of hims. In Macbeth, the betrayal occurs in a more active form as Macbeth murders Duncan after the crows of the cock.

## 5.3 Act 3

### 5.3.1 Scenes 1-6

#### Scene 1

Alone at Macbeth's court, Banquo voices his suspicions that Macbeth has killed Duncan in order to fulfill the witches' prophesies. He muses that perhaps the witches' vision for his own future will also be realized, but pushes the thought from his mind. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth enter to the fanfare of trumpets, along with Lennox and Ross. Macbeth announces that he will hold a banquet in the evening and that Banquo will be honored as chief guest. Banquo states that he must ride in the afternoon but will return for the banquet. Macbeth tells him that Malcolm and Donalbain will not confess to killing their father. After confirming that Fleance will accompany Banquo on his trip, Macbeth wishes Banquo a safe ride.

Left alone, Macbeth summons the two murderers he has hired. While he waits for them, he voices his greatest worry of the moment—that the witches' prophecy will also come true for Banquo, making

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his children kings. He will put an end to such worries by hiring two men to kill Banquo and Fleance. The men are not professional assassins, but rather poor men who are willing to work as mercenaries. Macbeth has already blamed their current state of poverty on Banquo. He now tells them that while Banquo is his own enemy as much as theirs, loyal friends of Banquo's prevent him from killing Banquo himself. Macbeth proceeds to detail the particulars of the murder: they must attack him as he returns from his ride—at a certain distance from the palace—and they must also kill Fleance at the same time.

### Scene 2

Alone on stage, Lady Macbeth expresses her unhappiness: there seems to be no end to her desire for power and she feels insecure and anxious. Macbeth enters looking upset and she counsels him to stop mulling over the crimes they have committed. But Macbeth declares that their job is not done: he still spends every waking moment in fear and every night embroiled in nightmares. He even envies Duncan, who now sleeps peacefully in his grave. Lady Macbeth warns him to act cheerful in front of their dinner guests. She also tries to comfort him by reminding him that Banquo and Fleance are by no means immortal. Macbeth responds by telling her that "a deed of dreadful note" will be done in the night, though he will not divulge the details.

### Scene 3

The two murderers are joined by a third, who says that he has also been hired by Macbeth. Horses are heard approaching and Banquo and Fleance enter. The murderers attack Banquo but Fleance manages to escape. The murderers leave to report back to Macbeth.

### Scene 4

At the banquet, a murderer arrives and reports to Macbeth just as the dinner guests begin to arrive. He informs Macbeth that Banquo is dead but Fleance has escaped. Shaken, Macbeth thanks him for what he has done and arranges another meeting on the following day. The murderer leaves and Macbeth returns to the feast.

Looking over the table, Macbeth declares that the banquet would be perfect if only Banquo were present. At this point Banquo's ghost appears unobserved and takes Macbeth's seat. The guests urge Macbeth to sit and eat with them but Macbeth says that the table is full. When Lennox points to Macbeth's empty seat, Macbeth is shocked to see Banquo's ghost. He addresses the ghost, saying, "Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake / Thy gory locks at me". The guests, confused by his behavior, think that he is ill. Lady Macbeth reassures them, however, by saying that he has had similar fits since youth and that he will soon be well. She draws Macbeth aside and attempts to calm him by asserting that the vision is merely a "painting of [his] fear"—just like the dagger he saw earlier. Ignoring her, Macbeth charges the ghost to speak but it disappears. After Lady Macbeth scolds him for being "unmanned in folly", Macbeth returns to his guests and claims that he has "a strange infirmity," which they should ignore.

Just as the party resumes and Macbeth is offering a toast to Banquo, the ghost reappears. As Macbeth once again bursts out in a speech directed at the ghost, Lady Macbeth tries to smooth things over with the guests. In response to Macbeth's exclamation that he sees sights that make his cheeks "blanched with fear," Ross asks what sights Macbeth means. Lady Macbeth asks the guests to leave, since Macbeth's "illness" seems to be deteriorating. Alone with Lady Macbeth, Macbeth expresses his deep anxieties and vows to return to the Weird Sisters.

### Scene 5

On the heath, the witches meet Hecate, queen of witches, who chastises them for meddling in Macbeth's affairs without involving her or showing him any fancy magic spectacles. She tells them that Macbeth will visit them tomorrow and that they must put on a more dramatic show for him.

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### Scene 6

Lennox and another lord discuss politics. Lennox comments sarcastically on the recent deaths of Duncan and Banquo. He suggests that it seems implausible for Malcolm and Donalbain to be inhuman enough to kill their father. Moreover, Macbeth's slaying of the bodyguards seemed very convenient, since they probably would have denied killing Duncan. Lennox proposes that if Malcolm, Donalbain, and Fleance were in Macbeth's prison, they would also probably be dead now. He also reveals that since Macduff did not attend Macbeth's feast, he has been denounced. The lord with whom Lennox speaks comments that Macduff has joined Malcolm at the English court. The two men have apparently asked Siward to lead an army against Macbeth. Lennox and the lord send their prayers to Macduff and Malcolm.

## 5.3.2 Analysis

The "is a man" theme recurs in Macbeth's address to the murderers. When Macbeth demands whether the murderers have the courage to kill Banquo, they answer "we are men, my liege". But their answer does not satisfy Macbeth, who berates them as less-than-exemplary examples of men. Macbeth thus uses very much the same goading tactics his wife used in compelling him to kill Duncan. But what does it mean, exactly, to "be a man"? Both Macbeth and his Lady seem to have a clear idea of properly masculine actions. In Act 1, Lady Macbeth suggests that masculinity is largely a question of ruthlessness: one must be willing to "das[h] the brains out" of one's own baby. She claims that she herself is less "full o' th' milk of human kindness" than Macbeth—that is, more capable of casting away the last shreds of compassion, tenderness, loyalty, and guilt.

Lady Macbeth is not the only character that values ruthlessness as a masculine trait. Duncan, too, evaluates heroic action on a rather gory scale. When the captain describes how Macbeth "unseamed [Macdonald] from the nave to th' chops" with "his brandished steet/Which smoked of bloody execution," Duncan responds with high praise: "O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman"! A "real man" in Macbeth, then, is one who is capable of copious bloodshed without remorse. The catch, of course, is that the bloodshed must be justified. Whereas Macbeth needs no reason to slay Macdonald in battle per se, the two murderers require the justification that Banquo is an evil man.

As for the terms of murder, Macbeth warns the murderers to kill Fleance and thus "leave no rubs nor botches in the work". Macbeth "require[s] a clearness"—that is, a clearance from suspicion but also a mental and physical cleanliness. The theme of stains and washing runs throughout the play. From Macbeth's cry about all "great Neptune's ocean" in Act 2, to his instructions to the murderers in Act 3, to Lady Macbeth's famous "Out, damned spot" speech in Act 5, the Macbeths are haunted by the idea that they will be forever stained. Even when Macbeth has Banquo killed at a safe distance from himself, the spilled blood still returns to haunt Macbeth. When the murderer shows up to report his success, Macbeth observes: "There's blood upon thy face". The blood itself serves a sign and reminder of the Macbeths' culpability—ultimately driving Lady Macbeth mad.

Banquo's murder itself makes use of a common theme in Shakespeare's plays: the contrast between light and dark. While the murderers wait for Banquo and Fleance to approach, one of them observes that the sun is setting. This is no coincidence: Banquo serves as a bright contrast to the dark night that accompanies Macbeth's rise to power. He is a man who does not allow his ambitions to eclipse his conscience. At the moment that he dies, therefore, it is appropriate for the last remnant of sunlight to fade away. Such symbolism is reinforced by the fact that Banquo and Fleance approach the murderers carrying a torch. The torchlight is the first thing that the murderers see: "a light, a light" notes the second murderer. And after the deed is finished, the third murderer asks: "who did strike out the light?". At the same moment that the good and kind Banquo dies, the light is extinguished.

Another aspect of Banquo's murder has intrigued generations of scholars: who is the third murderer? Some believe that it is Lady Macbeth, who expressed curiosity about Macbeth's plans in Scene 2.

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Others believe that it is Macbeth himself, who could not trust the murderers fully. The third murderers could even be the three witches in disguise. In any case, introducing a third murderer rounds out the number of murderers so that they balance the three witches. There is power in the number three: Macbeth meets three witches, commits three separate murders, and sees three apparitions. The number three recurs throughout the play, adding to its mysterious and magic atmosphere.

Finally, one of the most compelling scenes in Macbeth takes place at the banquet haunted by Banquo's ghost. Once again, the boundaries between reality and the supernatural are blurred as Banquo's ghost appears twice—both at exactly the moment Macbeth mentions him. It seems that the vision of Banquo accompanies the idea of Banquo in Macbeth's mind. The ghost thus seems more like the manifestation of an idea—a figment of the imagination—rather than a "real" ghost. Lady Macbeth says as much when she pulls Macbeth aside: "This is the very painting of your fear; /This is the air-drawn dagger which you said/Led you to Duncan". Just like the dagger, Banquo's ghost appears to be a realization of Macbeth's guilt. Even if the occurrence is supernatural, the event is very real for Macbeth.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The play Macbeth figures wich of the following important themes?
   (a) Fate, prophecy, and equivocation
   (b) Fate
   (c) Prophecy
   (d) Equivocation.
2. Macbeth's famous soliloquy at the beginning of Act 2 introduces an important theme
   (a) dagger of the mind
   (b) visions and hallucinations caused by guilt
   (c) Supernatural manifestations
   (d) inner struggle contemplating the regicide.
3. The 'is a man' theme recurs in
   (a) Act 1
   (b) Act 2
   (c) Act 3
   (d) all the acts 1-3.

Fill in the blanks:

4. The play figures equivocation as one of its most important .....
5. The oracular sisters are in fact connected..... to the Fates of Greek mythology.
6. Lady Macbeth is not the only character that values ruthlessness as a .....
7. Banquo's murder makes use of contrast between light and dark ..... in Shakespeare's plays.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. This kind of equivocation is similar to lying; it is intentionally designed to mislead and confuse.

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9. Macbeth's famous soliloquy at the beginning of Act 2 introduces an important theme—prophecy by guilt.
10. One of the most compelling scenes in Macbeth takes place at the banquet haunted by Banquo's ghost.

## 5.4 Act 4

### 5.4.1 Scenes

#### Scene 1

The witches circle a cauldron, mixing in a variety of grotesque ingredients while chanting "double, double toil and trouble;/Fire burn, and cauldron bubble". Hecate appears, they sing all together, and Hecate leaves. Macbeth then enters, demanding answers to his pressing questions about the future. The witches complete their magic spell and summon forth a series of apparitions. The first is an armed head that warns Macbeth to beware the Thane of Fife (Macduff). The second apparition is a bloody child, who tells him that "none of woman born/Shall harm Macbeth". This news bolsters Macbeth spirits. The third apparition is a crowned child with a tree in its hand, who says that "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until/Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill/Shall come against him". This cheers Macbeth even more, since he knows that nothing can move a forest. Macbeth proceeds to ask his last question: will Banquo's children ever rule Scotland?

The cauldron sinks and a strange sound is heard. The witches now show Macbeth a procession of kings, the eighth of whom holds a mirror in his hand, followed by Banquo. As Banquo points at this line of kings, Macbeth realizes that they are indeed his family line. After the witches dance and disappear, Lennox enters with the news that Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth resolves that he will henceforth act immediately on his ambitions: the first step will be to seize Fife and kill Macduff's wife and children.

#### Scene 2

At Fife, Ross visits Lady Macduff, who is frightened for her own safety now that her husband has fled. He reassures her by telling her that her husband did only what was right and necessary. After he leaves, Lady Macduff engages her son in a conversation about his missing father. The little boy demonstrates wisdom well beyond his years. A messenger interrupts them with a warning to flee the house immediately. But before Lady Macduff can escape, murderers attack the house and kill everyone including Lady Macduff and her son.

#### Scene 3

Macduff arrives at the English court and meets with Malcolm. Malcolm, remembering his father's misplaced trust in Macbeth, decides to test Macduff: he confesses that he is a greedy, lustful, and sinful man who makes Macbeth look like an angel in comparison. Macduff despairs and says that he will leave Scotland forever if this is the case, since there seems to be no man fit to rule it. Upon hearing this, Malcolm is convinced of Macduff's goodness and reveals that he was merely testing him; he has none of these faults to which he has just confessed. In fact, he claims, the first lie he has ever told was this false confession to Macduff. He then announces that Siward has assembled an army of ten thousand men and is prepared to march on Scotland.

A messenger appears and tells the men that the king of England is approaching, attended by a crowd of sick and despairing people who wish the king to cure them. The king, according to Malcolm, has a gift for healing people simply by laying his hands on them.

Ross arrives from Scotland and reports that the country is in a shambles. When Macduff asks how his wife and children are faring, Ross first responds that they are "well at peace". When pressed

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further, he relates the story of their death. Macduff is stunned speechless and Malcolm urges him to cure his grief by exacting revenge on Macbeth. Macduff is overcome with guilt and sorrow from the murders that occurred while he was absent. Again Malcolm urges him to put his grief to good use and seek revenge. All three men leave to prepare for battle.

## 5.4.2 Analysis

As the act opens, the witches carry on the theme of doubling and equivocation that threads throughout the play. As they throw ingredients into their cauldron, they chant "double, double, toil and trouble"—a reminder that their speech is full of double meanings, paradox, and equivocation. The apparitions that the witches summon give equivocal messages to Macbeth, and they appear to know quite consciously that he will only understand one half of their words. Although Macbeth himself has previously acknowledged that "stones have been known to move and trees to speak", the apparitions give Macbeth a false sense of security. He takes the apparitions' words at face value, forgetting to examine how their predictions could potentially come true.

*Example*: The theme of doubling is amplified when the witches summon the "show of kings." Each king who appears looks "too like the spirit of Banquo," frightens Macbeth with their resemblance. For Macbeth, it is as if the ghosts of Banquo have returned to haunt him several times over. In the procession of kings, Macbeth also notes that some carry "twofold balls and treble scepters"—as if even the signs of their power have been doubled.

On a historical note, it is generally thought the eighth king holds up a mirror in order to pander to James I. This last king—the eighth-generation descendant of Banquo—is none other than a figure of James I himself. He thus carries a mirror to signal as much to the real James I, who sits at the forefront of the audience. A similar moment of pandering occurs when Malcolm notes that the king of England has a special power to heal people affected by "the evil". In various subtle ways, Shakespeare complimented King James I—a legendary descendant of Banquo and author of a book on witchcraft.

James I is not the only character who is doubled in Macbeth. Throughout the play, characters balance and complement each other in a carefully constructed harmony. As a man who also receives a prophecy but refuses to act actively upon it, Banquo serves as sort of inverse mirror image of Macbeth. Although he has troubled dreams like Macbeth, his arise from the suppression of ambitions whereas Macbeth's arise from the fulfillment thereof. Other major characters, including Malcolm, Macduff, and Lady Macbeth, can also be seen as foils or doubles for Macbeth. Particularly interesting is the case of Lady Macbeth, who in some sense "switches roles" with Macbeth as the play progresses. Whereas she first advises Macbeth to forget all remorse and guilt, Lady Macbeth becomes increasingly troubled by her own guilt as Macbeth begins to heed her advice.

Another form of doubling or equivocation is found in the theme of costumes, masks, and disguises. While planning Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth counsels Macbeth to "look like the innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't"—to "beguile the time" by disguising his motives behind a mask of loyalty. After the murder, Lady Macbeth paints the bodyguards' faces with a mask of blood to implicate them. Similarly, while preparing to kill Banquo, Macbeth comments that men must "make [their] faces visors to [their] hearts, / Disguising what they are". Thus when Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty, he begins appropriately by saying that "all things foul would wear the brows of grace" (IV iii 23). Even the most foul of men—perhaps like Macbeth and the murderers—are able to disguise themselves. Just as the witches' equivocation covers up the true harm within their alluring words, disguises and masks hide the inner world from the outer.

Finally, during the scene in which the murders occur, Lady Macduff reflects the bird symbolism that began in Act 1. When Lady Macduff complains to Ross about the abrupt departure of Macduff, she states: "the poor wren / the most diminutive of birds, will fight,/her young ones in her nest,

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against the owl". Her metaphor comes to life when she and her son are attacked by Macbeth's men. Macbeth, as earlier established, is identified with the owl; so Lady Macduff, trying to protect her son, becomes the wren in a realization of her own figure of speech. It is with particular pathos that the audience sees Macduff's precocious son fall prey to the swords of Macbeth's ruthless murderers.

## 5.5 Act 5

### 5.5.1 Scenes

#### Scene 1

At the Scottish royal home of Dunsinane, a gentlewoman has summoned a doctor to observe Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking. The doctor reports that he has watched her for two nights now and has yet to see anything strange. The gentlewoman describes how she has seen Lady Macbeth rise, dress, leave her room, write something on a piece of paper, read it, seal it, and return to bed—all without waking up. The gentlewoman dares not repeat what Lady Macbeth says while thus sleepwalking.

The two are interrupted by a sleepwalking Lady Macbeth, who enters carrying a candle. The gentlewoman reports that Lady Macbeth asks to have a light by her all night. The doctor and the gentlewoman watch as Lady Macbeth rubs her hands as if washing them and says "Yet here's a spot. . . Out, damned spot; out I say". As she continues to "wash" her hands, her words betray her guilt to the two onlookers. Lady Macbeth seems to be reliving the events on the night of Duncan's death. She cannot get the stain or smell of blood off her hand: "What, will these hands ne'er be clean. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand". As the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth imagines she hears knocking at the gate and returns to her chamber, the doctor concludes that Lady Macbeth needs a priest's help and not a physician's. He takes his leave, asserting that he and the gentlewoman had better not reveal what they have seen or heard.

#### Scene 2

The thanes Menteith, Caithness, Angus, and Lennox march with a company of soldiers toward Birnam Wood, where they will join Malcolm and the English army. They claim that they will "purge" the country of Macbeth's sickening influence.

#### Scene 3

At Dunsinane, Macbeth tires of hearing reports of nobles who have defected to join the English forces. He feels consoled; however, by the witches' prophesy that he has nothing to fear until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane, or until he counters a man not born of woman. Since both of the events seem impossible, Macbeth feels invincible.

A servant enters with the news that the enemy has rallied a thousand men but Macbeth sends him away, scolding him for cowardice. After calling for his servant Seyton to help him put on his armor, Macbeth demands the doctor's prognosis about Lady Macbeth. The doctor replies that she is "not so sick" but troubled with visions. In some way or other, she must cure herself of these visions—an answer that displeases Macbeth. As attendants put on his armor, he declares that he would applaud the doctor if he could analyze the country's urine and therein derive a medicine for Lady Macbeth. Abruptly, Macbeth leaves the room, professing once again that he will not fear "death and bane" until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane. Aside, the doctor confesses that he would like to be as far away from Dunsinane as possible.

#### Scene 4

Malcolm, Siward, Young Siward, Macduff, Mentieth, Caithness, and Angus march toward Birnam Wood. As they approach the forest, Malcolm instructs the soldiers to cut off branches and hold

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them up in order to disguise their numbers. Siward informs Malcolm that Macbeth confidently holds Dunsinane, waiting for their arrival. Malcolm comments that almost all of Macbeth's men have deserted him. The army marches on.

### Scene 5

Macbeth orders his men to hang his banners on the outer walls of the castle, claiming that it will hold until the attackers die of famine. If only the other side were not reinforced with men who deserted him, he claims, he would not think twice about rushing out to meet the English army head-on. Upon hearing the cry of a woman within, Macbeth comments that he has almost forgotten the taste of fears. Seyton returns and announces the death of Lady Macbeth. Seemingly unfazed, Macbeth comments that she should have died later, at a more appropriate time.

A messenger enters and reports that he has seen something unbelievable: as he looked out toward Birnam Wood, it appeared that the forest began to move toward the castle. Macbeth is stunned and begins to fear that the witch's words may come true after all. He instructs his men to ring the alarm.

### Scene 6

Malcolm tells his soldiers that they are near enough to the castle now to throw down the branches they carry. He announces that Siward and Young Siward will lead the first battle. He and Macduff will follow behind. The trumpeters sound a charge.

### Scene 7

Macbeth waits on the battlefield to defend his castle. He feels like a bear that has been tied to a stake for dogs to attack. Young Siward enters and demands his name. Macbeth responds that he will be afraid to hear it. Macbeth kills Young Siward in the ensuing duel, commenting that Young Siward must have been "born of woman".

### Scene 8

Macduff enters alone and shouts a challenge to Macbeth, swearing to avenge the death of his wife and children. As he exists, he asks Fortune to help him find Macbeth.

### Scene 9

Malcolm and Siward enter and charge the castle.

### Scene 10

Macbeth enters, asserting that he should not "play the Roman fool" and commit suicide. Macduff finds him and challenges him. Macbeth replies that he has thus far avoided Macduff but that he is now ready to fight. As they fight, Macbeth tells him that he "bears a charmed life": he will only fall to a man who is not born of woman. Macduff replies that the time has come for Macbeth to despair: "let the angel whom thou still hast served / Tell thee Macduff was from his mother's womb / Untimely ripped"—Macduff was born through the equivalent of a caesarian section. Hearing this, Macbeth quails and says that he will not fight. Macduff replies by commanding him to yield and become the laughing stock of Scotland under Malcolm's rule. This enrages Macbeth, who swears he will never yield to swear allegiance to Malcolm. They fight on and thus exit.

### Scene 11

Malcolm, Siward, and the other thanes enter. Although they have won the battle, Malcolm notes that Macduff and Young Siward are missing. Ross reports that Young Siward is dead and eulogizes

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him by stating that "he only lived but till he was a man,/the which no sooner had his prowess confirmed / in the unshrinking station where he fought,/But like a man he died". After confirming that his son's wounds were on his front—in other words, that the Young Siward died bravely in battle—Siward declares that he not wish for a better death for his son.

Macduff enters, carrying Macbeth's severed head and shouting "Hail, King of Scotland!" The men echo this shout and the trumpets flourish as Malcolm accepts the kingship. Malcolm announces that he will rename the current thanes as earls. He will call back all the men whom Macbeth has exiled and will attempt to heal the scarred country. All exit towards Scone, where Malcolm will be crowned as King of Scotland.

### 5.5.2 Analysis

Until Act 5, Macbeth has been tormented with visions and nightmares while Lady Macbeth has derided him for his weakness. Now the audience witnesses the way in which the murders have also preyed on Lady Macbeth. In her sleepwalking, Lady Macbeth plays out the theme of washing and cleansing that runs throughout the play. After killing Duncan, she flippantly tells Macbeth that "a little water clears us of this deed". But the deed now returns to haunt Lady Macbeth in her sleep. Lady Macbeth's stained hands are reminiscent of the biblical mark of Cain—the mark that God placed on Cain for murdering his brother Abel. But Cain's mark is a sign from God that protects Cain from the revenge of others. Lady Macbeth's mark does not protect her from death, as she dies only a few scenes later.

*Notes* The doctor's behavior in Act 5 Scene 3 resembles that of a psychoanalyst. Like a Freudian psychoanalyst, the doctor observes Lady Macbeth's dreams and uses her words to infer the cause of her distress. Lady Macbeth's language in this scene betrays her troubled mind in many ways. Her speech in previous acts has been eloquent and smooth.

In this speech, Lady Macbeth makes use of metaphor (Duncan's honor is "deep and broad"), metonymy (he honors "our house," meaning the Macbeths themselves), and hyperbole ("in every point twice done and then done double"). Her syntax is complex but the rhythm of her speech remains smooth and flowing, in the iambic pentameter used by noble characters in Shakespearean plays. What a contrast it is, therefore, when she talks in her sleep in Act 5!

Out, damned spot, out, I say! One. Two. Why then, 'tis time to don't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him. . . The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that. You mar all with this starting.

In this speech, Lady Macbeth's language is choppy, jumping from idea to idea as her state of mind changes. Her sentences are short and unpolished, reflecting a mind too disturbed to speak eloquently. Although she spoke in iambic pentameter before, she now speaks in prose—thus falling from the noble to the prosaic.

Lady Macbeth's dissolution is swift. As Macbeth's power grows, indeed, Lady Macbeth's has decreased. She began the play as a remorseless, influential voice capable of sweet-talking Duncan and of making Macbeth do her bidding. In the third act Macbeth leaves her out of his plans to kill Banquo, refusing to reveal his intentions to her. Now in the last act, she has dwindled to a mumbling sleepwalker, capable only of a mad and rambling speech. Whereas even the relatively unimportant Lady Macduff has a stirring death scene, Lady Macbeth dies offstage. When her death is reported to Macbeth, his response is shocking in its cold apathy.

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As the play nears its bloody conclusion, Macbeth's tragic flaw comes to the forefront: like Duncan before him, his character is too trusting. He takes the witches' prophesies at face value, never realizing that things are seldom what they seem—an ironic flaw, given his own treachery. He thus foolishly fortifies his castle with the few men who remain, banking on the fact that the events that the apparitions foretold could not come true. But in fact the English army does bring Birnam Wood to Dunsinane. And Macduff, who has indeed been "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb, advances to kill Macbeth. The witches have equivocated; they told him a double truth, concealing the complex reality within a framework that seems simple.

It is fitting that the play ends as it began—with a victorious battle in which a valiant hero kills a traitor and holds high the severed head. The first we hear of Macbeth in Act 1 is the story of his bravery in battle, wherein he decapitated Macdonwald's and displayed it on the castle battlements. At the end of the tragedy, Macbeth—himself a traitor to Duncan and his family—is treated in exactly the same manner. After killing Macbeth, Macduff enters with Macbeth's severed head and exclaims "behold where stands / Th'usurper's cursed head" the play thus ends with the completion of a parallel structure.

One moral of the story is that the course of fate cannot be changed. The events that the Weird Sisters predicted and set in motion at the beginning of the play happen exactly as predicted, no matter what the characters do to change them. Macbeth tries his hardest to force fate to work to his bidding, but to no avail. Banquo still becomes the father of kings and Macbeth still falls to a man not born of woman. The man who triumphs in the end is the one who did nothing to change the fate prescribed for him. The prophecy is self-fulfilling.

*Task* Illustrate that fate can not be changed in context of the play Macbeth.

The river of time thus flows on, despite the struggles of man. Although Macbeth's reign of terror has made "the frame of things disjoint," by the end of the play the tide of time has smoothed over Scotland. The unnatural uprising of Macbeth now in the past, Macduff comments that "the time is free". And Macbeth's life proves to be indeed a "tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". Time washes over his meaningless, bloody history: Banquo's family will give rise to the line of Stuart kings and Malcolm will regain the throne his father left him—all exactly as if Macbeth had never dared to kill Duncan.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. As the act 4 opens, the witches carry on the theme
    (a) doubling and equivocation
    (b) prophecy
    (c) doubling
    (d) equivocation.

12. In her sleepwalking, Lady Macbeth plays out which of the following theme that runs throughout the play?
    (a) Prophecy and equivocation
    (b) Washing and cleansing
    (c) Wickedness
    (d) Cleansing and wickedness.

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13. Which of the following statements about Lady Macbeth is not correct?
    (a) Lady Macbeth's dissolution is swift
    (b) Lady Macbeth's language is choppy
    (c) As Macbeth's power grows, Lady Macbeth's has also grows
    (d) Her state of mind changes.

Fill in the blanks:

14. As the act 4 opens, the witches carry on the theme of ..... and equivocation.
15. Another form of doubling or equivocation is found in the theme of ..... , masks, and disguises.
16. Until Act 5, Macbeth has been tormented with visions and ..... while Lady Macbeth has derided him for his weakness.
17. In her sleepwalking, Lady Macbeth plays out the theme of ..... and cleansing.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. On a historical note, it is generally thought the eighth king holds up a mirror in order to pander to James I.
19. While planning Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth counsels Macbeth to look like the innocent flower.
20. One moral of the story is that the course of fate can be changed.

## 5.6 Summary

- On a heath in Scotland, three witches, the Weird Sisters, wait to meet Macbeth amidst thunder and lightning.
- The conversation of three witches is filled with paradox and equivocation: they say that they will meet Macbeth "when the battle's lost and won" and when "fair is foul and foul is fair".
- The Scottish army is at war with the Norwegian army. Duncan, king of Scotland, meets a captain returning from battle.
- The Weird Sisters meet on the heath and wait for Macbeth. He arrives with Banquo, repeating the witches' paradoxical phrase by stating "So foul and fair a day I have not seen".
- Duncan demands to know whether the former Thane of Cawdor has been executed. His son Malcolm assures him that he has witnessed the former Thane's becoming death.
- At Inverness, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth that describes his meeting with the witches. She fears that his nature is not ruthless enough— he's "too full o' th' milk of human kindness" - to murder Duncan and assure the completion of the witches' prophesy.
- Duncan arrives at Inverness with Banquo and exchanges pleasantries with Lady Macbeth.
- Alone on stage, Macbeth agonizes over whether to kill Duncan, recognizing the act of murdering the king as a terrible sin.
- The play figures equivocation as one of its most important themes, just as the Porter in Act 2 extemporizes about the sin of equivocation.
- This kind of equivocation is similar to lying; it is intentionally designed to mislead and confuse. The intentional ambiguity of terms is what we see in the prophesies of the Weird Sisters.

  Just as their words are confusing, it is unclear as to whether the witches merely predict or actually affect the future.

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- The ambiguity of the Weird Sisters reflects a greater theme of doubling, mirrors, and schism between inner and outer worlds that permeates the work as a whole.
- Throughout the play, characters, scenes, and ideas are doubled.
- The corruption of nature is a theme that surfaces and resurfaces in the same act.
- The witches circle a cauldron, mixing in a variety of grotesque ingredients while chanting "double, double toil and trouble;/Fire burn, and cauldron bubble".
- As the act 4 opens, the witches carry on the theme of doubling and equivocation that threads throughout the play.
- On a historical note, it is generally thought the eighth king holds up a mirror in order to pander to James I.
- Another form of doubling or equivocation is found in the theme of costumes, masks, and disguises.
- At the Scottish royal home of Dunsinane, a gentlewoman has summoned a doctor to observe Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking.
- The two are interrupted by a sleepwalking Lady Macbeth, who enters carrying a candle.
- Until Act 5, Macbeth has been tormented with visions and nightmares while Lady Macbeth has derided him for his weakness. Now the audience witnesses the way in which the murders have also preyed on Lady Macbeth.
- As the play nears its bloody conclusion, Macbeth's tragic flaw comes to the forefront: like Duncan before him, his character is too trusting.
- One moral of the story is that the course of fate cannot be changed. The events that the Weird Sisters predicted and set in motion at the beginning of the play happen exactly as predicted, no matter what the characters do to change them.

## 5.7 Keywords

***Witch*** : A person, now especially a woman, who professes or is supposed to practice magic, especially black magic or the black art; sorceress.

***Fate*** : The universal principle or ultimate agency by which the order of things is presumably prescribed; the decreed cause of events; time.

***Prophecy*** : Something that is declared by a prophet, especially a divinely inspired prediction, instruction, or exhortation.

***Equivocation*** : The use of equivocal or ambiguous expressions, especially in order to mislead or hedge; prevarication.

***Remorse*** : Deep and painful regret for wrongdoing; compunction.

***Regicide*** : A person who kills a king or is responsible for his death, especially one of the judges who condemned Charles I of England to death.

***Equivocator*** : To use ambiguous or unclear expressions, usually to avoid commitment or in order to mislead; prevaricate or hedge.

***Fife*** : A high-pitched transverse flute used commonly in military and marching musical groups.

***Amen*** : A prayer word in the play Macbeth.

***Pathetic Fallacy*** : The endowment of nature, inanimate objects, etc., with human traits and feelings.

***Weird*** : Involving or suggesting the supernatural; unearthly or uncanny.

***Cauldron*** : A large pot used for boiling, esp one with handles.

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## 5.8 Review Questions

1. Critically analyse the act 1 and act 2.
2. Mention any two themes used in act 2 and act 3.
3. What is meant by equivocation?
4. Write short notes on the events of the following Acts:
   (a) Act 1 (b) Act 2 (c) Act 3
5. Write the two important scenes of
   (a) Act 4 (b) Act 5
6. Explain that the course of fate can not be changed.
7. Until Act 5, Macbeth has been tormented with visions and nightmares, illustrate this statement.
8. Illustrate the statement that the river of time flows on, despite the struggles of man in context of the play Macbeth.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. themes | 5. etymologically | 6. masculine trait |
| 7. theme | 8. True | 9. False |
| 10. True | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. doubling | 15. costumes |
| 16. nightmares | 17. washing | 18. True |
| 19. True | 20. False | |

## 5.9 Further Readings

*Books*

James Shapiro. 2006. *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*. Harper Perennial, UK.

William Shakespeare (A), G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin (eds.). 1996. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, UK.

Coursen, H. R. 1997. *Macbeth A Guide to the Play*. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, London.

*Online links*

http://www.shmoop.com/macbeth/

http://www.shmoop.com/macbeth/questions.html

http://dramamacbeth/macbethplotact.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature

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# Unit 6: Macbeth—Concept of Tragedy of Aristotle and its Application on Macbeth, Poetic Tragedy and Motifs

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Apply the Aristotle's tragedy on Macbeth;
- Explain the tragedy of character in Macbeth;
- Elaborate the tragedy of moral order;
- Illustrate the poetic tragedy in Macbeth;
- Enumerate the motifs in Macbeth.

## Introduction

According to Aristotle, tragedies had certain recognizable sections which most of our surviving plays follow. A prologue, spoken by one or two characters, introduces the play's setting and major action. The parodos brings the chorus into the orchestra to become an audience and respondent to the characters. The body of the play alternates between episodes involving the principle actors and choral odes sung and danced by the chorus, to allow for the actors to change costumes and indicate the passage of time. The exodos concludes the play with all performers leaving the stage. Plays were written entirely in verse, although lyric passages and dramatic dialogue differed considerably in style. Choral odes exhibit a wide variety of meters, nearly impossible to convey in translation, which indicate changes in mood and subject, whether religious, solemn, excited, etc. Actors spoke

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verse sounding more like common speech but using heightened rhetoric for specific purposes: rhesis, monody, agon, stychomythia are the major forms. These make up the formal elements of tragedy.

Here in this unit details of Aristotle's tragedy and its application on Macbeth has been given. Poetic tragedy and motifs have also been described in this unit.

## 6.1 Aristotle's Concept of Tragedy and its Application on Macbeth

*Macbeth* is an anomaly among Shakespeare's tragedies in certain critical ways. It is short: more than a thousand lines shorter than *Othello* and *King Lear*, and only slightly more than half as long as *Hamlet*. This brevity has suggested to many critics that the received version is based on a heavily cut source, perhaps a prompt-book for a particular performance. That brevity has also been connected to other unusual features: the fast pace of the first act, which has seemed to be "stripped for action"; the comparative flatness of the characters other than Macbeth; the oddness of Macbeth himself compared with other Shakespearean tragic heroes.

### 6.1.1 Tragedy of Character

At least since the days of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, analysis of the play has centred on the question of Macbeth's ambition, commonly seen as so dominant a trait that it defines the character. Johnson asserted that Macbeth, though esteemed for his military bravery, is wholly reviled. This opinion recurs in critical literature, and, according to Caroline Spurgeon, is supported by Shakespeare himself, who apparently intended to degrade his hero by vesting him with clothes unsuited to him and to make Macbeth look ridiculous by several nimisms he applies: His garments seem either too big or too small for him—as his ambition is too big and his character too small for his new and unrightful role as king. When he feels as if "dressed in borrowed clothes", after his new title as Thane of Cawdor, prophesied by the witches, has been confirmed by Rosse, Banquo comments: "New honours come upon him,/Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould,/But with the aid of use." And, at the end, when the tyrant is at bay at Dunsinane, Caithness sees him as a man trying in vain to fasten a large garment on him with too small a belt: "He cannot buckle his distemper'd cause/Within the belt of rule," while Angus, in a similar nimism, sums up what everybody thinks ever since Macbeth's accession to power: "now does he feel his title/Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe/upon a dwarfish thief."

Like Richard III, but without that character's perversely appealing exuberance, Macbeth wades through blood until his inevitable fall. As Kenneth Muir writes, "Macbeth has not a predisposition to murder; he has merely an inordinate ambition that makes murder itself seem to be a lesser evil than failure to achieve the crown." Some critics, such as E. E. Stoll, explain this characterisation as a holdover from Senecan or medieval tradition. Shakespeare's audience, in this view, expected villains to be wholly bad, and Senecan style, far from prohibiting a villainous protagonist, all but demanded it.

Yet for other critics, it has not been so easy to resolve the question of Macbeth's motivation. Robert Bridges, for instance, perceived a paradox: a character able to express such convincing horror before Duncan's murder would likely be incapable of committing the crime.

*Notes* For many critics, Macbeth's motivations in the first act appear vague and insufficient. John Dover Wilson hypothesised that Shakespeare's original text had an extra scene or scenes where husband and wife discussed their plans. This interpretation is not fully provable; however, the motivating role of ambition for Macbeth is universally recognised. The evil actions motivated by his ambition seem to trap him in a cycle of increasing evil, as Macbeth himself recognises: "I am in blood/Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,/Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

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### 6.1.2 Tragedy of Moral Order

The disastrous consequences of Macbeth's ambition are not limited to him. Almost from the moment of the murder, the play depicts Scotland as a land shaken by inversions of the natural order. Shakespeare may have intended a reference to the great chain of being, although the play's images of disorder are mostly not specific enough to support detailed intellectual readings. He may also have intended an elaborate compliment to James's belief in the divine right of kings, although this hypothesis, outlined at greatest length by Henry N. Paul, is not universally accepted. As in *Julius Caesar*, though, perturbations in the political sphere are echoed and even amplified by events in the material world. Among the most often depicted of the inversions of the natural order is sleep. Macbeth's announcement that he has "murdered sleep" is figuratively mirrored in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking.

Macbeth's generally accepted indebtedness to medieval tragedy is often seen as significant in the play's treatment of moral order. Glynne Wickham connects the play, through the Porter, to a mystery play on the harrowing of hell. Howard Felperin argues that the play has a more complex attitude toward "orthodox Christian tragedy" than is often admitted; he sees a kinship between the play and the tyrant plays within the medieval liturgical drama.

The theme of androgyny is often seen as a special aspect of the theme of disorder. Inversion of normative gender roles is most famously associated with the witches and with Lady Macbeth as she appears in the first act. Whatever Shakespeare's degree of sympathy with such inversions, the play ends with a thorough return to normative gender values. Some feminist psychoanalytic critics, such as Janet Adelman, have connected the play's treatment of gender roles to its larger theme of inverted natural order. In this light, Macbeth is punished for his violation of the moral order by being removed from the cycles of nature (which are figured as female); nature itself (as embodied in the movement of Birnam Wood) is part of the restoration of moral order.

### 6.1.3 Poetic Tragedy

Critics in the early twentieth century reacted against what they saw as an excessive dependence on the study of character in criticism of the play. This dependence, though most closely associated with Andrew Cecil Bradley, is clear as early as the time of Mary Cowden Clarke, who offered precise, if fanciful, accounts of the predramatic lives of Shakespeare's female leads. She suggested, for instance, that the child Lady Macbeth refers to in the first act died during a foolish military action.

#### Witchcraft and Evil

In the play, the Three Witches represent darkness, chaos, and conflict, while their role is as agents and witnesses. Their presence communicates treason and impending doom. During Shakespeare's day, witches were seen as worse than rebels, "the most notorious traitor and rebell that can be." They were not only political traitors, but spiritual traitors as well. Much of the confusion that springs from them comes from their ability to straddle the play's borders between reality and the supernatural. They are so deeply entrenched in both worlds that it is unclear whether they control fate, or whether they are merely its agents. They defy logic, not being subject to the rules of the real world. The witches' lines in the first act: "Fair is foul, and foul is fair: Hover through the fog and filthy air" are often said to set the tone for the rest of the play by establishing a sense of confusion. Indeed, the play is filled with situations where evil is depicted as good, while good is rendered evil.

*Did u know?* The line "Double, double toil and trouble," often sensationalized to a point that it loses meaning, communicates the witches' intent clearly: they seek only trouble for the mortals around them.

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While the witches do not tell Macbeth directly to kill King Duncan, they use a subtle form of temptation when they tell Macbeth that he is destined to be king. By placing this thought in his mind, they effectively guide him on the path to his own destruction. This follows the pattern of temptation many believed the Devil used at the time of Shakespeare. First, they argued, a thought is put in a man's mind, then the person may either indulge in the thought or reject it. Macbeth indulges in it, while Banquo rejects.

According to J. A. Bryant Jr., Macbeth also makes use of Biblical parallels, notably between King Duncan's murder and the murder of Christ.

*Example*: No matter how one looks at it, whether as history or as tragedy, Macbeth is distinctively Christian. One may simply count the Biblical allusions as Richmond Noble has done; one may go further and study the parallels between Shakespeare's story and the Old Testament stories of Saul and Jezebel as Miss Jane H. Jack has done; or one may examine with W. C. Curry the progressive degeneration of Macbeth from the point of view of medieval theology.

### 6.1.4 Motifs

A motif is a recurring element, event, idea, or theme in a story. Shakespeare, when writing Macbeth, included many different motifs that added depth to this magnificent work.

#### Blood

Blood is often used to symbolize guilt, or the lack of it. For example, Macbeth has just murdered King Duncan and feels horribly guilty for his deed. Duncan had thought rather fondly of Macbeth, and had trusted him after his previous Thane of Cawdor had betrayed him.

This means that he feels extremely guilty, and does not believe that he will ever be able to overcome it. Not even Neptune, the god of the sea, could wash all of the blood away. In fact, it would turn the ocean red with blood.

Macbeth describes Duncan as having had "golden blood," which contrasts with his own. Duncan had no guilt and had done nothing to anger Macbeth, or to make him worthy of being murdered. In spite of this fact, Macbeth still murdered King Duncan and contaminated his blood in the process.

Another example of the blood motif occurs in Act V. Macduff has come and challenged Macbeth to a sword fight to which Macbeth refused. This happened because Macbeth didn't want to shed anymore blood (kill people) than he already has and because more bloodshed is more guilt. Macbeth is already suffering from his guilt and more guilt would just cause more problems for him.

#### Manipulation

Another motif in Macbeth is manipulation. Many people throughout the play attempt to manipulate others in order to fit their own needs and desires.

A prime example of this is with Lady Macbeth. She uses her influence with her husband to convince to murder King Duncan. Previously, Macbeth had written her a letter telling her of the events that had occurred, including his new title. He had just become the Thane of Cawdor and, based on the witches' prophecy, was in line to become a king. This made him mention his thoughts of killing King Duncan, which brought out the desire for power in his wife. When he arrived at his own castle, he decides to go along with her new plan to poison and stab the King. However, he starts expressing doubt later in the night after considering the King's trust in him. At this point, Lady Macbeth continues using manipulation to try to convince him to go along with it.

A second, and major, example of manipulation in Macbeth is with the three witches. They give the prophecy to Macbeth, knowing that he and his wife will plan to murder King Duncan in order to fulfill it.

Notes

The witches yet manipulate Macbeths yet again near the end when they show him various confusing apparitions. Hecate commands tham to confuse Macbeth and give him a sense of security that will lead to his downfall. The first apparition, an armed head, warns Macbeth of Macduff. Macbeth then decides to have Macduff's family murdered. Macduff ends up killing Macbeth as revenge, showing how the witches manipulated Macbeth into his downfall.

The second apparition, a bloody child, tells Macbeth that none born of a woman can harm him. When Macbeth finally meets Macduff, Macbeth tells him this prophecy, but Macduff tells him that he was prematurely born through surgery. Once again, the witches succeeded in manipulating Macbeth by providing him with a false sense of security.

The third apparition, a crowned child with a tree in his hand, tells him that no one will harm him until the forest of Great Birnam Wood comes against him on Dunsinane Hill. The opposing forces take branches from the forest's tress and use them to hide themselves from Macbeth's forces.

### Reversal of Nature

One of the most common motifs in Macbeth is reversal of nature. This is prominent in role reversal between characters, unnatural weather, masculinity and femininity reversal, and unusual events.

We are first presented in Macbeth with the three witches, who show characteristics of their male counterparts such as a beard.

The second example of "reversal of nature" is with Lady Macbeth and her masculine characteristics when compared to the norm at the time and her husband's femininity. After she reads her husband's letter, she asks for the gods to "unsex" her and therefore, remove all feminine feeling from her mind. She takes charge over Macbeth, which was unusual for the time. Macbeth meanwhile falters under her manipulation. The weather also shows evidence of the reversal of the natural order.

### Hallucinations

Hallucination is an important motif for character development because it shows how the two main characters, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, slowly go insane. Their decreasing mental state is easily told by their various fits of hallucinations and visions.

Some of the first examples of this occur around Duncan's death. Macbeth believes that people are calling out in the night.

*Notes* After Macbeth commands the killing of Banquo, he sees Banquo's ghost sitting in his seat. This, like with the dagger, shows his regret in killing others. He ends up embarrassing himself in front of a group of lords whom he had invited to dinner. His wife tries to calm him, but in the end the lords are made to leave early.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the folowing is true about Macbeth?
   (a) It is tragedy
   (b) The Othello and KIng Lear are shorter than it
   (c) It is a comedy of manners
   (d) It is a comedy for class power struggle.

Notes

2. Macbeth is a tragedy of character as proved by
   (a) his character of high abmition
   (b) his ambition too big and his character too small for his new role as king
   (c) his character of a coward
   (d) his motivation to kill the others.

3. Which of the following motifs is not used in Macbeth?
   (a) Blood, manipulation, reversal of nature, and hallucination
   (b) Thinking, Blood, and manipulation
   (c) Kiling, blood, and manipulation
   (d) Thinking, killing, and blood.

Fill in the blanks:

4. A motif is a recurring element, event, idea, or theme in a .....
5. In the play, the Three Witches represent darkness, ....., and conflict.
6. The disastrous consequences of Macbeth's ..... are not limited to him.
7. Macbeth's generally accepted indebtedness to medieval tragedy is often seen as significant in the play's treatment of .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Blood is often used to symbolize guilt, or the lack of it.
9. Many people throughout the play attempt to manipulate others in order to fit their own needs and desires.
10. One of the most common motifs in Macbeth is killing.

## 6.2 Summary

- *Macbeth* is an anomaly among Shakespeare's tragedies in certain critical ways.
- It is short: more than a thousand lines shorter than *Othello* and *King Lear*, and only slightly more than half as long as *Hamlet*. This brevity has suggested to many critics that the received version is based on a heavily cut source, perhaps a prompt-book for a particular performance.
- At least since the days of Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, analysis of the play has centred on the question of Macbeth's ambition, commonly seen as so dominant a trait that it defines the character.
- Johnson asserted that Macbeth, though esteemed for his military bravery, is wholly reviled. This opinion recurs in critical literature, and, according to Caroline Spurgeon, is supported by Shakespeare himself, who apparently intended to degrade his hero by vesting him with clothes unsuited to him and to make Macbeth look ridiculous by several nimisms he applies: His garments seem either too big or too small for him—as his ambition is too big and his character too small for his new and unrightful role as king.
- The disastrous consequences of Macbeth's ambition are not limited to him. Almost from the moment of the murder, the play depicts Scotland as a land shaken by inversions of the natural order.
- Macbeth's generally accepted indebtedness to medieval tragedy is often seen as significant in the play's treatment of moral order.

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- The theme of androgyny is often seen as a special aspect of the theme of disorder.
- Inversion of normative gender roles is most famously associated with the witches and with Lady Macbeth as she appears in the first act.
- In the play, the Three Witches represent darkness, chaos, and conflict, while their role is as agents and witnesses. Their presence communicates treason and impending doom.
- While the witches do not tell Macbeth directly to kill King Duncan, they use a subtle form of temptation when they tell Macbeth that he is destined to be king. By placing this thought in his mind, they effectively guide him on the path to his own destruction.
- A motif is a recurring element, event, idea, or theme in a story. Shakespeare, when writing Macbeth, included many different motifs that added depth to this magnificent work.
- Blood is often used to symbolize guilt, or the lack of it.
- Many people throughout the play attempt to manipulate others in order to fit their own needs and desires.
- One of the most common motifs in Macbeth is reversal of nature. This is prominent in role reversal between characters, unnatural weather, masculinity and femininity reversal, and unusual events.
- Hallucination is an important motif for character development because it shows how the two main characters, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, slowly go insane.

## 6.3 Keywords

***Senecan*** : A member of the largest tribe of the iroquois Confederacy of North American Indians, formerly inhabiting western New York and being conspicuous in the wars south and west of Lake Erie.

***Moral order*** : This is the idea of a continuous cycle of life and death for one's soul.

***Mystery play*** : A medieval dramatic form based on a Biblical story, usually dealing with the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

***Liturgical drama*** : Medieval drama, based on incidents in the Bible and performed in churches on holy days, usually in Latin and often chanted.

***Androgyny*** : Being both male and female; hermaphroditic.

***Witchcraft*** : The art or practices of a witch; sorcery; magic.

***Treason*** : The offense of actinsg to overthrow one's government or to harm or kill its sovereign.

## 6.4 Review Questions

1. Define Aristotle tragedy.
2. Mention any two applications of Aristotle's tragedy to Macbeth.
3. What is meant by Poetic Tragedy?
4. Write short notes on the following terms:
   (a) Hallucinations (b) Reversal of nature (c) Blood
5. Write the two characters each of
   (a) Tragic character (b) Moral order (c) Motifs
6. Explain the application of the motifs blood, hallucination, and manipulations to Macbeth.

Notes

7. Explain tragedy of a character in context of Macbeth?
8. Elaborate the tragedy of moral order in Macbeth?

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (b) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. story | 5. chaos | 6. ambition |
| 7. moral order | 8. True | 9. True |
| 10. False | | |

## 6.5 Further Readings

*Books*

James Shapiro. 2006. *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*. Harper Perennial, UK.

William Shakespeare (A), G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin (eds.). 1996. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, UK.

Coursen, H. R. 1997. *MACBETH A Guide to the Play*. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, London.

*Online links*

http://macbethmotif.wikispaces.com/Hallucinations+Motif

http://www.shmoop.com/macbeth/questions.html

http://dramamacbeth/macbethplotact.shtml

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature

# Unit 7: Macbeth: Characterization and Superstition

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Elaborate the virtues of various characters in Macbeth;
- Explain the the weakness of Macbeth character, his vaulting ambition and the influence of Lady Macbeth on him;
- Illustrate the appearance of incidental characters in the play;
- Understands the superstition associated with Macbeth.

## Introduction

The *Tragedy of Macbeth* is a play by William Shakespeare about a regicide and its aftermath and revolves round a character Macbeth. Though the sources of this tragedy are accounts of King Macbeth of Scotland, Macduff, and Duncan in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), a history of England, Scotland and Ireland familiar to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the story bears little relation to real events in Scottish history, as Macbeth was an admired and able monarch. The characterization of the play is so remarkably generated that it seems a real happenings in the history. For example, at the beginning of the play Macbeth is the "bravest" soldier and the honorable Thane of Glamis. His rank and nobility are of great value, and he seems to be fit for his status. But his encounter with the witches awakens in him a deep impatient ambition. Immediately after the first prophecy of being Thane of Cawdor becomes true the "horrid image" of the murder of King Duncan in order to become king himself crosses his mind. He is not totally cold and solely ambitious as shown by his terror of

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the murder image, which thoroughly defies his loyalty. There is love in Macbeth as shown by his letter to Lady Macbeth in which he calls her his "dearest partner of greatness." Macbeth is already thinking about being king but he is undecided about whether it is better to succumb to the temptation presented by the witches or to wait for Fate to crown him. Banquo warns him that at times evil forces "tell us truths . . . to betray's in deepest consequence." Other characters also suit to their actions. For the strong character appeal the play has attracted some of the greatest actors in the roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. It has been adapted to film, television, opera, novels, comic books, and other media.

Here in this unit detail characterization of the play has been given. Detailed analysis of Macbeth and superstitions of various characters have also been dealt with in this unit.

## 7.1 Characterization

### Duncan, King of Scotland

A kindly and trusting older man, Duncan's unsuspecting nature leaves him open to Macbeth's betrayal. Both before and after the regicide, it is Duncan's particularly virtuous nature that enhances Macbeth's sense of guilt. The historic Duncan, incidentally, was a young man when he was betrayed by his general Macbeth.

### Malcolm and Donalbain, Duncan's Sons

Although Malcolm and Donalbain seem to have inherited Duncan's fairness, both display a cunning that far surpasses their father. After Duncan's death, they fear for their lives rightly and both flee Scotland. Malcolm also tests Macduff's loyalty whilst abroad by putting on dishonorable and corrupt airs. Such cunning, or shrewdness, allows for their successful return to the crown of Scotland.

### Macbeth, Thane of Glamis

Macbeth is a general in the king's army and originally the Thane of Glamis. As a reward for his valiant fighting, described in the opening scene, Macbeth is also named the Thane of Cawdor. Appropriately, the former Thane of Cawdor was a traitor to the crown who appeared loyal. At heart, Macbeth does not deserve the adjective "evil." To be sure, he commits regicide and eventually orders the death of women and children alike.

*Notes* Unlike Iago of *Othello* or Edmund of *King Lear*, Macbeth is not an explicitly malicious villain. His initial crime is a product of opportunistic prophecies, a weakness of character, his "vaulting ambition," and certainly the influence of Lady Macbeth. Thereafter, he is compelled to commit further crimes in an attempt to cover his tracks and defy the three witches' prophecy. After Duncan's death and the flight of Malcolm and Donalbain, Macbeth reigns as king of Scotland until his death.

### Lady Macbeth, Macbeth's Wife

What Macbeth lacks in decisiveness, Lady Macbeth makes up for in bloodthirsty lust for power and wealth. Swearing off her femininity at the beginning of the play, Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband powerfully to follow through with his plans to kill Duncan. After the act of regicide, it is Lady Macbeth who has the soundness of mind to plant the incriminating evidence on Duncan's guards. And yet, her firmness disintegrates gradually as the play progresses, leading to nightmares that haunt her and ultimately drive her to suicide. In this regard, Lady Macbeth appears to switch

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characters with Macbeth midway through the play. Although most famous for her cruelty and lines such as "unsex me here," the decline of Lady Macbeth is also of great interest and certainly a mysterious aspect of Macbeth.

*Task* Illucidate that Lady Macbeth has bloodthirsty lust for power and wealth while Macbeth lacks in decisiveness.

### Seyton, Macbeth's Servant

Macbeth's servant

### Banquo, Thane of Lochaber

A general in Duncan's army along with Macbeth, Banquo is also the subject of one of the witches' prophesies. Unlike Macbeth, however, Banquo does not act to fulfill these prophesies. He instead relies on his better judgement and morals. And true to the witches' words, his son Fleance escapes Macbeth's murderers to become a future king. Banquo is also important in that his ghost returns to haunt Macbeth, thus instilling a strong sense of uneasiness among Macbeth's servants.

### Fleance, Banquo's Son

Fleance is Banquo's son. He alone escapes from the ambush set by Macbeth for him and his father.

### Macduff, Thane of Fife

A Scottish nobleman who questions Macbeth's tyrannical rule and refuses to recognize him as king. Macduff follows Malcolm to England, where he demonstrates his true faithfulness to Scotland. When the English army marches on Dunsinane, it is Macduff who slays Macbeth in a duel. For even though Macbeth is said to be invincible against any man born of a woman, Macduff was born by the equivalent of a Caesarean section.

### Lady Macduff, Macduff's Wife

A kind and motherly foil for Lady Macbeth's lack of feminine sympathies, she is killed along with her children after Macduff flees Scotland.

### Lennox, a Scotish Noble

A Scottish noble who gradually questions Macbeth's tyrannical rule.

### Ross, Macbeth's Cousin

Macbeth's cousin, Ross is a Scottish noble who eventually turns on Macbeth, choosing to side with Malcolm and the English forces.

### Siward, Earl of Northumberland

As Duncan's brother, he leads the English army against Macbeth. His army disguises itself with branches from Birnam Wood, thereby fulfilling the witches' prophesy that Macbeth will fall only when "Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane." Siward is also a proud father, declaring his approval when his son dies bravely in battle.

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### Three Witches, the Weird Sisters

The witches foresee Macbeth's ascent to power and his defeat, as well as the succession of Banquo's line. Apparently without any real motive, their speech is full of paradox and equivocation. Although the witches do not have much character *per se*, they are in many ways central to the plot and themes of the play.

### Hecate, Queen of the Witches

Some critics believe that her character was added to the play by a later playwright.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Duncan's unsuspecting nature leaves him open to
   (a) Macbeth's betrayal
   (b) Macbeth's loyalty
   (c) Macbeth's guilt
   (d) betrayal by his army.
2. Which of the following statements about Macbeth is incorrect?
   (a) Macbeth is a general in the Duncan's army
   (b) Macbeth do deserve the adjective evil
   (c) Macbeth is also named the Thane of Cawdor
   (d) Macbeth is originally the Thane of Glamis.
3. Which of the following makes a difference between Macbeth and Banquo?
   (a) Macbeth is a general in the army of Duncan while Banquo is not
   (b) Macbeth is subject of one of the witches' prophesies while Banquo is not
   (c) Both are subject of one of the witches' prophesies but Banquo does not act to fulfill these prophesies
   (d) Macbeth betrays the king while Banquo does not.

Fill in the blanks:

4. Duncan's unsuspecting nature leaves him open to Macbeth's .....
5. After Duncan's death, both malcom and Donalbain, Duncan's sons fear for their lives rightly and both ..... Scotland.
6. Macduff is a Scottish nobleman who questions Macbeth's ..... and refuses to recognize him as king.
7. Siward, Duncan's brother, leads the English army against .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. The witches foresee Macbeth's ascent to power and the killing of Banquo.
9. Some critics believe that the character of hecate was added to the play by a later playwright.
10. Both before and after the regicide, it is Duncan's particularly virtuous nature that enhances Macbeth's sense of guilt.

## 7.2 Character of Macbeth

Notes

The first thought of acceding to the throne is suggested, and success in the attempt is promised, to Macbeth by the witches; he is therefore represented as a man whose natural temper would have deterred him from such a design if he had not been immediately tempted and strongly impelled to it.

A distinction between Richard III and Macbeth is made in the article of courage, though both are possessed of it even to an eminent degree; but in Richard it is intrepidity, and in Macbeth no more than resolution: in him it proceeds from exertion, not from nature; in enterprise he betrays a degree of fear, though he is able, when occasion requires, to stifle and subdue it. When he and his wife are concerting the murder, his doubt, 'If we should fail,' is a difficulty raised by apprehension; and as soon as that is removed by the contrivance of Lady Macbeth, he runs with violence into the other extreme of confidence. His question: 'Will it not be received,' and proceeds from that extravagance with which a delivery from apprehension and doubt is always accompanied. Then summoning all his fortitude, he proceeds to the bloody business without any further recoils. But a certain degree of restlessness and anxiety still continues, such as is constantly felt by a man not naturally very bold, worked up to a momentous achievement. His imagination dwells entirely on the circumstances of horror which surround him; the vision of the dagger; the darkness and the stillness of the night, etc... A resolution thus forced cannot hold longer than the immediate occasion for it: the moment after that is accomplished for which it was necessary, his thoughts take the contrary turn, and he cries out in agony and despair. He refuses to return to the chamber and complete his work. His disordered senses deceive him; he owns that 'every noise appals him.' He listens when nothing stirs; he mistakes the sounds he does hear; he is so confused, as not to distinguish whence the knocking proceeds. She, who is more calm, knows that it is at the south entry; she gives clear and distinct answers to all his incoherent questions, but he returns none to that which she puts to him. All his answers to the trivial questions of Lenox and Macduff are evidently given by a man thinking of something else; and by taking a tincture from the subject of his attention, they become equivocal.

Macbeth commits subsequent murders with less agitation than that of Duncan; but this is no inconsistency in his character; on the contrary, it confirms the principles upon which it is formed; for, besides his being hardened to the deeds of death, he is impelled by other motives than those which instigated him to assassinate his sovereign. In the one he sought to gratify his ambition; the rest are for his security; and he gets rid of fear by guilt, which, to a mind so constituted, may be the less uneasy sensation of the two. The anxiety which prompts him to the destruction of Banquo arises entirely from apprehension. For though one principle reason of his jealousy was the prophecy of the witches in favour of Banquo's issue, yet here starts forth another quite consistent with a temper not quite free from timidity. He is afraid of him personally; that fear is founded on the superior courage of the other, and he feels himself under an awe before him; a situation which a dauntless spirit can never get into. So great are these terrors that he betrays them to the murderers. As the murder is for his own security, the same apprehension which checked him in his designs upon Duncan, impel him to this upon Banquo.

*Task* "Macbeth commits subsequent murders with less agitation than that of Duncan." Illustrate this statement keeping in view the ambition of Macbeth.

Macbeth is always shaken upon great, and frequently alarmed upon trivial, occasions. Upon meeting the Witches, he is agitated much more than Banquo, who speaks to them first, and, the moment he sees them, asks them several particular and pertinent questions. But Macbeth, though he has had time to recollect himself, only repeats the same inquiry shortly, and bids them 'Speak, if you can:—

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What are you?' Which parts may appear to be injudiciously distributed; Macbeth being the principal personage in the play, and most immediately concerned in this particular scene, and it being to him that the Witches first address themselves. But the difference in their character accounts for such a distribution. Banquo's contemptuous defiance of the Witches seemed so bold to Macbeth, that he long after mentions it as an instance of his dauntless spirit, when he recollects that he 'chid the sisters.'

Macbeth has an acquired, though not a constitutional, courage, which is equal to all ordinary occasions; and if it fails him upon those which are extraordinary, it is however so well formed, as to be easily resumed as soon as the shock is over. But his idea never rises above manliness of character, and he continually asserts his right to that character; which he would not do if he did not take to himself a merit in supporting it. Upon the first appearance of Banquo's ghost, Lady Macbeth endeavors to recover him from his terror by summoning this consideration to his view: 'Are you a man,' 'Aye, and a bold one.' He puts in the same claim again, upon the ghost's rising again, and says, 'What man dare, I dare,' and on its disappearing finally, he says, 'I am a man again.' And even at the last, when he finds that the prophecy in which he had confided has deceived him by its equivocation, he says that 'it hath cow'd my better part of man.' In all which passages he is apparently shaken out of that character to which he had formed himself, but for which he relied only on exertion of courage, without supposing insensibility to fear.

Macbeth wants no disguise of his natural disposition, for it is not bad; he does not affect more piety than he has: on the contrary, a part of his distress arises from a real sense of religion: which makes him regret that he could not join the chamberlains in prayer for God's blessing, and bewail that he has 'given his eternal jewel to the common enemy of man.' He continually reproaches himself for his deeds; no use can harden him: confidence cannot silence, and even despair cannot stifle, the cries of his conscience. By the first murder he put 'rancours in the vessel of his peace;' and of the last he owns to Macduff, 'My soul is too much charged with blood of thine already.'

Against Banquo he acts with more determination, for the reasons which have been given: and yet he most unnecessarily acquaints the murderers with the reasons of his conduct; and even informs them of the behaviour he proposes to observe afterwards, which particularly and explanation to men who did not desire it; the confidence he places in those who could only abuse it; and the very needless caution of secrecy implied in this speech, are so many symptoms of a feeble mind; which again appears, when, after they had undertaken the business, he bids them 'resolve themselves apart;' and thereby leaves them an opportunity to retract, if they had not been more determined than he is, who supposes time to be requisite for settling such resolutions. His sending a third murderer to join the others, just at the moment of action, and without notice, is a further proof of the same imbecility.

Besides the proofs which have been given of these weaknesses in his character, through the whole conduct of his designs against Duncan and Banquo, another may be drawn from his attempt upon Macduff, whom he first sends for without acquainting Lady Macbeth of his intention, then betrays the secret, by asking her after the company have risen from the banquet, 'How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person At our great bidding?' 'Did you send to him, sir?' 'I hear it by the way: but I will send.' The time of making this enquiry when it has no relation to what has just passed otherwise than as his apprehension might connect it; the addressing of the question to her, who, as appears from what she says, knew nothing of the matter—and his awkward attempt then to disguise it, are strong evidence of the disorder of his mind.

## 7.3 Superstition on Various Characters of Macbeth

### 7.3.1 Few Examples

While many today would say that any misfortune surrounding a production is mere coincidence, actors and other theatre people often consider it bad luck to mention Macbeth by name while inside

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a theatre, and sometimes refer to it indirectly, for example as "the Scottish play", or "MacBee", or when referring to the character and not the play, "Mr. and Mrs. M", or "The Scottish King."

This is because Shakespeare is said to have used the spells of real witches in his text, purportedly angering the witches and causing them to curse the play. Thus, to say the name of the play inside a theatre is believed to doom the production to failure, and perhaps cause physical injury or death to cast members. There are stories of accidents, misfortunes and even deaths taking place during runs of Macbeth (or by actors who had uttered the name).

One particular incident that lent itself to the superstition was the Astor Place Riot. Because the cause of these riots was based on a conflict over two performances of Macbeth, this is often thought of as having been caused by the curse.

### 7.3.2 Methods to Dispel the Curse

Several methods exist to dispel the curse, depending on the actor. One, attributed to Michael York, is to immediately leave the building the stage is in with the person who uttered the name, walk around it three times, spit over their left shoulders, say an obscenity then wait to be invited back into the building. A related practice is to spin around three times as fast as possible on the spot, sometimes accompanied by spitting over their shoulder, and uttering an obscenity. Another popular "ritual" is to leave the room, knock three times, be invited in, and then quote a line from Hamlet. Yet another is to recite lines from The *Merchant of Venice*, thought to be a lucky play.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. The anxiety which prompts Macbeth to the destruction of Banquo arises entirely from
    (a) apprehension
    (b) fear
    (c) prophesy
    (d) superstition.

12. Which of the following is not a method to dispel the curse?
    (a) Spin around three times
    (b) Uttering an ill-will
    (c) Knock three times
    (d) Spit over the left shoulder.

13. Macbeth has an acquired, though not a constitutional, courage, which is equal to
    (a) all special occasions
    (b) only special occasions
    (c) all ordinary occasions
    (d) only ritual occasions.

Fill in the blanks:

14. The first thought of acceding to the throne is suggested, and success in the attempt is promised, to Macbeth by the .....

15. Macbeth commits murders with less agitation than that of .....

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16. Macbeth wants no disguise of his ..... disposition.

17. Macbeth is always shaken upon great, and frequently ..... upon trivial, occasions.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. A distinction between Richard III and Macbeth is made in the article of courage.

19. There are stories of accidents, misfortunes and even deaths taking place during runs of Macbeth.

20. Only a few methods exist to dispel the curse, depending on the actor.

## 7.4 Summary

- The *Tragedy of Macbeth* is a play by William Shakespeare about a regicide and its aftermath and revolves round a character Macbeth.
- Though the sources of this tragedy are accounts of King Macbeth of Scotland, Macduff, and Duncan in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), a history of England, Scotland and Ireland familiar to Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the story bears little relation to real events in Scottish history, as Macbeth was an admired and able monarch.
- The characterization of the play is so remarkably generated that it seems a real happenings in the history.
- Macbeth is not totally cold and solely ambitious as shown by his terror of the murder image, which thoroughly defies his loyalty. There is love in Macbeth as shown by his letter to Lady Macbeth in which he calls her his "dearest partner of greatness."
- Duncan, King of Scotland is a kindly and trusting older man, Duncan's unsuspecting nature leaves him open to Macbeth's betrayal.
- Malcolm and Donalbain seem to have inherited Duncan's fairness, both display a cunning that far surpasses their father.
- What Macbeth lacks in decisiveness, Lady Macbeth makes up for in bloodthirsty lust for power and wealth. Swearing off her femininity at the beginning of the play, Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband powerfully to follow through with his plans to kill Duncan.
- Banquo, a general in Duncan's army along with Macbeth, Banquo is also the subject of one of the witches' prophesies. Unlike Macbeth, however, Banquo does not act to fulfill these prophesies.
- Macduff, a Scottish nobleman who questions Macbeth's tyrannical rule and refuses to recognize him as king. Macduff follows Malcolm to England, where he demonstrates his true faithfulness to Scotland.
- The witches foresee Macbeth's ascent to power and his defeat, as well as the succession of Banquo's line.
- The first thought of acceding to the throne is suggested, and success in the attempt is promised, to Macbeth by the witches
- A distinction between Richard III and Macbeth is made in the article of courage, though both are possessed of it even to an eminent degree; but in Richard it is intrepidity, and in Macbeth no more than resolution
- Macbeth commits subsequent murders with less agitation than that of Duncan; but this is no inconsistency in his character; on the contrary, it confirms the principles upon which it is formed.

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- Besides his being hardened to the deeds of death, Macbeth is impelled by other motives than those which instigated him to assassinate his sovereign.
- Macbeth is always shaken upon great, and frequently alarmed upon trivial, occasions. Upon meeting the Witches, he is agitated much more than Banquo, who speaks to them first, and, the moment he sees them, asks them several particular and pertinent questions.
- Macbeth has an acquired, though not a constitutional, courage, which is equal to all ordinary occasions; and if it fails him upon those which are extraordinary, it is however so well formed, as to be easily resumed as soon as the shock is over.
- Macbeth wants no disguise of his natural disposition, for it is not bad; he does not affect more piety than he has: on the contrary, a part of his distress arises from a real sense of religion: which makes him regret that he could not join the chamberlains in prayer for God's blessing, and bewail that he has 'given his eternal jewel to the common enemy of man.'
- While many today would say that any misfortune surrounding a production is mere coincidence, actors and other theatre people often consider it bad luck to mention Macbeth by name while inside a theatre, and sometimes refer to it indirectly.
- The above is pertain to the fact that Shakespeare is said to have used the spells of real witches in his text, purportedly angering the witches and causing them to curse the play.
- One particular incident that lent itself to the superstition was the Astor Place Riot.
- Several methods exist to dispel the curse, depending on the actor.

## 7.5 Keywords

***Virtuous nature*** : Conforming to moral and ethical principles; morally excellent; upright nature.

***Betrayal*** : To deliver or expose to an enemy by treachery or disloyalty.

***Shrewdness*** : Astute or sharp in practical matters.

***Regicide*** : A person who kills a king or is responsible for his death, especially one of the judges who condemned Charles I of England to death.

***Prophecies*** : Something that is declared by a prophet, especially a divinely inspired prediction, instruction, or exhortation.

***Contrivance*** : Something contrived; a device, especially a mechanical one.

***Timidity*** : Lacking in self-assurance, courage, or bravery; easily alarmed; timorous; shy.

***Imbecility*** : An instance or point of weakness; feebleness; incapability.

***Superstition*** : A belief or notion, not based on reason or knowledge, in or of the ominous significance of a particular thing, circumstance, occurrence, proceeding, or the like.

***Obscenity*** : The character or quality of being obscene; indecency; lewdness.

## 7.6 Review Questions

1. Explain superstitions as mentioned in the play Macbeth.
2. Mention any two qualities of Lady Macbeth's character.
3. Explain that Duncan's unsuspecting nature leaves him open to Macbeth's betrayal.
4. Write short notes on the following:
   (a) Superstition (b) Methods to dispel the curse

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5. Write the two characters each of
   (a) Duncan (b) Banquo (c) Malcolm
6. Cite a few examples illustrating the weaknesses of Macbeth's character.
7. Illustrate that apparently without any real motive, the speech of three witches is full of paradox and equivocation.
8. Give a brief description of the characterization of Macbeth?

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. betrayal | 5. flee | 6. tyrannical rule |
| 7. Macbeth | 8. False | 9. True |
| 10. True | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. witches | 15. Duncan |
| 16. natural | 17. alarmed | 18. True |
| 19. True | 20. False | |

## 7.7 Further Readings

*Books*

William Shakespeare (A), G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin (eds.). 1996. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, UK.

Coursen, H. R. 1997. *MACBETH A Guide to the Play*. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, London.

*Online links*

http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/characters.html

http://www.playshakespeare.com/macbeth/characters

http://www.angelfire.com/tx3/chrissandy1/camacbeth.htm

# Unit 8: Macbeth: Plot Construction and Themes

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the plot construction in various scenes in Macbeth;
- Explain that the plot of Macbeth is set in motion ostensibly by the prophecy of the three witches;
- Elaborate the various themes that play key factor in the motion of the drama.

## Introduction

The play begins with the brief appearance of a trio of witches and then moves to a military camp, where the Scottish King Duncan hears the news that his generals, Macbeth and Banquo, have defeated two separate invading armies—one from Ireland, led by the rebel Macdonwald, and one from Norway. Following their pitched battle with these enemy forces, Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches as they cross a moor. The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be made thane of Cawdor

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and eventually King of Scotland. Thus prophecy sets *Macbeth*'s plot in motion—namely, the witches' prophecy that Macbeth will become first thane of Cawdor and then king. The weird sisters make a number of other prophecies: they tell us that Banquo's heirs will be kings, that Macbeth should beware Macduff, that Macbeth is safe till Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane, and that no man born of woman can harm Macbeth. Save for the prophecy about Banquo's heirs, all of these predictions are fulfilled within the course of the play.

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. The main theme of *Macbeth*—the destruction wrought when ambition goes unchecked by moral constraints—finds its most powerful expression in the play's two main characters. Macbeth is a courageous Scottish general who is not naturally inclined to commit evil deeds, yet he deeply desires power and advancement. He kills Duncan against his better judgment and afterward stews in guilt and paranoia. Toward the end of the play he descends into a kind of frantic, boastful madness. Visions and hallucinations recur throughout the play and serve as reminders of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's joint culpability for the growing body count. *Macbeth* is a famously violent play. Interestingly, most of the killings take place offstage, but throughout the play the characters provide the audience with gory descriptions of the carnage, from the opening scene where the captain describes Macbeth and Banquo wading in blood on the battlefield, to the endless references to the bloodstained hands of Macbeth and his wife.

Here in this unit details of plot construction and the themes explored in the play have been described.

## 8.1 Plot Construction

The first act of the play opens amidst thunder and lightning with the Three Witches deciding that their next meeting shall be with Macbeth. In the following scene, a wounded sergeant reports to King Duncan of Scotland that his generals—Macbeth, who is the Thane of Glamis, and Banquo —have just defeated the allied forces of Norway and Ireland, who were led by the traitor Macdonwald. Macbeth, the King's kinsman, is praised for his bravery and fighting prowess.

The scene changes. Macbeth and Banquo enter, discussing the weather and their victory. As they wander onto a heath, the Three Witches enter, who have waited to greet them with prophecies. Even though Banquo challenges them first, they address Macbeth. The first witch hails Macbeth as "Thane of Glamis," the second as "Thane of Cawdor," and the third proclaims that he shall "be King hereafter." Macbeth appears to be stunned to silence, so again Banquo challenges them. The witches inform Banquo that he will father a line of kings, though he himself will not be one. While the two men wonder at these pronouncements, the witches vanish, and another thane, Ross, a messenger from the King, arrives and informs Macbeth of his newly bestowed title: Thane of Cawdor. The first prophecy is thus fulfilled. Immediately, Macbeth begins to harbour ambitions of becoming king.

*Notes* Macbeth writes to his wife about the witches' prophecies. When Duncan decides to stay at the Macbeths' castle at Inverness, Lady Macbeth hatches a plan to murder him and secure the throne for her husband. Although Macbeth raises concerns about the regicide, Lady Macbeth eventually persuades him, by challenging his manhood, to follow her plan.

On the night of the king's visit, Macbeth hallucinates before entering Duncan's quarters, believing he sees a bloody dagger. Macbeth later reunites with his wife, having done the deed. He is so shaken that Lady Macbeth has to take charge. In accordance with her plan, she frames Duncan's sleeping servants for the murder by placing bloody daggers on them. Early the next morning, Lennox, a Scottish nobleman, and Macduff, the loyal Thane of Fife, arrive. A porter opens the gate and Macbeth leads them to the king's chamber, where Macduff discovers Duncan's corpse. In a feigned fit of

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anger, Macbeth murders the guards before they can protest their innocence. Macduff is immediately suspicious of Macbeth, but does not reveal his suspicions publicly. Fearing for their lives, Duncan's sons flee Malcolm to England and Donalbain to Ireland. The rightful heirs' flight makes them suspects and Macbeth assumes the throne as the new King of Scotland as a kinsman of the dead king. Banquo reveals this to the audience with his sceptical words of the new King Macbeth.

Despite his success, Macbeth remains uneasy about the prophecy about Banquo, so Macbeth invites him to a royal banquet where he discovers that Banquo and his young son, Fleance, will be riding out that night. He hires two men to kill them; a third murderer appears in the park before the murder. The assassins kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes. At the banquet, Macbeth invites his lords and Lady Macbeth to a night of drinking and merriment. Banquo's ghost enters and sits in Macbeth's place. Macbeth sees the spectre - he is the only person who can—and refuses to sit. As he grows furious, the rest panic at the sight of Macbeth raging at an empty chair, until a desperate Lady Macbeth tells them that her husband is merely afflicted with a familiar and harmless malady. The ghost departs and returns once more, causing the same rioutous anger in Macbeth. This time, the lords flee.

*Task* "Despite his success, Macbeth remains uneasy about the prophecy about Banquo." Illustrate this statement keeping in view the fear Macbeth has for the prospects of his kingship.

Macbeth, disturbed, visits the Three Witches once more. They conjure up three spirits with three further warnings and prophecies: an armed head tells him to, "beware Macduff," a bloody child, that warns, "none of woman born shall harm Macbeth," and a crowned child holding a tree, stating Macbeth will "never vanquish'd be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him". Since Macduff is in exile in England, Macbeth assumes that he is safe; so he puts to death everyone in Macduff's castle, including Macduff's wife and their young son.

*Notes* Lady Macbeth becomes wracked with guilt from the crimes she and her husband have committed. She sleepwalks and tries to wash imaginary bloodstains from her hands, all the while speaking of the terrible things she knows she pressed her husband to do.

In England, Macduff is informed by Ross that his "castle is surprised; [his] wife and babes/savagely slaughter'd." Macbeth, now viewed as a tyrant, sees many of his thanes defecting. Malcolm leads an army, along with Macduff and Englishmen Siward, the Earl of Northumberland, against Dunsinane Castle. While encamped in Birnam Wood, the soldiers are ordered to cut down and carry tree limbs to camouflage their numbers, thus fulfilling the witches' third prophecy. Meanwhile, Macbeth delivers a soliloquy upon his learning of Lady Macbeth's death.

A battle culminates in the slaying of the young Siward and Macduff's confrontation with Macbeth. Macbeth boasts that he has no reason to fear Macduff, for he cannot be killed by any man born of woman. Macduff declares that he was "from his mother's womb/Untimely ripp'd" (i.e., born by Caesarean section) and was not "of woman born" (an example of a literary quibble). Macbeth realises too late that he has misinterpreted the witches' words. Macduff beheads Macbeth offstage and thereby fulfills the last of the prophecies.

Although Malcolm, and not Fleance, is placed on the throne, the witches' prophecy concerning Banquo ("Thou shalt get kings") was known to the audience of Shakespeare's time to be true: James VI of Scotland (later also James I of England) was supposedly a descendant of Banquo.

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## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The first witch hails Macbeth as
   (a) Thane of Glamis
   (b) Thane of Cawdor
   (c) the king of Scotland
   (d) the king of Ireland.
2. What does the three witches inform Banquo?
   (a) That he will be the Thane of Cawdor
   (b) That he will father a line of kings
   (c) That he will be the Thane of Glamis
   (d) That he will be the king of Scotland.
3. What for the Macbeth remains uneasy despite his success as the king of Scotland?
   (a) For the ghost of Banquo
   (b) For the killing of Banquo and his son Fleance
   (c) About the prophecy about Banquo
   (d) For the manly behaviour of Lady Macbeth.

Fill in the blanks:

4. The first scene changes when Macbeth and Banquo enter, discussing the weather and their .....
5. The witches inform ..... that he will father a line of kings.
6. On the night of the king's visit, Macbeth ..... before entering Duncan's quarters, believing he sees a bloody dagger.
7. Seeing the murder of King Duncan, in a feigned fit of anger, Macbeth murders the ..... before they can protest their innocence.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Macbeth, the Thane of Glamis, and Banquo both defeated the allied forces of Norway and Ireland.
9. Lady Macbeth frames Duncan's sleeping servants for the murder by placing bloody daggers on them.
10. Macbeth, disturbed for the prophesy of Banquo's kingship, visits the Three Witches twice.

## 8.2 Themes in Macbeth

### 8.2.1 Prophecy

The plot of Macbeth is set in motion ostensibly by the prophecy of the three witches. The prophecy fans the flames of ambition within Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, serving as the primary impetus for the couple to plot the death of Duncan—and subsequently Banquo. But one also wonders: Would Macbeth have committed such heinous crimes if not for the prophecy? What if he had ignored the witches' statements? Such speculation, however interesting, ultimately appears futile, since the prophecy itself is self-fulfilling. The witches know Macbeth's tragic flaw: given the irresistible

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temptation to become King, he will choose to commit murder even though he could simply discard their words. As it turns out, the prophecies are not only fated but fatal, as Macbeth's confidence in the witches leads him to fight a rash battle in the final act.

*Task* Macbeth's confidence in the witches leads him to fight a rash battle that he may avoid by discarding the witches' words. Analyse this statement.

### 8.2.2 Guilt and Remorse

Some of the most famous and poetic lines from Macbeth are expressions of remorse. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/Clean from my hand?" exclaims Macbeth after he stabs Duncan. Similarly, Lady Macbeth is plagued by a "spot" that she cannot remove from her hand: "Out, damned spot! Out, I say. . . What, will these hands ne'er be clean?". At first physical remainders of a regrettable crime, the royal blood leaves permanent marks on the psyche of the couple, forever staining them with guilt and remorse. The different ways in which the Macbeths cope with their crimes show how their characters develop: whereas Lady Macbeth is initially the one without scruples, urging Macbeth to take action, it is an overpowering sense of guilt and remorse that drives the Lady to her untimely death. Macbeth, on the other hand, seems to overcome the guilt that plagues him early on in the play.

### 8.2.3 Ghosts and Visions

Just as an overwhelming guilty conscience drives Lady Macbeth mad, so too does Macbeth's "heat-oppressed" brain project the vision of a dagger before he murders Duncan. In what concerns ghosts and visions, the relation of the natural to the supernatural in Macbeth is unclear. The three apparitions that the witches summon, for example, are usually taken to be "real"—even if only as supernatural occurrences. But the matter is less clear when it comes to Banquo's ghost. Macbeth is the only one who sees the ghost in a crowded room; is this yet another projection of his feverish mind? Or is it really, so to speak, a supernatural occurrence? Such ambiguities contribute to the eerie mood and sense of uncanniness that pervade the play, from the very opening scene with the three bearded witches.

### 8.2.4 The Natural/Supernatural

If the witches' prophecy is understood to be imposing a supernatural order on the natural order of things, the natural order can also be understood as responding with tempestuous signs. Following Duncan's death, Lennox describes the "unruly" night in some detail. Similarly, Ross notes that "the heavens, as troubled with man's act/Threatens his bloody stage". In the same scene, the Old Man and Ross both agree that they saw horses eat each other. Even the events leading to the conclusion of the play can be understood as a negotiation of the natural and supernatural. Whereas Macbeth believes that he will live the "lease of nature"—since Birnam Wood cannot possible comes to Dunsinane Hill—the forest is literally uprooted by the English army in accordance with the prophecy. The dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural forms a backdrop that suggests the epic proportions of the struggle over the Scottish crown.

### 8.2.5 Dichotomy and Equivocation

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair/Hover through the fog and filthy air." The first scene of the first act ends with these words of the witches, which Macbeth echoes in his first line: "So foul and fair a day I have not seen.". In a similar fashion, many scenes conclude with lines of dichotomy or equivocation: "Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell/That summons thee to heaven or hell;" "God's benison go with you, and with those/That would make good of bad, and friends of foes." Such lines evoke an

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air of deep uncertainty: while polarities are reversed and established values are overturned, it is entirely unclear as to whether the dichotomous clarity of "heaven or hell" trumps the equivocatory fogginess of "fair is foul, and foul is fair." Thus, for Macbeth, this translates into an uncertainty as to whether the prophecies are believable. It seems that Birnam Wood will either come to Dunsinane Hill (a supernatural event) or it will not (a natural event); but the actual even turns out to be neither here nor there, as the Wood figuratively comes to Dunsinane.

### 8.2.6 Ambition and Temptation

Ambition and temptation both play a key factor in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's decision to kill Duncan. Macbeth possesses enough self-awareness to realize the dangers of overzealous ambition: "I have no spur/To prick the sides of my intent, but only/Vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself /And falls on th'other." And yet, the temptation to carry out the witches' prophecy is ultimately too strong for Macbeth to curb his ambition. In Lady Macbeth's lexicon, incidentally, "hope" is also another word for "ambition" and perhaps "temptation." As Macbeth expresses his doubts about killing Duncan, she demands: "Was the hope drunk/Wherein you dressed yourself"? Ironically, Lady Macbeth must herself rely on intoxicants to "make [her] bold" before executing her ambitious and murderous plans. Once the intoxication wears off, Lady Macbeth finds that she is unable to cope with the consequences of her own "hope." Ultimately, ambition and temptation prove fatal for both the Macbeths.

### 8.2.7 Salvation and Damnation

As a morality tale of sorts, Macbeth has as its near contemporary Christopher Marlowe's Dr Faustus. Like Dr Faustus, Macbeth recognizes the damning consequences of his crime:

> Besides, this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off"

And yet Macbeth carries out the crime, thus precipitating his own descent into hell. Later in the play, appropriately, Macduff calls Macbeth by the name of "hell-hound". Indeed, the story of Macbeth is that of a man who acquiesces in his damnation—in part because he cannot utter words that may attenuate his crime. As Duncan's guards pray "God bless us" on their deathbed, Macbeth cannot say one "Amen". His fate is thus sealed entirely by his own hands.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. The plot of Macbeth is set in motion ostensibly by
    (a) the prophesy of three witches
    (b) murder of king Duncan
    (c) murder of Banquo
    (d) speculation of Macbeth to be the king.

12. Which of the following is not an expression of remorse in the play Macbeth?
    (a) Macbeth's exclamation that the Neptune's ocean wash the blood from his hand
    (b) The murder of Banquo
    (c) The untimely death of Lady Macbeth
    (d) Macbeth saying "I say. . . What, will these hands ne'er be clean."

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13. Which of the following is true about themes in Macbeth?
    (a) The most famous and poetic lines from Macbeth are expressions of remorse
    (b) The natural order can also be understood as responding with tempestuous signs
    (c) The relation of the natural to the supernatural in Macbeth is clear
    (d) There is an air of deep uncertainty.

Fill in the blanks:

14. The prophecy of three witches fans the flames of ..... within Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.
15. Ambition and ..... both play a key factor in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's decision to kill Duncan.
16. As a morality tale of sorts, Macbeth has as its near contemporary .....
17. An overwhelming guilty conscience drives ..... mad.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. The prophecy of three witches fans the flames of ambition within Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and serve as the primary impetus for the couple to plot the death of Duncan.
19. The most famous and poetic lines from Macbeth are expressions of guilt.
20. Macbeth overcomes the guilt that plagues him early on in the play while Lady Macbeth could not.

## 8.3 Summary

- The first act of the play opens amidst thunder and lightning with the Three Witches deciding that their next meeting shall be with Macbeth.
- The scene changes as the Three Witches enter, who have waited to greet them with prophecies. Even though Banquo challenges them first, they address Macbeth.
- The first witch hails Macbeth as "Thane of Glamis," the second as "Thane of Cawdor," and the third proclaims that he shall "be King hereafter." Macbeth appears to be stunned to silence, so again Banquo challenges them.
- The witches inform Banquo that he will father a line of kings, though he himself will not be one. While the two men wonder at these pronouncements, the witches vanish.
- Macbeth writes to his wife about the witches' prophecies. When Duncan decides to stay at the Macbeths' castle at Inverness, Lady Macbeth hatches a plan to murder him and secure the throne for her husband.
- On the night of the king's visit, Macbeth hallucinates before entering Duncan's quarters, believing he sees a bloody dagger.
- In accordance with her plan, Lady Macbeth frames Duncan's sleeping servants for the murder by placing bloody daggers on them.
- Fearing for their lives, Duncan's sons flee Malcolm to England and Donalbain to Ireland. The rightful heirs' flight makes them suspects and Macbeth assumes the throne as the new King of Scotland as a kinsman of the dead king.
- Despite his success, Macbeth remains uneasy about the prophecy about Banquo and he ploted to get ride of them.

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- Lady Macbeth becomes wracked with guilt from the crimes she and her husband have committed. She sleepwalks and tries to wash imaginary bloodstains from her hands, all the while speaking of the terrible things she knows she pressed her husband to do.
- The plot of Macbeth is set in motion ostensibly by the prophecy of the three witches.
- The prophecy fans the flames of ambition within Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, serving as the primary impetus for the couple to plot the death of Duncan—and subsequently Banquo.
- The witches know Macbeth's tragic flaw: given the irresistible temptation to become King, he will choose to commit murder even though he could simply discard their words.
- The prophecies are not only fated but fatal, as Macbeth's confidence in the witches leads him to fight a rash battle in the final act.
- In what concerns ghosts and visions, the relation of the natural to the supernatural in Macbeth is unclear. The three apparitions that the witches summon, for example, are usually taken to be real. But the matter is less clear when it comes to Banquo' ghost.
- Macbeth is the only one who sees the ghost in a crowded room; is this yet another projection of his feverish mind?
- If the witches' prophecy is understood to be imposing a supernatural order on the natural order of things, the natural order can also be understood as responding with tempestuous signs.
- Ambition and temptation both play a key factor in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's decision to kill Duncan. Macbeth possesses enough self-awareness to realize the dangers of overzealous ambition. At the end, ambition and temptation prove fatal for both the Macbeths.
- Macbeth carries out the crime, precipitating his own descent into hell. Later in the play, appropriately, Macduff calls Macbeth by the name of "hell-hound". Indeed, the story of Macbeth is that of a man who acquiesces in his damnation—in part because he cannot utter words that may attenuate his crime. His fate is thus sealed entirely by his own hands.

## 8.4 Keywords

***Traitor*** : A person who betrays another, a cause, or any trust. Or a person who commits treason by betraying his or her country.

***Kinsman*** : A person of the same nationality or ethnic group.

***Prophecy*** : Something that is declared by a prophet, especially a divinelyinspired prediction, instruction, or exhortation.

***Merriment*** : Cheerful or joyful gaiety; mirth; hilarity; laughter.

***Malady*** : Any disorder or disease of the body, especially one that ischronic or deepseated.

***Guilt*** : The fact or state of having committed an offense, crime,violation, or wrong, especially against moral or penal law;culpability. Or a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime,wrong, etc., whether real or imagined.

***Remorse*** : Deep and painful regret for wrongdoing; compunction.

***Supernatural*** : Pertaining to, or being above or beyond what is natural; unexplainable by natural law or phenomena; abnormal. Or of, pertaining to, characteristic of, or attributed to God or adeity.

***Dichotomy*** : Division into two parts, kinds, etc.; subdivision into halves orpairs.

***Equivocation*** : The use of equivocal or ambiguous expressions, especially inorder to mislead or hedge; prevarication.

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***Ambition*** : An earnest desire for some type of achievement ordistinction, as power, honor, fame, or wealth, and thewillingness to strive for its attainment.

***Temptation*** : The act of tempting; enticement or allurement.

***Salvation*** : The act of saving or protecting from harm, risk, loss, destruction, etc.

## 8.5 Review Questions

1. Explain that the play Macbeth is a story of plots.
2. Mention any two expressions of line showing construction of plots in Macbeth.
3. What are the various themes used in Macbeth?
4. Write short notes on the following terms:
   (a) Prophesy (b) Remorse (c) Ambition
5. From the play Macbeth, write the two events each of
   (a) Salvation (b) Temptation (c) Equivocation
6. Explain the relation among the concepts natural and supernatural.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. victory | 5. Banquo | 6. hallucinates |
| 7. guards | 8. True | 9. True |
| 10. False | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. ambition | 15. temptation |
| 16. Dr Faustus | 17. Lady Macbeth | 18. True |
| 19. False | 20. True | |

## 8.6 Further Readings

*Books*

James Shapiro. 2006. *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599*. Harper Perennial, UK.

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*Online links*

http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/themes.html

http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth/summary.html

http://dramamacbeth/macbethplotact.shtml

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# Unit 9: Macbeth: History and its Impact on 18th and 19th Century

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Objectives

Introduction

9.1 History of Macbeth

9.1.1 The Stage History of Macbeth

9.2 Summary

9.3 Keywords

9.4 Review Questions

9.5 Further Readings

## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Illustrate the history of Macbeth;
- Elaborate the transformations, the Macbeth underwent ever since its first stage display;
- Enumerate the stage history of Macbeth;
- Explain the impact of Macbeth history on 18th and 19th century.

## Introduction

The play Macbeth has immense historic interest, its incidents dating back to the days of Edward the Confessor. There were sufficient materials for the drama in Holinshed's *Chronicles of Englande, Scotlande, and Ireland*, the first edition of which was issued in 1577, and the second in 1586-87. The extracts from Holinshed in the notes will show that the main incidents are taken from his account of two separate events—the murder of Duncan by Macbeth, and that of King Duffe, the great-grandfather of Lady Macbeth, by Donwald. It will be seen, too, that Shakespeare has deviated in other respects from the chronicle, especially in the character of Banquo. The following historical description substantiate the historical impact of Macbeth during 18th and 19th century.

Duncan, by his mother Beatrice a grandson of Malcolm II, succeeded to the throne on his grandfather's death, in 1033: he reigned only six years. Macbeth, his near relation, also a grandchild of Malcolm II, though by the mother's side, was stirred up by ambition to contest the throne with the possessor. The Lady of Macbeth also, whose real name was Graoch, had deadly injuries to avenge on the reigning prince. She was the granddaughter of Kenneth IV, killed 1003, fighting against Malcolm II, and other causes for revenge animated the mind of her who has been since painted as the sternest of women. The old annalists add some instigations of a supernatural kind to the influence of a vindictive woman over an ambitious husband. Three women, of more than human stature and beauty, appeared

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to Macbeth in a dream or vision, and hailed him successively by the titles of Thane of Cromarty, Thane of Moray, which the king afterwards bestowed on him, and finally by that of King of Scots; this dream, it is said, inspired him with the seductive hopes so well expressed in the drama.

Here in this unit a detail of Macbeth history and its impact on 18th and 19th century have been given.

## 9.1 History of Macbeth

The story is taken from Holinshed, who copied it from the History of Scotland, by Hector Boece or Boyce, in seventeen volumes (1527). The history, written in Latin, was translated by John Bellenden (1531-1535). Macbeth was first printed in the folio of 1623, where it occupies pages 131 to 151 inclusive, in the division of "Tragedies." It was registered in the books of the Stationers' Company, on the 8th of November, 1623, by Blount and Jaggard, the publishers of the folio, as one of the plays "not formerly entered to other men." It was written between 1604 and 1610; the former limit being fixed by the allusion to the union of England and Scotland under James I, and the latter by the MS Diary of Dr Simon Forman, who saw the play performed "at the Globe, 1610, the 20th of April, Saturday." It may then have been a new play, but it is more probable, as nearly all critics agree, that it was written in 1605 or 1606. The accession of James made Scottish subjects popular in England, and the tale of Macbeth and Banquo would be one of the first to be brought forward, as Banquo was held to be an ancestor of the new king. A Latin "interlude" on this subject was performed at Oxford in 1605, on the occasion of the king's visit to the city; but there is no reason for supposing that Shakespeare got the hint of his tragedy from that source.

*Did u know?* Macbeth was first printed in the folio of 1623, where it occupies pages 131 to 151 inclusive, in the division of "Tragedies."

It is barely possible that there was an earlier play on the subject of Macbeth. Collier finds in the Registers of the Stationers' Company, under the date of August 27, 1596, the entry of a Ballad of Makdobeth, which he gives plausible reasons for supposing to have been a drama, and not a "ballad" properly so called. There appears to be a reference to the same piece in Kemp's Nine Days' Wonder, printed in 1600, where it is called a "miserable stolen story," and said to be the work of "a penny Poet."

George Steevens maintained that Shakespeare was indebted, in the supernatural parts of Macbeth, to The Witch, a play by Thomas Middleton, which was discovered in manuscript towards the end of the eighteenth century. Malone at first took the same view of the subject, but finally came to the conclusion that Middleton's play was the later production, and that he must therefore be the plagiarist. The Clarendon Press editors take the ground that there are portions of Macbeth which Shakespeare did not write; that these were interpolated after the poet's death, or at least after he had ceased to be connected with the theatre; and that "the interpolator was, not improbably, Thomas Middleton."

These views have found little favour with other Shakespearian critics. A more satisfactory explanation of the imperfections of the play ascribes them to the haste with which it was written. Richard Grant White, who refers its composition to "the period between October, 1604, and August, 1605," remarks: "I am the more inclined to this opinion from the indications which the play itself affords that it was produced upon an emergency. It exhibits throughout the hasty execution of a grand and clearly conceived design. But the haste is that of a master of his art, who, with conscious command of its resources, and in the frenzy of a grand inspiration, works out his composition to its minutest detail of essential form, leaving the work of surface finish for the occupation of cooler leisure. What the Sistine Madonna was to Raphael, it seems that Macbeth was to Shakespeare—a magnificent

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impromptu; that kind of impromptu which results from the application of well-disciplined powers and rich stores of thought to subject suggested by occasion. I am inclined to regard Macbeth as, for the most part, a specimen of Shakespeare's unelaborated, if not unfinished, writing, in the maturity and highest vitality of his genius. It abounds in instances of extremest compression and most daring ellipsis, while it exhibits in every scene a union of supreme dramatic and poetic power, and in almost every line an imperially irresponsible control of language. Hence, I think, its lack of completeness of versification in certain passages, and also some of the imperfection of the text, the thought in which the compositors were not always able to follow and apprehend."

### 9.1.1 The Stage History of Macbeth

Evidence suggests that Macbeth was written by command as one of the plays to be given before King James I and the King of Denmark during the latter's notable visit to England in the summer of 1606. Shakespeare's company was the King's Players, and it would be natural for them to be commanded to produce a story of Scottish history touching on the ancestry of their patron. The title role was created by the great Richard Burbage and his infamous queen by the boy-actress Edmans.

*Notes* The play was first printed in the Folio of 1623, where the text shows some signs of cutting and alteration. The lyrical episodes of Hecate and the witches are thought to have been added by another playwright.

When Charles II ascended the British throne in 1660, he assigned Macbeth to William Davenant and the Duke's Company. Not content to produce the play in its original form, Davenant altered the work considerably to indulge his two favorite hobbies. The first was his desire for operatic and scenic splendor; the second, his pursuit of structural balance. The first he obtained by elaborating the witches' scenes, introducing all kinds of dancing, singing, and gibberish, some of it taken from Middleton's *The Witch*. The second was achieved by amplifying the role of Lady Macduff, for whom he created numerous scenes between her and her lord symmetrically opposed to the bits between Macbeth and his wicked wife. Macduff's virtuous lady inveighs to him against ambition. Lady Macbeth is given a new scene in which she is haunted by the ghost of Duncan, which induces her to try to persuade Macbeth to give up ambition and the crown. Davenant's bastardization, with Thomas Betterton in the title role, drove Shakespeare's original from the stage until 1744.

It was David Garrick who, during his management of the Drury Lane Theatre (1742-1776), revived Macbeth as written by Shakespeare, playing the title role there every season except four. Although he kept Davenant's operatic witch scenes, he omitted the spurious Lady Macduff scenes, along with her infamous murder scene and the bit with the Porter. He could not resist writing a new climactic speech for Macbeth, in which the hero-villain mentions, with his dying breath, his guilt, delusion, the witches, and horrid visions of future punishment. Garrick and his leading lady, Hannah Pritchard, introduced a natural style of acting and became famous as the tortured hero and heroine. So urgent was Garrick's delivery that in one performance when he told the First Murderer "There's blood upon thy face," the actor in question involuntarily replied, "Is there, by God?"

The next famous pair to assay these roles were John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) and his talented sister, Sarah Siddons, at Drury Lane in the season of 1784 and for many years thereafter. Siddons made an extraordinary innovation when in the sleep-walking scene she put the candle down, defying the tradition of carrying the candle throughout. J. Boaden recorded in her Memoirs (1827), "She laded the water from the imaginary ewer over her hands-bent her body to listen to the sounds presented to her fancy, and hurried to resume the taper where she had left it, that she might with all speed drag her husband to their chamber." Her delivery of several lines has become legendary: the long pause on "made themselves-air," the sudden energy on "shalt be what thou art promised," the association of "my spirits in your ear" with the spirits she has just invoked, and the downward and

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decisive inflection on "We fail." Siddons imagined the character as a fragile and delicate blonde who subdued Macbeth by the dual exercise of intellect and beauty, moved by the memory of her father and the babe to whom she had "given suck." She achieved every part of the role except the blonde fragility, which was beyond her stately, statuesque appearance.

William Charles Macready proved a workmanlike Macbeth in his revival of 1837, which featured new scenic effects and innovative staging. John Bull recorded his admiration of the scene in which the murder of Duncan is discovered, and the march of the army from Birnam Wood. "In the latter each man was completely screened by the immense bough he carried; and the scenic illusion by which a whole host was represented stretching away into the distance, and covered as by one leafy screen, which was removed at the same time that the soldiers in the foreground threw down theirs, had all the reality of a dioramic effect." Macready himself made memorable several moments: his imperious command to the witches-"Stay and speak," his desperate recoil from Banquo's ghost, the dropping of his truncheon on hearing that Lady Macbeth is dead, his half-drawn sword over the messenger who announces the approach of Birnam Wood, and the remarkable energy of the fight in which he died.

*Task* Illustrate that William Charles Macready proved a workmanlike Macbeth in his revival of 1837, which featured new scenic effects and innovative staging.

Samuel Phelps (1804-1878) is credited with removing the last vestiges of adaptation from Macbeth during his management of Sadler's Wells between 1844 and 1862. Unlike his contemporaries, who rearranged the play to avoid scene shifts and made drastic cuts to allow scope for spectacle, Phelps made only minor cuts and transpositions.

Charles Kean and his wife Ellen Tree staged a spectacular, long-running Macbeth at the Princess's Theatre in 1853, famed for its historically accurate scenery and costumes. Kean apparently turned in a performance considerably less ferocious than his wife's. The Leader reported, "When the witches accost him, his only expression of 'metaphysical influence' is to stand still with his eyes fixed and his mouth open ... In Charles Kean's Macbeth all tragedy has vanished; sympathy is impossible, because the mind of the criminal is hidden from us. He makes Macbeth ignoble, with perhaps a tendency towards Methodism."

The last great pair of the 19th Century were Henry Irving and Ellen Terry at the Lyceum Theatre in 1874 and later in 1889. Terry's Lady Macbeth was less fearsome than sympathetic, according to *The Times*. "Her matted red hair, hanging in long tresses and her ruddy cheeks mark her as a raw-boned daughter of the North, and she wears an appropriate dress of garish green stuff embroidered with gold. There is nothing of the martial or adventurous spirit in her composition to bring her into harmony with her barbarous surroundings. On the contrary, she is a woman of warm sympathies living in the tenderest relation with her husband."

*Notes* The 20th Century has seen numerous great revivals, especially Orson Welles' "Voodoo" Macbeth at the Lafayette Theatre in Harlem (1936), Margaret Webster's famous production with Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson (1941) which set a standard for decades to come, and Glen Byam Shaw's Royal Shakespeare Theatre production with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh (1955). Kenneth Tynan argued that in the role of Macbeth Olivier "shook hands with greatness," and proclaimed the performance "a masterpiece: not of the superficial, booming, have-a-bash kind, but the real thing, a structure of perfect forethought and proportion, lit by flashes of intuitive lightning."

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## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The story of Macbeth is taken from
   (a) Holinshed's Chronicle of the History of Scotland
   (b) the Folio of 1723
   (c) the book of Stationers' Company
   (d) the Folio of Blount and Jaggard.
2. Shakespeare was indebted in the supernatural parts of Macbeth to *The Witch*, a play by
   (a) Collier
   (b) Thomas Middleton
   (c) Richard Grant
   (d) John Bellenden.
3. Macbeth was written by command as one of the plays to be given before
   (a) King of England and the King James of Denmark
   (b) William Davenant and Charles II
   (c) King James I and the King of Denmark
   (d) King James I and Charles II.

Fill in the blanks:

4. Macbeth was written by command as one of the plays to be given before ..... and the King of Denmark.
5. Charles Kean and his wife Ellen Tree staged a spectacular, long-running Macbeth at the ..... in 1853.
6. Macbeth was first printed in the .....of 1623.
7. William Charles Macready proved a ..... Macbeth in his revival of 1837.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. David Garrick during his management of the Drury Lane Theatre (1742-1776), revived Macbeth as written by Shakespeare.
9. Charles Kean and his wife Ellen Tree staged a spectacular, long-running Macbeth at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1853.
10. Margaret Webster's famous production of Macbeth with Maurice Evans and Judith Anderson set a standard for decades to come.

## 9.2 Summary

- The play Macbeth has immense historic interest, its incidents dating back to the days of Edward the Confessor.
- There were sufficient materials for the drama in Holinshed's *Chronicles of Englande, Scotlande, and Ireland*, the first edition of which was issued in 1577, and the second in 1586-87. The extracts from Holinshed in the notes will show that the main incidents are taken from his account of two separate events—the murder of Duncan by Macbeth, and that of King Duffe, the great-grandfather of Lady Macbeth, by Donwald.

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- Macbeth, his near relation, also a grandchild of Malcolm II, though by the mother's side, was stirred up by ambition to contest the throne with the possessor.
- Three women, of more than human stature and beauty, appeared to Macbeth in a dream or vision, and hailed him successively by the titles of Thane of Cromarty, Thane of Moray, which the king afterwards bestowed on him, and finally by that of King of Scots; this dream, it is said, inspired him with the seductive hopes so well expressed in the drama.
- Macbeth was first printed in the folio of 1623, where it occupies pages 131 to 151 inclusive, in the division of "Tragedies."
- George Steevens maintained that Shakespeare was indebted, in the supernatural parts of Macbeth, to The Witch, a play by Thomas Middleton, which was discovered in manuscript towards the end of the eighteenth century.
- Evidence suggests that Macbeth was written by command as one of the plays to be given before King James I and the King of Denmark during the latter's notable visit to England in the summer of 1606.
- Shakespeare's company was the King's Players, and it would be natural for them to be commanded to produce a story of Scottish history touching on the ancestry of their patron. The title role was created by the great Richard Burbage and his infamous queen by the boy-actress Edmans.
- When Charles II ascended the British throne in 1660, he assigned Macbeth to William Davenant and the Duke's Company. Not content to produce the play in its original form, Davenant altered the work considerably to indulge his two favorite hobbies.
- David Garrick who, during his management of the Drury Lane Theatre (1742-1776), revived Macbeth as written by Shakespeare, playing the title role there every season except four.
- The next famous pair to assay these roles were John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) and his talented sister, Sarah Siddons, at Drury Lane in the season of 1784 and for many years thereafter.
- Siddons made an extraordinary innovation when in the sleep-walking scene she put the candle down, defying the tradition of carrying the candle throughout.
- Samuel Phelps (1804-1878) is credited with removing the last vestiges of adaptation from Macbeth during his management of Sadler's Wells between 1844 and 1862.
- Charles Kean and his wife Ellen Tree staged a spectacular, long-running Macbeth at the Princess's Theatre in 1853, famed for its historically accurate scenery and costumes.
- Kean apparently turned in a performance considerably less ferocious than his wife's.
- The last great pair of the 19th Century were Henry Irving and Ellen Terry at the Lyceum Theatre in 1874 and later in 1889.

## 9.3 Keywords

***Interlude*** : A short dramatic piece, especially of a light or farcicalcharacter, formerly introduced between the parts or acts ofmiracle and morality plays or given as part of otherentertainments.

***Witch*** : A person, now especially a woman, who professes or is supposed to practice magic, especially black magic or the black art.

***Plagiarist*** : The unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one's own original work, as by not crediting the author.

***Imperfections*** : The quality or condition of being imperfect.

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*Fragility* : Easily broken, shattered, or damaged; delicate; brittle; frail.

*Metaphysical* : Designating or pertaining to the poetry of an early group of 17th-century English poets, notably John Donne, whose characteristic style is highly intellectual and philosophicaland features intensive use of ingenious conceits and turns of wit.

## 9.4 Review Questions

1. Describe the sources of the story of Macbeth.
2. Mention any two impacts of Macbeth on the history of 18th and 19th century.
3. Give a brief view of the stage history of Macbeth?
4. Write short notes on the contribution of the following on the historical development of Macbeth:
   (a) Charles Kean (b) Ellen Terry (c) Orson Welles
5. Write the brief account of following critics on Macbeth:
   (a) George Steevens (b) John Bellenden (c) Malone

### Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a) 2. (b) 3. (c)
4. King James I 5. Princess's Theatre 6. folio
7. workmanlike 8. True 9. False
10. True

## 9.5 Further Readings

*Books*

William Shakespeare (A), G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin (eds.). 1996. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, UK.

Coursen, H. R. 1997. *Macbeth A Guide to the Play*. Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, London.

*Online links*

http://www.theatrehistory.com/british/macbeth001.html

http://www.theatrehistory.com/british/historical_sources_of_macbeth.html

http://dramamacbeth/macbethplotact.shtml

# Unit 10: Doctor Faustus: Morality Play

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Enumerate the themes and characteristics of morality play;
- Cite the examples of morality in Doctor Faustus Play;
- Explain that Doctor Faustus is a morality play;
- Elaborate the features of morality in Doctor Faustus play.

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# Introduction

The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, commonly referred to simply as Doctor Faustus, is a play by Christopher Marlowe, based on the Faust story, in which a man sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge. Doctor Faustus was first published in 1604, eleven years after Marlowe's death and at least twelve years after the first performance of the play.

"No Elizabethan play outside the Shakespeare canon has raised more controversy than Doctor Faustus. There is no agreement concerning the nature of the text and the date of composition... and the centrality of the Faust legend in the history of the Western world precludes any definitive agreement on the interpretation of the play. A judicious analysis and interpretation of the play ascertain that it is a morality play.

This unit elaborates the morality features of Doctor Faustus at length. More emphasis is given to justify that it is a morality play. The themes and characteristics of morality have also been dealt with in this unit.

## 10.1 Morality of Doctor Faustus Play

Liturgical Drama in the beginning had three forms, Mystery, Miracle and Morality. The morality plays are a type of allegory in which the protagonist is met by personification of various moral attributes, who try to prompt him to choose a godly life over one of evil. It flourished in the middle ages, was at its height in the first half of the 15 century, disappeared after the second half, but reappeared in Elizabethan drama. In this play the characters were personified abstractions of vice or virtues such as Good deeds, Faith, Mercy, Anger, Truth, Pride, etc. The general theme of the moralities was theological and the main one was the struggle between the good and evil powers for capturing the man's soul and good always won. The story of whole morality play centres round the single towering figure. The seven deadly sins were found engaged in physical and verbal battle with cardinal virtues. The antics of vices and devils, etc. offered a considerable opportunity for low comedy or buffoonery. The morality play often ended with a solemn moral.

### 10.1.1 Themes of the Morality Play

- The main theme of the morality play is: Man begins in innocence, man falls into temptation, man repents and is saved or killed.
- The central action is the struggle of man against the seven deadly sins that are personified into real characters.
- Morality plays help the audience understand the greater concepts of sin and virtue.

### 10.1.2 Characteristics of the Morality Play

Following are some elements of morality plays:

- In these plays character were personified abstractions of vice and virtues such as good and evil and faith and anger.
- Theme was dividing in terms of general and main.
- General: this theme was theological. Main: the struggle between good and bad powers for capturing man's soul.
- Seven sins were also the part of these plays.
- Comic scenes were also included in morality plays.
- Concept of damnation/salvation was also there.

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*Notes* Morality plays are a type of allegory in which the protagonist is met by personification of various moral attributes, who try to prompt him to choose a godly life over one of evil.

### 10.1.3 Morality in Doctor Faustus Play

There are many ways in which Doctor Faustus resembles medieval morality plays. Morality plays use allegorical characters to teach the audience moral lessons, typically of a Christian nature. In the story of Doctor Faustus we see how his trend with his sin of excessive pride, which led him to become a greedy person, obsess with knowing everything about life. In this story we also see how a good angel, a bad angel and an old man try to tell Doctor Faustus what type of decision to make.

In the light of the theme and characteristics of morality play, we may call "*Doctor Faustus*" a belated morality play in spite of its tragic ending. It has been mentioned that in morality plays the characters were personified abstractions of vice or virtues. In "*Doctor Faustus*" also we find the Good and Evil angels, the former stand for the path of virtue and the latter for sin and damnation, one for conscience and the other for desires. Then we have the old man appearing, telling Faustus that he is there "To guide' thy steps unto the way of life". He symbolizes the forces of righteousness and morality. The seven deadly sins are also there in a grand spectacle to cheer up the despairing soul of Faustus.

*Did u know?* Christian monks developed the morality play in the 13th century by adding actors and theatrical elements. By doing so the masses could more easily learn the basics of Christianity through dramatic spoken words.

If the, general theme of morality plays was theological dealing with the struggle of forces of good and evil for man's soul, then "*Doctor Faustus*" may be called a religious or morality play to a very great extent. We find Faustus, abjuring the scriptures, the Trinity and Christ. He surrenders his soul to the devil out of his inordinate ambition to gain:

"……a world of profit and delight'

Of power, of honour, of omnipotence."

Through knowledge by mastering the unholy art of magic. About the books of magic, he declares:

"These metaphysics of magicians,

And necromantic books are heavenly."

By selling his soul to the devil he lives a blasphemous life full of vain and sensual pleasures just for only twenty-four years. There is struggle between his overwhelming ambition and conscience which are externalized by good angel and evil angel. But Faustus has already accepted the opinionof evil angel, who says: "Be thou on earth as Jove in the sky." Faustus is also fascinated by the thought:

"A sound magician is a mighty god,

Here, Faustus, tire thy brains to gain a deity."

When the final hours approaches, Faustus find himself at the edge of eternal damnation and cries with deep sorrow: "My God, my God, look not so fierce to me!"

Through the story of *Doctor Faustus*, the author gives the lesson that the man, who desires to be God, is doomed to eternal damnation. The chief aim of morality play was didactic. It was a dramatized guide to Christian living and Christian dying. Whosoever discards the path of virtue and faith in God and Christ is destined to despair and eternal damnation—this is also the message of the story of *Doctor Faustus*. And it has found the most touching expression in the closing lines of the play:

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"Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits,

To practice more than heavenly power permits."

The tradition of chorus is also maintained. We find the chorus introducing the story just before the beginning of the first scene and subsequently filling in the gaps in the narrative and announcing the end of the play with a very solemn moral. The appearance of seven deadly sins shows that the playwright in "*Doctor Faustus*" adopted some of the conventions of the old morality plays. The seven deadly sins—pride, covetousness, wrath, envy, gluttony, sloth and lechery of good old morality plays are also very much here in this play in a grand spectacle to cheer up the dejected soul of Faustus. And the old favourite and familiar figure of the devil is also not missing. Mephistophilis, an assistant to Lucifer, appears as a servile slave of Faustus in many scenes. The comic scenes of "*Doctor Faustus*" also belong to the tradition of old morality plays. The comic scenes were not integral part of those plays but were introduced to entertain. In "*Doctor Faustus*" many comic scenes are depicted especially his pranks on the Pope, the planting of a pair of horns on the head of a knight and the cheating of a greedy horse-dealer. They throw light on the nature of the tragedy of *Doctor Faustus*. The comic episodes underline the fact that Faustus has sunk to the low level of a sordid fun-loving sorcerer. In "Doctor Faustus" there is only one towering figure all the action and incidents centre round him. Then just like the earlier morality plays, it also suffers from looseness of construction especially in the middle part of the play.

*Caution* The comic scenes were not integral part of traditional morality plays, but introduced to entertain. In "*Doctor Faustus*" many comic scenes are depicted especially his pranks on the Pope, the planting of a pair of horns on the head of a knight and the cheating of a greedy horse-dealer. Such comic scenes underline the fact that Faustus has sunk to the low level of a sordid fun-loving sorcerer.

Though to a great extent, "*Doctor Faustus*" is a morality play yet there are also some other elements which make it different from morality play. The difference is that in morality plays, all characters are abstractions, not concrete. But in "*Doctor Faustus*" the main character, Faustus is not an abstraction but as person with desires and high ambitions. He is a living person like other human beings. Then the element of conflict is the fountain head of the entire action in the play and the movement of the action defines the plot of the play. Faustus heart and soul is the greatest battle field for the internal or spiritual conflict. Though Faustus has abjured God and has made his pact with the devil, yet there is a conflict in his mind between good and evil, he feels the pricks of conscience. The growing sense of loss and of the wages of "damnation" begins to sting him like a scorpion.

"When I behold the heaven, then I repent,

And curse thee, Wicked Mephistophilis,

Because thou hast deprived me of those joys"

*Notes* This inner conflict in Faustus is the element of tragedy not of morality, on the basis of which we some times think that it is not a morality play. In a morality play, the moral is always positive and goodness always triumphs over evil, truth over lie and virtue over vice. Virtue is always rewarded. But in "*Doctor Faustus*" we find evil spreading its powerful hands over goodness and then laying it down.

Faustus follows the path told by evil angel and ultimately is ruined. He cannot repent and devil is successful in getting hold of his soul. This moral is negative which is not in accordance with morality

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plays. Moreover, in this play, Faustus plays pranks with pope and knight and makes fun of them. Unlike morality plays the butt of this low comedy is Pope instead of devil.

Faustus is a character ideal to be the hero of a tragedy where man alone is the maker of his fate,good or bad. He falls not by the fickleness of fortune or the decree of fate, or because he has been corrupted by Mephistophilis, the agent of Lucifer; the devil, but because of his own will. Faustus, being a tragic hero was dominated by some uncontrollable passion or inordinate ambition. There is a conflict in his mind between good and evil. He falls from high to low and this degradation is clear in his soliloquy, when he says:

"O soul, be changed into little water drops,

And fall into ocean, never to be found!"

Such a tragic hero cannot be the hero of a morality play. Thus we see that in spite of its entire links with medieval miracle plays or moralities, Doctor Faustus can never be treated wholly as a morality play. It is the greatest heroic tragedy before Shakespeare with its enormous stress on characterization and inner conflict in the soul of a towering personality. We may call this play the last of the morality plays and the beginning of tragedy that was developed by Shakespeare. We may conclude in the words of a critic: "*Doctor Faustus* is both the consummation of the English morality,tradition and the last and the finest of Marlowe's heroic plays."

*Task* Is Doctor Faustus a morality play? Why or why not? Illustrate.

We conclude that how Doctor Faustus came from a respected and admired person by society to a corrupted person. He embarked on this path due to his temptations. At the beginning of the story scene 1 "Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please, perform what desperate enterprise I will? Have them fly to India for gold, Ransack the ocean for orient pearl." In this part we have both angels telling Doctor Faustus what to do. But he only seems to listen to the bad angel because he not thinking about God but only of the benefits that performing black magic would bring to him. Doctor Faustus did a conjured as a result Mephastophilis appeared to him. All he could think about was possibilities. All he would think about was all the things he was going to be able to accomplish with Mephastophilis assistance. Another example of how Doctor Faustus resembles a morality play can be seen on scene 5 here on this scene with have the good and evil angel trying to convince Doctor Faustus to do what is right. Both sides tell their point of view. Good angel tells him to leave dark magic and evil angel tells him to think of honor and wealth. But once again Doctor Faustus only thinks about the benefits that giving up his soul would bring to him without thinking of the consequences. Another scene in which we see how this story resembles a morality play is scene 5.

" Good Angel Never Too late, if Faustus will repent." And the "Evil Angel if thou repent, devils."

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Liturgical drama in the beginning had three forms, viz.
   (a) Mystery, Miracle, and Morality
   (b) Tragedy, Mystery, and Miracle
   (c) Mercy, Tragedy, and Morality
   (d) Mercy, Anger, and Truth.
2. Which of the following statements is correct about the Doctor Faustus ?
   (a) It is a typical morality play

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(b) It is a belated morality play

(c) Themes and characters make it a supernatural morality play

(d) The seven sin make it a tragedy.

3. Which of the following is not a theme of morality play?

(a) Man begins in innocence, man falls into temptation, man repents and is saved or killed

(b) The struggle of man against the seven deadly sins

(c) The contemplation of man with seven deadly sins and to indulge in them

(d) Audience understand the greater concepts of sin and virtu.

Fill in the blanks:

4. The morality plays are a type of ..... in which the protagonist is met by personification of various moral attributes.

5. Morality plays help the audience understand the greater concepts of ..... and virtue.

6. Theme was dividing in terms of ..... and main.

7. Faustus follows the path told by ..... and ultimately is ruined.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. The appearance of seven deadly sins shows that the playwright in "*Doctor Faustus*" adopted some of the conventions of the old morality plays.

9. The morality plays are a type of allegory in which the protagonist is met by personification of various immoral attributes.

10. Comic scenes were also included in morality plays.

## 10.2 Doctor Faustus' Features of a Morality Play

Doctor Faustus has many features of a morality play: the conflict between good and evil, the conflict between medieval and renaissance values, power as a corrupting influence, magic and the supernatural, 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.

### 10.2.1 Conflict between Good and Evil

The conflict between Good and Evil was a recurring theme in the medieval morality plays. From this point of view, the play Doctor Faustus is a morality play in which heaven struggles for the soul of a Renaissance Everyman, namely Doctor Faustus.

#### Sin, Redemption, and Damnation

Insofar as Doctor Faustus is a Christian play, it deals with the themes at the heart of Christianity's understanding of the world. First, there is the idea of sin, which Christianity defines as acts contrary to the will of God. In making a pact with Lucifer, Faustus commits what is in a sense the ultimate sin: not only does he disobey God, but he consciously and even eagerly renounces obedience to him, choosing instead to swear allegiance to the devil. In a Christian framework, however, even the worst deed can be forgiven through the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, God's son, who, according to Christian belief, died on the cross for humankind's sins. Thus, however terrible Faustus's pact with Lucifer may be, the possibility of redemption is always open to him. All that he needs to do,

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theoretically, is ask God for forgiveness. The play offers countless moments in which Faustus considers doing just that, urged on by the good angel on his shoulder or by the old man in scene 12—both of whom can be seen either as emissaries of God, personifications of Faustus's conscience, or both.

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

### The Divided Nature of Man

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

## 10.2.2 The Conflict between Medieval and Renaissance Values

Scholars remarked that Doctor Faustus tells "the story of a Renaissance man who had to pay the medieval price for being one." While slightly simplistic, this quotation does get at the heart of one of the play's central themes: the clash between the medieval world and the world of the emerging Renaissance. The medieval world placed God at the center of existence and shunted aside man and the natural world.

*Notes* The Renaissance was a movement that began in Italy in the fifteenth century and soon spread throughout Europe, carrying with it a new emphasis on the individual, on classical learning, and on scientific inquiry into the nature of the world. In the medieval academy, theology was the queen of the sciences. In the Renaissance, though, secular matters took center stage.

Faustus, despite being a magician rather than a scientist (a blurred distinction in the sixteenth century), explicitly rejects the medieval model. In his opening speech in scene 1, he goes through every field of scholarship, beginning with logic and proceeding through medicine, law, and theology, quoting an ancient authority for each: Aristotle on logic, Galen on medicine, the Byzantine emperor Justinian on law, and the Bible on religion. In the medieval model, tradition and authority, not individual inquiry, were key. But in this soliloquy, Faustus considers and rejects this medieval way of thinking. He resolves, in full Renaissance spirit, to accept no limits, traditions, or authorities in his quest for knowledge, wealth, and power.

The play's attitude toward the clash between medieval and Renaissance values is ambiguous. Marlowe seems hostile toward the ambitions of Faustus, and, as Dawkins notes, he keeps his tragic hero squarely in the medieval world, where eternal damnation is the price of human pride. Yet Marlowe himself was no pious traditionalist, and it is tempting to see in Faustus—as many readers

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have—a hero of the new modern world, a world free of God, religion, and the limits that these imposed on humanity. Faustus may pay a medieval price, this reading suggests, but his successors will go further than he and suffer less, as we have in modern times. On the other hand, the disappointment and mediocrity that follow Faustus's pact with the devil, as he descends from grand ambitions to petty conjuring tricks, might suggest a contrasting interpretation. Marlowe may be suggesting that the new, modern spirit, though ambitious and glittering, will lead only to a Faustian dead end.

### 10.2.3 Power as a Corrupting Influence

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

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

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

### 10.2.4 Magic and the Supernatural

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

#### Creation of Good and Bad Angels

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—the good angel

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urging him to repent and serve God, the evil angel urging him to follow his lust for power and serve Lucifer. The two symbolize his divided will, part of which wants to do good and part of which is sunk in sin. A close examination shows that the Evil Angel declines in importance as the play advances. The angles work by suggestion, as allegorical characters in morality plays do.

### Blood

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

## 10.2.5 The Pageant of Seven Deadly Sins

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. The following are the deadly sins as described in Bible.

### Pride

Seeing ourselves as we are and not comparing ourselves to others is humility. Pride and vanity are competitive. If someone else's pride really bothers you, you have a lot of pride.

### Envy

"Love is patient, love is kind…" Love actively seeks the good of others for their sake. Envy resents the good others receive or even might receive. Envy is almost indistinguishable from pride at times.

### Wrath/Anger

Kindness means taking the tender approach, with patience and compassion. Anger is often our first reaction to the problems of others. Impatience with the faults of others is related to this.

### Sloth

Zeal is the energetic response of the heart to God's commands. The other sins work together to deaden the spiritual senses so we first become slow to respond to God and then drift completely into the sleep of complacency.

### Avarice/Greed

This is about more than money. Generosity means letting others get the credit or praise. It is giving without having expectations of the other person. Greed wants to get its "fair share" or a bit more.

### Gluttony

Temperance accepts the natural limits of pleasures and preserves this natural balance. This does not pertain only to food, but to entertainment and other legitimate goods, and even the company of others.

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**Lust**

Self control and self mastery prevent pleasure from killing the soul by suffocation. Legitimate pleasures are controlled in the same way an athlete's muscles are: for maximum efficiency without damage. Lust is the self-destructive drive for pleasure out of proportion to its worth. Sex, power, or image can be used well, but they tend to go out of control.

### 10.2.6 Appearance of Faustus' Enemies to Ambush and Kill Him

Benvolio's attempt to ambush and take revenge on Faustus is 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. Doctor Faustus has many features of the morality play of the middle ages.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. Which of the following is not feature of a morality play, that Doctor Faustus has?
    (a) Magic as a corrupting power
    (b) Conflict between good and evil
    (c) Power as a corrupting influence
    (d) Creation of good and bad angels.
12. Which of the following play regarding Doctor Faustus is incorrect?
    (a) Doctor Faustus deals with the themes at the heart of Christianity
    (b) Doctor Faustus deals with morality more than the sin
    (c) Doctor Faustus deals with seven deadly sins
    (d) Doctor Faustus disobey God.
13. Doctor Faustus, despite being a magician rather than a scientist, explicitly rejects
    (a) the deadly sins
    (b) the moral code of conduct
    (c) the medieval model
    (d) supernatural thoughts.

Fill in the blanks:

14. The conflict between ..... and Evil was a recurring theme in the medieval morality plays.
15. Doctor Faustus deals with the themes at the heart of ..... understanding of the world.
16. Throughout the play, Doctor Faustus decides to remain loyal to ..... rather than seek heaven.
17. The Good Angel and the Bad Angel are characters derived from the ..... plays.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. Blood plays only one symbolic role in the play.
19. The audience also observes the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins in Doctor Faustus.
20. Seeing ourselves as we are and not comparing ourselves to others is humility.

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## 10.3 Summary

- Liturgical Drama in the beginning had three forms, Mystery, Miracle and Morality.
- The morality plays are a type of allegory in which the protagonist is met by personification of various moral attributes, who try to prompt him to choose a godly life over one of evil.
- Morality play flourished in the middle ages, was at its height in the first half of the 15 century, disappeared after the second half, but reappeared in Elizabethan drama.
- In the play, Doctor Faustus, the characters were personified abstractions of vice or virtues such as Good deeds, Faith, Mercy, Anger, Truth, Pride, etc.
- The general theme of the moralities was theological and the main one was the struggle between the good and evil powers for capturing the man's soul and good always won.
- The story of whole morality play centres round the single towering figure.
- The seven deadly sins were found engaged in physical and verbal battle with cardinal virtues. The antics of vices and devils, etc. offered a considerable opportunity for low comedy or buffoonery. The morality play often ended with a solemn moral.
- The main theme of the morality play is: Man begins in innocence, man falls into temptation, man repents and is saved or killed.
- Morality plays help the audience understand the greater concepts of sin and virtue.
- There are many ways in which Doctor Faustus resembles medieval morality plays.
- In the story of Doctor Faustus we see how his trend with his sin of excessive pride, which led him to become a greedy person, obsess with knowing everything about life. In this story we also see how a good angel, a bad angel and an old man try to tell Doctor Faustus what type of decision to make.
- In the light of the theme and characteristics of morality play, we may call "*Doctor Faustus*" a belated morality play in spite of its tragic ending.
- Faustus follows the path told by evil angel and ultimately is ruined. He cannot repent and devil is successful in getting hold of his soul. This moral is negative which is not in accordance with morality plays.
- Faustus is a character ideal to be the hero of a tragedy where man alone is the maker of his fate,good or bad.
- We conclude that how Doctor Faustus came from a respected and admired person by society to a corrupted person. He embarked on this path due to his temptations.
- Doctor Faustus has many features of a morality play: the conflict between good and evil, the conflict between medieval and renaissance values, power as a corrupting influence, magic and the supernatural, 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.

## 10.4 Keywords

***Morality Play*** : An allegorical form of the drama current from the 14th to 16th centuries and employing such personified abstractions as Virtue, vice, Greed, Gluttony, etc.

***Angels*** : One of a class of spiritual beings; a celestial attendant of God. In medieval angelology, angels constituted the lowest of the nine celestial orders.

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***Counsel*** : Advice; opinion or instruction given in directing the judgmentor conduct of another. Or interchange of opinions as to future procedure; consultation; deliberation. Or one of the advisory declarations of Christ, considered by some Christians as not universally binding but as given for aid in attaining moral perfection.

***Deadly Sins*** : The seven sins of pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth.

***Allegorical*** : Consisting of or pertaining to allegory; of the nature of or containing allegory.

***Savior*** : A person who saves, rescues, or delivers: *the savior of the country.*

***Pageant*** : An elaborate public spectacle illustrative of the history of a place, institution, or the like, often given in dramatic form or as a procession of colorful floats. Or a costumed procession, masque, allegorical tableau, or the like forming part of public or social festivities. Or a show or exhibition, especially one consisting of a succession of participants or events: a beauty pageant. Or something comparable to a procession in colorful variety, splendor, or grandeur

## 10.5 Review Questions

1. What is a morality play?
2. Mention four characteristics of morality play.
3. What are the main themes of traditional morality play?
4. Write short notes on the following:
   (a) Good Angel and Bad Angel
   (b) The conflict between medieval and renaissance values
   (c) Magic and the supernatural themes in Doctor Faustus play.
5. Explain the following in context of Doctor Faustus play:
   (a) Pride (b) Sloth (c) Gluttony
6. Illustrate that Doctor Faustus is a morality play.
7. What are the pageant of seven deadly sins?
8. The main theme of the morality play is: Man begins in innocence, man falls into temptation, man repents and is saved or killed, in the context of this theme, explain the play Doctor Faustus.
9. Evaluate the the conflict between good and evil in the context of Doctor Faustus.
10. Illustrate the character of Doctor Faustus as a divided nature of man.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. allegory | 5. sin | 6. general |
| 7. evil angel | 8. True | 9. False |
| 10. True | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. Good | 15. Christianity's |
| 16. hell | 17. medieval morality | 18. False |
| 19. True | 20. True | |

## 10.6 Further Readings

Notes

*Books*

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Tydeman, William. 1984. *Doctor Faustus : Text and Performance*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, England.

*Online links*

http://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/short-summary/

http://www.enotes.com/faustus/

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# Unit 11: Doctor Faustus: Plot Construction Including Detailed Analysis of Sub Plot and Theme

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the plot construction in Doctor Faustus;
- Illustrate the detailed analysis of sub plot;
- Examine the various themes used in Doctor Faustus;
- Elaborate the analysis of themes used in Doctor Faustus.

## Introduction

Doctor Faustus, a well-respected German scholar, grows dissatisfied with the limits of traditional forms of knowledge—logic, medicine, law, and religion—and decides that he wants to learn to practice magic. His friends Valdes and Cornelius instruct him in the black arts, and he begins his new career as a magician by summoning up Mephastophilis, a devil. Despite Mephastophilis's warnings about the horrors of hell, Faustus tells the devil to return to his master, Lucifer, with an offer of Faustus's soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service from Mephastophilis. Meanwhile, Wagner, Faustus's servant, has picked up some magical ability and uses it to press a clown named Robin into his service.

Armed with his new powers and attended by Mephastophilis, Faustus begins to travel. He goes to the pope's court in Rome, makes himself invisible, and plays a series of tricks. He disrupts the pope's banquet by stealing food and boxing the pope's ears. Following this incident, he travels through the courts of Europe, with his fame spreading as he goes. Eventually, he is invited to the court of the German emperor, Charles V (the enemy of the pope), who asks Faustus to allow him to see Alexander the Great, the famed fourth-century BC Macedonian king and conqueror. Faustus conjures up an image of Alexander, and Charles is suitably impressed. A knight scoffs at Faustus's powers, and Faustus chastises him by making antlers sprout from his head. Furious, the knight vows revenge. Doctor Faustus is a well-constructed play. The plot constructiion is superb and the themes used were so well organised that the play seems a real story. This unit elaborates the plot construction of the play Doctor Faustus at length. Emphasis has also been given on the detailed analysis of sub-plot and theme.

## 11.1 Story of Doctor Faustus Play

Doctor Faustus, a talented German scholar at Wittenburg, rails against the limits of human knowledge. He has learned everything he can learn, or so he thinks, from the conventional academic disciplines. All of these things have left him unsatisfied, so now he turns to magic. A Good Angel and an Evil Angel arrive, representing Faustus' choice between Christian conscience and the path to damnation. The former advises him to leave off this pursuit of magic, and the latter tempts him. From two fellow scholars, Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus learns the fundamentals of the black arts. He thrills at the power he will have, and the great feats he'll perform. He summons the devil Mephostophilis. They flesh out the terms of their agreement, with Mephostophilis representing Lucifer. Faustus will sell his soul, in exchange for twenty-four years of power, with Mephostophilis as servant to his every whim.

*Notes* In a comic relief scene, we learn that Faustus' servant Wagner has gleaned some magic learning. He uses it to convince Robin the Clown to be his servant.

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Before the time comes to sign the contract, Faustus has misgivings, but he puts them aside. Mephistophilis returns and Faustus signs away his soul, writing with his own blood. The words "Homo fuge" ("Fly, man) appear on his arm, and Faustus is seized by fear. Mephistophilis distracts him with a dance of devils. Faustus requests a wife, a demand Mephostophilis denies, but he does give Faustus books full of knowledge.

Some time has passed. Faustus curses Mephostophilis for depriving him of heaven, although he has seen many wonders. He manages to torment Mephostophilis, he can't stomach mention of God, and the devil flees. The Good Angel and Evil Angel arrive again. The Good Angel tells him to repent, and the Evil Angel tells him to stick to his wicked ways. Lucifer, Belzebub, and Mephostophilis return, to intimidate Faustus. He is cowed by them, and agrees to speak and think no more of God. They delight him with a pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, and then Lucifer promises to show Faustus hell. Meanwhile, Robin the Clown has gotten one of Faustus' magic books.

Faustus has explored the heavens and the earth from a chariot drawn by dragons, and is now flying to Rome, where the feast honoring St. Peter is about to be celebrated. Mephostophilis and Faustus wait for the Pope, depicted as an arrogant, decidedly unholy man. They play a series of tricks, by using magic to disguise themselves and make themselves invisible, before leaving.

The Chorus returns to tell us that Faustus returns home, where his vast knowledge of astronomy and his abilities earn him wide renown. Meanwhile, Robin the Clown has also learned magic, and uses it to impress his friend Rafe and summon Mephostophilis, who doesn't seem too happy to be called.

At the court of Charles V, Faustus performs illusions that delight the Emperor. He also humiliates a knight named Benvolio. When Benvolio and his friends try to avenge the humiliation, Faustus has his devils hurt them and cruelly transform them, so that horns grow on their heads.

Faustus swindles a Horse-courser, and when the Horse-courser returns, Faustus plays a frightening trick on him. Faustus then goes off to serve the Duke of Vanholt. Robin the Clown, his friend Dick, the Horse-courser, and a Carter all meet. They all have been swindled or hurt by Faustus' magic. They go off to the court of the Duke to settle scores with Faustus.

Faustus entertains the Duke and Duchess with petty illusions, before Robin the Clown and his band of ruffians arrives. Faustus toys with them, besting them with magic, to the delight of the Duke and Duchess.

Faustus' twenty-four years are running out. Wagner tells the audience that he thinks Faustus prepares for death. He has made his will, leaving all to Wagner. But even as death approaches, Faustus spends his days feasting and drinking with the other students. For the delight of his fellow scholars, Faustus summons a spirit to take the shape of Helen of Troy. Later, an Old Man enters, warning Faustus to repent. Faustus opts for pleasure instead, and asks Mephostophilis to bring Helen of Troy to him, to be his love and comfort during these last days. Mephostophilis readily agrees.

Later, Faustus tells his scholar friends that he is damned, and that his power came at the price of his soul. As the hour approaches, Mephostophilis taunts Faustus. Faustus blames Mephostophilis for his damnation, and the devil proudly takes credit for it. The Good and Evil Angel arrive, and the Good Angel abandons Faustus. The gates of Hell open. The Evil Angel taunts Faustus, naming the horrible tortures seen there.

The Clock strikes eleven. Faustus gives a final, frenzied monologue, regretting his choices. At midnight the devils enter. As Faustus begs God and the devil for mercy, the devils drag him away. Later, the Scholar friends find Faustus' body, torn to pieces.

*Notes* The chorus emphasizes that Faustus is gone, his once-great potential wasted. The chorus warns the audience to remember his fall, and the lessons it offers.

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## 11.2 Plot Construction

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.

*Notes* 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.

*Task* Men should not delve into forbidden territories. They should go only where "heaven permits" one to tread. Illustrate this statement in context of the play Doctor Faustsus.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Doctor Faustus is
   (a) a talented German scholar
   (b) a talented magician
   (c) a shrewd deceit
   (d) a victim of the plot of Lucifer.
2. Faustus curses Mephostophilis for
   (a) refusing the service
   (b) depriving him of heaven
   (c) creating illusion in the Court of Charles V
   (d) returning to his master Lucifer.
3. Doctor Faustus is a well constructed play, and in the opening of the play
   (a) Faustus surveys different branches of knowledge
   (b) Faustus has a foretaste of what magic can do for him
   (c) the audience is given an explanation of the subject matter of this tragedy
   (d) Faustus as a magician is challenged by Benvolio.

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Fill in the blanks:

4. Faustus has explored the heavens and the ..... from a chariot drawn by dragons.
5. Doctor Faustus, a talented ..... at Wittenburg, rails against the limits of human knowledge.
6. Faustus ..... Mephostophilis for depriving him of heaven.
7. The outcome of the Doctor Faustus' pact with the devil is seen in ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. The Good Angel tells Doctor Faustus to repent, and the Evil Angel tells him to stick to his wicked ways.
9. All the knwoledge from conventional academic disciplines has left Doctor Faustus unsatisfied, so now he turns to magic.
10. Faustus swindles a horse-courser, and when the horse-courser returns, Faustus plays a frightening trick on him.

## 11.3 Themes in Doctor Faustus

### 11.3.1 Conflict between Good and Evil

One of the most important and prominent themes in Doctor Faustus is by far the conflict between good and evil in the world and the human soul. Marlowe's play set the precedent for religious works that were concerned with morals and suffering. In the play, Doctor Faustus is frequently accompanied by two angels, one good and one evil. Both spirits try to advise him on a course of action, with the evil one usually being more influential over his mind. These two angels embody the internal battle that is raging inside of Faustus. On one hand, he has an insatiable thirst for knowledge and supreme power; on the other hand, Faustus realizes that it is folly to relinquish heavenly pleasures for fleeting mortal happiness.

Although society is accustomed to believing that good will always prevails, evil gains the upper hand in Marlowe's play. Innocent and often devout men are tortured at Faustus's delight and command. He partakes in many pleasures with devils and is even shown the seven deadly sins in person. Thus, Faustus is depicted as doomed from the very beginning. Although he has moments of contrition, he quickly shoves aside thoughts of God and turns to evil. Marlowe attempted to express to his audience that while prayer and repentance are the paths to heaven, sin and mortal pleasure are very hard temptations to pass over.

Lucifer's acquisition of Faustus's soul is especially delightful for him because Faustus was once a good and devout soul. Even during his last moments on earth, Faustus curses himself for willingly burning the scriptures and denouncing God. In Doctor Faustus, Marlowe shows the reader that everything in the mortal world is a double-edged sword.

*Example*: In his never-ending quest for knowledge, Faustus exemplifies how even scholarly life can have evil undertones when studies are used for unholy purposes. Doctor Faustus's miserable defeat against the forces of evil within and without enlightens the reader to beware a surfeit of anything.

### 11.3.2 Greed

Like many of Marlowe's heroes, Faustus was self-driven by greed and ambition. In this case, the Doctor tries to satiate his appetite for knowledge and power. These heroes forget their responsibilities

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to God and their fellow creatures. Instead, they attempt to hide their weak characters with a megalomaniacal insanity. While Faustus is amused by the seven deadly sins, he does not realize that he is guilty of every single one, namely avarice and jealousy. In effect, Marlowe presents to the reader a good soul gone bad-a brilliant scholar who squanders his time with necromancy and is later courted by the devil himself. Although he is frequently surrounded by powerful heads of state, beautiful women and servile devils, Faustus is never truly happy. He tries to bury his unrest with luxury and debauchery, to no avail.

*Task* What Faustus does not realize is that he craves happiness and salvation, not wealth and damnation. Instead, in a tragic cycle of greed and despair, Faustus sadly wallows in riches up to the time of his miserable death. Keeping this in view, explain that Doctor Faustus is a tragic hero.

### 11.3.3 Salvation through Prayer

A third important motif in the play is that of salvation through prayer. While Doctor Faustus is an example of what happens to a wayward soul, the old man represents the devout Christian soul. The old man begs Faustus to repent, regardless of the tortures that the devils inflict on him for this. He clings to his faith to the very end and even Mephostophilis is wary of harming him because of his good soul. Thus, the old man serves as a foil to Faustus's misery and damnation.

### 11.3.4 Tragic Hero

A fourth theme in Doctor Faustus is that of the tragic hero. Despite his unholy soul, Faustus is often viewed by audiences with pity and compassion. A tragic hero is a character that the audience sympathizes with despite his/her actions that would indicate the contrary. Faustus is not the mere shell of a man in the play, existing only to represent the evil in the world. He is a veritable human being with a range of emotions and thoughts. He displays pride, joy, contrition and self-doubt quite frequently. At many times, Faustus alternately displays his cowardice and foolish strength against the devils. Thus, Faustus's one saving grace with the audience is his identifiable character. Although the Doctor himself does not care for humanity, many find themselves identifying with his all too human dreams of power, knowledge and lechery. Unfortunately, Faustus's humanity was not enough in the play to make him repent and save him from the depths of hell.

*Caution* Doctor Faustus has an unholy soul existing only to represent the evil in the world, but he is often viewed by audiences with pity and compassion—a tragic hero.

### 11.3.5 Man's Limitations and Potential

The axis of this theme is the conflict between Greek or Renaissance worldviews, and the Christian worldview that has held sway throughout the medieval period. As Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, contact with previously lost Greek learning had a revelatory effect on man's conception of himself. While the Christian worldview places man below God, and requires obedience to him, the Greek worldview places man at the center of the universe. For the Greeks, man defies the gods at his own peril, but man has nobility that no deity can match.

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*Notes* The possible range of human accomplishment is at the heart of Doctor Faustus, and many of the other themes are auxiliary to this one.

Doctor Faustus, scholar and lover of beauty, chafes at the bit of human limitation. He seeks to achieve godhood himself, and so he leaves behind the Christian conceptions of human limitation. Though he fancies himself to be a seeker of Greek greatness, we see quickly that he is not up to the task.

### 11.3.6 Pride and Sin

Pride is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, arguable the one that leads to all the others. Within the Christian framework, pride is a lethal motivation because it makes the sinner forget his fallen state. A men made haughty with pride forgets that he shares Eve's sin, and must therefore be saved by the gift of grace. Only God, through Christ, can dispense this grace, and the man who forgets that fact deprives himself of the path to salvation.

*Notes* For Christians, men are fallen since birth, because they carry with them the taint of original sin.

Faustus' first great sin is pride. He does not stop there. Reflecting the Christian view, pride gives rise to all of the other sins, and ends ironically with the proud man's abasement. Faustus goes quickly from pride to all of the other sins, becoming increasingly petty and low.

### 11.3.7 Flesh and Spirit

The division between flesh and spirit was stronger in Greek thought than in Hebrew thought, but Christians adapted the divide into their own belief system. While Westerners now take this conception of being for granted, the flesh/spirit divide is not a feature of many of the world's major belief systems. Nor is the flesh/spirit divide necessary for belief in the afterlife: both Hindus and Buddhists conceive of the human entity differently, while retaining belief in life after death.

In Christianity, flesh and spirit are divided to value the later and devalue the former. Faustus' problem is that he values his flesh, and the pleasure it can provide him, while failing to look after the state of his soul.

### 11.3.8 Damnation

Damnation is eternal. Eternal hell is another concept that Westerners take for granted as part of religion, but again this belief's uniqueness needs to be appreciated. While the Jewish view of the afterlife was somewhat vague, Christians developed the idea of judgment after death. Moslems adapted a similar conception of hell and heaven, and to this day eternal hell and eternal heaven remains an important feature of Christianity and Islam. While Buddhists and Hindus have hell in their belief systems, for the most part in neither religion is hell considered eternal. For example, an eternal hell in Mahayana Buddhism would contradict Buddhist beliefs about transience and the saving power of Buddha's compassion.

Not so in Christianity. If Faustus dies without repenting and accepting God, he will be damned forever. As we learn from Mephostophilis, hell is not merely a place, but separation from God's love.

### 11.3.9 Salvation, Mercy and Redemption

Hell is eternal, but so is heaven. For a Christian, all that is necessary to be saved from eternal damnation is acceptance of Jesus Christ's grace. Even after signing away his soul to the devil, Faustus

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has the option of repentance that will save him from hell. But once he has committed himself to his own damnation, Faustus seems unable to change his course. While Christianity seems to accept even a deathbed repentance as acceptable for the attainment of salvation, Marlowe plays with that idea, possibly rejecting it for his own thematic purposes.

### 11.3.10 Valuing Knowledge over Wisdom

Faustus has a thirst for knowledge, but he seems unable to acquire wisdom. Faustus' thirst for knowledge is impressive, but it is overshadowed by his complete inability to understand certain truths. Because of this weakness, Faustus cannot use his knowledge to better himself or his world. He ends life with a head full of facts, and vital understanding gained too late to save him.

### 11.3.11 Talk and Action

Faustus is, with no exceptions, beautiful when he speaks and contemptible when he acts. His opening speeches about the uses to which he'll put his power are exhilarating, but once he gains near-omnipotence he squanders twenty-four years in debauchery and petty tricks. This gap between high talk and low action seems related to the fault of valuing knowledge over wisdom. While Faustus has learned much of the Greek world's learning, he has not really understood what he's been reading. He can talk about potential and plans in terms of a Greek worldview, but he lacks the internal strength to follow through on his purported goals.

### 11.3.12 Quest for Power

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.

*Notes* 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.

### 11.3.13 Quest for Knowledge

Marlowe's Faustus embodies the Renaissance aspiration for infinite knowledge. In the first scene of the play, Faustus reviews all the existing branches of knowledge. He rejects them all and opts for the study of the black arts, since they will bestow upon him "a world of profit and delight/of power, of honor, of omnipotence."

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

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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.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. Conflict between good and evil is best depicted by
    (a) good angel and bad angel
    (b) morals and sufferings
    (c) thrust for knowledge and supreme power
    (d) evil will gains the upper hand over good will.
12. Pride and sin is one of the seven deadly sins that leads to
    (a) be saved by the gift of grace
    (b) all other deadly sins
    (c) the man's abasement
    (d) world's major belief system.
13. The theme quest for knowledge best embodies by
    (a) the gain the magical power by Doctor Faustus
    (b) the creation of illusion
    (c) the Renaissance aspiration for infinite knowledge
    (d) the gain of spiritul knowledge.

Fill in the blanks:

14. Doctor Faustus is frequently accompanied by two angels, one ..... and one evil.
15. Faustus was self-driven by ..... and ambition.
16. Faustus has a thirst for knowledge, but he seems unable to acquire ..... .
17. Knowledge bestows ..... on the knower.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. Pride is a lethal motivation because it makes the sinner forget his fallen state.
19. The division between flesh and spirit was stronger in Christian Theology.
20. This gap between high talk and low action seems related to the fault of valuing knowledge over wisdom.

## 11.4 Summary

- Doctor Faustus, a talented German scholar at Wittenburg, rails against the limits of human knowledge. He has learned everything he can learn, or so he thinks, from the conventional academic disciplines. All of these things have left him unsatisfied, so now he turns to magic.
- A Good Angel and an Evil Angel arrive, representing Faustus' choice between Christian conscience and the path to damnation.
- Faustus curses Mephostophilis for depriving him of heaven, although he has seen many wonders. He manages to torment Mephostophilis, he can't stomach mention of God, and the devil flees.

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- Faustus has explored the heavens and the earth from a chariot drawn by dragons, and is now flying to Rome, where the feast honoring St. Peter is about to be celebrated. Mephostophilis and Faustus wait for the Pope, depicted as an arrogant, decidedly unholy man.
- 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.
- 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 outcome of the protagonist's pact with the devil is seen in Act V.
- The most important and prominent themes in Doctor Faustus is by far the conflict between good and evil in the world and the human soul.
- Like many of Marlowe's heroes, Faustus was self-driven by greed and ambition.
- Salvation through Prayer is the third important motif in the play.
- Despite his unholy soul, Faustus is often viewed by audiences with pity and compassion.
- The axis of this theme is the conflict between Greek or Renaissance worldviews, and the Christian worldview that has held sway throughout the medieval period.
- Pride is one of the Seven Deadly Sins, arguable the one that leads to all the others.
- 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.

## 11.5 Keywords

***Repent*** : To feel sorry, self-reproachful, or contrite for past conduct; regret or be conscience-stricken about a past action, attitude, etc.

***Monologue*** : A form of dramatic entertainment, comedic solo, or the like by a single speaker. Or a prolonged talk or discourse by a single speaker, especially one dominating or monopolizing a conversation.

***Exposition*** : A large-scale public exhibition or show, as of art or manufactured products. Or writing or speech primarily intended to convey information or to explain.

***Plebeians*** : Belonging or pertaining to the common people.

***Epilogue*** : A speech, usually in verse, delivered by one of the actors after the conclusion of a play.

***Morals*** : Pertaining to, or concerned with the principles or rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong, ethical, moral attitudes. Or expressing or conveying truths or counsel as to right conduct, as a speaker or a literary work.

***Greed*** : Excessive or rapacious desire, especially for wealth or possessions.

***Ambition*** : An earnest desire for some type of achievement or distinction, as power, honor, fame, or wealth, and the willingness to strive for its attainment.

***Avarice*** : Insatiable greed for riches; inordinate, miserly desire to gain and hoard wealth.

***Salvation*** : The act of saving or protecting from harm, risk, loss, destruction, etc. Or the state of being saved or protected from harm, risk, etc.

***Despair*** : Someone or something that causes hopelessness.

***Tragic Hero*** : A great or virtuous character in a dramatic tragedy who is destined for downfall, suffering, or defeat.

***Pride*** : A high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as displayed in bearing, conduct, etc.

***Redemption*** : An act of redeeming or the state of being redeemed.

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## 11.6 Review Questions

1. Give a detailed analysis of plot in Doctor Faustus.
2. Quist for knowledge is an important theme used in Doctor Faustus. Explain.
3. What are the main themes used in Doctor Faustus?
4. Write short notes on the following in context of Doctor Faustus:
   (a) Conflict between good and evil
   (b) Pride and sin
   (c) Valuing knowledge over wisdom.
5. Explain the following in context of Doctor Faustus play:
   (a) Flesh and spirit (b) Quist for Power (c) Tragic Hero
6. Illustrate that salvation through power is an important motif in Doctor Faustus play.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (b) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. earth | 5. German scholar | 6. curses |
| 7. Act V | 8. True | 9. True |
| 10. True | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. good | 15. greed |
| 16. wisdom | 17. power | 18. True |
| 19. False | 20. True | |

## 11.7 Further Readings

*Books*

Farnham, Willard. 1969. *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Doctor Faustus*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice- Hall.

Tydeman, William. 1984. *Doctor Faustus : Text and Performance*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, England.

*Online links*

http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/doctorfaustus/summary.html

http://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/major-themes/

http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/doctorfaustus/themes.html

http://www.enotes.com/lit/q-and-a/plot-construction-play-doctor-faustus-296885

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# Unit 12: Doctor Faustus: Detailed Analysis of Seven Deadly Sins

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the term sin;
- Elaborate the seven deadly sins as set forth in literature;
- Illustrate the seven cardinal sins as ordered Marlowe in the play Doctor Faustus;
- Enumerate an illustrative analysis of the seven sins.

## Introduction

The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, commonly referred to simply as Doctor Faustus, is a play by Christopher Marlowe, based on the Faust story, in which a man sells his soul to the devil for power and knowledge. Marlowe very effectively depicted the seven deadly sins in the charcater of Doctor Faustus. But what exactly is sin? While there are many definitions of

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sin, the broadest and most accurate definition of sin is found in 1 John 5: 17: "All wrongdoing is sin. …" In other words, all unrighteousness is considered sin. The Bible has clearly and emphatically indicated that which is not right; Gods laws and standards are very specific, showing us His utter and complete holiness. This unit elaborates the seven deadly sins used in Doctor Faustus at length.

## 12.1 Seven Deadly Dins

The Seven Deadly Sins, when mentioned, conjure up ancient tales of dark deeds and dark characters, like Faustus and Mephistopheles. Doctor Faustus supposedly sold his soul to the devil, the evil Mephistopheles and, in so doing, made himself prey to all types of corruption and degradation. In his descent into wickedness, the ruined Faustus committed all of these deadly sins: pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth. These sins were considered deadly because they led Faustus, or any man or woman who would commit them onto a path from which there was no return.

The characteristics that are considered to be the seven deadly sins can be described this way: Pride is the exaggerated opinion of one's worth in comparison to God and others and a willful oblivion to one's flaws. Envy is the unhealthy longing for the possessions, abilities, or status of another. Gluttony is excessive indulgence in the pleasures of food and drink. Lust is extreme desire for sexual and sensual gratification. Anger is manifested by fits of wrath and rage due to intolerance of others. Greed is an insatiable desire to acquire material goods. Sloth is an almost pathological laziness which hinders productivity and good health. Anyone possessing some of these vices was considered evil; anyone who possessed all of them was utterly doomed.

By using the words "seven deadly sins," it suggests that there are serious character flaws which may exist in a man and that the deeds which are produced as a result of these flaws have fatal consequences. All death is a type of separation; spiritual death is separation from God. The Bible indicates that sin ends in death: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

*Task* The use of words seven deadly sins suggests that there are serious character flaws which may exist in a man and that the deeds which are produced as a result of these flaws have fatal consequences. Explain.

James, the brother of Jesus said it this way, "But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

*Notes* In Romans, Paul indicates that the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God. The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again; Jesus paid the price. Jesus paid this price by being brutalized and massacred in ignominy on a cross. This painful and humiliating death showed us God's attitude towards sin.

The Seven Deadly Sins as set forth in literature—pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth—are by no means an exhaustive list of sins. It has already established that all unrighteousness is sin, but the book of Proverbs also lists seven things that God hates: "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." Yes, God has indicated that these are things that he despises and that every wrong is sin—but He has also provided a remedy:

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"'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

*Notes* God has promised to make us pure and white and whole; this cleansing and purification was provided through, His Son, Jesus Christ. There was no contribution from man. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly." All we need to do is believe that Christ died for us and accept Him as Savior and Lord.

If God has provided a remedy for sin, how can it be deadly? The deadliness of sin was erased through the death of Christ and the shedding of His blood. God loves us so much that He sent His Son to earth for the express purpose of accomplishing this. However, if we do not believe and accept what God has offered, than *any* sin we commit will be deadly. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

*Task* Elucidate that the deadliness of sin was erased through the death of Christ and the shedding of His blood.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. The seven deadly sins, when mentioned, conjure up ancient tales of dark deeds
   (a) ancient tales of dark deeds and dark characters
   (b) fairy tales of dark deeds
   (c) modern tales of dark characters
   (d) medieval tales of dark deeds and dark characters.
2. The characteristics that are considered to be the seven deadly sins can be described as
   (a) gluttony, fight, lust, anger, sloth, proud, and envy
   (b) pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth
   (c) fight, repent, pride, lust, sloth, anger, and worship
   (d) repent, fight, glottony, pride, sloth, anger, and worship.
3. The deadlyness of sin was erased through
   (a) repent
   (b) worship
   (c) the death of Christ and shedding of His blood
   (d) both repent and worship.

Fill in the blanks:

4. Doctor Faustus supposedly sold his ..... to the devil.

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5. In his descent into wickedness, the ruined Faustus committed all of the .....
6. By using the words "seven deadly sins," it suggests that there are serious ..... flaws.
7. God has indicated that these are things that he despises and that every ..... is sin.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Even though God has provided a remedy for sin, then how can it be deadly?
9. Anger is manifested by fits of wrath and rage due to intolerance of others.
10. In Romans, Paul indicates that the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God.

## 12.2 Marlowe's Cardinal Sins

Marlowe has ordered seven cardinal sins in his play Doctor Faustus, viz. pride, covetousness, envy, wrath, gluttony, sloth, and lechery.

### 12.2.1 Pride

Faustus is proud of his knowledge. Pride, creates Doctor Faustus' inability to repent, therefore ultimately resulting in his death. "His fall is caused by the same pride and ambition that caused the fall of angels in heaven, and of humanity in the Garden of Eden.". Faustus' fall is foreshadowed during his first encounter with a devil, inquiring of the reason for Lucifer's exile in hell.

FAUSTUS: How comes it then that he is prince of devils?

MEPHASTOPHILIS: O, by aspiring pride and insolence

For which God threw him from the face of Heaven.

An eternity in hell becomes Doctor Faustus' fate, a fate determined by his own irrational decisions. Although he is a well-educated scholar, traits of arrogance, selfishness, and pride hinder his judgment. Doctor Faustus' troubles begin when he craves power and knowledge beyond human capacity. Bored with his great knowledge, he wishes to find another subject to study to pacify himself and achieve happiness.

*Example*: FAUSTUS: Then read no more, thou hast attained the end;

A greater subject fitteth Faustus' wit.

By making a deal with the devil, Faustus trades his soul for satisfaction, and a greater field of study. He is selfish—wanting knowledge, power, and fun without having to work or take responsibility for it. As result of his selfish desires, he signs a contract with his blood trading his soul for his desires, eternal peace for eternal anguish, thus beginning his hardships.

Throughout the twenty-four year period in which Faustus has power and knowledge, his pride is constant and emerges in several scenes. Evidence of this threatening pride begins as early as the prologue when the chorus compares Doctor Faustus with Icarus, their similarity being vanity.

This excerpt suggests, that like Icarus, Doctor Faustus' pride will lead to his overthrow. Other examples of Faustus' arrogance are the scenes in which he comments on the things that the devil shows him. Several times in the play, Faustus remarks that hat Mephastophilis shows or tells him could easily be figured out by his own student, Wagner.

To make a statement such as that is egotistical, and typical of his character. Other statements that Doctor Faustus made in which his egotism is apparent.

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*Examples*: FAUSTUS. I charge thee to return and change thy shape,

Thou art too ugly to attend on me;

FAUSTUS: Come, I think hell's a fable.

Thinkest 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.

In these examples, Doctor Faustus clearly regards himself on a higher level than hell and its devils. He will allow Mephastophilis to be his "servant", but only in a more becoming shape, even though it is Mephastophilis that brings Faustus his magic. Furthermore, despite Mephastophilis' warnings, Faustus is oblivious to the dangers about him; he believes nothing will or can happen to him. It is the notion of near superhuman power that Faustus possesses that creates this unmovable pride. Faustus believes he is all-knowing; if anything was wrong, he would perceive it.

The arrogance that hinders Doctor Faustus' judgment continues as the play progresses, and it is depicted in several scenes. Faustus wishes to visit the Pope, as he feels he is entitled, and during this encounter in which Faustus is invisible, he grabs and important dish meant to be given to the Friar.

It is the extreme pride of Doctor Faustus that leads him to believe that he is more deserving of the special dish than the Pope. Faustus also reacts in the same manner with the horse-courser. Instead of selling his horse made of magic for a fair price, he insists on more money than the courser can afford. Throughout the play, Marlowe combines these shameful displays of pride with several interventions between Faustus and the Good and Evil Angels. During these encounters, Faustus is asked and given the chance to repent to receive God's forgiveness and release from his contract with Lucifer. However, he reacts negatively to the Good Angel's advice and is tempted by the Evil Angel's persuasions of worldly possessions and power, to maintain his pact with Lucifer.

Despite his agreement with the devil, Faustus is a free individual. However, Faustus was too stubborn and overcome by his pride to realize his freedom, and therefore does not repent. He is again unconcerned with the fate that lies ahead of him. He believes himself to be so powerful that there is no pain in hell capable of harming him.

The level of pride that Faustus contains at the end of the play is still abundant, and at this point, it is too late for him. In his last words, Faustus finally realizes the terrible fate upon him and admits his vulnerability asking for mercy on his soul, but only to lessen the pain of hell.

*Examples*: FAUSTUS: O God, if thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,

Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,

Impose some end to my incessant pain:

Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,

A hundred thousand, and at last be saved

With the closing of the play as Doctor Faustus is sent to hell, there are many ironic details evident. The main one is that despite his great knowledge and power, Faustus makes the most unwise decision. Repenting to Mephastophilis instead of God, he gives up everything for nothing in return. In all his years with his new knowledge and power. He did nothing of significance; he merely played tricks and showed off his new talents. Marlowe's play is full of irony depicting the downfall of man riddled with sin. The underlying theme however is that, like Icarus and Lucifer, Doctor Faustus allows his pride, a key to most tragedies, to become excessive and ultimately it is his downfall.

Notes

### 12.2.2 Covetousness

Faustus demonstrates this in various scenes, when he evokes the devils magic, the want of a wife, and the overall actions of his character portray his pursuit of knowledge and glory. Usually this sin is manifested through sex, power, or image which demises the self control and can suffocate the soul. It is the self-destructive drive for pleasure which is out of control. Faustus ... performs his silly tricks for self indulgence.

Task

Illustrate a few scenes where Faustus demonstrates covetousness.

### 12.2.3 Envy

Doctor Faustus wanted more in his life and envied the powers of others. Therefore he wanted to command the demons to control the world to his accord... Doctor Faustus was envious of the accomplishment of others and wanted to exceed their glory (Act One). In one of the comic scenes, scene 6, we learn that Robin and Rafe have stolen one of Faustus' books and plan to use it to seduce a woman. They must have been jealous of Faustus' power and his magical aptitude.

### 12.2.4 Wrath

Often this is our first reaction to the faults of others. Faustus demonstrates his impatience with the way he treats the people around him, his servants (demonic and human), as well as other characters ... Wrath is what Faustus feels when he conjures up horns to place on the head of a knight of Emperor Charles V, court. Since the knight shows skepticism in Faustus' powers, Faustus must rebuke his insolence by placing horns on the knight's head.

### 12.2.5 Gluttony

Glottony is temperance in accepting the natural limits of pleasures, and preserves of the natural balance. This does not pertain only to food, but to entertainment and other legitimate goods, and even the company of others. Faustus demonstrates gluttony when he evokes the use of the dark arts. He is attempting to go beyond his earthly knowledge while disturbing the natural balance of Gods laws and expectations. Faustus wants to elevate himself as an equal to God. In Faustus's eyes God is no longer the balance or medium in his life, the devil has become the greater power to Faustus. ... Faustus starts using the devils name in place of where one would use Gods name.

### 12.2.6 Sloth

Sloth in conjunction with the other sins, works to muffle the spiritual senses so we first become slow to respond to God and then drift completely into the slumber of complacency to the demonic ways. This is the sixth sin in the death of Faustus ... Faustus has become numb to his own sub consciousness; he no longer abides by what he does. Even in the scene where he signs the contract with the devil, his blood congeals and he does not understand why. His own body is fighting the deadly deed he was attempting to do.

### 12.2.7 Lechery

Also known as greed is the seventh sin. Faustus also displays greed in act one when he states he has not accomplished greatness. Faustus wants to gain glory; he has expectations of others to get him his glory. Faustus uses Mephastophilis to gain glory ... and he does not acknowledge that the demon is responsible for all the tasks he performs, but states it is his gift of the dark arts.

## Self Assessment

Notes

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. Pride creates Doctor Faustus' inability
    (a) to repent
    (b) to adjust in the new situation
    (c) to dispel the Gospel
    (d) to dispel the evil deeds.
12. Which of the following sin make Doctor Faustus to want more in his life?
    (a) Pride
    (b) Envy
    (c) Gluttony
    (d) Sloth.
13. Which of the following group is not Marlowe's deadly sins?
    (a) Lechery, gluttony, and envy
    (b) Wrath, sloth, and pride
    (c) Repent, sloth, and gluttony
    (d) Covetousness, envy, and gluttony.

Fill in the blanks:

14. Doctor Faustus wanted more in his life and envied the ..... of others.
15. Glottony is temperance in accepting the ..... of pleasures, and preserves of the natural balance.
16. Faustus demonstrates covetoudness in various scenes, when he evokes the .....
17. Despite his agreement with the ....., Faustus is a free individual.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. Doctor Faustus wanted to command the demons to control the world to his accord.
19. Faustus displays Lechery in act one when he states he has not accomplished greatness.
20. By making a deal with the devil, Faustus trades his soul for satisfaction, and a greater field of study.

## 12.3 Summary

- The Seven Deadly Sins, when mentioned, conjure up ancient tales of dark deeds and dark characters, like Faustus and Mephistopheles.
- Doctor Faustus supposedly sold his soul to the devil, the evil Mephistopheles and, in so doing, made himself prey to all types of corruption and degradation.
- In his descent into wickedness, the ruined Faustus committed all of these deadly sins: pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth.
- These sins were considered deadly because they led Faustus, or any man or woman who would commit them onto a path from which there was no return.

Notes

- Pride is the exaggerated opinion of one's worth in comparison to God and others and a willful oblivion to one's flaws.
- Envy is the unhealthy longing for the possessions, abilities, or status of another.
- Gluttony is excessive indulgence in the pleasures of food and drink.
- Lust is extreme desire for sexual and sensual gratification.
- Anger is manifested by fits of wrath and rage due to intolerance of others.
- Greed is an insatiable desire to acquire material goods.
- Sloth is an almost pathological laziness which hinders productivity and good health.
- Anyone possessing some of the deadlly sins was considered evil and anyone who possessed all of them was utterly doomed.
- In Romans, Paul indicates that the Gospel reveals the righteousness of God.
- The Gospel is the Good News that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again; Jesus paid the price.
- God has promised to make us pure and white and whole; this cleansing and purification was provided through, His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Marlowe has ordered seven cardinal sins in his play Doctor Faustus, viz. pride, covetousness, envy, wrath, gluttony, sloth, and lechery.
- Faustus is proud of his knowledge. Pride, creates Doctor Faustus' inability to repent, therefore ultimately resulting in his death. An eternity in hell becomes Doctor Faustus' fate, a fate determined by his own irrational decisions. By making a deal with the devil, Faustus trades his soul for satisfaction, and a greater field of study.
- Throughout the twenty-four year period in which Faustus has power and knowledge, his pride is constant and emerges in several scenes. In these examples, Doctor Faustus clearly regards himself on a higher level than hell and its devils.
- It is the extreme pride of Doctor Faustus that leads him to believe that he is more deserving of the special dish than the Pope. Faustus also reacts in the same manner with the horse-courser.
- Despite his agreement with the devil, Faustus is a free individual. However, Faustus was too stubborn and overcome by his pride to realize his freedom, and therefore does not repent.
- The level of pride that Faustus contains at the end of the play is still abundant, and at this point, it is too late for him.
- With the closing of the play as Doctor Faustus is sent to hell, there are many ironic details evident. The main one is that despite his great knowledge and power, Faustus makes the most unwise decision.
- Faustus demonstrates covetousness in various scenes, when he evokes the devils magic, the want of a wife, and the overall actions of his character portray his pursuit of knowledge and glory.
- Doctor Faustus wanted more in his life and envied the powers of others. Therefore he wanted to command the demons to control the world to his accord.
- Often wrath is our first reaction to the faults of others. Faustus demonstrates his impatience with the way he treats the people around him, his servants (demonic and human), as well as other characters.
- Faustus demonstrates gluttony when he evokes the use of the dark arts. He is attempting to go beyond his earthly knowledge while disturbing the natural balance of Gods laws and expectations.

Notes

- Sloth is the sixth sin in the death of Faustus ... Faustus has become numb to his own sub consciousness; he no longer abides by what he does.
- Faustus also displays greed in act one when he states he has not accomplished greatness. Faustus wants to gain glory; he has expectations of others to get him his glory.

## 12.4 Keywords

***Pride*** : It is excessive belief in one's own abilities, that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God. It has been called the sin from which all others arise. Pride is also known as vanity.

***Envy*** : It is the desire for others' traits, status, abilities, or situation.

***Gluttony*** : It is an inordinate desire to consume more than that which one requires.

***Sloth*** : It is the avoidance of physical or spiritual work.

***Gospel*** : It is the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again.

***Lust*** : It is an inordinate craving for the pleasures of the body.

***Anger*** : It is manifested in the individual who spurns love and opts instead for fury. It is also known as wrath.

***Greed*** : It is the desire for material wealth or gain, ignoring the realm of the spiritual. It is also called Avarice or Covetousness.

***Virtuous nature*** : Conforming to moral and ethical principles; morally excellent; upright nature.

***Betrayal*** : To deliver or expose to an enemy by treachery or disloyalty.

***Shrewdness*** : Astute or sharp in practical matters.

***Regicide*** : A person who kills a king or is responsible for his death, especially one of the judges who condemned Charles I of England to death.

***Prophecies*** : Something that is declared by a prophet, especially a divinely inspired prediction, instruction, or exhortation.

***Contrivance*** : Something contrived; a device, especially a mechanical one.

***Timidity*** : Lacking in self-assurance, courage, or bravery.

***Imbecility*** : An instance or point of weakness; feebleness; incapability.

***Superstition*** : A belief or notion, not based on reason or knowledge, in or of the ominous significance of a particular thing, circumstance, occurrence, proceeding, or the like.

***Obscenity*** : The character or quality of being obscene; indecency; lewdness.

## 12.5 Review Questions

1. Give a brief view of ancient tales of dark deeds and dark characters.
2. Mention the characteristics that are considered to be the seven deadly sins.
3. What are Marlowe's cardinal sins?
4. Write short notes on the following:
   (a) Greed is an insatiable desire
   (b) Pride is cause of one's fall
   (c) Gluttony preserves the natural balance.

Notes

5. Explain the following in context of Doctor Faustus play:
   (a) Wrath (b) Envy (c) Lechery
6. Illustrate that Pride is the exaggerated opinion of one's worth in comparison to God.
7. Explain the fact that Doctor Faustus wanted more in his life and envied the powers of others.
8. It is the extreme pride of Doctor Faustus that leads him to believe that he is more deserving of the special dish than the Pope. Explain.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (c) |
| 4. soul | 5. deadly sins | 6. character |
| 7. wrong | 8. False | 9. True |
| 10. True | 11. (a) | 12. (b) |
| 13. (c) | 14. powers | 15. natural limits |
| 16. devils magic | 17. devil | 18. True |
| 19. True | 20. True | |

## 12.6 Further Readings

*Books*

Solomon Schimmel. 1997. *The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian, and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Tydeman, William. 1984. *Doctor Faustus : Text and Performance*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, England.

*Online links*

http://www.deadlysins.com/sins/index.htm

http://www.allaboutgod.com/seven-deadly-sins.htm

http://www.enotes.com/faustus/q-and-a/analyze-how-dr-faustus-guilty-seven-cardinal-sins-86739

http://www.gradesaver.com/dr-faustus/study-guide/section3/

Notes

# Unit 13: Doctor Faustus: Characterization and Faustus Character

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Enumerate the characterization of the play Doctor Faustus;
- Illustrate that Doctor Faustus is the central character of the play;
- Describe that Doctor Faustus is a tragic hero with admirable aspirations;
- Examine that Doctor Faustus is a character with dual attitude;
- Elaborate that Doctor Faustus is an unholy and arrogant soul ;
- Explain that Doctor Faustus is a brilliant man.

## Introduction

Christopher Marlowe based his play *Doctor Faustus* on stories about a scholar and magician, Johann Faust, who allegedly sold his soul to the devil to gain magical powers. Born in 1488, the original Faust wandered through his German homeland until his death in 1541. In 1587, the first story about his life appeared in Germany, translated into English in 1592 as *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*. Scholars believe Marlowe heard or read the story of Johann Faust and composed *Doctor Faustus* sometime between 1588 and 1592. Most critics believe that Marlowe wrote the play's tragic beginning and end, while his collaborators wrote much of the comical middle sections. The character of Doctor Faustus and Demon so brilliantly depicted that during the 17th century audiences believed that the devil actually appeared among them. This unit elaborates the characterization of the play Doctor Faustus at length. More emphasis is given on the analysis of the Doctor Faustus' character.

## 13.1 Characterization of the Play—Character List

### 13.1.1 Faustus

A brilliant man, who seems to have reached the limits of natural knowledge. Faustus is a scholar of the early sixteenth century in the German city of Wittenburg. He is arrogant, fiery, and possesses a thirst for knowledge. As an intellectual, Faustus is familiar with things (like demon summoning and astrology) not normally considered academic subjects by today's universities. Faustus decides to sell his soul to the devil in exchange for earthly power and knowledge and an additional 24 years of life. He proceeds to waste this time on self-indulgence and low tricks.

*Task* Elucidate that Doctor Faustus is the absolute center of the play, which has few truly developed characters.

### 13.1.2 Mephostophilis

From the Hebrew, mephitz, destroyer, and tophel, liar. A devil of craft and cunning. He is the devil who comes at Faustus' summoning, and the devil who serves Faustus for 24 years. In lore, Mephostophilis (also spelled Mephistopheles, or Mephostophilis, and also called Mephisto) seems to be a relative latecomer in the recognized hierarchy of demons. He possibly was created for the Faustus legend.

Notes

*Notes* In Marlowe's play, Mephostophilis has layers to his personality. He admits that separation from God is anguish, and is capable of fear and pain. But he is gleefully evil, participating at every level in Faustus' destruction. Not only does Mephostophilis get Faustus to sell his soul; he also encourages Faustus to waste his twenty-four years of power.

### 13.1.3 Wagner

Wagner is the servant to Faustus. He steals Faustus' books and learns how to summon demons. At the end of the play, he seems concerned about his master's fate.

### 13.1.4 Good Angel and Evil Angel

Personifications of Faustus' inner turmoil, who give differing advice to him at key points. Their characters also reflect Christian belief that humans are assigned guardian angels, and that devils can influence human thoughts.

### 13.1.5 Cornelius

Friend to Faustus, who teaches him the dark arts. He appears only in Act One.

### 13.1.6 Lucifer

Satan. "Lucifer" original meant Venus, referring to the planet's brilliance. In Christian lore, Lucifer is sometimes thought to be another name of Satan. Some traditions say that Lucifer was Satan's name before the fall, while the Fathers of the Catholic Church held that Lucifer was not Satan's proper name but a word showing the brilliance and beauty of his station before the fall. He appears at a few choice moments in Doctor Faustus, and Marlowe uses "Lucifer" as Satan's proper name.

### 13.1.7 Belzebub

One of Lucifer's officers. A powerful demon.

### 13.1.8 Clown/Robin

Robin learns demon summoning by stealing one of Faustus' books. He is the chief character in a number of scenes that provide comic relief from the main story.

### 13.1.9 Dick

A friend of Robin's. He is one of the characters peopling the few comic relief scenes.

### 13.1.10 Rafe

A horse ostler, or groomer, and friend to Robin. With the Clown, he summons Mephostophilis, who is none too pleased to be called.

### 13.1.11 Vintner

A wine merchant or a wine maker. This Vintner chases down Robin and Rafe after they steal a silver goblet from him.

Notes

### 13.1.12 Carter

A man who meets Faustus while carting hay to town. Faustus swindles him.

### 13.1.13 Horse-Courser

A man who buys Faustus' horse. Faustus swindles him.

### 13.1.14 Hostess

An ale wench. She treats Robin and his friends kindly.

### 13.1.15 The Pope

Yeah, that Pope. In a move that would have pleases his Protestant audience, Marlowe depicts him as cruel, power-mad, and far from holy. Faustus plays some cheap tricks on him.

### 13.1.16 The Miscellaneous Characters

#### Bruno

A man who would be Pope, selected by the German emperor and representing the conflicts between Church and state authority.

#### Raymond

King of Hungary. He serves the Pope.

#### Charles

The German Emperor. Faustus performs at his court.

#### Martino

Knight in the court of the German Emperor. Friend to Benvolio and Frederick. When Benvolio seeks revenge against Faustus, Martino decides to help out of loyalty.

#### Frederick

Knight in the court of the German Emperor. Friend to Martino and Benvolio. When Benvolio seeks revenge against Faustus, Frederick decides to help out of loyalty.

#### Benvolio

Knight in the court of the German Emperor. Friend to Martino and Frederick. When Faustus humiliates him, he seeks revenge.

#### Saxony

A man attending at the court of the German Emperor.

Notes

### Duke of Vanholt

A nobleman. Faustus performs illusions at his court.

### Duchess of Vanholt

A noblewoman. Faustus fetches her grapes in January.

**Spirits in the shapes of Alexander the Great, Darius, Paramour, and Helen**

Faustus' illusions.

### An Old Man

A holy old man, he tries to save Faustus by getting him to repent, and for his good deed, Faustus initially thanks him. But later, Faustus sends devils to harm the Old Man.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which of the following statements about Mephostophilis is incorrect?
   (a) He is the first in the recognized hierarchy of demons
   (b) He was created for the Faustus legend
   (c) He serves Faustus for 24 years
   (d) He is a devil of craft and cunning.
2. Which of the following statements about characterization of Doctor Faustus is correct?
   (a) Wagner is the devil of Faustus
   (b) Good Angel and Evil Angel are personifications of Faustus inner turmoil
   (c) Lucifer refers to the Planet's brilliance
   (d) Robin learns demon summoning by stealing one of Faustus' books..
3. Lucifer originally meant Venus also refers to
   (a) another name for demon
   (b) another name for god
   (c) the planet's brilliance
   (d) father of Catholic Church.

Fill in the blanks:

4. Raymond is the King of ..... who serves the Pope.
5. Bruno, a man who would be Pope, selected by the German ..... .
6. Martino, knight in the court of the German Emperor is friend to ..... and Frederick.
7. When Faustus humiliates Benvolio, he seeks ..... .

State whether the following statements are true or false:

8. Faustus performs illusions at Duke of Vanholt court.
9. Hostess treats Robin and his friends badly.
10. Carter meets Faustus while carting hay to town.

Notes

## 13.2 Character of Doctor Faustus

### 13.2.1 Central Character of the Play

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.

### 13.2.2 Doctor Faustus—A Brilliant Man

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.

### 13.2.3 Doctor Faustus—A Tragic Hero with Admirable Aspirations

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.

*Task* "Aristotle stated that the tragic hero is a predominantly good man, whose undoing is brought about by some error of human frailty." Illustrate this statement in context of Doctor Faustus.

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.

### 13.2.4 Doctor Faustus—A Character with Dual Attitude

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

Notes

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.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

11. What proves that the character of Doctor Faustus is central of the play?
    (a) The attention of audience is focused upon him
    (b) He was born of poor parents
    (c) He was tragically treated in the play
    (d) He excelled in the study of divinity.
12. The character of Doctor Faustus is a tragic hero because
    (a) he was predominantly a bad man
    (b) Mephistophilis had ultimate domination on him
    (c) he was a sufferer of Mephistophilis excesses
    (d) he has admirable aspirations.
13. Which of the following best analyse the character of Doctor Faustus?
    (a) A tragic hero with limited aspirations
    (b) A brilliant man with admirable aspirations
    (c) A character with dual attitude
    (d) A central character of the play but with bad attitude.

Fill in the blanks:

14. Faustus was born of poor parents in ..... in Germany.
15. At the beginning of the play, Doctor Faustus is no longer content with the ..... of knowledge.
16. Aristotle stated that the tragic hero is a predominantly ..... man.
17. Doctor Faustus desire to be equated with God is a ..... in Christian terms as well.

State whether the following statements are true or false:

18. Doctor Faustus looks sometimes forward to the medieval world, and sometimes backward to the modern world.
19. It was the glory and the ambition of the Renaissance man to have an aspiring mind.
20. Doctor Faustus was brought up by relatives who sent him to the university at Wittenberg.

## 13.3 Summary

- Faustus is a brilliant man, who seems to have reached the limits of natural knowledge.
- Faustus is a scholar of the early sixteenth century in the German city of Wittenburg. He is arrogant, fiery, and possesses a thirst for knowledge.
- As an intellectual, Faustus is familiar with things (like demon summoning and astrology) not normally considered academic subjects by today's universities.

Notes

- Mephostophilis is a devil of craft and cunning.
- He is the devil who comes at Faustus' summoning, and the devil who serves Faustus for 24 years.
- He is considered to be a latecomer in the recognized hierarchy of demons.
- Wagner is the servant to Faustus who steals Faustus' books and learns how to summon demons.
- Good Angel and Evil Angel is the personifications of Faustus' inner turmoil, who give differing advice to him at key points.
- Lucifer thought to be another name of Satan originally meant Venus, referring to the planet's brilliance.
- Robin learns demon summoning by stealing one of Faustus' books. He is the chief character in a number of scenes that provide comic relief from the main story.
- Bruno is a man who would be Pope, selected by the German emperor and representing the conflicts between Church and state authority.
- Martino, knight in the court of the German Emperor is friend to Benvolio and Frederick.
- 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. He was brought up by relatives who sent him to the university at Wittenberg.
- 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, Doctor Faustus 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 Doctor Faustus 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 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.
- In his pride, Doctor Faustus 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.
- 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.
- Doctor Faustus 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.

Notes

## 13.4 Keywords

***Arrogant*** : Making claims or pretensions to superior importance or rights; overbearingly assuming; insolently proud.

***Fiery*** : Consisting of, attended with, characterized by, or containing fire.

***Astrology*** : The study that assumes and attempts to interpret the influence of the heavenly bodies on human affairs.

***Self-indulgence*** : Indulging one's own desires, passions, whims, etc., especially without restraint.

***Tophel*** : Lime, a place in the wilderness of Sinai, now identified with Tafyleh or Tufileh, on the west side of the Edomitish mountains.

***Gleefully*** : Full of exultant joy; merry; delighted.

***Demon*** : A person considered extremely wicked, evil, or cruel.

***Slaves*** : A person who is the property of and wholly subject to another; a bond servant.

***Divinity*** : The quality of being divine; divine nature.

***Voyage*** : A course of travel or passage, especially a long journey by water to a distant place. Or a passage through air or space, as a flight in an airplane or space vehicle.

***Exploration*** : An act or instance of exploring or investigating; examination.

## 13.5 Review Questions

1. Which character in the play do you most admire. Sustantiate your answer.
2. Illustrate that Doctor Faustus is a brilliant man.
3. Mention few characters of Doctor Faustus proving him a tragic hero with admirable aspirations.
4. Give a critical view of the following characters in the play Doctor Faustus:
   (a) Mephostophilis
   (b) Bruno
   (c) Spirits in the shapes of Alexander the Great, Darius, Paramour, and Helen.
5. Explain the following in context of the character of Doctor Faustus:
   (a) Central character of the play
   (b) A brilliant man
   (c) A character with dual attitude
6. Elucidate that Doctor Faustus is central character of the play with dual attitude.
7. Evaluate the the conflict between good and evil in context of the character of Doctor Faustus.
8. Illustrate the character of Doctor Faustus as a divided nature of man.

### Answers: Self Assessment

1. (a)
2. (b)
3. (c)
4. Hungary
5. emperor
6. Benvolio
7. revenge
8. True
9. False
10. True
11. (a)
12. (b)

Notes

13. (c) 14. Rhode 15. pursuit
16. good 17. sin 18. False
19. True 20. True

## 13.6 Further Readings

Books

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Tydeman, William. 1984. *Doctor Faustus : Text and Performance*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, England.

Online links

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http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/doctorfaustus/canalysis.html

http://www.enotes.com/faustus/other-characters

http://us.penguingroup.com/static/pdf/teachersguides/faustus.pdf

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# Unit 14: Doctor Faustus: A Tragedy and all Concepts of Tragedy

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you will be able to:

- Elucidate that Doctor Faustus is a tragedy;
- Explain the element of Christian Morality in Doctor Faustus;
- Examine the elements of classical tragedy in Doctor Faustus;
- Illustrate the elements of Aristotle's tragedy in Doctor Faustus.

## Introduction

Doctor Faustus is a tragedy based upon a traditional morality story. The thing that makes Doctor Faustus a tragedy is the ending where Faustus ends up damned. In effect he has learned nothing because he knows the consequences of his actions and all goes as he planned. As Homer Simpson said "There's no moral to it. It's just a bunch of stuff that happened." Faustus makes his bed and lies in it. In effect Faustus is an anti-hero.

In the original morality story Faust is saved by the power of love and penitence. The moral is that even a fallen man can be saved by the power of God if he repents and feels love. How nice. Goethe's version of Faust plays out very much as a morality play because it retains the traditional ending.

This unit elaborates the tragic features of Doctor Faustus at length. More emphasis is given to justify that it is a tragedy in Christian and Classical terms. All concepts of tragedy in context to Doctor Faustus have also been dealt with in this unit.

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## 14.1 Doctor Faustus—A Tragedy: Tragedy in Christian Terms

Doctor Faustus has elements of both Christian morality and classical tragedy. On the one hand, it takes place in an explicitly Christian cosmos: God sits on high, as the judge of the world, and every soul goes either to hell or to heaven. There are devils and angels, with the devils tempting people into sin and the angels urging them to remain true to God. Faustus's story is a tragedy in Christian terms, because he gives in to temptation and is damned to hell. Faustus's principal sin is his great pride and ambition, which can be contrasted with the Christian virtue of humility; by letting these traits rule his life, Faustus allows his soul to be claimed by Lucifer, Christian cosmology's prince of devils.

*Task* Doctor Faustus is a tragedy in Christian terms. Explain.

Yet while the play seems to offer a very basic Christian message—that one should avoid temptation and sin, and repent if one cannot avoid temptation and sin—its conclusion can be interpreted as straying from orthodox Christianity in order to conform to the structure of tragedy. In a traditional tragic play, as pioneered by the Greeks and imitated by William Shakespeare, a hero is brought low by an error or series of errors and realizes his or her mistake only when it is too late. In Christianity, though, as long as a person is alive, there is always the possibility of repentance—so if a tragic hero realizes his or her mistake, he or she may still be saved even at the last moment. But though Faustus, in the final, wrenching scene, comes to his senses and begs for a chance to repent, it is too late, and he is carried off to hell. Marlowe rejects the Christian idea that it is never too late to repent in order to increase the dramatic power of his finale, in which Faustus is conscious of his damnation and yet, tragically, can do nothing about it.

In the Elizabethan age there was a strictly dichotomised attitude towards right and wrong, and the framework of Christian morality was one by which most people aimed to live: religion was of much more central importance than it is now. Abandoning God and turning to the path of sin would be seen as a shocking and unforgiveable crime, as would experimenting with black magic and forbidden knowledge. Elizabethan audiences would be more familiar with the concepts of sinful distraction and the soul-poisoning influences of the Seven Deadly Sins. Elizabethan audiences firmly believed in the Christian cosmology of angels and devils. Following are the influences of Christianity on the play:

- The play takes place in an explicitly Christian cosmos of angels and devils.
- Although Faustus' journey ends in damnation, the essential message of the play upholds the Protestant belief: that the journey to spiritual redemption is a personal one requiring no intermediary. People damn themselves through their own actions but they can repent.
- Faustus is not a typical Elizabethan thinker because he rejects 'good' knowledge and yearns for knowledge 'more than heavenly power permits'.
- The play contains Medieval and Renaissance concepts of Hell. Hell is shown as a physical place, but there is also the interesting idea that Hell has no location and may be defined as the absence of God.
- Faustus expresses atheistic beliefs ('I think hell's a fable') and turns his back on the redemptive power of God. On the surface the play has a Christian moral, as Faustus is damned for abandoning God. However there are reasons to be suspicious, as Marlowe was widely believed to be an atheist. There is a lot of blasphemy in the play, as well as powerful sacrilege hidden in the Latin phrases.
- Marlowe uses the scenes in Rome to satirise institutions sacred to the Catholic Church. The Pope is represented as a greedy, power-mad fool, and the power-struggle between Rome and

Germany is treated as a joke by Faustus and Mephostophilis. The pomp and ceremony of the Catholic Church is also ridiculed.

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## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Doctor Faustus has elements of
   (a) both Christian morality and classical tragedy
   (b) Aristotlean tragedy
   (c) both classical tragedy and Aristotlean tragedy
   (d) only Christian morality.
2. Which of the following is an example of Christian morality?
   (a) Men sits on high, though God is the judge of the world
   (b) The devils tempting people into sin and the angel urging them to remain true to God
   (c) Faustus allows his soul to be claimed by Lucifer
   (d) Avoid temptation and sin and do not repent if indulge in temptation.

Fill in the blanks:

3. Doctor Faustus has elements of both ..... and classical tragedy.
4. In the Elizabethan age there was a strictly dichotomised attitude towards ..... and wrong.
5. The play contains Medieval and Renaissance concepts of .....

State whether the following statements are true or false:

6. Faustus's story is a tragedy in Christian terms, because he gives in to temptation and is damned to hell.
7. Faustus expresses atheistic beliefs and turns his back on the redemptive power of God.
8. Faustus's principal sin is his great pride and repent.

## 14.2 Elements of Classical Tragedy in Doctor Faustus

Despite its pantheon of gods, the classical world believed in humanity. The ancient Greeks extolled the perfection of the human body and the clarity of human thought. The medieval church held the opposite view, reason was suspect and flesh was the devil's snare.

Another concept derived from the classical past, though it was present in the Middle Ages too, was the literary doctrine of 'imitation.'

Theoretically, then, it was the task of the writer to translate for present readers the moral vision of the past, and they were to do this by "imitating" great works, adapting them to a Christian perspective. Of course Renaissance literature reflects the idea that such "imitation" was to be neither mechanical nor complete: writers were to capture the spirit of the originals, mastering the best models, learning from them, and then using them for their own purposes.

Another medieval dramatic form emerged in the 14th century and flourished in the 15th-16th centuries, a form which has more direct links with Elizabethan drama. This is the morality play, which differs from the miracle play in that it does not deal with a biblical or pseudo-biblical story but with personified abstractions of virtues and vices that struggle for man's soul. Simply put,

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morality plays dealt with man's search for salvation .This was usually done by reminding them of their mortality, and of the dangers of hell.

*Notes* Morality plays were dramatized allegories of the life of man, his temptation and sinning, his quest for salvation, and his confrontation by death. The morality play, which developed most fully in the 15th century, handled the subjects that were most popular among medieval preachers and drew considerably on contemporary homiletic (sermon, preaching) technique.

Morality plays held several key elements in common:

- The hero represents Mankind or Everyman.
- 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.
- 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 Doctor Faustus indicates.
- 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:

- The theme of the Seven Deadly Sins, which was a common place of medieval art and literature;
- The theme of Mercy and Peace pleading before God for man's soul against Truth and Righteousness.

Originally, because of their roots in religious drama and their didactic purpose, moralities were serious in tone and style, but the increasing secularization of the plays led to the incorporation of elements derived from popular farce, a process encouraged by the presentation of the Devil and his servant the Vice as boisterous mischief-makers. These characters soon became figures of amusement rather than of moral edification.

Characterization was also crude and naïve, and there was little attempt to portray psychological depth. But over time, the moralities began to show signs of increasingly sophisticated analysis of characters. From about the mid-sixteenth century, under increasing pressure from religious authorities, the popularity of the moralities began to wane, but they continued to be a major influence on mainstream drama.

*Task* Characterization was crude and naïve, and there was little attempt to portray psychological depth. Explain.

Doctor Faustus contains references to classical mythology, and draws parallels between the downfall of its central character and similar famous Falls (Icarus, Lucifer). It also contains sections in Latin and Greek which further reference classical times and ideas. The story itself is an example of imitation, a dramatic retelling of the Faust legend which had developed in the Middle Ages.

## 14.3 Elements of Aristotle's Tragedy in Doctor Faustus

The classic discussion of Greek tragedy is Aristotle's Poetics. He defines tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also as having magnitude, complete in itself." He continues, "Tragedy

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is a form of drama exciting the emotions of pity and fear. Its action should be single and complete, presenting a reversal of fortune, involving persons renowned and of superior attainments, and it should be written in poetry embellished with every kind of artistic expression. The writer presents "incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to interpret its catharsis of such emotions."

The basic difference Aristotle draws between tragedy and other genres, such as comedy and the epic, is the "tragic pleasure of pity and fear" the audience feel watching a tragedy. In order for the tragic hero to arouse these feelings in the audience, he cannot be either all good or all evil but must be someone the audience can identify with; however, if he is superior in some way(s), the tragic pleasure is intensified. His disastrous end results from a mistaken action, which in turn arises from a tragic flaw or from a tragic error in judgment. Often the tragic flaw is hubris, an excessive pride that causes the hero to ignore a divine warning or to break a moral law. It has been suggested that because the tragic hero's suffering is greater than his offence, the audience feels pity; because the audience members perceive that they could behave similarly, they feel pity. A tragic hero has the potential for greatness but is doomed to fail. He is trapped in a situation where he cannot win. He makes some sort of tragic flaw, and this causes his fall from greatness. Even though he is a fallen hero, he still wins a moral victory, and his spirit lives on. The tragic hero

- Born into nobility
- Responsible for their own fate
- Endowed with a tragic flaw
- Doomed to make a serious error in judgement
- Fall from great heights or high esteem
- Realize they have made an irreversible mistake
- Face and accept death with honor
- Meet a tragic death
- The audience is affected by pity and/or fear

Doctor faustus has many instances of Aristotlean tragedy as depicted beow:

- Faustus is a great figure of learning who is undone by a serious error in judgement. His tragic flaw is pride, called hubris by Aristotle.
- Faustus is arguably responsible for his own fate.
- Faustus' end is tragic, but just; there is no other fair outcome to his actions. The end of the play brings a process of catharsis for the audience, as our pity and fear for Faustus is released when we see justice being done.
- Faustus is not born into nobility.
- Faustus never realises he is the cause of his own downfall, trying to blame external forces to the very end.
- Faustus does not face and accept death with honour, but struggles to come to terms with his own mortality.
- There is some suggestion of the workings of fate in Faustus' death: 'heaven conspired his overthrow.'

In the Epilogue there is a balance between the traditions of an Aristotelian tragic hero and the didactic element of a morality play.

- The low comedy scenes focus on the interactions between stock characters which broadly fall into the categories of the Masters and the Servants (Wagner/Faustus = Masters, Robin/Dick = servants).
- These scenes also involve bawdy humour and visual humour: low comedy.

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- However the comic sub-plot merges with the main plot and serious characters also act in a way that might be associated with low comedy.

## Self Assessment

Multiple Choice Questions:

9. Despite its pantheon of gods, the classical world believed in
   (a) humanity
   (b) god
   (c) knowledge
   (d) supernatural power.
10. The basic difference Aristotle draws between tragedy and other genres is
   (a) the pleasure of emotions, the audience feel
   (b) tragic pleasure of pity and fear, the audience feel watching a tragedy
   (c) the tragic flaw, the audience feel
   (d) the protagonist responsible for its own feet.

Fill in the blanks:

11. The hero represents ..... or everyman.
12. The classic discussion of Greek tragedy is ..... .
13. Faustus' end is ....., but just; there is no other fair outcome to his actions

State whether the following statements are true or false:

14. The ancient Greeks extolled the perfection of the human body and the clarity of human thought.
15. Doctor Faustus doomed to make a serious error in judgement.
16. Faustus is born into nobility.

## 14.4 Summary

- Doctor Faustus has elements of both Christian morality and classical tragedy.
- In the Elizabethan age there was a strictly dichotomised attitude towards right and wrong, and the framework of Christian morality was one by which most people aimed to live: religion was of much more central importance than it is now.
- Abandoning God and turning to the path of sin would be seen as a shocking and unforgiveable crime, as would experimenting with black magic and forbidden knowledge.
- The play takes place in an explicitly Christian cosmos of angels and devils.

  Although Faustus' journey ends in damnation, the essential message of the play upholds the Protestant belief: that the journey to spiritual redemption is a personal one requiring no intermediary. People damn themselves through their own actions but they can repent.
- The play contains Medieval and Renaissance concepts of Hell. Hell is shown as a physical place, but there is also the interesting idea that Hell has no location and may be defined as the absence of God.
- Marlowe uses the scenes in Rome to satirise institutions sacred to the Catholic Church. The Pope is represented as a greedy, power-mad fool, and the power-struggle between Rome and Germany is treated as a joke by Faustus and Mephostophilis.

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- Despite its pantheon of gods, the classical world believed in humanity. The ancient Greeks extolled the perfection of the human body and the clarity of human thought. Another concept derived from the classical past, though it was present in the Middle Ages too, was the literary doctrine of 'imitation.'
- Morality plays held several key elements in common such as The hero represents Mankind or Everyman; personifications of virtues, vices and death, as well as angels and demons who battle for the possession of the soul of man; the battle for the soul, was a common medieval theme and bound up with the whole idea of medieval allegory; a character known as the vice often played the role of the tempter in a fashion both sinister and comic.
- Doctor Faustus contains references to classical mythology, and draws parallels between the downfall of its central character and similar famous falls.
- The classic discussion of Greek tragedy is Aristotle's poetics. He defines tragedy as "the imitation of an action that is serious and also as having magnitude, complete in itself."
- The basic difference Aristotle draws between tragedy and other genres, such as comedy and the epic, is the "tragic pleasure of pity and fear" the audience feel watching a tragedy. In order for the tragic hero to arouse these feelings in the audience, he cannot be either all good or all evil but must be someone the audience can identify with.

## 14.5 Keywords

***Tragedy*** : A dramatic composition, often in verse, dealing with a serious or somber theme, typically that of a great person destinedthrough a flaw of character or conflict with some overpowering force, as fate or society, to downfall or destruction.

***Hell*** : The place or state of punishment of the wicked after death; the abode of evil and condemned spirits; Gehenna or Tartarus.

***Heaven*** : The abode of God, the angels, and the spirits of the righteous after death; the place or state of existence of the blessed after the mortal life.

***Devil*** : A subordinate evil spirit at enmity with God, and having power to afflict humans both with bodily disease and with spiritual corruption.

***Angel*** : One of a class of spiritual beings; a celestial attendant of God. In medieval angelology, angels constituted the lowest of the nine celestial orders.

***Sin*** : Any act regarded as such a transgression, especially a willful or deliberate violation of some religious or moral principle.

***Temptation*** : The act of tempting; enticement or allurement. Or something that tempts, entices, or allures.

***Soul*** : The principle of life, feeling, thought, and action in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body, and commonly held to be separable in existence from the body; the spiritual part of humans as distinct from the physical part. Or the spiritual part of humans regarded in its moral aspect, or as believed to survive death and be subject to happiness or misery in a life to come.

***Pride*** : A high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as displayed in bearing, conduct, etc.

***Ambition*** : An earnest desire for some type of achievement or distinction, as power, honor, fame, or wealth, and the willingness to strive for its attainment.

***Cosmology*** : The branch of philosophy dealing with the origin and general structure of the universe, with its parts, elements, and laws, and especially with such of its characteristics as space, time, causality, and freedom.

***Repent*** : To feel sorry, self-reproachful, or contrite for past conduct; regret or be conscience-stricken about a past action, attitude, etc.

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## 14.6 Review Questions

1. Explain that the play Doctor Faustus takes place in an explicitly Christian cosmos of angels and devils.
2. Mention four influences of Christianity on the play Doctor Faustus.
3. Mention four instances of Aristotlean tragedy in the play Doctor Faustus?
4. Write short notes on the following:
   (a) Faustus as Tragic hero
   (b) Faustus as Tragedy in Christian terms
   (c) Elements of classical tragedy in Doctor Faustus.
5. Explain the following in context of Doctor Faustus play:
   (a) Pride (b) Sloth (c) Gluttony
6. Illustrate that Doctor Faustus is a tragedy in Christian terms.

### Answers: Self Assessment

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. Christian morality |
| 4. right | 5. Hell | 6. True |
| 7. True | 8. False | 9. (a) |
| 10. (b) | 11. mankind | 12. Aristotle's Poetics |
| 13. tragic | 14. True | 15. True |
| 16. False | | |

## 14.7 Further Readings

*Books*

Solomon Schimmel. 1997. *The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian, and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology*. Oxford University Press, USA.

Tydeman, William. 1984. *Doctor Faustus : Text and Performance*. Macmillan, Basingstoke, England.

*Online links*

http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/doctorfaustus/study.html#explanation1

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