SHAKESPEARE AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA

BBL 3208

BBL 3208
Program Bacelor Bahasa Inggeris

Dr. Arbaayah Ali Termizi
Dr. Wan Roselezam bt. Wan Yahya

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Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
43400 UPM Serdang
Selangor Darul Ehsan
## INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

### a. General information of the course

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<td>Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Code</td>
<td>BBL 3208</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credit</td>
<td>3 (3+0)</td>
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</table>

**An overview of the course**

The course ideally comprises of 3 hours lecture per week. As part of the evaluation for the course, students are required to submit 2 individual essays as well as sitting for both mid-semester and final examinations within the period of 42 hours throughout the semester. Since students do not meet the instructors frequently in the PJJ program, activities as prescribed at the end of each unit in this module is ‘self-learning’ in nature.

### b. The module Writer/s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/s</th>
<th>Arbaayah Ali Termizi (PhD), Wan Roselezam Wan Yanya (PhD)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>English Department</td>
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<td>Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication,</td>
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<td>Universiti Putra Malaysia</td>
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<td>43400 UPM Serdang Selangor</td>
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<td>Telephone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>03-89439914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td><a href="mailto:arbaayah@fkmk.upm.edu.my">arbaayah@fkmk.upm.edu.my</a> / <a href="mailto:rose@fkmk.upm.edu.my">rose@fkmk.upm.edu.my</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
c. Course Objectives
   By the end of the course, students are able to:
   1) identify the Elizabethan dramatic convention;
   2) conduct detailed research regarding Shakespeare's plays and his contemporaries;
   3) show their understanding of selected plays covered in the course; and
   4) manage relevant information from various sources.

d. Course Synopsis
   This course covers a survey of Elizabethan drama in relation to tragedies, comedies, and historical plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries and an analysis of selected plays. The plays chosen for this course are representatives of the characteristics of Renaissance drama specifically as well seventeenth-century English literature in general. In addition, aspects of seventeenth-century play productions and stage performances will also be discussed.

e. Course Content
   The course content will consist of topics and issues as presented in Table 1.
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>42</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
f. Practical
This course does not have any PRACTICAL assessment.

g. Evaluation
Course evaluation consists of three components:
(i). Course work 70%
   - Assignments – 2 individual essays (40%)
   - Mid semester examination (30%)
(ii). Final examination 30%
<TOTAL 100%

h. Mid Semester Examination
The students will have to sit for a mid semester examination as scheduled by the PPL. The question in this examination will rely on the prescribed module for this course. The questions will be SUBJECTIVE in nature (for example short answers, fill in the blanks). Tentatively the examination will cover all topics from UNIT 1 to UNIT 3. Nonetheless students will be informed of the latest information related to the examination from time to time. The percentage for this examination is 30%.

i. Final Examination
The questions in the final examination will cover all topics as prescribed in the
module with special concentration on units which are not covered in the mid semester examination. Students will be informed of any latest updates related to the final examination through appointed tutors in learning centres as well as the respective instructors of the course. The questions will be SUBJECTIVE in nature. Do refer to UNIT 7 of this module for samples of examination questions.

A reminder to all students! The nature of final examination questions is subject to change. Please refer to latest information as prescribed by the instructors of this course.

j. Main References and Prescribed Texts

Main references

Prescribed Texts (subject to change from time to time)
1) A Midsummer’s Night Dream by William Shakespeare
2) Macbeth by William Shakespeare
3) Romeo and Juliet by William Shakespeare
4) The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe
5) The Changeling by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley
6) The Tragedy of Antonie by Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke
k. Secondary reading materials


I. Icons in the module

Below is the explanation for all icons as used in the module.

a) Objective
   ➔ Objective of module, unit or topic

b) Introduction
   ➔ Introduction to unit, topic or sub-topic

c) Main contents
   ➔ Important points in unit or topic

d) Observation
   ➔ Observation made by other researchers, critics or relevant information related to the course

e) Conclusion / Summary
   ➔ Conclusion or summary to unit or topic

f) In-text questions
   ➔ Questions related to discussion in unit or topic

g) SCL exercises
   ➔ Questions at the end of each unit to assist students understand the content better

h) Answer key
   ➔ Answer key to the SCL exercises or relevant exercises in module

i) References
   ➔ References used for this course

j) Reminder
   ➔ Students need to pay special attention to matters as highlighted in this section
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j) **Reminder** ➔ Students need to pay special attention to matters as highlighted in this section
UNIT 1
OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

Introduction
This unit provides you with a brief introduction to William Shakespeare, Renaissance plays and playwrights.

Unit Objectives
By the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. relate to the historical background which influence Renaissance playwrights,
2. know other Renaissance playwrights besides William Shakespeare, and
3. understand the literary culture during the Renaissance Period.

TOPICS

Topic 1: William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)
   a) Shakespeare’s ancestry
   b) Shakespeare’s parents
   c) Chronology of John Shakespeare’s decline in reputation
   d) Shakespeare’s birth
   e) Shakespeare’s siblings
   f) Shakespeare’s education and childhood
g) Shakespeare’s marriage and children
h) Shakespeare as actor and playwright
i) Last years

Topic 2: The literary qualities of Shakespeare’s plays
   a) Shakespeare’s characters
   b) Shakespeare’s attitudes
   c) Shakespeare’s stagecrafts
   d) Shakespeare’s language
   e) Shakespeare’s plays

Topic 3: Other major Renaissance playwrights
   a) Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)
   b) Ben Jonson (1573-1637)
   c) Thomas Middleton (1580-1627)
   d) William Rowley (1585-1637)
   e) John Ford (1586-1640)
   f) Elizabeth Cary (1585-1639)
   g) Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621)
   h) Publication of selected Renaissance plays

TOPIC 1: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616)

The famous Chandos Portrait
This portrait is attributed to Joseph Taylor dated about 1610. It is claimed as the only painting with any real claim to have been done from a life model. The name arose as it was once in the possession of the Duke of Chandos.

Notes adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portraits_of_Shakespeare

Introduction

William Shakespeare, English playwright and poet, recognized in much of the world as the greatest of all dramatists. Hundreds of editions of his plays have been published, including translations in all major languages. Scholars have written thousands of books and articles about his plots, characters, themes, and language. He is the most widely quoted author in history, and his plays have probably been performed more times than those of any other dramatist.

There is no simple explanation for Shakespeare's unrivaled popularity, but he remains our greatest entertainer and perhaps our most profound thinker. He had a remarkable knowledge of human behavior, which he was able to communicate through his portrayal of a wide variety of characters. He was able to enter fully into the point of view of each of his characters and to create vivid dramatic situations in which to explore human motivations and behavior. His mastery of poetic language and of the techniques of drama enabled him to combine these multiple viewpoints, human motives, and actions to produce a uniquely compelling theatrical experience.

For someone who lived almost 400 years ago, a surprising amount is known about Shakespeare's life. Indeed we know more about his life than about almost any other writer of his age. Nonetheless, for the life of the greatest writer in the English language, there are still significant gaps, and therefore much supposition surrounds the facts we have. He composed his plays during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, who ruled England from 1558 to 1603, and during the early part of the reign of her cousin James VI of Scotland, who took England's throne as James I after Elizabeth's death in 1603. During this period England saw an outpouring of poetry and drama, led by Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, and Christopher Marlowe, that remains unsurpassed in English literary history.
a) **SHAKESPEARE'S ANCESTRY**

As a brief introductory detail it should be mentioned that, during the sixteenth century, there were many families with the name Shakespeare in and around Stratford.

"Shakespeare" appears countless times in town minutes and court records, spelled in a variety of ways, from Shagsper to Chacsper.

Unfortunately, there are very few records that reveal William Shakespeare's relationship to or with the many other Stratford Shakespeares.

The Bard's (a fanciful title for Shakespeare) paternal grandfather was Richard Shakespeare (d. 1561), a farmer in Snitterfield, a village four miles northeast of Stratford.

There is no record of Richard Shakespeare before 1529, but details about his life after this reveal that he was a tenant farmer, who, on occasion, would be fined for grazing too many cattle on the common grounds and for not attending manor court.

There is no record of Richard Shakespeare's wife, but together they had two sons (possibly more), John and Henry.

Richard Shakespeare worked on several different sections of land during his lifetime, including the land owned by the wealthy Robert Arden of Wilmecote, Shakespeare's maternal grandfather.

Shakespeare's maternal great-grandfather, who probably belonged to the aristocratic family of the Ardens of Park Hall was a Catholic and married more than once (we know the name of his second wife — Agnes Hill) and he fathered no fewer than eight daughters.

He became the stepfather of Agnes' four children. Robert Arden had accumulated much property, and when he died, he named his daughter (Shakespeare's mother) Mary, only sixteen at the time, one of his executors.
Shakespeare’s family coat-of-arms

Motto: “Non sanz droict” / “Not without Right”


b) SHAKEPEARE’S PARENTS

Shakespeare’s father, John, came to Stratford from Snitterfield before 1532 as an apprentice glover and tanner of leathers.

John Shakespeare prospered and began to deal in farm products and wool.

Sometime between 1556 and 1558 John Shakespeare married Mary Arden, the daughter of the wealthy Robert Arden of Wilmecote and owner of the sixty-acre farm called Asbies.

Although there is no evidence of strong piety on either side of the family, it would have been a Catholic service, since Queen Mary I was the reigning monarch.

We assume neither John nor Mary could write — John used a pair of glovers’ compasses as his signature while Mary used a running horse — but it did not prevent them from becoming important members of the community.

John Shakespeare was elected to a multitude of civic positions, including ale-taster of the borough (Stratford had a long-reaching reputation for its brewing) in 1557, chamberlain of the borough in 1561, alderman in 1565, (a position which
came with free education for his children at the Stratford Grammar School), high bailiff, or mayor, in 1568, and chief alderman in 1571.

Due to his important civic duties, he rightfully sought the title of gentleman and applied for his coat-of-arms in 1570 (see picture on top).

However, for unspecified reasons the application was abruptly withdrawn, and within the next few years, for reasons just as mystifying, John Shakespeare would go from wealthy business owner and dedicated civil servant to debtor and absentee council member.

c) CHRONOLOGY OF JOHN SHAKESPEARE’S DECLINE IN REPUTATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Applied for coat-of-arms</td>
<td>1570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behind in his taxes</td>
<td>1578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgaged Mary’s estate</td>
<td>1579</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fined 40 pounds for missing a court date</td>
<td>1580</td>
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<tr>
<td>Removed from the board of alderman</td>
<td>1586</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owned only his house at Henley Street</td>
<td>1590</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fined for not attending church</td>
<td>1592</td>
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<tr>
<td>Re-applied coat-of-arms and granted</td>
<td>1596</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reinstated on the town council (due likely to the success of William in London)</td>
<td>1599</td>
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</tbody>
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On October 20 of that year, by permission of the Garter King of Arms (the Queen’s aid in such matters) “the said John Shakespeare, Gentlemen, and...his children, issue and posterity” were lawfully entitled to display the gold coat-of-arms, with a black banner bearing a silver spear (a visual representation of the family name "Shakespeare").

The coat-of-arms could then be displayed on their door and all their personal items. The motto was "Non sanz droict" or "not without right".

John Shakespeare died in 1601 (probably near seventy years old and he had been married for forty-four years).
Mary Shakespeare died in 1608 and was buried on September 9.

d)  **SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTH**

The baptismal register of the Holy Trinity parish church, in Stratford, shows the following entry in Latin for April 26, 1564: Gulielmus filius Johannes Shakespeare (which means 'son of Shakespeare').

The actual date of Shakespeare's birth is not known, but, traditionally, April 23, St George's Day, has been Shakespeare's accepted birthday, and a house on Henley Street in Stratford, owned by William's father, John, is accepted as Shakespeare's birth place.

No doubt Shakespeare's true birthday will remain a mystery forever. But the assumption that the Bard was born on the same day of the month that he died lends an exciting esoteric highlight to the otherwise mundane details of Shakespeare's life.

e)  **SHAKESPEARE'S SIBLINGS**

William Shakespeare was indeed lucky to survive to adulthood in sixteenth-century England.

Waves of the plague swept across the countryside, and pestilence ravaged Stratford during the hot summer months.

Mary and John Shakespeare became parents for the first time in September of 1558, when their daughter Joan was born. Nothing is known of Joan Shakespeare except for the fact that she was baptized in Stratford on September 15, and succumbed to the plague shortly after.

Their second child, Margaret, was born in 1562 and was baptized on December 2. She died one year later.

The Shakespeares' fourth child, Gilbert, was baptized on October 13, 1566, at Holy Trinity. Records show that Gilbert Shakespeare survived the plague and reached adulthood, becoming a haberdasher, working in London as of 1597, and spending much of his time back in Stratford. In 1609 he appeared in Stratford court in connection with a lawsuit, but we know no details regarding the matter. Gilbert Shakespeare seems to have had a long and successful career as a tradesman, and he died a bachelor in Stratford on February 3, 1612.
In 1569, John and Mary Shakespeare gave birth to another girl, and named her after her first born sister, Joan. Joan Shakespeare accomplished the wondrous feat of living to be seventy-seven years old -- outliving William and all her other siblings by decades. Joan married William Hart the hatter and had four children but two of them died in childhood.

Undoubtedly already euphoric that Joan had survived the precarious first few years of childhood, the Shakespeares' joy was heightened with the birth of their fourth daughter, Anne, in 1571, when William was seven years old. Unfortunately, tragedy befell the family yet again when Anne died at the age of eight. The sorrow felt by the Shakespeares' over the loss of Anne was profound, and even though they were burdened by numerous debts at the time of her death, they arranged an unusually elaborate funeral for their cherished daughter. Anne Shakespeare was buried on April 4, 1579.

In 1574, Mary and John Shakespeare had another boy and they named him Richard, probably after his paternal grandfather. Richard was baptized on March 11 of that year, and nothing else is known about him, except for the fact that he died, unmarried, and was buried on February 4, 1613 -- a year and a day after the death of Gilbert Shakespeare.

Mary gave birth to one more child in 1580. They christened him on May 3 and named him Edmund, probably in honor of his uncle Edmund Lambert. Edmund died in 1607 -- not yet thirty years old. He was buried in St. Saviour's Church, in Southwark, on December 31 of that year. His funeral was costly and magnificent, with tolling bells heard across the Thames. It is most likely that William planned the funeral for his younger brother because William would have been the only Shakespeare wealthy enough to afford such an expensive tribute to Edmund.

f) **SHAKESPEARE'S EDUCATION AND CHILDHOOD**

William Shakespeare probably began his education at the age of six or seven at the Stratford grammar school, which is still standing only a short distance from his house on Henley Street and is in the care of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Although we have no record of Shakespeare attending the school, due to the official position held by John Shakespeare it seems likely that he would have decided to educate young William at the school which was under the care of Stratford's governing body.

The Stratford grammar school had been built some two hundred years before Shakespeare was born and in that time the lessons taught there were, of course, dictated primarily by the beliefs of the reigning monarch.
During the years that Shakespeare attended the school, at least one and possibly three headmasters stepped down because of their devotion to the Catholic religion proscribed by Queen Elizabeth.

Like all of the great poets and dramatists of the time, Shakespeare learned his basic reading and writing skills from an ABC, or horn-book. Robert Spealght in his book, *Shakespeare: The Man and His Achievement*, describes this book as:

a primer framed in wood and covered with a thin plate of transparent horn. It included the alphabet in small letters and in capitals, with combinations of the five vowels with b, c, and d, and the Lord’s Prayer in English. The first of these alphabets, which ended with the abbreviation for ‘and’, began with the mark of the cross. Hence the alphabet was known as ‘Christ cross row’ -- the cross-row of Richard III, I, i, 55. A short catechism was often included in the ABC book (the ‘absey book’ of King John, I, i, 196) (10)

As was the case in all Elizabethan grammar schools, Latin was the primary language of learning.

Although Shakespeare likely had some lessons in English, Latin composition and the study of Latin authors like Seneca, Cicero, Ovid, Virgil, and Horace would have been the focus of his literary training.

One can see that Shakespeare absorbed much that was taught in his grammar school, for he had an impressive familiarity with the stories by Latin authors, as is evident when examining his plays and their sources.

Even though scholars, basing their argument on a story told more than a century after the fact, accept that Shakespeare was removed from school around age thirteen because of his father’s financial and social difficulties, there is no reason whatsoever to believe that he had not acquired a firm grasp of both English and Latin and that he had continued his studies elsewhere.

Shakespeare’s daily activities after he left school and before he re-emerged as a professional actor in the late 1580s are impossible to trace.

But, it is from this period known as the “lost years”, that we obtain one vital piece of information about Shakespeare: he married a pregnant orphan named Anne Hathaway.
Miss Campion holding a hornbook, 1661.
Tuer's History of the Horn-Book


**g) SHAKESPEARE’S MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN**

Recordings in the Episcopal register at Worcester on the dates of November 27 and 28, 1582, reveal that Shakespeare desired to marry a young girl named Anne.

Shakespeare, a minor at the time, married Anne Hathaway, who was twenty-six and already several months pregnant.

Anne was the eldest daughter, and one of the seven children of Richard Hathaway, a twice-married farmer in Shottery. When Richard died in 1581, he requested his son, Bartholomew, move into the house we now know as Anne Hathaway’s Cottage, and maintain the property for his mother, Richard’s second wife and Anne’s stepmother.

Anne lived in the cottage with Bartholomew, her step-mother, and her other siblings. No doubt she was bombarded with a barrage of household tasks to fill her days at Hewland Farm, as it was then called.

After her marriage to Shakespeare, Anne left Hewland Farm to live in John Shakespeare’s house on Henley Street, as was the custom of the day.

The Shakespeares’ first child was Susanna, christened on May 26th, 1583, and twins arrived in January, 1585.

They were baptized on February 2 of that year and named after two very close friends of William -- the baker Hamnet Sadler and his wife, Judith.
Not much information is known about the life of Anne and her children after this date, except for the tragic fact that Hamnet Shakespeare died of an unknown cause on August 11, 1596, at the age of eleven.

By this time Shakespeare had long since moved to London to realize his dreams on the English stage (a time in the Bard's life that will be covered in depth later on) and we do not know if he was present at Hamnet's funeral in Stratford.

h) **SHAKESPEARE AS ACTOR AND PLAYWRIGHT**

We know very little about Shakespeare's life during two major spans of time, commonly referred to as the "lost years."

The lost years fall into two periods: **1578-82** and **1585-92**.

The first period covers the time after Shakespeare left grammar school until his marriage to Anne Hathaway in November of 1582.

The second period covers the seven years of Shakespeare's life in which he must have been perfecting his dramatic skills and collecting sources for the plots of his plays.

No one knows for certain how Shakespeare first started his career in the theatre, although several London strolling players would visit Stratford regularly, and so, sometime between 1585 and 1592, it is probable that young Shakespeare could have been recruited by the Leicester's or Queen's men.

Whether an acting troupe recruited Shakespeare in his hometown or he was forced on his own to travel to London to begin his career, he was nevertheless an established actor in the great city by the end of 1592.

Records also tell us that several of Shakespeare's plays were popular by this time, including *Henry VI, The Comedy of Errors*, and *Titus Andronicus*.

The company that staged most of the early productions of these plays was Pembroke's Men, sponsored by the Earl of Pembroke, Henry Herbert. The troupe was very popular and performed regularly at the court of Queen Elizabeth.
Most critics conclude that Shakespeare spent time as both a writer and an actor for Pembroke's Men before 1592.

The turning point in Shakespeare's career came in 1593. The theatres had been closed since 1592 due to an outbreak of the plague and, although it is possible that Shakespeare toured the outlying areas of London with acting companies like Pembroke's Men or Lord Strange's Men, it seems more likely that he left the theatre entirely during this time to work on his non-dramatic poetry.

The hard work paid off, for by the end of 1593, Shakespeare had caught the attention of the Earl of Southampton.

Southampton became Shakespeare's patron, and on April 18, 1593, Venus and Adonis was entered for publication. Shakespeare had made his formal debut as a poet. The dedication Shakespeare wrote to Southampton at the beginning of the poem is impassioned and telling, "phrased with courtly deference" (Rowse 74):

TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE HENRY Wriothesley, EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON, AND BARON OF TICHFIELD.
RIGHT HONORABLE,

I KNOW not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burden only, if your honour seem but pleased, I account myself highly praised, and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour. But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, and never after ear so barren a land, for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest. I leave it to your honourable survey, and your honour to your heart's content; which I wish may always answer your own wish and the world's hopeful expectation.

Your honour's in all duty,
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.
Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, 1603, in the Tower, attributed to John de Critz.


Although there is no concrete proof that Shakespeare had a long and close friendship with Southampton, most scholars agree that this was the case, based on Shakespeare’s writings, particularly the early sonnets.

Shakespeare returned to the theatre in 1594, and became a leading member of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, formally known as Lord Strange’s Men.

There are proofs that Shakespeare had performed with the Chamberlain’s Men before Elizabeth I on several occasions. As payment for their performance the actors each received 10 pounds. During his time with the Chamberlain’s Men Shakespeare wrote many plays, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, *King John*, and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.

As G.E. Bentley points out in *Shakespeare and the Theatre*, Shakespeare had by this time become immersed in his roles as actor and writer. He was “more completely and more continuously involved in theatres and acting companies than any other Elizabethan dramatist. [Shakespeare is] “the only one known who not only wrote plays for his company, acted in the plays, and shared the profits, but who was also one of the housekeepers who owned the building. For seventeen years he was one of the owners of the Globe theatre and for eight years he was one of the housekeepers of the company’s second theatre, the Blackfriars, as well” (Rowse 128).

During the years Shakespeare performed with the Chamberlain’s Men, before their purchase of the Globe in 1599, they played primarily at the well-established
theatres like the Swan, the Curtain, and the Theatre. The troupe would also give regular performances before Elizabeth I and her court, and tour the surrounding areas of London.

Some important events in Shakespeare's personal life also take place during this time period.

The Shakespeares finally received a coat of arms 1596, and on August 11 of the same year, Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died at the age of eleven.

Shakespeare no doubt returned to Stratford for the burial, although we have no documented proof.

Many theorize that Shakespeare renewed his interest in Stratford only after the death of Hamnet and that, for the many years he was away in London, he neglected his family back home. However, it is just as likely that he made frequent yet unrecorded trips to Stratford while he was trying to find success in London.

i) Last Years

After about 1608 Shakespeare began to write fewer plays. For most of his working life he wrote at least two plays a year; by 1608 he had slowed usually to one a year, even though the acting company continued to enjoy great success.

In 1608 the King's Men, as his company was called after King James took the throne, began to perform at Blackfriars, an indoor theater that charged higher prices and drew a more sophisticated audience than the outdoor Globe. An indoor theater presented possibilities in staging and scenery that the Globe did not permit, and these can be recognized in the late plays.

In 1613 fire destroyed the Globe Theatre during a performance of Henry VIII. Although the Globe was quickly rebuilt, Shakespeare's association with it—and probably with the company—had ended.

Around the time of the fire, Shakespeare retired to Stratford, where he had established his family and become a prominent citizen. Shakespeare's daughter Susanna had married John Hall, a doctor with a thriving practice in Stratford, in 1607. His younger daughter, Judith, married a Stratford winemaker, Thomas Quiney, in 1616.
Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616—the month and day traditionally assigned to his birth—and was buried in Stratford’s Holy Trinity Church. He had made his will the previous month, “in perfect health and memory.” The cause of his death is not known, though a report from the Holy Trinity’s vicar in the 1660s claims that he “died of a fever ... contracted after a night of drinking with Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton, friends and fellow writers.”

Shakespeare left the bulk of his estate to his daughter Susanna and the sum of 300 pounds to his daughter Judith. The only specific provision for his wife was their “second-best bed with the furniture [linens],” although customary practice allowed a widow one-third of the estate. Shakespeare also left money for “the poor of Stratford,” and remembered the three surviving original members of his acting company, Richard Burbage, John Heminges, and Henry Condell, with small grants to buy memorial rings.

Shakespeare’s wife, Anne, died on August 6, 1623. She lived long enough to see a monument to her husband erected in Holy Trinity Church, but she died just before the publication of the First Folio of Shakespeare’s plays, the more lasting monument to his memory. Soon after her death, Susanna and John Hall moved into New Place, where they lived until their deaths, his in 1635 and hers in 1649. Their daughter, Elizabeth Hall, died childless in 1670. Judith Quiney had three sons, but none lived long enough to produce heirs, and she died in 1662. Thus, by 1670, the line of Shakespeare’s descendants had reached its end.

**SELF ASSESSMENT TASK**

Shakespeare comes from a middle class family. Do you feel that his background influence his works in any way?

**TOPIC 2: THE LITERARY QUALITIES OF SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS**

Everyone loves a good story, and Shakespeare was one of the very best storytellers. Most of Shakespeare’s stories have an almost universal appeal, an appeal often lacking in the plays of his contemporaries, who clung more closely to the tastes and interests of their own day. An even greater achievement is
Shakespeare's creation of believable characters. His people are not the exaggerated types or allegorical abstractions found in many other Elizabethan plays. They are instead men and women with the mingled qualities and many of the inconsistencies of life itself. The very richness of Shakespeare's language continues to delight, and it is always amazing to be reminded how many common words and phrases have their origin in Shakespeare's art. His poetical and theatrical artistry has created plays that continue to attract readers and theatergoers, and he properly remains one of our own age's most popular playwrights.

a) Shakespeare's Characters

Shakespeare's characters emerge in his plays as distinctive human beings. Although some of the characters display elements of conventional dramatic types such as the melancholy man, the braggart soldier, the pedant, and the young lover, they are nevertheless usually individualized rather than caricatures or exaggerated types. Falstaff, for example, bears some resemblance to the braggart soldiers of 16th-century Italian comedy and to representations of the character Vice in medieval morality plays, but his vitality and inexhaustible wit make him unique. Hamlet, one of the most complex characters in all literature, is partly a picture of the ideal Renaissance man, and he also exhibits traits of the conventional melancholic character. However, his personality as a whole transcends these types, and he is so real that commentators have continued for centuries to explore his fascinating mind.

The women in Shakespeare's plays are vivid creations, each differing from the others. It is important to remember that in Shakespeare's time boy actors played the female parts. Actresses did not appear in a Shakespeare play until after the restoration of Charles II to the English throne in 1660 and the introduction of French practices such as women actors. It says much about the talent of the boy actors of his own day that Shakespeare could create such a rich array of fascinating woman characters. Shakespeare was fond of portraying aggressive, witty heroines, such as Kate of The Taming of the Shrew, Rosaline of Love's Labour's Lost, and Beatrice of Much Ado About Nothing. However, he was equally adept at creating gentle and innocent women, such as Ophelia in Hamlet, Desdemona in Othello, and Cordelia in King Lear. His female characters also include the treacherous Goneril and Regan in King Lear, the iron-willed Lady Macbeth, the witty and resourceful Portia in Merchant of Venice, the tender and loyal Juliet, and the alluring Cleopatra.

Shakespeare's comic figures are also highly varied. They include bumbling rustics such as Dogberry and Verges in Much Ado About Nothing, tireless punsters like the Dromios in The Comedy of Errors, pompous grotesques like Don Armado in Love's Labour's Lost, elegant wits like Feste in Twelfth Night, cynical realists like Thersites in Troilus and Cressida, and fools who utter
nonsense that often conceals wisdom, such as Touchstone in As You Like It and the Fool in King Lear.

Shakespeare drew his characters with remarkable insight into human character. Even the most wicked characters, such as Iago in Othello, have human traits that can elicit understanding if not compassion. Thus, Macbeth’s violent end arouses pity and awe rather than scornful triumph at a criminal’s just punishment for his deeds. The characters achieve uniqueness through their brilliantly individualized styles of speech. Shakespeare’s understanding of the human soul and his mastery of language enabled him to write dialogue that makes the characters in his plays always intelligible, vital, and memorable.

b) Shakespeare’s Attitudes

Shakespeare’s philosophy of life can only be deduced from the ideas and attitudes that appear frequently in his writings, and he remained always a dramatist, not a writer of philosophical or ethical tracts. Nonetheless, the tolerance of human weakness evident in the plays tends to indicate that Shakespeare was a broad-minded person with generous and balanced views. Although he never lectured his audience, sound morality is implicit in his themes and in the way he handled his material. He attached less importance to noble birth than to an individual’s noble relations with other people. Despite the bawdniness of Shakespeare’s language, which is characteristic of his period, he did not condone sexual license. He accepted people as they are, without condemning them, but he did not allow wickedness to triumph. The comments of Shakespeare’s contemporaries suggest that he himself possessed both integrity and gentle manners.

It should be remembered that even though Shakespeare was a poet “for all time,” as his friend Ben Jonson said, he nevertheless was necessarily a product of his own era and shared many beliefs of the time. These beliefs are different from our own, and some of them may now seem strange and even unenlightened. Although Shakespeare anticipated many modern ideas and values, in other ways he does not rise above the ideas and values of his own time. As the history plays indicate, he accepted the idea of monarchy and had little interest in, or even concept of, participatory democracy. Although many of his women characters are assertive and independent, the plays still have them subordinate their energy to the logic of the male-dominated household. It is also likely that Shakespeare believed in ghosts and witches, as did many people of his time, including King James I.

c) Shakespeare’s Stagecrafts

Shakespeare brilliantly exploited the resources of the theaters he worked in. The Globe Theatre held an audience of 2,000 to 3,000 people. Like other outdoor theaters, it had a covered, raised stage thrusting out into the audience. The
audience stood around the three sides of the stage in an unroofed area called the pit. Covered galleries, where people paid more money to sit, rose beyond the pit. Performances took place only during daylight hours, and there was little use of lighting. Few props were used, and little scenery. Costumes, however, were elaborate. Language created the scene, as in this passage from *The Merchant of Venice*:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!  
Here we will sit, and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears: stillness and the night  
Become the touches of sweet harmony.  
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven  
is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold.  
(Act V, scene 1, 54-59)

d) Shakespeare’s Language

In Shakespeare’s time English was a more flexible language than it is today. Grammar and spelling were not yet completely formalized, although scholars were beginning to urge rules to regulate them. English had begun to emerge as a significant literary language, having recently replaced Latin as the language of serious intellectual and artistic activity in England. Freed of many of the conventions and rules of modern English, Shakespeare could shape vocabulary and syntax to the demands of style. For example, he could interchange the various parts of speech, using nouns as adjectives or verbs, adjectives as adverbs, and pronouns as nouns. Such freedom gave his language an extraordinary plasticity, which enabled him to create the large number of unique and memorable characters he has left us. Shakespeare made each character singular by a distinctive and characteristic set of speech habits.

Just as important to Shakespeare’s success as the suppleness of the English language was the rapid expansion of the language. New words were being coined and borrowed at an unprecedented rate in Shakespeare’s time. Shakespeare himself had an unusually large vocabulary: about 23,000 different words appear in his plays and poetry, many of these words first appearing in print through his usage. During the Renaissance many new words enriched the English language, borrowed from Latin and from other European languages, and Shakespeare made full use of the new resources available to English. He also took advantage of the possibilities of his native tongue, especially the crispness and energy of the sounds of English that derives in large measure from the language’s rich store of monosyllabic (one-syllable) words.

The main influences on Shakespeare’s style were the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, the *homilies* (sermons) that were prescribed for reading in church, the rhetorical treatises that were studied in grammar school, and the proverbial lore of common speech. The result was that Shakespeare could draw
on a stock of images and ideas that were familiar to most members of his audience. His knowledge of figures of speech and other devices enabled him to phrase his original thoughts concisely and forcefully. Clarity of expression and the use of ordinary diction partly account for the fact that many of Shakespeare's phrases have become proverbial in everyday speech, even among people who have never read the plays. It is also significant that the passages most often quoted are usually from plays written around 1600 and after, when his language became more subtle and complex. The phrases "my mind's eye," "the primrose path," and "sweets to the sweet" derive from Hamlet. Macbeth is the source of "the milk of human kindness" and "at one fell swoop." From Julius Caesar come the expressions "it was Greek to me," "ambition should be made of sterner stuff," and "the most unkindest cut of all."

Shakespeare wrote many of his plays in blank verse—unrhymed poetry in iambic pentameter, a verse form in which unaccented and accented syllables alternate in lines of ten syllables. In Shakespeare's hand the verse form never becomes mechanical but is always subject to shifts of emphasis to clarify the meaning of a line and avoid the monotony of unbroken metrical regularity. Yet the five-beat pentameter line provides the norm against which the modifications are heard. Shakespeare sometimes used rhymed verse, particularly in his early plays. Rhymed couplets occur frequently at the end of a scene, punctuating the dramatic rhythm and perhaps serving as a cue to the offstage actors to enter for the next scene.

As Shakespeare's dramatic skill developed, he began to make greater use of prose, which became as subtle a medium as his hands as verse. Although prose lacks the regular rhythms of verse, it is not without its own rhythmical aspect, and Shakespeare came to use the possibilities of prose to achieve effects of characterization as subtle as those he accomplished in verse. In the early plays, prose is almost always reserved for characters from the lower classes. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, for example, the weaver Bottom speaks in prose to the fairy queen Titania, but she always responds in the verse appropriate to her position. Shakespeare, however, soon abandoned this rigid assignment of prose or verse on the basis of social rank. Although The Merry Wives of Windsor is the only play written almost entirely in prose, many plays use prose for important effects. Examples include Ophelia's mad scenes in Hamlet, Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene in Macbeth, and Falstaff's wonderful comedy in Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2.

Notes for Topic 2 adopted from:

e) **SHAKESPEARE’S PLAYS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Date of composition*</th>
<th>Major characters</th>
<th>Genre</th>
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<td>Caliban</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry VIII (probably written in collaboration with John Fletcher)</td>
<td>1613</td>
<td>King Henry VIII</td>
<td>History</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Queen Katherine</td>
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<td>Cardinal</td>
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<td>Wolsey Duke of Buckingham</td>
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<td>Anne Boleyn</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Noble Kinsmen (of doubtful authorship; may have been written in collaboration with John Fletcher)</td>
<td>1613-4</td>
<td>Palamon</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
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*Note:

TOPIC 3: OTHER RENAISSANCE PLAYWRIGHTS

For most modern readers, English Renaissance Drama begins and ends with the works of William Shakespeare. It may therefore come as a surprise to discover the richness and variety in the dramatic works produced by Shakespeare’s contemporaries (and rivals) in the dynamic theatrical world of 16th and 17th century London. This module also offers an introduction to some of the most representative, provocative—and peculiar and bizarre—dramatic works created by playwrights other than Shakespeare. In them we will see a fair sampling of the ideas that obsessed and challenged the human imagination in the early modern period: the place of human beings in the greater scheme of the cosmos, the existence (or not) of a Supreme Being, whether or not to respect the power invested in a monarch, the problems of personal and political corruption, whether to suppress or indulge sexual urges, the place of women in the social order—just to name a few. Below are brief background of selected Renaissance playwrights.

a) Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593)

Born the same year a Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe was to become the first great poet of the theatre's second great age. His life, much like the lives of his characters, would be short and violent.

The son of a shoemaker, Marlowe attended King's School, Canterbury and Corpus Christi College where he received his Bachelor of Arts in 1584 and his Masters degree three years later. According to university records, Marlowe disappeared frequently during his last years at school, exceeding the number of absences permitted him by statute and putting his degree in jeopardy. Apparently, much of this time was spent in Rheims among the Catholics who were plotting against Queen Elizabeth's protestant regime. Because of his absences and the fact that he refused to take holy orders, the university refused, for a time, to confer his degree, but the authorities intervened, and the degree was eventually granted.

Although we cannot be certain, Marlowe may have fought in the wars in the Low Country after graduation. What we can be certain of is that he settled in London in 1587 and began his career as a playwright—although he may still have been in
the employ of the secret service as well. The young poet plunged himself into a social circle that included such colorful literary figures as Sir Phillip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh. He shared a room with fellow playwright Thomas Kyd and was often seen frequenting the taverns of London with the likes of Robert Greene and Thomas Nashe. His magnificent appearance, impulsiveness, and bejeweled costumes soon became the talk of the town.

Primed by this new-found intellectual stimulation, Marlowe soon wrote Tamburlaine, the first notable English play in blank verse. Elizabethan drama had reached the foothills and was beginning its final ascent when Marlowe came onto the scene. All that was needed was a bold leap such as no one had yet dared or been able to make—and Marlowe was determined to make that leap.

He had the advantage of having his plays presented by the Lord Admiral's company. While his contemporaries were watching their work performed by church boys, Marlowe saw his dramas staged by full-chested men such as the seven-foot-tall, majestic Edward Alleyn.

No playwright had hitherto invoked the world, the flesh, and the devil so magnificently in plays such as Dr. Faustus, The Jew of Malta, and Edward II. The young poet, however, had neither wealth nor position, and the disparity between his dreams and the reality of his situation began to weigh upon him. He grew more and more restless and irritable until even his friends began to lose patience with him.

In 1593, after pointing out what he considered to be inconsistencies in the Bible, Marlowe fell under suspicion of heresy. His roommate, Thomas Kyd, was tortured into giving evidence against him, but before he could be brought before the Privy Council, the twenty-nine-year-old poet was found dead at Dame Eleanore Bull's tavern in Deptford. On May 30, 1593, he had gone to the tavern to have dinner with some friends. According to witnesses, there was a quarrel over the bill and Marlowe drew his dagger on another man who, defending himself, drove the dagger back into the young poet's eye, mortally wounding him. There is reason to believe, however, that Marlowe may have been deliberately provoked and murdered in order to prevent his arrest. Had he been brought before the Privy Council, he might have implicated men of importance such as Raleigh.

Christopher Marlowe's contribution to the drama, however, was complete. He had returned high poetry to its rightful place on the stage and left us characters as fiery and passionate as their creator, preparing the way for a poet even greater than himself—William Shakespeare.

Source: “Christopher Marlowe” (2001). Moonstruck Drama Bookstore
b) Ben Jonson (1573-1637)

Born in London in 1573, Ben Jonson would be no stranger to tragedy. His Protestant father—who had been imprisoned and deprived of his estate during the Catholic reign of Mary Tudor—had died only a month earlier, and his mother, left penniless and with no means of supporting her young son, was forced to marry a bricklayer. But despite these tragic beginnings, it was for his humor that Ben Jonson would be known.

At Westminster school, the scholar Camden recognized Jonson's exceptional literary gifts and took the young man under his tutelage. Though Jonson never received a university education, Camden's instruction proved more than adequate. He became one of the most learned men of Elizabethan times and eventually received honorary degrees from both universities.

Perhaps in remembrance of his father, Jonson enlisted with the English supporters of the Protestant Hollanders who were defending their religious and political liberties against Catholicism and Spanish rule. The fiery young poet proved to be as formidable with the sword as he was with the pen. In one particular act of bravado, he advanced before the English volunteers, challenged a Spaniard to single combat, slew him, and then—in classic Homeric tradition—stripped the corpse of its armor.

In 1592, he returned to London and married a woman whom he would later describe as "a shrew, yet honest." In 1596, she gave birth to a son whom Jonson called his "best piece of poetry." He was devastated when the young boy was struck down with the plague at the age of seven.

Jonson plunged himself into the bohemian life of the city, drank a lot, acted (badly), doctored Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* for Phillip Henslowe, and adapted two Roman comedies in *The Case Is Altered*. But it was not until 1598 that he finally emerged from the crowd of unrecognized playwrights with *Every Man in His Humour*. Dedicated to Master Camden, *Every Man in His Humour* is a masterpiece of its kind. It draws a telling portrait of the follies of the time—one huge canvas of the Elizabethan age.

But disaster quickly followed. Jonson fell into a quarrel with the actor Gabriel Spencer and, in a duel, killed the man, though his blade was ten inches shorter than Spencer's. He was imprisoned and very nearly put to death. At the last moment, he was granted a reprieve and released, but his property was confiscated, and he was branded on the thumb. His release was celebrated by the performance of his new play *Every Man Out of His Humour*.

Although often guilty of petty quarrels with his fellow playwrights, Jonson
collaborated with John Marston and George Chapman on *Eastward Ho!*, a script which would land them all in prison once again. The play contains an unflattering reference to Scottish royalty to which the new king, James I, took offense. Chapman and Marston were thrown into prison, and Jonson joined them there voluntarily, claiming equal responsibility for the play. In the end, they were spared—probably because of the new-found popularity Jonson was beginning to enjoy as a writer of masques for the court.

The next year, Jonson produced what is generally considered to be his masterpiece. In *Volpone*, a rich merchant hits upon the scheme of faking his own death in order to swell his coffers with gifts. Sickened by the greed which was becoming a predominant feature of the economic system, Jonson is no longer simply drawing an amusing picture of Elizabethan times, he is flatly assailing the morals of the age.

Jonson lived on long after his friend Shakespeare had passed away. He continued to write, piling comedy on comedy, and although he fell prey to illness and obesity in later life—weighing at one time nearly “twenty stone”—he remained the unquestioned literary dictator of England until his death in 1637.


c) **Thomas Middleton (1580-1627)**

Thomas Middleton was christened son of William Middleton and Anne Snow at St. Lawrence in the Old Jewry on April 18, 1580. As a lad in his teens he published *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased* (1597) and *Micro-Cynicon, Six Snarling Satires* (1599), but meanwhile, in April, 1598, had matriculated at Queen's College, Oxford. There is no record of his connection with the theater until May 22, 1602, when Henslowe records in his Diary a payment made to him together with Munday, Drayton, and Webster "in earnest of a book called Caesar's Fall." From this time almost to his death numerous references to his dramatic activity show that he sometimes wrote alone but more often with other well-known dramatists, notably Dekker and Rowley. Two satirical tales, *The Black Book* and *Father Hubbard's Tale*, published in 1604, reveal his early interest in the seamy side of London life, which he was to turn to good account in his comedies of manners written between 1604 and 1611. Among these may be mentioned *A Trick to Catch the Old One; A Mad World, My Masters;* and *Michaelmas Term*—all dealing with the duping of an unsuspecting victim by London sharpers; *Your Five Gallants* which reveals the wiles of five different types of swindlers and ruffians; and that laughter-provoking farce, *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. Middleton's one unaided tragedy, *Women, Beware Women*, written
about 1612, was followed in 1613 by his first masque, *The Triumphs of Truth*; and until his death he was in demand as a writer of this type of entertainment. The temporary amalgamation of the companies of the companies of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Charles in 1614 or 1615 brought Middleton and Rowley together, and their period of collaboration began shortly thereafter ... From 1620 until his death Middleton held the office of city chronologer. He was buried in the Newington Butts Parish Church on July 4, 1627.

Middleton possesses no unusual poetic gifts, and his style is often uneven. His strength lies rather in his constructive skill, and in his fine dramatic sense, which enables him to give rapidity of movement and effectiveness to his scenes, and to make very real his pictures of low life in London. These features are well illustrated by *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, which was composed between 1604 and 1606, entered in the Stationer's Register October 7, 1607, and issued in two quartos dated 1608, and again in 1616. The plot, ingeniously contrived save for the lack of moral justice in the *dénouement*, is presumably of Middleton's own invention, and the materials of the play are drawn from the dramatist's experience in London life.

*The Changeling*, the best of Middleton and Rowley's joint efforts, although written between 1622 and the date of its performance at Whitehall on January 4, 1624, was not published until 1653. The story of Beatrice Joanna and Defores is drawn from John Reynolds' *The Triumphs of God's Revenge against the Crying and Execrable Sin of Murther*, entered in the Stationer's Register June 7, 1621, and published later the same year; and one episode in the story is derived from Leonard Digges' translation of the Spanish novel of Cespedes, *Gerardo, the Unfortunate Spaniard* (1622). For the sub-plot, which gives the play its name, no source is known. According to Miss Pauline G. Wiggin (*An Inquiry into the Authorship of the Middleton-Rowley Plays*, Boston, 1897), "the first and last scenes, as well as the underplot" of the play are by Rowley. The play has been accorded high praise as a psychological tragedy and as one of the most successful plays written in collaboration in the whole range of Elizabethan drama.

**Source:** This article was originally published in *Elizabethan and Stuart Plays*. Ed. Charles Read Baskervil. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1934. pp. 1279-80.

**d) William Rowley (1585-1637)**

Rowley became an actor before 1610. He met Middleton about 1614 but was already writing plays for his company, Prince Charles's Men, in 1612-13. He later joined Lady Elizabeth's Men and then the King's Men, serving as both playwright and actor. Rowley's large girth and flair for comedy led to appearances as Plumporridge in The Inner Temple Masque (1619) and as the Fat Bishop in A Game at Chaess (1625), both plays by Middleton. In his own writings, Rowley often included oversized comic characters for his performance. Of some 50 plays known to have been written by Rowley alone or in collaboration, relatively few are extant. His most important solitary effort is All's Lost by Lust (performed 1619; published 1633), a romantic tragedy with a strong strain of dramatic morality, written in harsh but powerful verse. His other extant plays are comedies and include A New Wonder; A Woman Never Vext (c. 1610; published 1632), A Match at Mid-Night (c. 1607; published 1633), and A Shoo-maker a Gentleman (c. 1608; published 1638). Plays written with Middleton include The Old Law (performed c. 1615), on which Philip Massinger also collaborated; A Faire Quarrell (c. 1616, published 1617) and The Changeling (1622; published 1653), in both of which Rowley wrote the subplot and helped with the plan of the whole: Wit at Several Weapons (c. 1616), incorrectly attributed to John Fletcher; and The World Tost at Tennis (1620).

Other plays in which Rowley collaborated are Fortune by Land and Sea (c. 1609) with Thomas Heywood; The Witch of Edmonton (1621) with Thomas Dekker and John Ford; The Maid in the Mill (1623) with Fletcher; and The Birth of Merlin, or: The Child Hath Found His Father (1662), the title page of which wrongly attributes part authorship to William Shakespeare.


e) John Ford (1586-1640)

Because of his disdain of the orthodox moral code of his time and his sympathetic treatment of forbidden love, John Ford is often regarded as the most modern of Elizabethan and Stuart dramatists. He was baptized at Islington in Devonshire, April 17, 1586, was probably the John Ford who entered Exeter College, Oxford, in March, 1601, and was certainly the John Ford who was admitted to the Middle Temple in November 1602.

He first appeared in print with Fame's Memorial (1606), a long elegy on the death of the Earl of Devonshire, and he published other occasional pieces before he finally committed himself to a dramatic career. His first venture in dramatic work may well have been in the writing or revising of A Bad Beginning Makes a Good Ending, which was acted by the King's Men at court in 1612 or 1613, and which
was one of the four unprinted plays of Ford that were destroyed by Warburton's cook.

His career as a playwright definitely begins, however, in 1621, when he joined with Thomas Dekker and William Rowley in the composition of The Witch of Edmonton. He collaborated with Dekker in several other plays and with Webster in at least one. After about 1624, however, he seems to have worked alone, and his reputation rests chiefly upon his three unaided tragedies of forbidden love, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, The Broken Heart, and Love's Sacrifice.

On April 19, 1621, Elizabeth Sawyer, who was later to assume the title role in The Witch of Edmonton, was executed for witchcraft. On April 27, Henry Goodcole's Wonderful Discovery of E. Sawyer, a Witch was entered in the Stationer's Register, and was published later the same year. From this work the authors drew materials for The Witch of Edmonton, which was acted December 29, 1621, at Whitehall by the Prince's Servants. Studies of the proportionate shares of the three collaborators in the play have not led to agreement beyond a few general conclusions. Rowley's share in the play seems to be indeterminable, but is probably slight, being confined chiefly to those scenes in which Cuddy Banko appears. To Dekker may be assigned the witch scenes, the greater share in the character of Susan, and a considerable part in the prose passages. According to Sykes and others, Ford is responsible for the greater part of the play—it's main structure; the characters of Sir Arthur Clarington, Frank Thorne, and Winnifride; and some part in the character of Susan and in the prose passages, especially those dealing with Old Carter and his household.

The Broken Heart, printed in 1633, was probably written not long before its entry in the Stationer's Registry, March 28 of that year. No literary source for the play has been discovered, but, in view of II. 15-16 of the prologue and the arguments of Stuart Pratt Sherman (PMLA, 1909, and the introduction to his edition in the Belles-Lettres Series), it appears to have been based upon the experience of Sir Philip Sidney, Penelope Devereux, and Lord Rich, the triangle celebrated in Sidney's Astrophel and Stella. "In The Broken Heart," Sherman says, "Ford throws down the gauntlet to orthodox morality by placing a thoroughly pure woman in a genuine moral dilemma ... By establishing the tragic conflict of Penetha in her own spirit, he makes of her a distinctly modern type of heroine."

In The Chronicle History of Perkin Warbeck, entered in the Stationer's Register February 24, 1634, and published the same year, Ford turned aside from his interest in romantic love to produce a type of play which, as he seems to suggest in his prologue, had been neglected for a generation. He derived the materials for the play from Bacon's History of the Reign of Henry the Seventh (1622) and Thomas Gainsford's True and Wonderful History of Perkin Warbeck (1618), and apparently chose the Shakespearean chronicle play as his model. His plot, however, is simpler than Shakespeare's, and the play as a whole, though rapid in movement, lacks intensity and variety. Nevertheless, it fills a gap among
Shakespeare's chronicle plays, and it has often received high praise as a play not unworthy to rank among the few plays of the kind that deserve distant comparison with those of the master dramatist.

Source: This article was originally published in *Elizabethan and Stuart Plays*, Ed. Charles Read Baskervill. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1934. 1443-44.

f) Elizabeth Cary (1585-1639)

Elizabeth Cary held the honor of being known as the first Englishwoman to write an original drama. At the urging of writer John Davies, Cary published *The Tragedy of Mariam* in 1613. Cary was also the first Englishwoman to write a tragedy and the first to write a history play, *The History of the Life, Reign and Death of Edward II* (ca. 1627). Cary's other works include various religious hymns, poems and translations from the languages of French, Spanish, Latin and Hebrew.

Elizabeth Cary was the sole child born to Sir Laurence and Lady Elizabeth Tanfield of Burford Priory, Oxford in 1585. Her natural inclination for learning showed itself in early childhood despite her strict mother's attempts to thwart Elizabeth's intellectual development by reportedly forbidding her to read at night (to which Elizabeth began bribing servants for candles).

In 1602 at age 17, Elizabeth was contracted to marry Sir Henry Cary so that the Tanfields would have aristocratic connections and the Cary's, an heiress. The couple lived apart for the first several years of their marriage while Henry fought in the Protestant wars against Spain and where he was captured in 1605 and imprisoned. At the demand of her mother-in-law Dame Katherine (Lady Paget), Elizabeth moved in with her husband's family in 1603. Here, Elizabeth endured cruelties similar to those imposed by her mother as Lady Paget forbade Elizabeth to read and locked her in her room. It is believed that Elizabeth began writing during this period as a substitute for reading. Elizabeth had also participated in the literary circle of the countess of Pembroke and became acquainted with Senecan drama. Using the model of Roman tragedy, Elizabeth wrote and completed *The Tragedy of Mariam* between 1602-1604.

It was also during this period that Elizabeth began to entertain an attraction to Catholicism to which her husband was radically opposed and a soldier against. This religious conflict did not seem to threaten the marriage in its early years, as upon her husband's return from war in 1609, the couple had their first of eleven children.
Henry Cary was appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1622, moving the couple to Dublin where their marriage suffered terrific stress due to religious differences and Henry's persecution of Irish Catholics. Irreconcilable, the couple separated and Elizabeth returned to England in 1625.

In 1626, Elizabeth professed her Catholicism and, when rumor reached the king, she was confined to her room for six weeks. In addition, her children were taken away and Henry withdrew financial support from his wife. While in poverty, Cary once again drew up her pen began to write works that would later be published.

In 1627 the government intervened, forcing Henry to pay his wife's debts. The couple reconciled in 1631 with intervention from Queen Henrietta Maria. Henry died in 1633 with Elizabeth following in 1639.

Elizabeth's legacy was continued by her children of whom her son Lucius became the secretary of state for Charles I and her daughter Anne, a Benedictine nun, published the first biography about a woman writer, *The Lady Falkland: Her Life* (ca. 1643-1650), about her mother—a woman of many firsts.

Source: "Elizabeth Cary" The Prodigal Daughter Project Homepage
http://www.valpo.edu/home/staff/knnes/closet/carybio.html

**g) Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621)**

Mary Sidney was highly educated by tutors, who included a female Italian teacher. Like her learned aunt Jane Grey, she was educated in the Reformed humanist tradition. In the 16th century, noblewomen required a good understanding of theological issues and were taught to read original texts.

Mary was also schooled in poetry, music, French, the Classics, possibly in Hebrew and rhetoric, in needlework and practical medicine. She later translated Petrarch's "Triumph of Death" and many other European works. She had a keen interest in chemistry and set up a chemistry laboratory at Wilton House, run by Walter Raleigh's half-brother. She turned Wilton into a "paradise for poets", known as "The Wilton Circle" which included Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, Sir John Davies and Samuel Daniel, a salon-type literary group sustained by the Countess's hospitality. Her aim was to banish barbarism (an aim she shared with John Florio), by strengthening and classicising the English language and also by practising "true religion", which, in her view, combined Calvinism, devotion to Christ and acts of charity.

She propagated Italian culture and literature. She was herself a Calvinist theologian. Her public persona (at least) was pious, virtuous and learned. She was celebrated for her singing of the psalms, her warmth, charm and beauty. In
private, she was witty and, some reported, flirtatious. She ran safehouses for French reformed refugees.

Mary Sidney took on the task of amplifying and editing her brother's "Arcadia" which was published as The Countesse of Pembroke's Arcadia, one of the most widely read books for the next 300 years. She also finished Philip's translation of the Psalms (which are sung unaccompanied in Calvinist worship), composing Psalms 44-150 on her own poetry, using the 1560 Geneva Bible and commentaries by John Calvin and Theodore Beza.

As a competent theologian, she was unafraid to disagree with Calvin on minor points. A copy of the completed book was presented to Elizabeth I of England in 1599. This work is usually referred to as "The Sidney Psalms" or "The Sidneyan Psalms" and is regarded as an important influence on the development of English poetry in the late 16th and early 17th century. John Donne wrote a poem in celebration of them. The Psalms were drawn from previous English translations rather than original Hebrew texts and are therefore properly called "metaphrases" rather than translations. Like Philip's, Mary Sidney's versions use a wide variety of poetic forms and display a vivid imagination and vigorous phrasing.

Mary Sidney's imaginative, lively and warm style is filled with "Sidneian fire", transparency and holy ardour. This ardour is apparent in 'matters of the heart', for example in the death scenes in her closet drama The Tragedy of Antonie (1592), which William Shakespeare may have used as source material for his Antony and Cleopatra (1607), as well as in her poetic masterpiece "The Psalms of David", which describes the pain of an earthly existence in the light of the divine comfort of 'grace'.

The Psalms, which she considered her memorial, lack the weighty dignity of the Psalms of the Authorised Version (which was the crown of thirty years effort to forge English into a vehicle fit for theology). Mary's versions, though, have delightful and felicitous poetic forms and expressions. Her influence—through literary patronage, through her brother's works, through her own poetry, drama, translations and theology (e.g. she translated Philippe de Momay's Discourse of Life and Death to strengthen the international reformed community—cannot be easily quantified; it is clear that she had a strong influence on some of the finest literary fruits of the English Renaissance.

h) PUBLICATION OF SELECTED RENAISSANCE PLAYS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Date of first publication</th>
<th>Major characters</th>
<th>Genre</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Spanish Tragedy</em> by Thomas Kyd</td>
<td>1585</td>
<td>Don Andrea Hieronimo</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus</em> by Christopher Marlowe</td>
<td>1589</td>
<td>Dr Faustus Mephistopheles</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Duchess of Malfi</em> by John Webster</td>
<td>1614</td>
<td>The Duchess Ferdinand, Cardinal Antonio, Bosola</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Changeling</em> by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley</td>
<td>1653</td>
<td>Beatrice-Joanna De Flores</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</em> by John Ford</td>
<td>1633</td>
<td>Giovanni Annabella, Bonaventura (friar), Cardinal</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry</em> by Elizabeth Cary</td>
<td>1604</td>
<td>Mariam Salome Herod</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Epicoene, or The Silent Women</em> by Ben Jonson</td>
<td>1609</td>
<td>Dauphine Morose</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
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<td><em>The Roaring Girl</em> by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker</td>
<td>1611</td>
<td>Moll</td>
<td>Comedy</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>A Woman Killed with Kindness</em> by Thomas Heywood</td>
<td>1603</td>
<td>Anne Frankford, Susan Mountford, Frankford Wendell</td>
<td>Domestic Tragedy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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SELF-ASSESSMENT TASK

Name five Renaissance playwrights other than Shakespeare.

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CONCLUSION

By the end of this unit it is hoped that you have a brief background to the history and types of drama that influence Shakespeare and Renaissance plays, and brief background of Shakespeare and other Renaissance playwrights. These background information will enhance your comprehension of the plays to be studied in Units 4-6 in this module.
UNIT 2
ELEMENTS AND THEMES OF DRAMA

Introduction

This unit provides you with an exposure to the elements of Renaissance drama. It also traces the influence of various types of plays in Renaissance drama such as the ancient Greek and Rome tragedies, the miracle or mystery, and morality plays of the Middle Ages, and the Spanish tragedies.

Unit Objectives

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. identify the influences behind Renaissance drama,
2. understand the social condition during the period, and
3. discuss the prevailing themes of the drama.

TOPICS

Topic 1: Brief history of Elizabethan dramatic influence

Topic 2: Types of Elizabethan drama
   a) Trope to liturgical dramas
   b) Miracle plays
   c) Morality plays
   d) The interlude
Topic 3: Elements and Themes

a) Shifts in theme: from salvation to education, religion to politics
b) The classical influence on English comedy
c) English tragedy

TOPIC 1: BRIEF HISTORY OF ELIZABETHAN DRAMATIC INFLUENCE

For us to be able to understand the themes and concerns of Shakespeare and Renaissance drama in general, a brief historical overview of the origin of drama is necessary to see how these early drama influence them.

The origins of drama as we know it are more the concern of anthropologists because drama and religious ritual seem to have been bound up with one another in the earlier stages of all civilizations.

These things lie in the background of all drama:

- Folk celebrations,
- Ritual miming of such elemental themes as death and resurrection,
- Seasonal festivals with appropriate symbolic actions.

As far as we can trace the history of English drama, it begins with the elaboration of the ecclesiastical liturgy in mutually answering dialogues.

Of the other sources—pre-Christian seasonal festivals, St. George & Robin Hood plays, maypole dances, and similar folk activities—we know little else except that they existed.

No substantial continuity can be established between the origins of European drama in the Middle Ages and the drama of Greece and Rome, which had already run its course by the time the Christian era began.

Strolling minstrels and other varieties of itinerant entertainments might have preserved some bit of Roman theater but they eventually became absorbed into the repertory of the profession long before it contributed anything to the acting of miracle or mystery and morality plays.
TOPIC 2: TYPES OF ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

a) Tropes to Liturgical Dramas

With its two great festivals of Christmas and Easter, and its celebration of the significant points of Christ's life and career from birth to resurrection, the Christian Church itself was inherently dramatic.

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

- simple chanting between priest and choir or two sections of the choir to
- more elaborate acting out of a scene between two characters or sets of characters.

These ceremonial dramatizations were known as tropes—simple but dramatic elaborations of parts of the liturgy—and they represent the beginnings of medieval drama.

The Quem Quaeritis? Trope

One of the earliest recorded tropes was one performed at Easter in the 10th century. It depicts a dialogue between the three Marys and the angel at Christ's tomb, and it is known as the "Quem Quaeritis?" Trope because it asks the question "Whom do ye seek?:

"Whom do you seek?
"Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified."
"He is not here. He is risen."

The "Quem Quaeritis?" trope is often identified as the earliest instance of medieval drama.

The simple trope eventually grew into liturgical drama, which was drama arising from or developed in connection with church rites or services. Liturgical drama was fully developed in the 12th century. At first these dramatic renderings were presented in Latin but as they increased in popularity, they were presented in the vernacular.
Liturgical dramas represented dimensions of the life of Christ. A play bringing the shepherd to the crib of the infant was introduced at Christmas. An Epiphany play introduced the three kings and even a mechanical star. The first Passion Play developed in the 13th century.

What is a Passion Play?

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

At the same time the "plots" developed, the staging of the plays became more elaborate, which made it difficult to confine them to their traditional area: the choir portion of the church. As they grew more elaborate, the performances began to extend physically down the nave, using appropriate portions of the church as needed. At this point, however, they were still confined to the church, both physically and in subject matter.

b) Miracle Plays

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

Once outside the church, the vernacular ousted Latin and the focus of the story moved away from just the liturgy to encompass the whole range of sacred history from the Creation to the Last Judgment. Drama began to present the entire range of religious history.

Presentation of the plays outdoors became dependent upon the weather, so they could no longer be acted on all of the different church festivals. The establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi (May or June) in 1264 provided a suitable day for play presentation.

Corpus Christi was a good choice because it was warm but also because it involved a professional observance with the Host carried about and displayed at various stations. Dramas were generally given on wagons or pageant carts, which were in effect moving stages. Each pageant cart presented a different scene of the cycle and the wagons followed each other, repeating their scenes at
successive stations. Carts were often very elaborate, equipped with a changing room, a stage proper, and two areas which represented hell (usually a painted dragon's head) and heaven (a balcony). Stage machinery and sound effects became integral parts of the plotting.

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

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

### Miracle Plays vs. Mystery Plays

French critics tend to distinguish between miracle and mystery plays:

- **Miracle plays** had as their subject a story from the Scriptures or the life and martyrdom of a saint.
- **Mystery plays** usually base their stories on the New Testament.

For our purposes, the inclusive term **miracle play** can be used to identify works dealing with either Biblical history or saints' lives.

It is at this stage that elements from minstrel performances & older folk festivals began to be incorporated into what was originally Christian drama. These new elements provided vitality for a drama whose primary function was fast beginning to be plain old entertainment.

The transition from simple liturgical drama to miracle and mystery play cannot be accurately dated or documented. It is believed that miracle plays developed rapidly in the 13th century; there are records of cycles of miracle plays in many regions of England during the 14th-15th centuries, even into the 16th.
The cycles were developed by extending the themes of liturgical drama both backward and forward, to include the Creation, the Fall, early Old Testament stories, and Doomsday.

Almost complete cycles of miracle plays survive from Chester, York & Wakefield. Parts of other cycles also survive.

Some of the plays seem to have been written by the same person, who has come to be known as the "Wakefield Master." They date from the 15th century, and the two most famous are Noah and The Second Shepherds' Play.

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

c) Morality Plays

While the miracle plays were still going strong, 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 who struggle for man's soul. Simply put, morality plays dealt with man's search for salvation.

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 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 *Dr. 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 commonplace of medieval art and literature;
- The theme of Mercy and Peace pleading before God for man’s soul against Truth and Righteousness; and
- The **Dance of Death**, which focuses on Death as God’s messenger come to summon all, high and low. The Dance of Death is a dramatic rendition of the *ubi sunt* theme, which figures so largely in literature of the Middle Ages. The *ubi sunt* theme rhetorically asks “Where are all those who were before us?” (*ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt*).  

The earliest complete extant morality play is *The Castle of Perseverance*, which was written circa 1425. This was an elaborate play with 3650 lines and 34 characters, and its theme is the fight between Mankind’s Good Angel and his supporters and his Bad Angel, who is supported by the Seven Deadly Sins. The action takes Man from his birth to the Day of Judgment.

*Everyman* (ca. 1500) is perhaps the best known morality play. It depicts Everyman’s journey in the face of Death. The hero is capably assisted to his end by Good Deeds.

d) **The Interlude**

Toward the end of the 15th century, there developed a type of morality play which dealt in the same allegorical way with general moral problems, although
with more pronounced realistic and comic elements. This kind of play is known as the \textit{interlude}.

The term might originally have denoted a short play or playlet actually performed between the courses of a banquet. It can be applied to a variety of short entertainments, including secular farces and witty dialogues with a religious or political point.

Although the transition cannot be documented adequately because so many texts have not survived, the term "interlude" is employed by literary historians to denote the plays which mark the \textit{transition from medieval religious drama to Tudor secular drama}.

\textbf{Henry Medwall's \textit{Fulgens and Lucretes}}—at the end of the 15th century—is the earliest extant purely secular play in English. He had already written a morality play entitled \textit{Nature}.

Medwall was one of a group of early Tudor playwrights that included \textbf{John Rastell} and \textbf{John Heywood}, who ended up being the most important dramatist of them all. Heywood's interludes were often written as part of the evening's entertainment at a nobleman's house and their emphasis is more on amusement than instruction. Heywood's art resembles the modern music-hall or vaudeville sketch. The plots are very basic.

\textbf{TOPIC 3: KEY ELEMENTS AND THEMES}

\textbf{a) \ Shifts in Theme: from Salvation to Education, Religion to Politics}

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

Such controversial or propagandist morality plays abandoned the large universal moral and religious themes of the older moralities and were liable to portray the vices as Catholics.

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

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

The move from religious themes to ethical-political ones can be seen in John Skelton's *Magnificence* (1515), aimed at Cardinal Wolsey, which shows the rise, fall & final repentance of a worldly prince seduced and eventually redeemed by allegorical figures, such as Virtues and Vices.

b) The Classical Influence on English Comedy

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

Taking its theme from the Milos Glorious of Roman playwright Plautus, about 1553 Nicholas Udall wrote the comic *Ralph Roister Doister*. This play brings the braggart soldier for the first time into English drama. Udall's characters function both as traditional vices/virtues and as traditional characters in Latin comedy (for example, the Parasite, who also shows up in the plays of Ben Jonson). The plot is simple, but it does include a complication and a resolution, which shows a firmer grasp on structure.

Another comedy, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, by "Mr. S.," probably William Stevenson of Christ's College, was written a few years later and produced at the college. Here, the themes and characters of Plautus combine with the comedy of English rural life. The plot is crude and comic: "Gammer" Gurton loses her needle and it is found sticking in the pants of her servant. However, the construction in five acts is effective.

It was not until George Gascoigne produced his comic play *Supposes* at Gray's Inn in 1566 that prose made its first appearance in English drama. Gascoigne's play is another comedy adapted from a foreign source, from the Italian of Ariosto. Gascoigne's play is far more sophisticated and subtle than *Ralph Roister Doister* or *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. In fact, it is the first of many witty Italianate comedies in English which includes Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Although we rarely read any of these early works, they are important because they bring to English drama elements that would be further developed by its
master playwrights. Moreover, Gascoigne's work indicates that the popular
tradition of the English drama could be modified—enhanced—by classical
influences and by the needs of a more sophisticated audience.

c) English Tragedy

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

There were no tragedies among the miracle or morality plays; in fact, there was
nothing that could be called tragedy in English drama before the classical
influence began.

The favorite classical writer of tragedies among English Humanists was not
Sophocles or Euripides but Seneca, the Stoic Roman. Although they were never
meant to be acted, Seneca's nine tragedies provided Renaissance playwrights
with volatile materials: they adapted Greek myths to produce violent and somber
treatments of murder, cruelty, and lust. Seneca's works were translated into
English by Jasper Heywood and others in the mid-16th century, and they greatly
influenced the direction of drama on the English stage.

Senecan Tragedy

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

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

Although Seneca's writing style did not provide a good model for developing
English playwrights—it was polished yet monotonous—his methodology did. Like
the sonnet, the typical Senecan tragedy was ordered and concentrated. It was a
good proving ground for would-be dramatists.

Before Senecan tragedy fully influenced the English dramatists, there were some
other attempts at the genre. Richard Edwards' Damon and Pythias (1564) & John
Pickering's New Interlude of Vice Containing the History of Horestes (1567) were
two early tragedies that relied on classical themes. Thomas Preston's Cambises
(1570), which billed itself as a "new tragical comedy," combined features of both genres.

*Gorboduc*—also known as Ferrex and Porrex—written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton and produced around 1561-2 is considered the first successful English tragedy in the Senecan style:

- It is divided into 5 acts,
- It follows the classical manner in avoiding violence on the stage (instead, it presents it offstage), and
- It is written in blank verse, the first English play to be so.

Source: Mooney, J. *English 3024: Renaissance Literature Homepage.*
http://athena.english.vt.edu/~jmooney/renmetal/drama.htm

**SELF-ASSESSMENT TASK**

Describe briefly the types of plays that influence Shakespeare and Renaissance drama.
UNIT 3
ELIZABETHAN STAGE CONVENTIONS

Introduction

This unit provides you with an insight to the contemporary infrastructure as well as the players and playhouses which are prevalent during the period.

Unit Objectives

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. identify the connection between the types of drama with the playhouse, and
2. discuss the traits of some of the famous Renaissance plays/actors.

TOPICS

Topic 1: Playhouses in London
   a) Outdoor playhouses
   b) Indoor playhouses
      i. Blackfriars Theatre
      ii. The Globe Theatre

Topic 2: Major Renaissance Players and Companies
   a) The University Wits
TOPIC 1: PLAYHOUSES IN LONDON

Early theatrical performance in England was not linked either with professional companies or with purpose-built infrastructures. Playing arose out of particular sets of circumstances in specific places at specific time: a group of traveling (strolling) players arriving in town or calling at the great house of a local lord; a group of parishioners wishing to stage a play in order to raise money for a new roof for the church; a city wishing to honour a religious festival and attract visitors to the city; an enterprising individual staging versions of her neighbours’ adulterous affairs in her back yard. This absence of any necessary tie to playhouses or professional companies means that it can be quite difficult to define what should be classed as ‘theatre’.

When playhouses began to be built they were thus strategically placed outside the city limits. The edict banning playing during time of plague in specifying the area in which the ban applies as ‘this city of London, liberties and suburbs’. For most purposes, however, the city had no power to legislate for the liberties and suburbs. The boundary of its authority, once coincidental with the city walls, by this date extended a little way beyond the walls in places, to what were known as the ‘bars’ (sometimes marked by chains across the street). ‘Suburbs’ designated adjacent areas outside the boundary, while ‘liberties’ were areas free of city jurisdiction due to ancient privilege (often the site of former religious houses, as in the case of the Blackfriars) and could be located physically within the boundaries while remaining legally beyond them. The Theatre and the Curtain, the first two major theatrical enterprises, were built close to one another outside the city’s northern boundary, while the next group of playhouses to be built clustered within the liberties of the Clink and Paris Garden in Southwark. Southwark itself had come inside city jurisdiction in 1550, but the Clink and Paris Garden, as liberties, remained outside it.

The swift expansion of outdoor fixed playhouses is testimony both to the enormous popularity of playgoing and to London’s fast-growing population. It was an expansion that was to continue into the seventeenth century, as the population grew even further (from c. 15,000 in 1576 to c. 200,000 in 1642) and theatregoing became a more regular part of everyday life in the capital. If there is one thing scholars have learned from recent discoveries and excavation, as at the site of the Rose Theatre, it is that there is no ‘standard’ model that can be applied to all playhouses, but that individual playhouses differed significantly from
one another. Nevertheless, the playhouses of the period can be broadly divided under two headings; indoor and outdoor. Outdoor theatres were all uncovered (apart from a roof over the stage in most later ones) and mostly circular (the Fortune and the Red Bull being the exceptions to this).


a) Outdoor playhouses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name of theatre</th>
<th>Year built</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Red Lion</td>
<td>1567-?</td>
<td>Constructed by John Brayne, James Burbage’s brother-in-law. The entire structure cost about 20 pounds. The galleries were a single storey and rested on the ground without foundation, and there is no evidence that it lasted beyond the summer of 1567.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theatre</td>
<td>1576-90</td>
<td>Built by James Burbage in the Shoreditch district just north-east of the City. The first substantial purpose-built London playhouse built in England since Roman times. Its timber survived in the form of the Globe until the fire in 1613. Round open-air structure with a superstructural hut like that at Swan but does not prove that the Theatre had a stage cover. Patrons could apparently stand in the yard around the stage and either stand or sit in the galleries which enclosed the yard. Shakespeare’s plays written in the latter half of the 1950’s, <em>Love’s Labours Lost</em>, <em>Richard II</em>, <em>Romeo and Juliet</em>, <em>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</em>, <em>King John</em>, <em>The Merchant of Venice</em>, <em>1 and 2 Henry IV</em>, and <em>Much Ado about Nothing</em>, would have been written for the Theatre.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Curtain</td>
<td>1577--c.1625</td>
<td>Sold to James Burbage and John Brayne by the owner, Henry Lanman for 1400 pounds in 1585. Erected in Curtain Close, Finsbury Fields, Shoreditch, London. The Curtain amphitheatre was in use from 1577 to 1622 when it was closed by order of the Puritans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>1587-? 1608</td>
<td>Erected on the Bankside district by Philip Henslowe and John Cholmley. Open-air amphitheatre playhouse, polygon in shape, has a small shallow tapered stage which either fronted or formed a chord across 3 auditorium bays Titus Andronicus and I Henry VI were certainly performed here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Swan</td>
<td>1595-c.1637</td>
<td>Built by Francis Langley in the Bankside district. Intended to compete with the Rose. Named after the &quot;Swans&quot; swimming along the River Thames where it is located. Open-air amphitheatre playhouse, virtually round in shape, has a stage projecting to the yard surmounted by a stage cover supported on 2 pillars. It was described as the largest of the London playhouses of its day. It was closed in 1597 when Pembroke’s Men played The Isle of Dogs (Nashe and Jonson), which was highly critical of the government and which landed the dramatists in jail. The Swan had a revival of theatrical activity between 1611 and 1615 after it was opened again on 1602.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fortune</td>
<td>1599-1600</td>
<td>Built by Philip Henslowe. Open-air amphitheatre playhouse. Broke the tradition of circular shape by making the gallery ranges in the form of square.</td>
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</table>

**b) Indoor playhouses**

The indoor theatres were even more evidently dependent on earlier tradition, especially since most of them were conversions of halls originally designed for
other purposes. The two Blackfriars theatres, for example, converted different parts of the original Blackfriars monastery, the buttery and the dining hall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indoor playhouses</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St Paul's</td>
<td>1575 - 1606 (not in use 1590-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Blackfriars</td>
<td>1576 - 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Blackfriars</td>
<td>1600 - 66 (not in use after 1642)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitefriars</td>
<td>1609 - 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cockpit/ Phoenix</td>
<td>1616 - 1665 (not in use after 1661)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porter's Hall</td>
<td>1615 - 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salisbury Court</td>
<td>1629 - 66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Like the amphitheatres, they were galleried spaces surrounded on three sides by audience, their stages were entered from the tiring house wall, and that wall sometimes had a gallery that could be used as a performances space; but unlike most of the amphitheatres, the indoor theatres were rectangular, they seated all spectators and they were reliant on artificial lighting in the form of candles. There were other differences too. The indoor theatres were smaller and more exclusively located than the amphitheatres, hosted performances only once a week, rather than daily, and charged more for admission. The capacity of the Blackfriars has been estimated at about 700, while Paul's, within the cathedral precinct, held only 50-100.


i. Blackfriars Theatre

Blackfriars Theatre was the name of two separate theatres in the Blackfriars district of the City of London during the Renaissance.

Both theatres began as venues for child actors associated with the Queen’s chapel choirs; in this function, the theatres hosted some of the most innovative drama of Elizabeth and James’s reigns.

The second theatre eventually passed into the control of the King’s Men, who used it as their winter playhouse until the theatres were closed in 1642.
First Theatre

The Blackfriars Theatres were built on the grounds of the former Dominican monastery; the black robes worn by members of this order lent the neighbourhood, and theatres, their name.

In the pre-Reformation Tudor years, the site was used not only for religious but also for political functions.

In 1576, Richard Farrant, then Master of Windsor Chapel leased part of the former buttery from More in order to stage plays.

As often in the theatrical practice of the time, this commercial enterprise was justified by the convenient fiction of royal necessity; Farrant claimed to need the space for his child choristers to practice plays for the Queen, but he also staged plays for paying audiences.

The theatre was small, perhaps 46 feet long and 25 feet wide (14 by 8 metres), and admission, compared to public theatres, expensive (apparently fourpence); both these factors limited attendance at the theatre to a fairly select group of well-to-do gentry and nobles.

Second Theatre

The second Blackfriars was an indoor theatre built elsewhere on the property at the instigation of James Burbage, father of Richard Burbage.

In 1596, Burbage purchased this property for £600 and began converting it to become an indoor home for the Chamberlain's Men (whose leading actor is his own son).

This large space, perhaps 100 feet long and 50 wide (30 by 15 metres), with high ceilings allowed Burbage to construct two galleries, substantially increasing potential attendance.

As Burbage built, however, a petition from the residents of the wealthy neighbourhood persuaded the Privy Council to forbid playing there; the letter was signed even by Lord Hunsdon, patron of Burbage's company. The company was absolutely forbidden to perform there.

Three years later, Richard Burbage was able to lease the property to Henry Evans, the lawyer who had been among those ejected more fifteen years earlier.

They used the theatre for a commercial enterprise with a group called the Children of the Chapel, which combined the choristers of the chapel with other
boys, many taken up from local grammar schools to provide entertainment for the Queen.

The dubious legality of these dramatic impressments led to a challenge from a father in 1600; however, this method brought the company some of its most famous actors, including Nathaniel Field and Salmon Pavy. The residents did not protest this use, probably because of perceived social differences between the adult and child companies.

While it housed this company, Blackfriars was the site of an explosion of innovative drama and staging. Together with its competitor, Paul’s Children, the Blackfriars company produced plays by a number of the most talented young dramatists of Jacobean literature, among them Thomas Middleton, Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Marston.

In the latter half of the decade, the company at Blackfriars premiered plays by Francis Beaumont (The Knight of the Burning Pestle) and John Fletcher (The Faithful Shepherdess) that, although failures in their first production, marked the first significant appearance of these two dramatists, whose work would profoundly affect early Stuart drama.

The new plays of all these playwrights deliberately pushed the accepted boundaries of personal and social satire, of violence on stage, and of sexual frankness. These plays appear to have attracted members of a higher social class than was the norm at the Bankside and Shoreditch theatres, and the admission price (sixpence for a cheap seat) probably excluded the poorer patrons of the amphitheatres.

The Blackfriars playhouse was also the source of other innovations which would profoundly change the nature of English commercial staging: it was among the first commercial theatrical enterprises to rely on artificial lighting, and it featured music between acts, a practice which the induction to Marston’s The Malcontent (1604) indicates was not common in the public theatres at that time.

In the years around the turn of the century, the children’s companies were something of a phenomenon; a reference in Hamlet to “little eyasses” suggests that even the adult companies felt threatened by them.

By the later half of that decade, the fashion had changed somewhat. In 1608, Burbage’s company (by this time, the King’s Men) took possession of the theatre, which they still owned, this time without objections from the neighbourhood.

There were originally seven sharers in the reorganised theatre: Richard Burbage, William Shakespeare, Henry Condell, John Heminges, and William Sly, all members of the King’s Men, plus Cuthbert Burbage and Thomas Evans.
After renovations, the King's Men began using the theatre for performances in 1609. Thereafter the King's Men played in Blackfriars for the seven months in winter, and at the Globe during the summer. Blackfriars appears to have brought in a little over twice the revenue of the Globe; the shareholders could earn as much as £13 from a single performance, apart from what went to the actors.

In the reign of Charles I, even Queen Henrietta Maria was in the Blackfriars audience. On May 13, 1634 she and her attendants saw a play by Philip Massinger; in late 1635 or early 1636 they saw Lodowick Carrell's *Arniragus and Philicia, part 2*; and they attended a third performance in May of 1636.

The theatre closed at the onset of the English Civil War, and was demolished on August 6, 1655.

**Structure of the second theatre**

The nature of Burbage's modifications to his purchase is not clear, and the many contemporary references to the theatre do not offer a precise picture of its design.

Once fitted for playing, the space may have been about 66 feet long and 46 feet wide (20 by 14 meters), including tiring areas.

There were at least two and possibly three galleries, and perhaps a number of stage boxes adjacent to the stage.

Estimates of its capacity have varied from below 600 to almost 1000, depending on the number of galleries and boxes. Perhaps as many as ten spectators would have encumbered the stage.

Those who sit nearest to the stage paid most (opposite the public playhouse)

It preferred to use woodwind musical instruments rather than brass instrument because of enclosed space.

It was famous for the quality of its musicians who provided entertainment before the performance as well as during the four act intervals.
ii. The Globe Theatre

The Globe Theatre normally refers to one of three theatres in London associated with William Shakespeare. These are:

1. The original Globe Theatre was built in 1599 by the playing company to which Shakespeare belonged, and destroyed by fire on June 29, 1613.
2. The Globe Theatre that was rebuilt by June 1614 and closed in 1642.
3. A modern reconstruction of the original Globe, named "Shakespeare's Globe Theatre" or the "New Globe Theatre," opened in 1997. It is approximately 205 metres from the site of the original theatre off Park Street.

   The modern reconstruction of the Globe Theatre, in London.
Primary playing space of the Chamberlain's-King's Men between 1599 and 1608 and thereafter their summer venue alternating with the indoors Blackfriars playhouse in winter.

The Globe was located in the Bankside district of south London, famous for its animal-baiting rings and brothels, and near to the Rose theatre operated by Philip Henslowe.

The Globe was owned by many actors, who (except for one) were also shareholders in the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Two of the six Globe shareholders, Richard Burbage and his brother Cuthbert Burbage, owned double shares of the whole, or 25% each; the other four men, Shakespeare, John Heminges, Augustine Phillips, and Thomas Pope, owned a single share, or 12.5%. (Originally William Kempe was intended to be the seventh partner, but he sold out his share to the four minority sharers, leaving them with more than the originally planned 10%). These initial proportions changed over time, as new sharers were added. Shakespeare's share diminished from 1/8 to 1/14, or roughly 7%, over the course of his career.

The Globe was built in 1599 using timber from an earlier theatre, The Theatre, that had been built by Richard Burbage's father, James Burbage, in Shoreditch in 1576.

The Burbages originally had a 21-year lease of the site on which The Theatre was built, they dismantled The Theatre beam by beam and transported it over the Thames to reconstruct it as The Globe.


On June 29, 1613, the Globe Theatre went up in flames during a performance of Henry the Eighth. A theatrical cannon, set off during the performance, misfired, igniting the wooden beams and thatching. According to one of the few surviving documents of the event, no one was hurt except a man who put out his burning breeches with a bottle of ale.
Like all the other theatres in London, the Globe was closed down by the Puritans in 1642 after it was rebuilt in 1614. It was destroyed in 1644 to make room for tenements.

Its exact location remained unknown until remnants of its foundations were discovered in 1989 beneath the car park of Anchor Terrace on Park Street (the shape of the foundations are replicated in the surface of the car park). There may be further remains beneath Anchor Terrace, but the 18th century terrace is listed and therefore cannot be disturbed by archaeologists.

**Layout of the Globe**

The Globe’s actual dimensions are unknown, but its shape and size can be approximated from scholarly inquiry over the last two centuries.

The Globe was built because James Burbage’s intended new home for the company, the indoors Balckfriars playhouse, was prevented from opening in 1596 by the objection of local residents.

The Theatre’s name was intended to evoke the Roman amphitheatre whose circular shape it emulated.

The Globe’s name extended it association to assert the correspondence of the world of drama and the world of everyday life. Hence the same thing is suggested by the motto, “Totus Mundus Agit Histrionum” (“The whole world moves the actor”)

The evidence suggests that it was a three-story, virtually circular, open-air amphitheatre between 97 and 102 feet (29.6 - 31.1M) in diameter that could house up to 3,000 spectators and a thatched roof.

At the base of the stage, there was an area called the pit (or, harking back to the old inn-yards, yard) where, for a penny, people (the “groundlings”) would stand to watch the performance.

Groundlings would eat hazelnuts during performances — during the excavation of the Globe nutshells were found preserved in the dirt — or oranges.

Around the yard were three levels of stadium-style seats, which were more expensive than standing room.
The stage of the modern Globe Theatre


A rectangle stage platform, also known as an 'apron stage', thrust out into the middle of the open-air yard. The stage measured approximately 43 feet (13.1m) in width, 27 feet (8.2m) in depth and was raised about 5 feet (1.52m) off the ground.

On this stage, there was a trap door for use by performers to enter from the "cellarage" area beneath the stage. There may have been other trap doors around the stage.

With its stage extending into the middle of the yard, the Globe allowed an actor to stand almost at the center of a densely packed cylinder of spectators.

Large columns on either side of the stage supported a roof over the rear portion of the stage. The ceiling under this roof was called the "heavens," and may have been painted with clouds and the sky. A trap door in the heavens enabled performers to descend using some form of rope and harness.

The back wall of the stage had two or three doors on the main level, with a curtained inner stage in the center and a balcony above it. The doors entered into the "tiring house" (backstage area) where the actors dressed and awaited their entrances. The balcony housed the musicians and could also be used for scenes requiring an upper space, such as the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Twenty-nine plays of the period, fifteen of them by Shakespeare, seem to have had their first performance at the Globe.
SELF ASSESSMENT TASK

Discuss the factors which influence acting companies to start having/ building a proper infrastructure for their performances.

TOPIC 2: AUDAENCEES

Audiences sometimes paid and sometimes did not, depending on the nature and places of performance. Invited guests, whether at court or in any household, would not be expected to pay, though at certain types of court performance, such as tournaments, it was possible for a non-invited, paying audience to attend alongside the household and its guests. The performance of a morality play, St Christopher, at Gwthwaite Hall, home of the recusant Sir John Yorke, in 1609-10, drew an audience of local people so large (more than ‘fourscore or a hundred persons’) that it was necessary to turn some away. One of the problems, of course, before the building of permanent playhouses, was the difficulty of finding a way of making the spectators pay, a difficult street performers still face today. One way, as in Mankind (a morality play, that is, broadly speaking, a play dramatizing the moral choices in a human life that lead to their salvation or damnation), was to make a collection at a point when spectators would be inclined to stay rather than leave. Like most medieval plays, Mankind survives in only one manuscript, and there are no records of performance to tell us where or how it was first staged. Another was to finance the play in advance through loans or subscriptions, methods well documented in rural communities.

In trying to arrive at a broad view of how audiences behaved we must remember that many of the most memorable records that survive are recorded precisely because they were out of the normal run in some way. Lord Thurles’ deliberate blocking of Captain Essex’s view at the Blackfriars in 1632, resulting in Thurles drawing his sword to run Essex through, was out of the ordinary, as were the several accidents on record, where scaffolds fell killing audience members or muskets or cannons went off in the wrong direction, killing spectators or setting fire to the playhouse.

It is partly the case that different playhouses played different repertoires for different audiences, though too much can also be made of this. A late seventeenth-century historian of the theatre reports that the Fortune and the Red
Bull 'were mostly frequented by citizens, and the meaner sort of people' and identifies the Blackfriars as having the highest reputation amongst the others. Its players, he says, 'were men of grave and sober behaviour', implying a distinction between their calibre and that of other players. On the other hand, while the King's Men, playing at the Blackfriars from 1609, may have been noted for their respectability by that point, the children’s company occupying the Blackfriars before them were closed down for their insolence, and the King's Men themselves performed much of their repertories and reputations at any single playhouse must be treated with some caution. Plays and printers’ notes show clearly, however, that contemporaries were aware of fashions and divisions that set them apart. Yet men and women of all social classes shared a common impulse to take up this newly widespread form of entertainment, which kept them up to date with both fashion and news.

**TOPIC 3: MAJOR RENAISSANCE PLAYERS AND COMPANIES [PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS AND THEATRES]**

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

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**Players & Theatres: Fast Facts**

Here are some quick facts about the development of professional players and theatres:

- In 1583 Queen Elizabeth's Master of the Revels formed a company of players for the Queen.
- In 1576, James Burbage, leader of the Earl of Leicester's men, build the first permanent theater, called "The Theatre," in a field near Shoreditch, out of the city and thus out of the control of the Lord Mayor, who was the official "censor" of plays.
- Other permanent, public theatres soon followed: the Curtain, 1577; the Rose, 1588; the Swan, 1595.
Shakespeare’s theatre, the **Globe**, was built in 1598/99.

In addition to the public theatres, there were private ones, chief among them the Blackfriars (1576). They were different from public theatres because they:
- were roofed,
- had more elaborate interior arrangements, and
- presented plays originally acted by child players.

### a) The University Wits

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

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

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

The University Wits were

- **John Lyly** (1554-1606) is best known for court comedies, generally for private theatres, but also wrote mythological and pastoral plays. *Endimion & Euphues*.
- **George Peele** (1558-96) began writing courtly mythological pastoral plays like Lyly’s, but also wrote histories and biblical plays. *The Arraignment of Paris*.
- **Robert Greene** (1558-92), who founded **romantic comedy**, wrote plays which combined realistic native backgrounds with an atmosphere of romance, as well as comedies. *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay*.
- **Thomas Lodge** (1557-1625) tended toward euphistic prose romances. His *Rosalynde* provided Shakespeare with the basis for *As You Like It*. History most important work is his picaresque tale *The Unfortunate Traveller*, an early novel.
- **Thomas Kyd** (1558-94), who founded **romantic tragedy**, wrote plays mingling the themes of love, conspiracy, murder and revenge. Adapted
elements of Senecan drama to melodrama. His *The Spanish Tragedy* (1580s) is the first of the series of revenge plays which captured the Elizabethan and Jacobean imaginations. In these plays, violence and grossness comes to the stage. For example, in *The Spanish Tragedy*, one of the characters bites off his tongue and spits it on the stage. And we think Quentin Tarantino movies are wild!

The Importance of *The Spanish Tragedy*

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

- the revenge theme,
- the play within a play,
- madness real & faked, and
- the Machiavellian master of malicious plotting.

This play was the first truly popular tragedy of the English stage and one of the most influential.

UNIT 4
STUDYING A TRAGEDY

Introduction

This unit introduces you to Shakespearean tragedy in the context of an introduction to Renaissance tragedy in general.

Unit Objectives

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. discuss the peculiar problems of reading dramatic texts of the Renaissance and the implications of their status as texts for performance,
2. analyze and apply theoretical ideas to literary texts, and
3. present, write a critical essay, and retrieve information in order to construct a sound argument pertaining to Renaissance tragedy.

TOPICS

Topic 1: What is tragedy?
   a) Early tragedy
   b) Mature tragedy

Topic 2: The tragic hero in Shakespeare's tragedies
   a) The tragic hero and the tragic "story"
   b) Only great men qualify as tragic heroes
   c) Tragedy, human flaws, and responsibility
   d) The abnormal, the supernatural, fate/fortune/chance
   e) Tragic conflict: External
f) Tragic conflict: Internal

g) Common qualities of the tragic hero/protagonist

Topic 3: The tragic pattern

Topic 4: Tragic structure in the plays

a) Exposition

b) Development: rising action

c) Development: falling action

d) Tragic resolution

How to read Shakespeare’s Othello
How to read Christopher Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Dr Faustus

TOPIC 1: WHAT IS A TRAGEDY?

Shakespeare’s tragedies are among the most powerful studies of human nature in all literature and appropriately stand as the greatest achievements of his dramatic artistry. Attention understandably has focused on his unforgettable tragic characters, such as Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth. Yet the plays also explore and extend the very nature of tragedy itself by discovering within it a structure that derives meaning precisely from its refusal to offer consolation or compensation for the suffering it traces.

a) Early Tragedies

Shakespeare wrote his first tragedies in 1594 and 1595. But he left the field of tragedy untouched for at least five years after finishing Romeo and Juliet, probably in 1595, and turned to comedy and history plays. Julius Caesar, written about 1599, served as a link between the history plays and the mature tragedies that followed.

i. Titus Andronicus

The earliest tragedy attributed to Shakespeare is Titus Andronicus (published in 1594). In its treatment of murder, mutilation, and bloody revenge, the play is characteristic of many popular tragedies of the Elizabethan period (see Revenge Tragedy). The structure of a spectacular revenge for earlier heinous and bloody acts, all of which are staged in sensational detail, derives from Roman dramatist Seneca. It probably reached Shakespeare by way of Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy (1597). Shakespeare’s gory tragedy proved highly successful in Shakespeare’s time. But later audiences found the violent excesses of Titus
Andronicus absurd or disgusting, and only recently has the play's theatrical power been rediscovered. From the 1960s on, many directors and critics have recognized in the play's daring exploration of violence concerns that go beyond the merely sensationalistic to address some of the deepest fears and preoccupations of the modern world.

ii. Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet (1595?) is justly famous for its poetic treatment of the ecstasy of youthful love. The play dramatizes the fate of two lovers victimized by the feuds and misunderstandings of their elders and by their own hasty temperaments. Shakespeare borrowed the tragic story of the two young Italian lovers from a long narrative poem, The Tragical History of Romeo and Juliet (1562) by English writer Arthur Brooke. Shakespeare, however, added the character of Mercutio, increased the roles of the friar and the nurse, and reduced the moralizing of Brooke's work. The play made an instant hit; four editions of the play were published before the 1623 Folio, demonstrating its popularity. The play continues to be widely read and performed today, and its story of innocent love destroyed by inherited hatred has seen numerous reworkings, as, for example, in the musical West Side Story (1957) by American composer Leonard Bernstein.

iii. Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar was written about 1599 and first published in 1623. Though a serious tragedy of political rivalries, it is less intense in style than the tragic dramas that followed it. Shakespeare based this political tragedy concerning the plot to overthrow Julius Caesar on Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans by 1st-century Greek biographer Plutarch. Plutarch's Lives had first appeared in English in 1579, in a version produced by Thomas North from a French translation of the original. The North translation provided Shakespeare and his contemporaries with a great deal of historical material. Shakespeare followed Plutarch closely in Julius Caesar; little of incident or character appears in the play that is not found in the Lives as well, and he sometimes used North's wording. Shakespeare's play centers on the issue of whether the conspirators were justified in killing Caesar. How a production answers that question determines whether the conspirator Brutus is seen as sympathetic or tragically self-deceived.

b) Mature Tragedies

The tragedies Shakespeare wrote after 1600 are considered the most profound of his works and constitute the pillars upon which his literary reputation rests. Some scholars have tied the darkening of his dramatic imagination in this period to the death of his son in 1601. But in the absence of any compelling biographical information to support this theory, it remains only a speculation. For whatever reason, sometime around 1600 Shakespeare began work on a series of plays
that in their power and profundity are arguably unmatched in the achievement of any other writer.

i. *Hamlet*

*Hamlet*, written about 1601 and first printed in 1603, is perhaps Shakespeare’s most famous play. It exceeds by far most other tragedies of revenge in the power of its ethical and psychological imagining. The play is based on the story of Amleth, a 9th-century Danish prince, which Shakespeare encountered in a 16th-century French account by François Belleforest. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* tells the story of the prince’s effort to revenge the murder of his father, who has been poisoned by Hamlet’s uncle, Claudius, the man who then becomes Hamlet’s stepfather and the king. The prince alternates between rash action and delay that disgusted him, as he tries to enact the revenge his father’s ghost has asked from him. The play ends in a spectacular scene of death: As Hamlet, his mother, his uncle, and Laertes (the lord chamberlain’s son) all lie dead, the Norwegian prince Fortinbras marches in to claim the Danish throne. *Hamlet* is certainly Shakespeare’s most intellectually engaging and elusive play. Literary critics and actors turn to it again and again, possibly succeeding only in confirming the play’s inexhaustible richness and the inadequacy of any single attempt finally or fully to capture it.

ii. *Othello*

*Othello* was written about 1604, though it was not published until 1622. It portrays the growth of unjustified jealousy in the noble protagonist, Othello, a Moor serving as a general in the Venetian army. The innocent object of his jealousy is his wife, Desdemona. In this domestic tragedy, Othello’s evil lieutenant Iago draws him into mistaken jealousy in order to ruin him. Othello is destroyed partly through his gullibility and willingness to trust Iago and partly through the manipulations of this villain, who clearly enjoys the exercise of evildoing just as he hates the spectacle of goodness and happiness around him. At the end of the play, Othello comes to understand his terrible error; but as always in tragedy, that knowledge comes too late and he dies by his own hand in atonement for his error. In his final act of self-destruction, he becomes again and for a final time the defender of Venice and Venetian values.

iii. *King Lear*

*King Lear* was written about 1605 and first published in 1608. Conceived on a grander emotional and philosophic scale than *Othello*, it deals with the consequences of the arrogance and misjudgment of Lear, a ruler of early Britain, and the parallel behavior of his councilor, the Duke of Gloucester. Each of these fathers tragically banishes the child who most has his interests at heart and places himself in the power of the wicked child or children. Each is finally restored to the loving child, but only after a rending journey of suffering, and each
finally dies, having learned the truth about himself and the world, but too late to avert disaster. *King Lear* is arguably Shakespeare's most shocking play; the scenes of Lear with his dead child and of Gloucester having his eyes struck out are horrible images of the world's cruelty. But the play offers moving if ineffective examples of love and compassion. Even if these emotions are incapable of redeeming this world, they are discovered as infinitely precious in their very defeat.

iv. *Antony and Cleopatra*

*Antony and Cleopatra* was written about 1606 and first published in 1623. It deals with a different type of love than that in Shakespeare's earlier tragedies, namely the middle-aged passions of the Roman general Mark Antony and the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. Their love, which destroys an empire, is glorified by some of Shakespeare's most sensuous poetry. *Antony and Cleopatra*, like the other two plays that close Shakespeare's tragic period—*Timon of Athens* and *Coriolanus*—depicts events from ancient history and draws on North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*. The action in the play shifts from Egypt to Rome to Greece and back to Egypt and includes a battle at sea. In the process the play contrasts the luxuriant atmosphere of Egypt with the strict military code of Rome, and the cold and calculating Roman general Octavius with the passionate but ill-advised Antony. The contrasts between Roman rigor and Egyptian luxury are at the heart of this play, which keeps them in provocative balance and offers "no midway/Twixt these extremes at all."

v. *Macbeth*

*Macbeth* was written about 1606 and first published in 1623. In the play Shakespeare depicts the tragedy of a man torn between an amoral will and a powerfully moral intellect. Macbeth knows his actions are wrong but enacts his fearful deeds anyway, led on in part by the excitement of his own wrongdoing. In securing the Scottish throne, Macbeth deadens his moral intelligence to the point where he becomes capable of increasingly murderous (and pointless) behavior, although he never becomes the monster the moral world sees. At all times he feels the pull of his humanity. Yet for Macbeth there is no redemption, only the sharp descent into a bleak pessimism. Human existence, as he sees it (or as he has made it, at least for himself), amounts to nothing:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It is a tale

68
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.
(Act V, scene 4)

vi. Coriolanus

Shakespeare’s last tragedies, *Timon of Athens* and *Coriolanus*, both set in classical times, were written in 1605 and 1608 and first published in the 1623 Folio. Because their protagonists appear to lack the emotional greatness or tragic stature of the protagonists of the major tragedies, the two plays have an austerity that has cost them the popularity they may well merit. In *Coriolanus* Shakespeare adapts Plutarch’s account of the legendary Roman hero Gnaeus Marcius Coriolanus to the tragedy of a man who is arrogant and rigid, even in his virtue “too noble for the world.” If Coriolanus in his integrity refuses to curry favor with the populace, he also reveals his contempt for the citizenry. The isolating pride of this great but flawed individual prevents him from finding any comfortable place in the community. Finally, he is banished from Rome, and he seeks revenge against the city. Eventually his wife, mother, and young son are sent to plead with him to spare Rome, an action that reveals the relatedness to his others he would deny. The play powerfully explores the conflicts between public and private life, between personal needs and those of the community, and between the pressures of individual honor and family ties and national ties.

vii. *Timon of Athens*

*Timon of Athens*, written about 1605 and first published in the 1623 Folio, is a bitter play about a character who reacts to the ingratitude he discovers by hating all of humanity. Through his generosity to friends and flatterers, Timon bankrupts himself and then finds these same people unwilling to assist him in his poverty. His withering misanthropy follows. As in *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare explores the relationships between financial ties and ties of friendship. Shakespeare probably found some of the material for his play in Plutarch’s *Lives*, where anecdotes about Timon appear in the life of Marc Antony and the life of the Greek politician and general Alcibiades. He perhaps also found material in a dialogue, *Timon, the Man-Hater*, by the Greek writer Lucian, which had been adapted into an anonymous English play, *Timon*, and probably performed around 1602 in one of the London law schools, known as Inns of Court.

Source:
"Shakespeare, William," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2003
SELF-ASSESSMENT TASK
Describe briefly what you understand from the word ‘tragedy’ as used in Shakespeare’s time. Try to answer this question before you read the next section on tragedy.

TOPIC 2: THE TRAGIC HERO IN SHAKESPEARE’S TRAGEDIES

Shakespeare’s tragedies are, for the most part, stories of one person, the "hero," or at most two, to include the "heroine." Only the Love Tragedies (Romeo and Juliet; Antony and Cleopatra) are exceptions to this pattern. In these plays, the heroine is as much at the center of action as the hero. The rest of the tragedies, including Macbeth, have single stars, so the tragic story is concerned primarily with one person.

a) The Tragic Hero And The Tragic "Story"

- The tragic story leads up to, and includes, the death of the hero
- The suffering and calamity are exceptional
- They befall a conspicuous person
- They are themselves of a striking kind
- They are, as a rule, unexpected
- They are, as a rule, contrasted with previous happiness and/or glory

On the one hand (whatever may be true of tragedies elsewhere), no play that ends with the hero alive is, in the full Shakespearean sense, a tragedy. On the other hand, the story also depicts the troubled part of the hero's life which precedes and leads up to his death. It is, in fact, essentially a tale of suffering and calamity, conducting the hero to death.

Shakespeare's tragic heroes will be men of rank, and the calamities that befall them will be unusual and exceptionally disastrous in themselves. The hero falls unexpectedly from a high place, a place of glory, or honor, or joy, and as a consequence, we feel that kind of awe at the depths to which he is suddenly plunged. Thus, the catastrophe will be of monumental proportions. A tale, for example, of a man slowly worn to death by disease, poverty, little cares, sordid vices, petty persecutions, however piteous, would not be tragic in the Shakespearean sense of the word. Such exceptional suffering and calamity, then, affecting the hero, and generally extending far beyond him, so as to make the whole scene a scene of woe, are essential ingredients in tragedy, and the chief sources of the tragic emotions, and especially of pity.
b) Only Great Men Qualify As Tragic Heroes

- Peasants (merely because they're human beings) do not inspire pity and fear as great men do
- A Shakespearean tragedy, then, may be called a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man of high estate!

The pangs of despised love and the anguish of remorse, we say, are the same in a peasant and a prince. But not to insist that they cannot be so when the prince is really a prince, when the story of a prince, or the general, has a greatness and dignity of its own is a mistake. His fate affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire; and when he falls suddenly from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of man, and the omnipotence—perhaps the caprice—of Fate or Fortune, which no tale of private life could possibly rival. Such feelings are constantly invoked by Shakespeare's tragedies—again, in varying degrees.

To this point, then, we can extend the definition of Shakespearean tragedy to "a story of exceptional calamity, leading to the death of a man of high estate." That's adequate for now. Clearly, there is much more to it than that.

c) Tragedy, Human Flaws, And Responsibility

- The calamities of tragedy do not simply happen, nor are they sent--
- The calamities of tragedy proceed mainly from actions, and those, the actions of men--
- Shakespeare's tragic heroes are responsible for the catastrophe of their falls.

We see a number of human beings placed in certain situations, and from their relationships, certain actions arise. These actions cause other actions, until this series of interconnected deeds leads to complications and an apparently inevitable catastrophe.

The Effect of such a series on the imagination is to make us regard the sufferings which accompany it, and the catastrophe in which it ends, not only or chiefly as something which happens to the persons concerned, but equally as something which is caused by them. This at least may be said of the principal persons, and among them, of the hero, who always contributes in some measure to the disaster in which he perishes.

The Center of the tragedy, therefore, may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character, of flawed perceptions, and human frailty for which the hero is ultimately responsible. In Shakespeare, the hero recognizes his own responsibility for the catastrophe which befalls him too late to prevent his death.
d) The Abnormal, The Supernatural, Fate/Fortune/Chance

- Shakespeare occasionally represents abnormal conditions of mind: insanity, somnambulism, hallucinations--
- Shakespeare also introduces the supernatural: ghosts and witches who have supernatural knowledge--
- Shakespeare, in most of the tragedies, allows "chance" in some form to influence some of the action--

These three elements in the action are subordinate, while the dominant factor consists in deeds which issue from character.

The Abnormal Conditions of mind are never introduced as the origin of any deeds of any dramatic moment. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking has no influence whatsoever on the events that follow it. Macbeth did not murder Duncan because he saw a dagger in the air; he saw a dagger in the air because he was about to murder Duncan. Lear's insanity, like Ophelia's, is not the cause of a tragic conflict, but the result of a tragic conflict.

The Supernatural Elements cannot, in most cases, be explained away as an illusion in the mind of one of the characters. It does contribute to the action, but it's always placed in the closest relation with character. It gives a confirmation and a distinct form to inward movements already present and exerting an influence: to the half-formed thought or the horrified memory of guilt in Macbeth, to suspicion in Hamlet, to the stifled workings of conscience in Richard III.

Finally, the Operation of Chance or Accident/Fortune/Fate, what you will, is a fact, and a prominent fact of life. That men may start a course of events but can neither calculate nor control it, is a tragic fact. Shakespeare may use accident to make us feel this. But, we must remember that any large use of accident in the tragic sequence would certainly weaken, if not destroy, the sense of the causal connection of character, deed, and catastrophe. Shakespeare uses it sparingly, when the action already seems nearly inevitable: When Romeo never got Friar Lawrence's letter, or when Juliet didn't wake up a minute sooner, for example, or when Desdemona lost her handkerchief at exactly the fatal moment. You would do better to watch for what appear to be accidents that actually are connected to flaws of character or in behavior, and which are not, therefore, in the full sense, accidents. It is therefore inherent in Shakespearean tragedy that the tragic hero or protagonist is responsible through his own behavior or action, for the exceptional nature of the catastrophe itself. So to continue defining tragedy, it is

- a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man of high estate, AND
- a story of human actions, producing exceptional calamity in the death of such a man.
As you might suspect, the action of the protagonist/tragic hero is most often motivated by external and internal conflicts, which lead to complications from which further conflicts arise—all in a kind of snowballing effect, driving the action toward a tragic resolution.

e) Tragic Conflict: External

- Usually there are two persons, of whom the hero is one—OR,
- Two Parties or Groups, one of which the hero leads—OR,
- The passions, tendencies, ideas, principles, forces which animate these persons or groups.

In Richard II, for example, we have the King on one side and Henry Bolingbroke on the other. In Macbeth, we have the hero, Macbeth, and the heroine, Lady Macbeth, opposed to the representatives of Duncan, Malcolm, and Macduff. In all these cases, the great majority of the Dramatis Personae fall without difficulty into two antagonistic groups, and the conflict between these groups ends with the defeat of the hero.

External conflict will be there, but there is more to it than that. The type of tragedy in which an undivided soul is opposed to a hostile force is not the Shakespearean type. But, we must also be aware of the internal conflicts the hero tries to deal with, while hostile forces begin to surround him, and eventually overwhelm him.

f) Tragic Conflict: Internal

- Shakespeare’s tragic hero, though he pursues his fated way, is, at some point, torn by an inward struggle—
- A comparison of the earlier and later tragedies shows this struggle is most emphasized in the later tragedies—
- The conception of outer and inner struggle includes the action of “spiritual forces.”

Whatever forces act in the human spirit, whether good or evil, whether personal passion or impersonal principle; doubts, desires, scruples, ideas—whatever can animate, shake, possess, and drive a man’s soul—these are the "spiritual forces" generating the internal turmoil for the hero.

Treasonous ambition collides in Macbeth with loyalty, the laws of hospitality, patriotism in Macduff and Malcolm; this is the outer conflict. But these same forces collide in the soul of Macbeth as well; here is the inner conflict. It is a
combination of the pressures of the external and internal struggles or conflicts that make Shakespearean tragedy. All of this leads us to once again expand our definition of the tragic hero/protagonist.

**g) Common Qualities Of The Tragic Hero/Protagonist**

- Tragic heroes are exceptional beings: this is the fundamental trait--
- Tragic heroes contribute to their own destruction by acts in which we see a flaw in their character, or, by tragic error--
- The difficulty is that the audience must desire the defeat/destruction of the tragic hero, but this in itself does not constitute tragic feeling
  
  i. They Are Exceptional Beings

Being of high estate is not everything. The tragic hero's nature is also exceptional, and generally raises him in some respect much above the average level of humanity. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are made of the stuff we find in ourselves and within the persons who surround him. But, by an intensification of the life which they share with others, they are raised above them; and the greatest are raised so far that, if we fully realize all that is implied in their words and actions, we become conscious that in real life we have scarcely known anyone resembling them.

They have a fatal gift that carries with it a touch of greatness (fierce determination, fixed ideas); and when nobility of mind, or genius, or immense force are joined to it, we realize the full power and reach of the soul, and the conflict in which it engages acquires that magnitude which stirs not only sympathy and pity, but admiration, terror, and awe.

ii. They Will Have A Tragic Flaw

The flaw often takes the form of obsession. In the circumstances where we see the hero placed, this tragic trait, which is also his greatness, is fatal to him. To meet these circumstances, something is required which a smaller man might have given, but which the hero cannot give. He errs, by action or omission; and his error, joining with other causes, brings on his ruin.

*This fatal imperfection or error is of differing kinds and degrees*. At one extreme stands the excess and precipitancy of Romeo, which scarcely diminishes our regard for him. At the other extreme is the murderous ambition of Richard III. In most cases, the tragic error involves no conscious breach of right; in some (Brutus and Othello), it is accompanied by a full conviction of right. Only Richard III and Macbeth do what they themselves know to be villainous. So why are we affected by such villains? Shakespeare gives Richard a power and audacity which excite astonishment and a courage which extorts admiration. He gives to Macbeth a similar, though less extraordinary greatness, and adds to it a
conscience so terrifying in its warnings and so maddening in its reproaches that the spectacle of inward torment compels a horrified sympathy and awe which balance at the least, the desire for the hero's ruin.

- Shakespeare's tragic heroes need not be "good," though they generally are good--
- Shakespeare's tragic heroes project that man is not small or contemptible, no matter how rotten he can be--
- Shakespeare's tragic heroes illustrate the center of the tragic impression: the sense of waste--
- Shakespeare's tragic heroes live for what seems to be a type of the mystery of the whole world.

iii. They Need Not Be "Good":

But it is necessary that the tragic hero should have so much of greatness that in his error and fall, we may be vividly conscious of the possibilities of human nature. Hence, in the first place, a Shakespearean tragedy is never depressing. No one ever closes the book with the feeling that man is a poor, mean creature. Man may be wretched and he may be awful, but he is not small. His lot may be heart-rending and mysterious, but it is not contemptible.

iv. Connected To The Greatness Is A Sense Of Waste:

What a great man the tragic hero could have been, indeed, should have been! With Shakespeare, at any rate, the pity and fear which are stirred by the tragic story (Aristotelian requirements of tragedy) seem to unite with, and even merge in, a profound sense of sadness and mystery which is due to this impression of waste. With Hamlet, we say, "What a piece of work is man," so much more beautiful and so much more terrible than we knew. And from this comes the mystery, the existential question Lear would also come to understand so well: Why should man be so, if this beauty and greatness only tortures itself and throws itself away?

v. The Mystery Of The Whole World In Tragedy?

We seem to have before us a type of the mystery of the whole world, the tragic fact that extends far beyond the limits of tragedy. Everywhere, from the crushed rocks beneath our feet to the soul of man, we see power, intelligence, life, and glory which astounds us and seem to call for admiration. And everywhere, we see men perishing, devouring one another, and destroying themselves, often with dreadful pain, as though they came into being for no other end. Tragedy is the typical form of this mystery because the greatness of soul which it shows oppressed, conflicting, and destroyed is the highest existence in our minds. It forces the mystery upon us, and it makes us realize vividly the worth of that which is wasted, and that such waste of potential greatness, nobility of soul, of
humanity is truly the tragedy of human existence. Out of all of this, a tragic pattern emerges.

**TOPIC 3: THE TRAGIC PATTERN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Man of High Estate</th>
<th>A Flaw in Character</th>
<th>Intrusion of Time and a Sense of Urgency</th>
<th>Misreadings and Rationalizations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murder, Exile, Alienation of Enemies and Allies</td>
<td>Gradual Isolation of the Tragic Hero</td>
<td>Mobilization of the Opposition</td>
<td>Tragic Recognition of the Flaw by the Tragic Hero: too late</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last, Courageous Attempt to Restore Lost Honor/Greatness</td>
<td>Audience Recognizes Potential for Greatness</td>
<td>Death of the Tragic Hero</td>
<td>Restoration of Order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First of all, in Shakespearean tragedy, we will be dealing with a man of high estate: a king, a prince, a general, etc. Normally, we will hear about him from others before he makes an entrance in the play. Often, this is where we are given the first impression of the greatness of the tragic hero through the eyes of others. Within the first two acts or so, we will become aware of a driving force within the hero that is almost, if not entirely, obsessive in nature. We will also witness the nature of the inner torment he goes through as he follows his obsession. We see both Macbeth's potential for greatness and his obsessive ambition; we see both Othello's greatness as a general and human being and his naive, trusting nature that so easily becomes twisted into an obsessive jealousy by Iago. As the inner and outer conflicts the hero faces as he pursues his course intensify, we see time becoming more and more important. A sense of urgency develops with the plot and the conflict that not only creates tension, but also creates the effect of a kind of steam-rolling inevitability regarding the hero's fall that he has put into motion himself. The pace and urgency generally pick up significantly in the third act.

Contributing to, and furthering the obsession and the control of the tragic flaw are misreadings, supernatural suggestion, and accident or chance. Things happen a split second too late: the hero operates on what he believes to be the case rather than what he actually knows to be the case. Soon they are one and the same thing to him. As the flaw and the misreadings continue, new conflicts and complications arise which bring about the death or gradual alienation of all forms of support for the hero, so that by the end, he must face the opposing forces and
the responsibility for his actions alone. What we see during this process of alienation and isolation is suffering, sleeplessness, rage, confusion, hallucination, and violence as the internal conflicts intensify to an almost unbearable pitch. At some point in the play, the opposing forces will begin to mobilize against the hero to bring the tragedy to its conclusion.

Often the hero is confronted by an enemy in the fifth act who has good reason to seek his death (Macduff in Macbeth, for example). At about this point in the play, the hero will realize the error (often a misreading of people/events) that is bringing about his fall. Knowing that he alone is to blame, he alone has erred, and accepting it is absolutely necessary in Shakespearean tragedy, and is called Tragic Recognition. Tragic recognition inevitably takes place when there is no chance/time to correct the error: it is too late. Once recognition occurs, death speedily follows. Usually, the hero will provide us with a particularly moving display of courage or at least nobility of heart (as in Macbeth or King Lear). With this kind of display, we are left with the feeling that indeed Macbeth was a monster who should have been destroyed, accompanied by a kind of melancholy recognition on our parts that he also had greatness in him: nobility, strength, courage. If only those qualities could have been re-directed—if only he hadn't made those mistakes. And we can say, good, he's gone-- but what a waste!

**TOPIC 4: TRAGIC STRUCTURE IN THE PLAYS**

As a Shakespearean tragedy represents a conflict which ends in catastrophe, any such tragedy can be divided into 4 parts:

- Exposition
- Development/Rising Action
- Development/Falling Action
- Resolution

a) Exposition

This first part sets forth or expounds the situation or state of affairs, out of which the conflict arises. Thus, exposition is the task of the first act and often part or most of the second act. Here we are made aware of the general setting, the persons, character traits, problems of the play, the conflicts or potential conflicts. Usually, by the time the second act is completed, we know what the overriding problem of the play is, what the major conflict is and who the players in the conflict are, who our protagonist or tragic hero is, and often what seems to be his tragic flaw is already in place.

b) Development: Rising Action

This second part of the structure deals with a definite beginning, the growth and nature of the conflict, and forms the bulk of the play, comprising the 2nd, 3rd, and
4th acts, usually part of the 1st act, and part of the 5th act. This division unveils the developing complications arising from the conflicts as the problem intensifies. Time and a sense of urgency become increasingly important as the speed of the action increases. A sense of inevitability begins to advance as we watch the tragic hero alienating his allies and closest supporters, until he is all alone and with his back to the wall in the 5th act.

c) Development: Falling Action

Usually, from act 2 onwards, we see the action rising, with the tragic hero powerful, advancing, scattering the opposition until, late in the 4th act, when a reversal of the situation starts taking place. Opposing forces begin to openly resist and to make plans for the removal of the tragic hero, and the hero’s power is obviously declining as the opposition’s power advances.

d) Tragic Resolution

In the final acts, then, the opposition reaches its full strength and defeats/destroys the isolated, weakened hero. This is where Tragic Recognition takes place, and the final scenes of the play are normally such that we become aware again of the greatness of the soul that has just been dispatched. Macbeth is dead; Hamlet is dead; Lear is dead: and though we can see the justice of it, the usual feeling of satisfaction at the death of a tyrant or killer (an Iago, for example) is conspicuously lacking.


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SELF-ASSESSMENT TASK

After reading this section on ‘Tragedy’, now explain briefly what do you understand from the word tragedy as used in Shakespeare and Renaissance drama.
How to read Shakespeare's *Othello*

Desdemona pleading for her innocence with Othello

Illustration taken from http://www.panteek.com/boydellShakespeare/index2.htm

**Dramatis personae**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Othello</td>
<td>Black Moor who is the greatest army general in Venice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iago</td>
<td>Military officer who schemes against Othello because the Moor did not promote him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desdemona</td>
<td>Daughter of Brabantio, wife of Othello, and victim of Iago's machinations and Othello's jealousy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Venice</td>
<td>He rules in favor of Othello when Desdemona's father attacks Othello's character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brabantio</td>
<td>Senator and father of Desdemona. A bigot whose racism is inflamed by Iago, he despises Othello.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Senator, Second Senator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gratiano</td>
<td>Brabantio's brother.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lodovico: Brabantio’s kinsman.
Cassio: Othello's lieutenant who is manipulated by Iago.
Roderigo: Venetian gentleman manipulated by Iago.
Montano: Othello's predecessor in the government of Cyprus.
Clown: Servant to Othello.
Emilia: Wife of Iago.
Bianca: Cassio’s mistress.
Minor Characters: Sailor, messenger, herald, officers, gentlemen, musicians, attendants.

**Background of the Play**

**Settings:** Venice (in northern Italy) and Cyprus (an island in the eastern Mediterranean about 40 miles south of present-day Turkey). It is interesting to note that Venice is the setting for both major Shakespeare plays dealing in part with racial prejudice—Othello and The Merchant of Venice. As one of the world’s leading sea powers, Venice was the center of commercialism and materialism and, therefore, corruption and conflict arising from avarice, social status, and fierce competition. Cyprus—as a strategically located island which yielded substantial harvests of olives, grapes and various grains—was much prized throughout its history. Assyrians, Greeks, Egyptians, Romans, and Byzantines all fought over and occupied it. England’s King Richard the I, the Lion-Hearted, conquered Cyprus in 1191 but later ceded it to the French. Venice seized the island in 1489 and, in Shakespeare’s time (1571), the Ottoman Turks brought Cyprus under its control.

**Moor:** A Moor was a Muslim of mixed Arab and Berber descent. Berbers were North African natives who eventually accepted Arab customs and Islam after Arabs invaded North Africa in the Seventh Century A.D. The term has been used to refer in general to Muslims of North Africa and to Muslim conquerors of Spain. The word Moor derives from a Latin word, Mauri, used to name the residents of the ancient Roman province of Mauritania in North Africa. To refer to Othello as a “black Moor” is not to commit a redundancy, for there are white Moors as well as black Moors, the latter mostly of Sudanese origin.

**Moor in Titus Andronicus:** In Titus Andronicus Shakespeare introduces an evil Moor named Aaron who displays goodness near the end when he pleads for his child’s life. Othello introduces an upright and righteous Moor who displays evil near the end when he suspects his wife of infidelity and kills her.

**Moor in Merchant of Venice:** A Moor also appears in The Merchant of Venice. He is the Prince of Morocco, a suitor for the hand of Portia. Even before he arrives to make his bid for her, Portia, a racist snob, says, “if he have . . . the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrive me than wive me.”
Plot Summary

Othello, a black Moor, is a general in the service of Venice. Because he has conquered the Turks, the Venetians esteem him highly as a military leader. Iago, Othello's ensign, aspires to rise in the ranks. But when Othello promotes the Florentine Michael Cassio to the position of personal lieutenant, Iago smolders with deadly anger for being passed over. Immediately he begins a campaign to poison Venice against Othello. On a Venetian street, he tells the gullible Roderigo, a gentleman of the city, that Cassio is untested in battle; his soldierly abilities consist of "mere prattle, without practise." In other words, Cassio is all talk, no action. Iago says that he himself, on the other hand, has proved his military prowess in battles at Rhodes, Cyprus, and elsewhere, against Christian and heathen alike. Apparently, he says, Othello promotes his men on the merits of their political and personal connections, not on their soldierly skills. The goal of Iago's plot against the highly respected Moor is not only to gain revenge; it is also to do what he most enjoys: evil.

When Othello elopes with Desdemona, daughter of Senator Brabantio, Iago realizes he has the perfect opening to get back at Othello. He enlists Roderigo, a former suitor of Desdemona, to awaken Desdemona's father late at night. Then Iago—using crude racist metaphors—tells Brabantio that a "black ram" [Othello] is "topping your white ewe [Desdemona]." In a further attempt to inflame Brabantio, Iago says, "Awake the snorting [sleeping] citizens with the bell, or else the devil [Othello] will make a grandsire [grandfather of a black child] of you." Outraged, Brabantio complains to the Duke of Venice, claiming Othello used spells and charms to win Desdemona's favor. How else could a vile black man have won her favor?

When a fleet of Turks threatens Cyprus, the Venetian Senate decides to send Othello to Cyprus to defend it and become the new governor. During the senate meeting, the duke listens to Brabantio's charges against Othello. But after hearing Othello speak of his love for Desdemona, the duke finds in favor of Othello, and Brabantio relinquishes his daughter to the Moor. She decides to follow him to Cyprus. Unaware that Iago was behind Brabantio's earlier protests against the elopement, Othello orders Iago to accompany his wife. Roderigo goes along at the urging of Iago, who tells Roderigo that Desdemona will eventually tire of Othello. However, Iago also tells Roderigo they must first act to discredit Cassio to prevent Desdemona from taking up with him. On the evening of the first night in Cyprus, Iago gets Cassio drunk, then has Roderigo start an argument with him. Montano, the outgoing governor of Cyprus, intervenes, and Cassio wounds him.

After Othello arrives at the scene of the commotion, he asks: "Honest Iago, that look'st dead with grieving, speak, who began this?" Playing the innocent, Iago replies: "I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth than it should do
offense to Michael Cassio." Having duly established his himself as an unbiased 
onlooker, he then says, "Yet, I persuade myself, to speak the truth . . . ." Iago 
then recounts for Othello what happened during the fray, implicating Cassio. 
Othello tells Cassio that he will never more serve as the Moor's officer. Lovely 
Desdemona appears and inquires about the disturbance. Othello tells her all is 
well, and they go off to bed. Montano is led away for treatment of his injury. 
Cassio, now alone with Iago, says he regrets his behavior. Iago tells him he can 
yet regain favor with Othello by having Desdemona intercede on his behalf.

When Cassio presents his case to Othello's wife, she agrees to speak with her 
husband on Cassio's behalf. When she does so in an innocent attempt to be 
helpful, she inflames Othello's jealousy. After all, Cassio is far younger than 
Othello--and terribly handsome. Is it not reasonable to believe that Desdemona 
has something going with Cassio? Meanwhile, Iago's wife Emilia has found a 
handkerchief dropped by Desdemona. Othello had given it to his wife as a gift. 
When Emilia shows it to Iago, he sees an opportunity to advance his scheme and 
snatches it away, saying, "I have use for it." Iago then plants the handkerchief in 
Cassio's room and tells Othello Cassio has come into possession of it. When 
Othello asks his wife for the handkerchief and she cannot produce it, he tells her 
that it was a valued heirloom given to his mother by an Egyptian woman. He says 
his mother, in turn, gave the handkerchief to him as she lay dying, requesting 
that he give it to his future wife.

"I did so," Othello says, "and . . . to lose't or give't away were such perdition as 
nothing else could match." When he further presses Desdemona to produce the 
handkerchief and she cannot, he becomes convinced that she gave it to Cassio 
and has been having affair with him. Othello then tells Iago he plans to poison 
Desdemona, but Iago persuades him to strangle her in the bed she "contaminated." As for Cassio, Iago says, "Let me be his undertaker." Letters 
from the Duke of Venice arrive recalling Othello and naming Cassio the new 
governor. Kind-hearted Desdemona praises Cassio. For this, Othello strikes and 
berates her. To further his plan, Iago again uses the helpless Rodrigo, 
persuading him to kill Cassio for him. On a dark street Rodrigo thrusts at Cassio 
but fails to kill him.

Cassio, in turn, wounds Rodrigo. Iago, darting by unseen, wounds Cassio in 
the leg. Othello arrives to observe from a distance. Believing Iago has been good 
to his word—that he has killed Cassio—the Moor goes back to the castle for the 
awful task of executing his wife. As others are drawn to the scene of the fray 
between Rodrigo and Cassio, Iago returns with a lantern as if he is just 
discovering the melee. At an opportune moment he steals aside and finishes off 
Rodrigo with a dagger thrust. Cassio is taken away for treatment. Othello, still 
loving his wife, kisses her awake, asks her to prepare her soul for death, and-- 
after an exchange of accusations and denials--smothers her in her bed. When 
Emilia tells Othello the truth about the scheming Iago, the wounded Cassio backs
up Emilia's story, Othello wounds Iago, then kills himself. Iago kills Emilia. After Iago is led away in chains, Cassio becomes governor of Cyprus.


**SELF-ASSESSMENT TASK**

How is Othello a tragic hero?

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**How to read Christopher Marlowe’s The Tragical History of Dr Faustus**

**Dramatis Personae**

Faustus  
Devils, Mephistopheles, Lucifer  
Good Angel, Evil Angel  
Robin, Ralph, Vintner  
The Seven Deadly Sins: Pride, Covetousness, Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth, Lechery  
The Pope, Cardinal of Lorraine, Friars, Emperor, Attendants, Knight, Alexander the Great, Alexander's Paramour  
Old Man

**The Plot Summary**

Doctor Faustus is a drama about a famous scholar who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for magical powers. It is a play which has come down to us over the centuries in two different versions. Events found in the 1616 text, but missing from the 1604, are marked here with an asterisk (*)

In Doctor Faustus, as in many Elizabethan plays, the main plot centers on the tragic hero, while a subplot offers comic relief. Dr. John Faustus, the renowned scholar of Wittenberg, has cloistered himself in his study to decide his future career. Law, medicine, theology—he has mastered them all. And he finds them all dissatisfying.
Faustus wants a career to match the scope of his ambition, a subject to challenge his enormous intellect. So he turns to necromancy, or black magic, which seems to offer him godlike powers. He knows, however, that it involves forbidden traffic with demons.

Faustus summons Valdes and Cornelius, two accomplished magicians, to instruct him in the art of conjuring. That night, in the midst of a crashing thunderstorm, Faustus raises up the demon spirit, Mephistophilis. Faustus proposes a bargain. He will give his immortal soul to the devil in exchange for twenty-four years of magic and merrymaking.

Mephistophilis procrastinates. Reconsider, he advises Faustus. You really don’t know what you are getting into. Besides, Mephistophilis does not have the power to conclude such an agreement. He is only a servant to Lucifer, the prince of hell. Faustus orders him to speak with Lucifer, so Mephistophilis quickly flies off to the nether regions.

While waiting for the spirit to return, Faustus has second thoughts. Is it too late to pull back from the abyss? Never too late, counsels the Good Angel, who suddenly appears before Faustus’ eyes. Too late, whispers the Evil Angel, who advises Faustus to think of fame and wealth. Wealth! The very word makes Faustus catch fire. Hesitation flies out the window as Mephistophilis flies in with Lucifer’s reply.

The prince of hell will grant Faustus’ wish, provided that Faustus sign over his soul in a deed of gift. Lucifer wants a contract to make sure he isn’t cheated. The contract must be written in Faustus’ own blood.

In compliance with Lucifer’s demand, Faustus stabs his arm, only to find that his blood has mysteriously frozen in his veins. Mephistophilis comes running with hot coals to warm Faustus’ blood, and it starts flowing again. The contract is completed, and the moment of crisis past. Mephistophilis provides a show to divert Faustus’ thoughts. He calls for devils who enter with a crown and royal robes. They dance around Faustus, delighting him with the thought that he can summon such spirits at any time.

Now that the bargain is sealed, Faustus is eager to satisfy his passionate curiosity and appetites. He wants answers to questions that surge in his brain about the stars and the heavenly spheres. He also wants a wife to share his bed.

Faustus’ demands are met in typically hellish fashion. Mephistophilis’ revelations about the stars turn out to be no more than elementary assumptions of medieval astronomy. And the wife provided Faustus by the spirit is a female demon who bursts onto the stage in a hot spray of fireworks.
Faustus becomes wary. He suspects he has sold his soul for a cheap bag of tricks. The disillusioned scholar falls into bitterness and despair. He curses Mephistophilis and ponders suicide.

Faustus makes a futile stab at repentance. He prays desperately to God, only to have Lucifer appear before him. As a confirmation of Faustus' bondage to hell, they watch a parade of the Seven Deadly Sins. Pride leads Avarice, Gluttony, and the rest, as each branches his own special weakness of the soul or flesh.

Casting aside all further thoughts of repentance, Faustus gives himself up to the distractions that Mephistophilis puts in his way. Through travel and visits to foreign courts, Faustus seeks to enjoy himself in the time he has left on earth.

Mephistophilis takes Faustus to Rome and to the private chambers of the Pope. The two become invisible and play practical jokes until a planned papal banquet breaks up in disarray. Then it's on to the German Emperor's court, where they entertain his majesty by raising the ghost of Alexander the Great.

At the Emperor's court, a sceptical knight voices his doubts about Faustus' magic powers. The magician takes revenge by making a pair of stag horns grow on the knight's head. Faustus follows this prank with another. He sells a crafty horse-dealer a demon horse which vanishes when it is ridden into water.

In the meantime, Faustus's experiments with magic are being imitated by his household staff. Faustus' servant, Wagner, tries his own hand at conjuring by summoning two comic devils who force the clown, Robin, into Wagner's service.

Not to be outdone, Robin steals one of Faustus' conjuring books. In his dimwitted way, he tries to puzzle out the spells. The real magic is that Robin's spell works! A weary Mephistophilis, summoned from Constantinople, rises up before the startled clown. In anger, the spirit turns Robin into an ape and his sidekick, Dick, into a dog.

* The transformed clowns and the horse-dealer meet in a nearby tavern, where they swap stories about the injuries they have suffered at Faustus' hand. Tipsy with ale, they descend on the castle of Vanholt, where Faustus is busy entertaining the Duke and Duchess with his fabulous magic tricks. The magician produces for the pregnant Duchess an out-of-season delicacy she craves—wintertime grapes.

Faustus' mind has turned toward death. He has made a will, leaving his estate to Wagner. Yet he still holds feverishly onto life. He drinks and feasts far into the night with the dissolute scholars of Wittenberg. And, in a last magnificent conjuring trick, he raises the shade (spirit) of the most beautiful woman in history, Helen of Troy.
At the end of his career, poised between life and death, Faustus undergoes a last crisis of conscience. An Old Man appears to plead with Faustus to give up his magic art. God is merciful, the Old Man promises. He will yet pardon Faustus and fill his heart with grace.

The magician hesitates, visibly moved by the Old Man’s chastening words. But Mephistophiles is too quick for him. The spirit threatens Faustus with torture, if he reneges on his contract with Lucifer. At the same time, Mephistophiles promises to reward Faustus with Helen of Troy, if he keeps faith with hell. Faustus collapses under the pressure. He orders Mephistophiles to torture the Old Man. (Anyone, anyone but himself.) And he takes the insubstantial shade of Helen for his lover. In doing so, he is lost.

The final hour approaches. As the minutes tick away, Faustus tries frantically to stop the clock. Give him one more month, one more week, one more day to repent, he cries. But the hours chime away. Midnight strikes. The devil arrives through billowing smoke and fire, and Faustus is led away to hell.

* In the morning, the scholars of Wittenberg find Faustus’ body. They deplore his evil fate, but honor him for his learning. For the black magician who might have been a light unto the world, they plan a stately funeral.

Source: Rosner, J. Barron’s Booknotes: Doctor Faustus
http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/barrons/drfaust.asp

**SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS**

Is Mephistophiles Faustus’ friend or his deadly enemy?

Why doesn’t Faustus repent?

What role do diversions play in Doctor Faustus?

How does magic affect the comic characters, Wagner and Robin?
CONCLUSION

This unit provides a close read of selected plays. Among the themes and issues that will arise are: the status of the tragic hero or heroine (and the implications of transvestite acting); the language and style of tragedy; the role of dramatic dialogue and soliloquies; the function of space; tragedy in performance; the impact of tragedy on the audience. Yet we shall not limit ourselves to discussing tragedy as a dramatic (and poetic) genre. In the early modern era the theatre was the most powerful cultural institution that made possible dissemination and critique of assumptions about politics, religion, and society. We shall ask how tragedy shaped those assumptions. We shall explore the political functions of tragic drama in changing historical contexts. Since all texts on this module are set in ancient Rome, we shall be able to trace how Renaissance writers confronted pressing contemporary concerns about national identity and England’s emergent status as a colonial power by refracting them through the classical past. We shall also examine the representation of gender, race, and class in tragedy, and consider the ideology of the tragic form.
UNIT 5
STUDYING A COMEDY

Introduction
This unit introduces you to Shakespearean comedy in the context of an introduction to Renaissance comedy in general. These dramas of love, marriage and carnival are examined in the light of the evolution of comedy and in the light of pressing social issues, including issues of family, sexuality, gender, money, class and power.

Unit Objectives
By the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. discuss the peculiar problems of reading dramatic texts of the Renaissance and the implications of their status as texts for performance,
2. analyse and apply theoretical ideas to literary texts, and
3. present, write a critical essay, and retrieve information in order to construct a sound argument in relation to Renaissance comedies.

TOPICS

Topic 1: The comedies

a) Early comedies
b) Middle comedies
c) Romantic comedies
d) Problem comedies
e) Tragedies or romances
How to read Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

How to read Ben Jonson's *Volpone*

**TOPIC 1: THE COMEDIES**

Shakespeare's comedies celebrate human social life even as they expose human folly. By means that are sometimes humiliating, even painful, characters learn greater wisdom and emerge with a clearer view of reality. Some of his early comedies can be regarded as light farces in that their humor depends mainly upon complications of plot, minor foibles of the characters, and elements of physical comedy such as slapstick. The so-called joyous comedies follow the early comedies and culminate in *As You Like It*. Written about 1600, this comedy strikes a perfect balance between the worlds of the city and the country, verbal wit and physical comedy, and realism and fantasy.

After 1600, Shakespeare's comedies take on a darker tone, as Shakespeare uses the comic form to explore less changeable aspects of human behavior. *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* test the ability of comedy to deal with the unsettling realities of human desire, and these plays, therefore, have usually been thought of as "problem comedies," or, at very least, as evidence that comedy in its tendency toward wish fulfillment is a problem.

**a) Early Comedies**

Shakespeare remained busy writing comedies during his early years in London, until about 1595. These comedies reflect in their gaiety and exuberant language the lively and self-confident tone of the English nation after 1588, the year England defeated the Spanish Armada, an invasion force from Spain. The comedies in this group include *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

i. *The Comedy of Errors*

Shakespeare based the plot of *The Comedy of Errors*, a farce performed in 1594, on classical comedies by Plautus. It was published for the first time in the First Folio of 1623. The play, Shakespeare's shortest, depends for its appeal on the
mistaken identities of two sets of twins both separated in their youth. The comedy ends happily with the reunion of both sets of twins, after a bewildering series of confusions. Shakespeare makes his play more complex than Plautus's by the addition of the second set of twins, twin servants to the twin brothers of the main action, and the play displays the young Shakespeare's formal mastery of the comic form and anticipates themes and techniques of his later plays.

ii. The Two Gentlemen of Verona

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, which appears as the second comedy in the First Folio, was probably first performed about 1594. Shakespeare's first attempt at romantic comedy, it concerns two friends, Proteus and Valentine, and two women, Julia and Sylvia. The play traces the relations of the four, until the two sets of lovers are happily paired off: Proteus with Julia, and Valentine with Sylvia. Much of the humor in the play comes from a clownish servant, Launce, and his dog, Crab, described as "the sourest-natured dog that lives." Shakespeare probably wrote the part of Launce for comic actor Will Kemp.

iii. The Taming of the Shrew

The Taming of the Shrew (1593?) was first published in the First Folio in 1623. This comedy contrasts the prim and conventional Bianca, who grows wilful and disobedient over the course of the play, with the shrewish Katherine, who is finally tamed by Petruchio, her suitor and, finally, husband. Yet Katherine and Petruchio are clearly well matched in style and temperament, and Katherine's speech at the end on the importance of obedience may be delivered with an obvious sense of how far this is from what she believes or even from what Petruchio really wants. Kiss Me Kate (1948), a musical based on The Taming of the Shrew, proved popular on stage, as did a motion-picture version of Shakespeare's play in 1953 with actors Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. However, unless the action is played with its possible ironies clearly apparent, audiences today will likely find the play's ostensible values difficult to take, especially the belief in the need to tame a wife.

iv. Love's Labour's Lost

Love's Labour's Lost was first published in 1598 and was the first published play to have "By W. Shakespeare" on its title page. The play's slight action serves as a peg on which to hang a glittering robe of wit and poetry. It satirizes the loves of its main male characters as well as their fashionable devotion to studious pursuits. The noblemen in the play have sought to avoid romantic and worldly entanglements by devoting themselves in their studies, and they voice their pretensions in an artificially ornate style, until love forces them to recognize their own self-deceptions. The play's title anticipates its unconventional ending: The women refuse to marry at the end, demanding a waiting period of 12 months for
the men to demonstrate their reformation: “Our wooing does not end like an old play,” says Berowne; “Jack hath not Jill.”

b) Middle Comedies

Although very different in tone, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* from the mid-1590s provide evidence of Shakespeare’s growing mastery of the comic form and his willingness to explore and test its dramatic possibilities. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* represents Shakespeare’s first outstanding success in the field of romantic comedy. *The Merchant of Venice* is in its main plot another example of a romantic comedy, but the presence of Shylock disrupts the comic action, haunting the place even after he has disappeared from it.

i. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, first performed probably in 1594 or 1595 and first published in 1600, presents a happy blend of fantasy and realism, and may have been intended for performance at an aristocratic wedding. The comedy weaves together a number of separate plots involving three different realms: one inhabited by two pairs of noble Athenian lovers; another by members of the fairy world—notably, King Oberon, Queen Titania, and the mischievous Puck; and the third by a group of bumbling and unconsciously comic townspeople who seek to produce a play for wedding celebrations. These three worlds are brought together in a series of encounters that veer from the realistic to the magical to the absurd and back again in the space of only a few lines. In Act III, for example, Oberon plays a trick on Titania while she sleeps, employing Puck to anoint her with a potion that will cause her to fall in love with the first creature she sees on wakening. As it happens, she opens her eyes to the sight of Bottom the weaver, adorned by Puck with an ass’s head. Yet the comic episode of the Queen of the Fairies “enamored of an ass” echoes the play’s more profound concerns with the nature of love and imagination.

ii. *The Merchant of Venice*

*The Merchant of Venice*, first published in 1600 though seemingly written in 1596 or 1597, shares the lyric beauty and fairy-tale ending of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. But the strong characterization of the play’s villain, a Jewish moneylender named Shylock, shadows the gaiety. Shakespeare drew the main plot from an Italian story in which a crafty Jew threatens the life of a Christian merchant. Its composition may have arisen from a desire by Shakespeare’s acting company to stage a play that could compete with *The Jew of Malta* (1599?), a tragedy by English dramatist Christopher Marlowe, performed by a
rival company, the Admiral's Men. In the play Shakespeare sets motifs of masculine friendship and romantic love in opposition to the bitterness of Shylock, whose own misfortunes are presented so as to arouse understanding and even sympathy. While this play reflects European anti-Semitism of the time (although Jews had been banished from England in 1290 and were not formally readmitted until 1656), its exploration of power and prejudice also promote a critique of such bigotry. As Shylock says, confronted by the double standards of his opponents:

He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what's his reason?—I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.

c) Romantic Comedies

The romantic plays Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, The Merry Wives of Windsor, and Twelfth Night are often characterized as joyous comedies because of their generally happy mood and sympathetic characters. Written around 1599 and 1600, they represent Shakespeare's triumph in the field of high comedy. These mature comedies revolve around beautiful, intelligent, and strong-minded heroines, a type anticipated by the quick-witted heiress Portia in The Merchant of Venice. Nothing quite like these plays appears in earlier English drama, and Shakespeare never wrote anything like them in later years. They present a contrast to the satiric comedy that was coming into fashion at the time, and many critics believe they demonstrate not only Shakespeare's mastery of his art but also his congenial temperament in the sympathy he reveals toward his characters.

i. Much Ado About Nothing

The witty comedy Much Ado About Nothing, written about 1599 and first published the following year, concerns two pairs of lovers. In the play's main plot, the war hero Claudio is deceived into believing Hero has been unfaithful and calls off their wedding, until he is forced to recognize his error and take her as his wife. The subplot, a "merry war" of words and wit between Beatrice and Benedick, has long delighted audiences. Although the two outwardly dislike each other, the audience soon comprehends the real affection between the two. One of the play's most popular characters is the bumbling village constable Dogberry, who finally exposes the plot that has deceived Claudio. In 1993 a film version was released, starring Kenneth Branagh and Emma Thompson.
ii. As You Like It

In *As You Like It*, written about 1599 but not published until the 1623 First Folio, Shakespeare draws a rich and varied contrast between the strict code of manners at the court and the relative freedom from such structure in the countryside. Yet it also satirizes popular pastoral plays, novels, and poems of the time. Those popular but sentimental works presents rural life as idyllic and its inhabitants as innocents not yet corrupted by the world. In Shakespeare’s play the rural world is far from perfect, and the characters are not always what they appear. Rosalind and Celia have disguised themselves as men when they flee the court for the forest, but other characters not disguised are self-deceived. In the forest, however, true identifies are re-established. A number of love matches mark the conclusion, and the play ends in a parade of lovers marching two-by-two, like “couples coming to the Ark.” Even the melancholy Jacques, who remains outside the play’s concluding harmonies, expresses his benevolent hopes for the lovers, as the comic logic promises all “true delights.”

iii. The Merry Wives of Windsor

*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, written probably in 1599 but first published in 1602, is Shakespeare’s only comedy of middle-class life. The “merry wives,” Mistress Page and Mistress Ford, outwit Shakespeare’s greatest comic invention, Sir John Falstaff, who had first appeared in *Henry IV*. Falstaff’s unsuccessful efforts to seduce the two wives and their comic revenge upon him make up the main plot of the play. The comedy also includes the story of Anne Page, who is wooed by two inappropriate lovers, but who finally is united with Fenton, the man she loves. According to an early 16th-century tradition *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was written at the request of Queen Elizabeth I, who wished to see “Falstaff in love” following his comic appearance in both of the *Henry IV* plays.

iv. Twelfth Night

*Twelfth Night* is the most mature of Shakespeare’s romantic comedies and one that recalls his own earlier plays. It was written probably in 1601 and was published for the first time in the Folio of 1623. We know it was performed in the winter of 1602 at the Middle Temple, one of London’s law schools. It is a play of great emotional range, from farcical misunderstandings (based on a set of separated twins, as in *The Comedy of Errors*) to poignant moments in which a woman in disguise must serve the man she loves (as in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*). The play ends with lovers happily paired, but with the ambitious Malvolio isolated (like Jacques in *As You Like It* or Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*) and swearing to “be revenged upon the whole pack of you.”

The comedy may have been written specifically for presentation at a festival of Twelfth Night, which occurs 12 nights after Christmas Eve and was once a time for mirth and merrymaking, marking the end of the Christmas revels. The play’s
outrageous antics, especially for Sir Toby Belch, reflect in spirit the outrageous behavior permitted at Twelfth Night celebrations during the Middle Ages. Yet there is a darker side to Twelfth Night. Not only is Malvolio unreconciled to the community at the end, but Sir Andrew, Antonio, and the clown, Feste, all stand apart from the final celebrations, and Feste’s final song reminds the audience of how far our day-to-day world is from the idealization of comedy.

d) Problem Comedies

Three plays—All’s Well That Ends Well, Troilus and Cressida, and Measure for Measure—written soon after the mature comedies are usually called by modern critics “problem plays,” a term first coined for them in 1896. The problem comedies touch on complex and often unpleasant themes and contain characters whose moral flaws are greater and more difficult to change than the shortcomings of the characters in the farces or the joyous comedies. Little of the light-hearted humor of the earlier comedies, nor the easy satisfactions of their endings, appears in these plays. They are, however, emotionally rich and dramatically exciting, and have become increasingly successful on stage and stimulating to readers.

i. All’s Well That Ends Well

All’s Well That Ends Well, written about 1603 but not published until the 1623 Folio, adheres to the conventional pattern for comedy, as its title promises, ending with the reunion of a separated couple. But the reunion is deeply troubled and troubling. The callow, cowardly, and ungenerous Bertram is finally successfully paired with Helena, but they have reached that point through a process that has humiliated each. He immediately flees to Italy, and she must trick him to consummate the marriage. At the end they accept each other, but the ending is appropriately hedged with conditionals: “All yet seems well, and if it end so meet,” “The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet.” The stability of even this muted resolution is itself unsettled by the King’s offer to Diana, a young woman Bertram has tried to seduce, to choose a husband for herself. At best this offer reveals how little the King has learned and at worst it threatens to start the dispiriting action all over again.

ii. Troilus and Cressida

Critics always have had trouble classifying Troilus and Cressida (written about 1602) as a tragedy, a history, or a comedy. In many ways it qualifies as all three, and its earliest readers did not seem to know what kind of play it was. The editors of the First Folio placed the play at the beginning of the section of tragedies; the 1609 quarto titles the play The Famous Historie of Troylus and Cressida; and the prefatory note in that edition considers the play one of Shakespeare’s comedies and worthy of comparison with the best of the classical comic playwrights. Some critics believe that Troilus somewhat resembles the satiric comedy in fashion at
the time it was written. The play has two plots. The first, a dramatic version of the sieve of Troy by Greek armies during the Trojan War, and the second, which gives the play its name, a rendering of the medieval legend of the doomed love between Troilus, son of the king of Troy, and Cressida, daughter of a Trojan priest who defects to the Greek side during the war. The legend inspired a number of other works, including the tragic poem Troilus and Criseyde (1385?) by Geoffrey Chaucer. Shakespeare’s play, however, brilliantly combines the two plots in a withering exploration of the realities of both chivalric honor and romantic love.

iii. *Measure for Measure*

*Measure for Measure* (written about 1604 but not printed until the 1623 Folio) raises complex questions about sex, marriage, identity, and justice but does not offer the comfort of easy solutions. Like the other problem plays, it stretches the normal limits of the comic form. In the play the Duke of Vienna sets out in disguise to test the virtue of his unruly subjects, and leaves a harsh deputy, Angelo, in charge. Although the deputy reveals himself a hypocrite and couples are successfully united at the end, the questions that the play raises remain unanswered. At the very end Isabella remains silent at the Duke’s proposal of marriage, leaving open the question of whether she is overcome with joy or with horror, whether the proposal promises future happiness or a mere recapitulation of Angelo’s earlier intimidations.

The play’s most likely source was *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), a two-part play by English author George Whetstone. Shakespeare’s additions and changes, however, create a far more disturbing play, which increasingly has found enthusiasm from critics and audiences in its anticipation of modern questionings: Can one find a middle ground between law and liberty? Is sexual desire constructive or transgressive (an overstepping of proper limits)? Can morality be legislated?

e) **Tragicomedies Or Romances**

Toward the end of his career, Shakespeare created several experimental plays that have become known as tragicomedies or romances. These plays differ considerably from Shakespeare’s earlier comedies, being more radical in their dramatic art and showing greater concern with reconciliation among generations. Yet like the earlier comedies the tragicomedies end happily with reunions or renewal. Typically, virtue is sorely tested in the tragicomedies, but almost miraculously succeeds. Through the intervention of magic and art—or their emotional equivalent, compassion, or their theological equivalent, grace—the spectacular triumph of virtue that marks the ends of these plays suggests redemptive hope for the human condition. In these late plays, the necessity of death and sadness in human existence is recognized but located within larger
patterns of harmony that suggest we are "led on by heaven, and crowned with joy at last," as the epilogue of Pericles proposes.

i. Pericles, Prince of Tyre

The romantic tragicomedy Pericles, Prince of Tyre was written in 1607 and 1608 and first published in 1609. It concerns the trials and tribulations of the title character, including the painful loss of his wife and the persecution of his daughter. After many exotic adventures, Pericles is reunited with his loved ones; even his supposedly dead wife is discovered to have been magically preserved. The play's central themes are characteristic of the late plays. Pericles focuses particularly on the relationship between father and daughter, as do The Winter's Tale and The Tempest. Its backdrop of the sea also recalls the setting of The Tempest, while its concern with separation and reunion is reminiscent of The Winter's Tale. However, Pericles is innocent of any blame for the disruption of his family, unlike Leontes's estrangement from his wife and daughter in The Winter's Tale.

Although Pericles, Prince of Tyre was a great success in its own time, the play exists only in a somewhat corrupted text. It did not appear in the First Folio, and critics have long debated how much of it Shakespeare actually wrote. Some believe the play was a collaborative effort between Shakespeare and another author, usually thought to be George Wilkins. Pericles is based on a medieval legend, Aquilina, Prince of Tyre, which had many English retellings, from Confessio Amantis (Confessions of a Poet) by John Gower in the late 14th century to a prose novella by Laurence Twine written in the 1570s.

ii. Cymbeline

Cymbeline was written about 1610 and first published in the 1623 Folio, where it appears as the last of the tragedies. Like the other late plays, Cymbeline responds to the fashion of the time for colorful plots and theatrical display. It is packed with adventure, plot reversals, and dramatic spectacle, and was perhaps intended to exploit the mechanical resources of Blackfriars, the new indoor theater of Shakespeare's company. One stage direction instructs that "Jupiter descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle he throws a thunderbolt." This bit of staging was far better suited to the indoor theater than to the Globe, where the play was also performed.

The play has three interrelated plots: one concerns Imogen's love for her husband, Posthumus, and his jealousy; another involves the long-lost sons of King Cymbeline; and the third concerns Britain's challenge to the power of Rome. The three plots marvelously come together in the play's astonishing conclusion, as characters move from error to truth, from skepticism to faith, and from hatred to love. Confusion and loss are replaced by clarity and gain, as families and nations are reunited and are again at peace. At the play's end, the comic order
is, as the Soothsayer says, "full accomplished." King Cymbeline ruled at the time of Jesus Christ's incarnation. If the Soothsayer's words seem to the echo Christ's "consummatum est" (it is finished), it may be because the achievement of harmony in the play offers a secular (worldly) reflection of the patterns of Christian salvation history.

iii. The Winter's Tale

The Winter's Tale was written about 1610 and published for the first time in the 1623 Folio. In The Winter's Tale, as in Cymbeline, characters suffer great loss and pain and families are driven apart, but by the end most of what has been lost has been regained. This poignant romance revolves around the estrangement of Leontes, King of Sicilia, from his wife and daughter. In a sudden fit of jealousy Leontes becomes convinced that his wife, Hermione, has been conducting an affair with his friend Polixenes. Believing the daughter she bears is not his own, he orders the child to be abandoned abroad. The first three acts deal with Leontes's jealousy, his persecution of Hermione, the death of his son, Mamillius, the loss of his daughter, Perdita, and the recognition of his error and subsequent repentance. In the middle of the play a speech by Time marks the change of fortunes that lead to the reconciliation and renewal of the final scene, with its spectacular revelation that Hermione, long thought dead, in fact still lives. Shakespeare borrowed the plot for The Winter's Tale from Pandosto, the Triumph of Time (1588), a romance in prose by English writer Robert Greene.

iv. The Tempest

The Tempest, perhaps the most successful of the tragicomedies, was written about 1611 and published for the first time in the 1623 Folio. The play's resolution suggests the beneficial effects of the union of wisdom and power. In this play Prospero is deprived of his dukedom by his brother and banished to an island. But he defeats his usurping brother by employing magical powers and furthering a love match between his daughter and the son of the king of Naples. At the play's conclusion, Prospero surrenders his magical powers. In this surrender some critics have seen Shakespeare's own relinquishment of the magic of the theater. In spite of the appealing sentimentality of this idea, The Tempest was not Shakespeare's last play, and it is worth remembering that Prospero gives up his magic only to return to the responsibilities of rule he had previously ignored.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,

As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.
(Act IV, scene 1)

The Tempest is without doubt reflective in tone, especially on the end of life, in its concerns with remembrance and forgiveness, the loss and limitation of power, and the need for the reconciliation of the past, present, and future.

Source:

How to read Shakespeare's The Tempest

The shipwreck scene at the very beginning of The Tempest


Dramatis Personae

Prospero : Rightful Duke of Milan. With his daughter, he had been set adrift by his brother to die, but provisions provided secretly by his friend Gonzalo enable him
and his daughter to reach an island. There, Prospero practices magic and rules the island and its inhabitants.

Antonio: Prospero's brother who is the usurping Duke of Milan
Miranda: Daughter of Prospero
Alonso: King of Naples.
Sebastian: Brother of the king
Ferdinand: Son of the King of Naples
Gonzalo: Honest old counselor and friend of Prospero
Adrian, Francisco: Lords
Trinculo: Jester
Stephano: Drunken butler
Ariel: Spirit of the air who serves Prospero
Caliban: Savage and deformed slave on Prospero's island
Iris, Ceres, Juno: Goddesses presented by the spirits
Nymphs, Reapers: Dancers
Master of a Ship.
Boatswain
Mariners
Spirits

Plot Summary

After attending his daughter Claribel's wedding in Tunis, Africa, King Alonso of Naples and his company sail home to Italy in a fleet of ships and encounter a violent storm. With Alonso is his beloved son, Ferdinand. Others on the king's ship are Antonio, the Duke of Milan; Antonio's butler, Stephano; the king's brother, Sebastian; a counselor, Gonzalo; and Trinculo, a jester. When thunder booms and lightning strikes, winds churn the sea into a terrible fury that imperils all of the ships. Mariners laboring to save the king's vessel cry out, "All lost! to prayers, to prayers! all lost!" Gonzalo, the king's counselor, is the last to speak as the ship founders:

Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground, long heath, brown furze, any thing. The wills above be done! But I would fain die a dry death.

As a strange, fiery light illumines the ship, the king and his company jump overboard. All except Ferdinand wash ashore at the same location on an enchanted island. Ferdinand lands on another part of the island. Alonso thinks Ferdinand has drowned, and vice versa, and both mourn their losses. The ruler of the island is the magician Prospero. It was Prospero who caused the tempest. Aware of who was on the ship, thanks to his magical powers, he commanded the sea to deliver to him the king and his company to settle some unfinished
business. Twelve years before, Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, had been set adrift to die at sea with his three-year-old daughter, Miranda, after his brother, Antonio, seized his dukedom with the connivance of King Alonso.

However, the kindly counselor Gonzalo sneaked food and drink to Propsero, along with his books of magic. So it was that Prospero and his daughter survived and landed on the island to live in a cave. One of Prospero’s first orders of business on the island was to free the sprites imprisoned by a witch named Sycorax. The chief sprite was Ariel, a spirit of the air. In exchange for his liberation, Ariel agreed to do Prospero’s bidding. Sycorax posed no further threat, for she was dead. However, she left behind an ugly, half-human offspring named Caliban. Although Caliban once tried to ravish Miranda, Prospero trains him to talk and perform menial chores, using magic to keep the beast-man’s baser instincts in check.

Ariel has proved a valuable servant. In fact, under Prospero’s orders, it was he who guided the tempest toward the island and set the king’s ship “ablaze” by imitating fire. Sometimes Ariel would divide himself and become fire in several places at once: the topmast, bowsprit, and yards. In flight, the king and his company hurled themselves overboard. However, Ariel preserved the ship in a hidden harbor and cast its crew into a deep sleep. He allowed the rest of the fleet to survive the storm and resume the trip to Italy, “supposing,” as Ariel tells Prospero, “that they saw the king’s ship wrecked and his great person perish.”

After Alonso and the others arrive on the island, Prospero dispatches Ariel to bring the handsome young Ferdinand to the cave, where Miranda—now fifteen and beautiful—is sleeping. He also sends Caliban to bring wood. When Ferdinand arrives, Miranda awakens and falls immediately in love with him. Love smites Ferdinand as well. Prospero pretends Ferdinand is a spy and takes him prisoner. Elsewhere on the island, King Alonso and most of his company fall asleep after Ariel sings a soothing song. The only two who remain awake—the evil Antonio and Alonso’s brother, Sebastian—see an opportunity before them: if they kill the king, Naples will be theirs. But just as they draw their swords, King Alonso and Gonzalo awaken. Meanwhile, Caliban, who is bringing in the wood, curses Prospero, wishing upon him “All the infections that the sun sucks up . . . .” Caliban, after all, was the ruler of the island before Prospero arrived. Why should he now be carrying wood for Prospero?

Trinculo happens upon Caliban and takes shelter with him from a threatening storm. Stephano, the king’s butler, also shows up, drunk. It seems he had the good fortune to float ashore on a barrel of wine, which he put to good use after fashioning a flask out of tree bark. After he plies Caliban with wine, the monster-man dreams of being free of Prospero. Back near the cave, Ferdinand is gathering wood under orders from Prospero. When Miranda goes out to help him, the two lovers forget about the wood. Instead, they coo and woo, and talk of
marriage. From a distance, Prospero watches and smiles approvingly. Caliban, suddenly possessed of a bold and persuasive tongue, convinces his new companions, Stephano and Trinculo, to help him murder Prospero so that they can all become the new rulers of the island. Their plan is to steal upon him while he is sleeping, brain him with a log or pierce him with a stake or a knife, then burn his books.

Ariel, off working on Prospero's behalf, conjures up a magnificent banquet for King Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, Gonzalo and the rest of the king's entourage. As they are about to eat, lightning flashes, thunder booms, and Ariel appears in the form of a harpy, a hideous bird. He claps his wings and the banquet vanishes. Then he rebukes Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian for their previous mistreatment of Prospero and Miranda. He says, "Lingering perdition, worse than any death can be at once, shall step by step attend you and your ways...." After Ariel vanishes, the goodly Gonzalo, observing the reaction of the three men, says, "All three of them are desperate: their great guilt, like poison given to work a great time after, now 'gins to bite the spirits." Prospero, meanwhile, presents an entertainment for Ferdinand and Miranda in celebration of their forthcoming marriage.

The entertainers are spirits in the form of three deities—Ceres, goddess of agriculture; Iris, goddess of the rainbow; and Juno, queen of the gods—who sing to the betrothed couple. Then Nymphs and Reapers descend upon the island and perform a graceful dance. After the entertainment, Prospero uses his magic to thwart the murderous plots against him while Ariel spellbinds Alonso and the others with music and leads them to Prospero's cave. Ferdinand rejoices at the sight of his father, and Alonso rejoices at the sight of his son. Then every offender repents his wrongs, and even the beastly Caliban admits he was a "thrice-double ass." Prospero, having regained his dukedom, renounces magic and prepares to return to Naples with Ferdinand, Miranda and Alonso and his entourage after Alonso's ship—thought wrecked and lost—is found still afloat and seaworthy. Prospero commands Ariel to calm the seas, then frees him. Only Caliban remains on the island.

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASK

What do you learn of Prospero's character from his treatment of Caliban and Ariel?

How to read Ben Jonson's Volpone

Dramatis Personae

Volpone : a Magnifico
Mosca : his Parasite
Voltore : an Advocate
Corbaccio : an old Gentleman
Corvino : a Merchant
Bonario : son to Corbaccio
Sir Politick Would-be: a Knight
Peregrine : a Gentleman Traveller
Nano : a Dwarf
Castrone : an Eunuch
Androgyno : a Hermaphrodite
Grege (or Mob) : Officers of Justice
Commandadori : three Merchants
Avocatori : four Magistrates
Notario : the Register
Lady Would-be : Sir Politick's Wife
Celia : Corvino's Wife
Servitori : Servants, two Waiting- women, etc

The Art of Deception

In Volpone, Ben Jonson celebrates the joy of a good trick. He emphasizes the fun and the humor of deceit, but he does not overlook its nastiness, and in the end he punishes the deceivers. The play centers around the wealthy Volpone, who, having no wife or children, pretends to be dying and, with the help of his wily servant Mosca, eggs on several greedy characters, each of whom hopes to be made Volpone's sole heir. Jonson's ardent love of language reveals itself throughout the play, but especially in the words of Mosca and Volpone, who relish the deceptive powers of language. Volpone himself pursues his schemes partly out of greed, but partly out of his passionate love of getting the best of people. He cannot resist the temptation to outsmart those around him,
particularly when fate delivers him such perfect gulls as the lawyer Voltore, the merchant Corvino, the doddering old Corbacio, and the foolish English travelers Sir Politic and Lady Would-Be. Mosca too revels in his ability to beguile others, remarking "I fear I shall begin to grow in love / With my dear self," so thrilled is he with his own manipulations. His self-love, however, proves his undoing, as it does for Volpone. Both characters become so entranced by their own elaborate fictions that they cannot bring themselves to stop their scheming before they betray themselves.

Jonson's audience would have recognized both the wily Volpone and the parasitical Mosca as stereotypically Italian. English playwrights frequently borrowed characters from Italian drama and from Italy's comic dramatic tradition, the commedia dell'arte. Venice, the setting for Volpone, evoked the glory of Italian art and culture, but also Italy's decadence and corruption, which the English viewed as dangerously seductive. English readers knew of Venice through the lively accounts of travelers such as Thomas Coryate, whom Lady Politic Would-Be mentions in Volpone. Coryate was particularly intrigued by Venice, a city renowned throughout Europe for its beautiful courtesans, many of whom were elegant and educated women ("subtle and full of art," as Mosca tells Corvino) with a highly sophisticated clientele. Other English authors warn about the perils of traveling in Venice, and Shakespeare too explores the darker side of the city in The Merchant Of Venice and Othello. Contemporary filmmakers have found Venice to be an apt setting for plots in which something sinister lurks below an attractive surface; the English travelers to Venice in the films Don't Look Now (1973) and The Comfort of Strangers (1991) find themselves lost in a frightening psychological maze as twisted and confusing as the canals of Venice itself. Venice thus has enduring appeal as a setting for Volpone, for despite its humor the play retains its disturbing aspects, and there is an unsettling ugliness to much of the action.

Even knowing the dangerous side of Italy, thousands of Englishmen and women continued to travel there during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Jonson satirizes the complacency and foolishness of many of these travelers in the characters of Sir Politic and Lady Would-Be, who come to Italy to acquire learning and sophistication but indiscriminately imitate what they find there. (Shakespeare makes a similar observation in Richard II, when York complains about the influence of "proud Italy, / Whose manners still our tardy-aphian nation / Limp after in base imitation.") Lady Would-Be has studied Castiglione's essays on proper conduct in The Book of the Courtier, but she is also said to have come to Venice to learn about "fashions and behavior among the courtesans," a detail that Jonson's audience would have snickered at, for Italian courtesans, were not considered appropriate role models for aristocratic Englishwomen. Lady Would-Be also claims to have read all the Italian authors, but she has read them without true comprehension; for along with Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto, she praises Aretino, whose infamous verses and the accompanying pornographic illustrations were well known to be more than just "a little obscene," as she says.
We are encouraged to laugh with Volpone and Mosca at the pretensions and hypocrisies of Lady Would-Be and the other ever-hopeful "heirs"; but ultimately Jonson chooses to punish the deceivers and asks us to side, however reluctantly, with the Venetian Senate in condemning them. Voltole, Corvino, and the others may richly deserve to be tricked, but Volpone and Mosca are not agents of justice, and we must not confuse them with such truly virtuous characters as Celia and Bonario. Nevertheless, Jonson gives Volpone the last word in the play's Epilogue, where Volpone asks our forgiveness, and we find ourselves in complicity with him once again. We are invited in the end to revel in the delightful obscenity and true language, and to suspend, if only briefly, our moral judgments.

http://www.shakespearedc.org/volart.html

VENICE AND VOLPONE

Ben Jonson's Volpone is a play about power, greed, seduction and lust—all of the good stuff. Written during the Renaissance, the play is set in Venice, Italy. The setting of the play in Venice is especially important because the climate in the city, both socially and politically, was just right for a play about debauchery and the ugly side of human passions. The sections on this site are here to help guide you through Renaissance Venice and illustrate the importance of Volpone being set in Venice.

Why is Volpone set in Venice?
The city of Venice during the Renaissance was the wealthiest city in Europe, but it was also a city of high immorality and decadence. Venice and its citizens were condemned as being materialistic and publicly extravagant. Condemned for being cynical, atheistic pragmatists in spiritual matters, and for having a government by oligarchy, Venice was ruled by an aristocracy that was proud, mean, lazy and vindictive. The justice system was an arbitrary and secretive political machine that often hid the nasty secrets of the private sexual tyranny of the upper class.

These characteristics of Venice provided Jonson with the perfect backdrop to Volpone. The main character, Volpone, is himself the ideal corrupt Venetian, surrounding himself with material goods and delighting in perverse sexual activities. The proud and lazy Volpone finds his entertainment in his dwarf, eunuch and hermaphrodite, who put on plays and sing songs for his amusement. They are also in a sense his family.
Another example of why Venice is a great setting for the play occurs when Celia is locked up by her jealous husband; the Venetians were very jealous people who would lock their wives and daughters away to protect them. Of course the husband’s Venetian immorality shines through later on when he prostitutes Celia in order to become Volpone’s heir. Corrupt, abnormal and immoral, Venice is the perfect setting for Jonson’s Volpone.

Political Climate
In Venice’s beginning, the clergy played a major role in government and politics. Over time, however, the church’s involvement diminished dramatically. The theory that authority in government must be unchallengeable and supreme to all in its domain was what kept the Venetian system of government together. The Pope declared “that the first loyalty of [his] messengers and servants...shall be to [him] and not to [the government]; they shall be above and not amenable to [Venetian] laws” (170-171).

In the seventeenth century this decree was put to the test as two churchmen were jailed and charged with serious crimes. Venice was able to achieve victory over the church and the papal consules were revoked.

Fra Paolo Sarpi, also known as Father Paul, served as a Friar of the Servite Order and was a supporter of the Venetian doctrine of state supremacy. Acting as the Theological Advisor to Signony, Father Paul became a sort of anti-Pope figure, while remaining loyal to the Catholic Church. Father Paul is reportedly the author of The Maxims of Government. These were rules for government during the Renaissance, to which many cities adhered. Here are five examples of those rules:

1. “The Prince has no greater justice than to preserve to himself the quality of the Prince, and to keep his subjects in a dutiful subjection to his authority.”
2. “Justice includes everything that may contribute to the preservation of the State.”
3. “The abuses committed by the Common People, one against another, may be judged in an ordinary way; and here Justice may be administered impartially, there being no political consideration to it.”
4. “When an offence is committed by a Nobleman against a Subject, let all ways be tried to justify him....If it is a Subject that has affronted a Nobleman, let him be punished with the utmost severity.”
5. “If there are any members of the Councils (in the Provinces) who are known to be of a very resolute temper, it is fit either to ruin them entirely or purchase their goodwill.”

These rules allow for the antics in Volpone, as it abolishes all punishment for the actions and words of the upper-class. And since all of Volpone’s victims were noblemen, his deception was not as punishable by law as there was no strict code on noble men offending noblemen. This melancholy of the law where the
rich were concerned created a political climate where many upper-class people were bound to support the state, since it worked in their best interests.

**Courtesans in Venice**

One of the most prominent features of Venice in 1606 (when Volpone was written) was the courtesan. A courtesan is a type of upper-class prostitute, renowned for her extreme beauty and lavish clothing. Now, Venetian courtesans of this period weren’t your average prostitutes—many were wealthy members of society. Some were kept by nobles, and thus had extravagant homes and clothing fit for royalty. Others were shrewd business women, having a different client every night of the week and making more money than an average merchant. According to Georgina Masson, the author of *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*, courtesans became so wealthy and dressed so nicely that it became difficult to distinguish them from the nobility. This identity crisis became such a problem in Venice that the authorities found it necessary to issue sumptuary laws. Masson writes that these laws:

specifically stated that it was a public shame that prostitutes were to be seen in the streets and churches, and elsewhere, so much bejewelled and well-dressed, that very often noble ladies and women citizens [of Venice], because there is no difference in their attire from that of the above-said women, are confused with them; not only by foreigners, but by the inhabitants [of Venice], who are unable to tell the good from the bad...therefore it is proclaimed that no prostitute may wear, nor have on any part of her person, gold, silver or silk, nor wear necklaces, pears or jewelled or plain rings, either in their ears or on their hands. (152)

As you can see, courtesans were not too bad off—some of them had so much wealth that they were the equivalent to royalty. Because of the lavish stylings of the courtesans, it is easy to see how Lady Would-be, an English tourist who strives to be something she is not, finds them fascinating. Jonson writes that while she is in Venice, she aligns herself chiefly with the courtesans, hoping to gain some useful information on the latest gossip and the trendiest styles. Early on in the play, Peregrine is perplexed that a woman such as Lady Would-be would associate herself with prostitutes, and he seeks to verify this shocking rumor with Sir Plotic Would-be. “Your Lady,” he inquires, “lies here in Venice for intelligence/ of tires, and fashions, and behaviour:/ Among the courtesans? The fine Lady Would-be?” (2.1.26-29).

**Political Abuses and Corruption in Venice**

During the Renaissance there were many corrupt practices in Venice, both in society and especially government. One such practice was the stuffing of ballot boxes during elections. There is evidence that there were "secret arrangements [where] more than one ballot is cast" (78). These "fistfuls" of ballots usually would help "the rich who are nominated and are willing to spend money on poor nobles" (79). There are also indications that government offices, such as those of
magistrate and council seat, were bought. Money also exchanged hands in
cases of people seeking office in order to be favored by those in positions of
power. In addition, noblemen would arrange to put candidates of their choosing
(who may not have been qualified) into office. These candidates usually took the
place of a qualified person who was of a good family. The government also
perpetrated instances of solicitation of foreign ambassadors by members of the
Senate and Secret Council. They would discuss issues of public business which
dealt with the state; this eventually became a punishable offense in Venice, with
a fine of up to 1000 ducats and two years exile.

Criminals suffered great abuses at the hands of the state, mainly the Venetian
Navy. The convicts would not be sent to fleet commanders but, instead, directly
to captains who would not register them. Their sentences were never reduced
and many times they were kept long after their appointed time was up. The
treatment of these men was extremely brutal; their often receiving insufficient
clothing, half a free man's pay, along with poor living conditions, resulted in
numerous deaths from exposure and malnutrition. Because so many were
illegally recruited by fleet commanders they were expendable. The crews of ships
were supposed to be free men only, but the convict labor was so cheap, and the
laborers so powerless to do anything about the mistreatment, that it was the
standard practice. The corruption wasn’t only in the Navy—the practice of using
convicts on ships was only permissible when magistrates released them from
prison early, or in some cases, before serving any real jail time. So the corruption
was whole from top to bottom, beginning with those who had the power to vote
ultimately controlling those who didn’t.

Source: “Volpone” . (2003). English Department, University of

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASK

Describe how is Volpone a comedy? Name two other (non-Shakespeare)
Renaissance comedies.
CONCLUSION

This unit provides you with an introduction to the comedies of William Shakespeare in the context of an introduction to Renaissance comedy in general. It helps you to become familiar with the comic dramatic writings of Shakespeare and other Renaissance playwrights. It also helps you to develop your understanding of the creative context in which the texts have their origin, namely the world of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre, and the social context in which it operated. You are also introduced to some major critical works and studies that have been written on the topic. It helps to direct the reader to recent critical developments in the field. This, indirectly helps you to develop your own critical approaches to the plays.
UNIT 6
STUDYING A HISTORY PLAY

Introduction

This unit is devoted to Shakespeare's four history plays (*Richard II*, *Part 1*, *Henry IV Part 2*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*) in which the upheavals in England 1398-1422 are represented in light of contemporary political themes that preoccupied the playwright and his audience. You will also discover how Shakespeare's ideas of proper rule, ideal social order, and government, and how his view of his own history reflected the major issues of his time.

Unit Objectives

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. discuss Shakespeare's history plays and appreciation of their generic and thematic variety,
2. analyse and apply theoretical ideas to literary texts, and
3. present, write a critical essay, and retrieve information in order to construct a sound argument in relation to history plays.

TOPICS

Topic 1: What is a history play?

a) Early histories
b) Later histories
How to read Shakespeare's Richard II
How to read Shakespeare's Henry IV Part I

TOPIC 1: WHAT IS A HISTORY PLAY?

History plays, sometimes known as chronicle plays (after the "chronicles" from which the plots were taken), were a highly popular form of drama in Shakespeare's time. By 1623, every English monarch from William the Conqueror to Elizabeth I had been represented in a play, as the English past served as an important repository of plots for the dramatists of the burgeoning theater industry of Elizabethan England. The plays not only offered entertainment but also served many people as an important source of information about the nation's past.

The Elizabethans considered history instructive but did not always agree on the particular lessons it taught. Sometimes history was thought to be a branch of theology, the record of God's providential guidance of events, and sometimes it was seen solely as the record of human motives and actions. Sometimes history was valued because it was an accurate record of the past, and sometimes because it provided examples of behavior to be imitated or avoided. History plays became increasingly popular after 1588 and the defeat of the Spanish Armada, so clearly the interest in English history reflected a growing patriotic consciousness.

Shakespeare wrote ten plays listed in the 1623 Folio as histories and differentiated from the other categories, comedies and tragedies, by their common origin in English history. Eight of Shakespeare's history plays re-create the period in English history from 1399, when King Henry IV took the throne after deposing King Richard II, to the defeat of Richard III in battle in 1485. Henry IV was the first English king from the house of Lancaster. The history plays cover the conflict between the houses of Lancaster and York, known as the Wars of the Roses, from 1455 to 1485. The final event is the victory of Henry VII over Richard III in 1485, ending the rule of the York dynasty and beginning the Tudor dynasty. The eight plays devoted to this period, listed in the chronological order of the kings with the dates of their composition in parentheses, are Richard II (1597?); Henry IV, Parts I and II (1597?); Henry V (1598?); Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III (1590-1592?); and Richard III (1592-1593?). As their dates indicate, Shakespeare did not write the plays in chronological order. He wrote the second
half of the story first, and only later returned to the events that initiated the political problems.

The two remaining Shakespeare history plays are King John (1596?) and Henry VIII (1613?). King John, beginning soon after John's coronation in 1199, was seemingly reworked from an anonymous, older play on the same subject. It treats the English king's failed effort to resist the power of the pope, a theme of obvious relevance in England after the Protestant Reformation. Henry VIII, probably co-written with English dramatist John Fletcher, is a loosely connected pageant of events in Henry's reign, ending with the prophecy of the birth of Elizabeth and her succession by King James.

Shakespeare's main sources for the events of the history plays were the Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1577; 2nd ed. 1586, which Shakespeare used) by Raphael Holinshed and Edward Hall's Chronicle (1542). Although Shakespeare took situations from these and a few other historical sources, he selected only such facts that suited his dramatic purposes. Sometimes he ignored chronology and telescoped the events of years to fit his own dramatic time scheme. Above all, he used the power of his imagination and language to mold vivid and memorable characters out of the historical figures he found in his sources.

The overall theme of the history plays is the importance of a stable political order, but also the heavy moral and emotional price that often must be paid for it. Shakespeare dramatized the great social upheaval that followed Henry IV's usurpation of the throne until the first Tudor king, Queen Elizabeth's grandfather, restored peace and stability. In addition to chronicling the often violent careers of England's great kings, Shakespeare's history plays explore the extreme pressures of public life, the moral conflicts that kings and queens uniquely face, and the potential tragedy of monarchy.

a) Early Histories

The four plays that dramatize the Wars of the Roses, the turbulent period from 1422 to 1485, are possibly Shakespeare's earliest dramatic works. These plays, Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III and Richard III, deal with disorder resulting from weak leadership and from national disunity fostered for selfish ends. Richard III, however, closes triumphantly with the death of Richard and the ascent to the throne of Henry VII, the founder of the Tudor dynasty and grandfather of Queen Elizabeth. See also England: The Lancastrian and Yorkist Kings.
Although Shakespeare probably did not invent the genre of the history play, only a very few plays on English history had been written before he turned to it for his plots, and no contemporary playwright wrote more histories than his ten. Clearly Shakespeare learned from his few predecessors in English drama, especially Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe had initiated the early greatness of Elizabethan tragedy, placing a single monumental personality at the center of each of his major plays. By studying Marlowe’s style and energetic protagonists, Shakespeare learned in Richard III to construct a play around a complex, dominating personality. But Shakespeare is as interested in the sweep of history itself, as it catches up personalities in rhythms they are unable to predict or control.

i. Henry VI, Parts I, II, and III

The three parts of Henry VI chronicle the troubled reign of that king, from the death of his father in 1422 to his own death in 1471. During that time England was all but torn apart by civil strife following the death of Henry V. Part I deals with wars in France, including combat with Joan of Arc, and had early success on stage, performed 15 times in 1592 alone. Parts II and III, revealing Henry VI as a weak and ineffectual king, treat England after it has lost its possessions in France and factionalism at home erupts into full-fledged civil war. Today, the Henry VI plays, if staged at all, are likely to be seen in condensed adaptations or conflations (combination of parts) as in English director John Barton’s Wars of the Roses in 1963 at Stratford-upon-Avon.

ii. Richard III

Richard III begins where Henry VI, Part III leaves off and completes the sequence begun with the Henry VI plays. It presents a fictionalized account of Richard III’s rise and fall, from the time he gains the crown through murder and treachery to his death at the Battle of Bosworth Field, which ends the Wars of the Roses and brings the Tudor dynasty to power. The story of Richard’s rise and fall derives from an account by English statesman Thomas More, written about 1513. As presented by Shakespeare, Richard is an eloquent, intelligent man, who is morally and physically deformed. Richard dominates the stage with a combination of wit and wickedness that has fascinated audiences and made the part a popular one among actors.

b) Later Histories

Shakespeare wrote his most important history plays in the period from 1596 to 1598, plays that reveal both his dramatic mastery and his deep understanding of politics and history. The so-called second tetralogy (four related works), consisting of Richard II, Henry IV, Parts I and II, and Henry V, encompass the 23 years immediately prior to those portrayed in the Henry VI plays. The last three plays of the second tetralogy constitute Shakespeare’s supreme achievement in
writing histories, focusing on the development of Prince Hal (in the two parts of *Henry IV*) into England’s greatest medieval hero—King Henry V.

i. *Richard II*

*Richard II* is a study of a sensitive, self-dramatizing, ineffective but sympathetic monarch who loses his kingdom to his forceful successor, Henry IV. As a model for this play Shakespeare relied heavily on Marlowe’s chronicle play *Edward II* (1592?) with its focus on a personality ill-suited for the demands of rule. The play was a success on stage and in the bookstalls, but until 1608 the scene of Richard relinquishing his crown to Henry Bolingbroke, in Act 4, was omitted from the printed versions because it portrayed the overthrow of a monarch.

ii. *Henry IV*, *Parts I, II*

In the two parts of *Henry IV*, Henry recognizes his own guilt for usurping the throne from Richard and finds himself facing rebellion from the very families that had helped him to the throne. His son, Prince Hal, is, however, in many ways the focus of the plays, which trace the prince’s development from a seemingly wayward youth, enjoying the company and influence of the fat knight Falstaff and other drinking cronies, to the future king who proves triumphant in the play *Henry V*. Many critics consider *Henry IV, Part I* to be the most entertaining and dramatic of the Henry plays with its struggle between King Henry and his rebellious nobles, led by the volatile Hotspur. The king’s fears for his son prove unfounded when Prince Hal leaves the tavern to take his place on the battlefield, where his defeat of Hotspur in combat proves his readiness to assume the burdens of rule.

Shakespeare makes much use of comedy in the plays, particularly in the portrayal of the fat knight Falstaff, whose irrepressible wit has long been the major source of the plays’ remarkable popularity. The comedy, however, neither dominates nor is subordinated to the historical plot, but is brilliantly intermingled with it, commenting often weringly on its actions and values. At the same the comedy insists that history is something more spacious than a mere record of aristocratic men and motives.

iii. *Henry V*

*Henry V* was the last history play that Shakespeare wrote, until he returned to the genre with his collaboration on *Henry VIII* late in his career. *Henry V* celebrates the great military and political achievements of the king in his victories over France, but also allows other angles of vision upon his accomplishments that may well raise doubts about their moral cost. While the Chorus speaks the lofty rhetoric of heroic idealization, the comic plot reveals a world of baser motive, which parallels and comments on the historical action. *Henry V* may well have been the first play performed at the Globe Theatre in the summer of 1599.
How to read Shakespeare’s *Richard II*

**Dramatis Personae**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King Richard II</td>
<td>Intelligent but weak and duplicitous monarch; however, he dies bravely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John of Gaunt</td>
<td>Duke of Lancaster. He is the king’s uncle and father of the king’s rival, Henry Bolingbroke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Bolingbroke</td>
<td>Duke of Hereford, son of John of Gaunt, and the king’s rival. He seizes power and becomes King Henry IV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Mowbray</td>
<td>Duke of Norfolk and opponent of Bolingbroke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Ross, Lord Willoughby</td>
<td>Supporters of Bolingbroke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmund of Langley</td>
<td>Duke of York and king’s uncle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Aumerle</td>
<td>Son of the Duke of York. He plots against Bolingbroke when the latter ascends the throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop of Carlisle, Abbot of Westminster</td>
<td>Co-conspirators in Aumerle’s plot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duke of Surrey</td>
<td>Supporter of Aumerle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Fitzwater</td>
<td>Opponent of Aumerle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duchess of York</td>
<td>Mother of Aumerle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl of Salisbury, Sir Stephen Scroop</td>
<td>Members of the king’s party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bushy, Bagot, Green</td>
<td>Servants of King Richard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl of Northumberland</td>
<td>Proud and arrogant follower of Bolingbroke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Percy, nicknamed Hotspur</td>
<td>Promising son of Northumberland who aids Bolingbroke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Pierce of Exton</td>
<td>Bolingbroke’s hatchet man. When Bolingbroke, as the new king, asks whether anyone will rid him of Richard, Exton assumes Bolingbroke wants Richard dead. With two assistants, he kills the king, who goes down swinging.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>Loyal wife of King Richard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duchess of Gloucester</td>
<td>Aunt of Richard and Bolingbroke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lord Marshal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain of a Band of Welshmen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lady attending on the Queen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Characters</td>
<td>Lords, heralds, officers, soldiers, two gardeners, keeper, messenger, groom,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Background of the Play

Settings: England and Wales, late 1300's. (Richard II reigned between 1377 and 1399.)

Theme 1: Even powerful kings must yield to the will of the people. Disenchanted with Richard's rule—which imposes a crushing tax burden—the people replace him with Henry Bolingbroke.

Theme 2: Guilt often exacts a heavy penance. At the end of the play, Henry Bolingbroke announces he will go to the Holy Land to remit the guilt he feels for the death of Richard. (See the passage at the end of the plot summary below.)

Wordplay: In Richard II, an early play, Shakespeare had not yet perfected his writing skills. One of his weaknesses was to rely too heavily on the pun (use of words of similar sound or spelling for humorous or unusual effect) to engage the audience. For example, in Act II, Scene I, John of Gaunt makes puns even as he is dying. When King Richard asks Gaunt how he fares as he nears death, Gaunt uses his name (the same as the adjective gaunt, meaning thin, bony and haggard) in the following "punny" reply:

Oh, how that name befits my composition!
Old Gaunt indeed, and gaunt in being old,
With me grief hath kept a tedious fast,
And who abstains from meat that is not gaunt?

Plot Summary

A vicious quarrel erupts in the realm of King Richard II. His cousin, Henry Bolinbrooke, Duke of Hereford, has accused Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, of being a "traitor and a miscreant" for misusing government money and for plotting the death of the Duke of Gloucester. John of Gaunt, Henry's father and King Richard's uncle, summons Henry before Richard for a hearing on the matter. Mowbray also appears. After the king listens to Bolingbroke and Mowbray plead their cases, he arranges a duel to resolve the matter, saying:

At Coventry, upon Saint Lambert's day:
There shall your swords and lances arbitrate
The swelling difference of your settled hate.

However, before the adversaries can raise shields and strike metal, the king banishes them, Mowbray for life and Bolingbroke for "twice five summers," or ten years. Richard makes both swear they will never plot against the crown. Moments later, when Richard sees how the sentence aggrieves John of Gaunt,
he shortens Henry's banishment to six years. However, Richard's show of mercy toward Henry masks inner rancor toward his cousin. Henry, it seems, has grown so popular with the people that he poses a threat to the crown. He has become a rival, a foil, a nettlesome thorn on the bush of comity. Thus, the king is only too glad to have Henry out of the way. Richard then turns his attention to organizing and leading a military campaign to quell a rebellion in Ireland. But because he spends lavishly and has run low on money, he plans to bleed the already overtaxed people to pay for the campaign. Conveniently, though, John of Gaunt, who has money and property, becomes gravely ill. Seeing an opportunity, Richard says:

Now put it, God, in the physician's mind
To help him to his grave immediately!
The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars.

When Richard visits the dying man, Gaunt tells Richard that he too is sick, in a manner of speaking: "Thy death-bed is no lesser than thy land wherein thou liest in reputation sick." Richard, infuriated, calls Gaunt "A lunatic lean-witted fool, presuming on an ague's privilege." After Gaunt dies, the king confiscates his property. Another uncle of Richard, the elderly Duke of York, protests the king's action on behalf of Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke, saying the law dictates that all of Gaunt's money and lands should go to Henry. Many other nobles, too, oppose the king's action. Richard, however, refuses to back down and, with Gaunt's wealth now in his keep, marches off to Ireland to wage war. After Henry Bolingbroke learns of his father's death and the king's appropriation of the inheritance, he raises an army of his own and returns to England to claim his property. Nobles join his cause, and Henry orders the execution of two of Richard's favorites, Bushy and Green. The king then returns from Ireland, landing in Wales, to deal with Henry. He believes God is on his side, saying,

The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord:
For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel: then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.

But woe unto Richard, for 20,000 Welsh soldiers have deserted him and gone over to Henry. Sir Stephen Scroop tells Richard that all of England seems to oppose him: "White-beards have arm'd their thin and hairless scalps against thy majesty; boys, with women's voices, strive to speak big and clap their female joints." After Richard takes refuge in Flint Castle, Henry arrives to claim his rightful inheritance. Richard yields and Henry escorts him to London.
Meanwhile, the queen, who loves Richard dearly, is visiting two ladies in the garden of the Duke of York when she overhears a gardener criticize Richard for not tending his kingdom in the same way that one tends a garden. Plants and trees must be trimmed and dressed, the gardener says, and superfluous branches must be cut away. When the queen reproaches him for his criticism, the gardener informs her that King Richard no longer holds sway in the realm; it is uncrowned Henry who rules. The queen says, "What, was I born to this, that my sad look should grace the triumph of great Bolingbroke?" Deeply grieved, she leaves immediately for London. The gardener plants a bank of rue in the spot where one of her tears has fallen "in the remembrance of a weeping queen."

Before Parliament in Westminster Hall, the Bishop of Carlisle, one of Richard's few remaining defenders, speaks out against Henry and his claims to the crown, but to no avail. After Richard's adversaries accuse him of high crimes, he signs a confession and yields the throne. Henry orders him confined to the Tower of London, then announces his own coronation as Henry IV. The Duke of Aumerle, the Bishop of Carlisle and the Abbot of Westminster organize a last-minute plot against Henry, but it fails. Henry has Richard transferred to Pomfret Castle.

Sir Pierce Exton overhears Henry ask a deadly question: "Have I no friend will rid me of this living fear?" The "living fear" is, of course, Richard. Without direct orders from Henry, Exton decides to fulfill Henry's wish. With two henchmen armed with axes, he goes to Pomfret Castle to murder Richard. To his credit, Richard goes down swinging. After snatching away an axe, he kills one henchman, then the other. But a blow from Exton brings him down. Before dying, he warns Exton that the hand that struck him "shall burn in never-quenching fire." Exton bears the body to Henry and proclaims, "Great king, within this coffin I present thy buried fear." Henry is horrified and tells Exton, "Thou hast wrought a deed of slander with thy fatal hand upon my head and all this famous land." When Exton reminds Henry that he wished Richard dead, Henry, full of guilt, banishes Exton then announces:

I'll make a voyage to the Holy Land,  
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand:  
March sadly after; grace my mournings here;  
In weeping after this untimely bier.

Source:
http://sites.micro-link.net/zekscreb/Richard2.html#richard2

SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS
1. Henry Bolingbroke banishes Exton at the end of the play. What was banishment? Where did a banished person go?

2. Does Richard II become a better or worse man at the end of the play, when he is about to die?

How to read Shakespeare’s *Henry IV Part I*

**Dramatis Personae**

- **King Henry IV**: Skilled politician who, as Henry Bolingbroke, forced Richard II’s abdication and usurped the throne. The son of the Duke of Lancaster (John of Gaunt), Henry was the first English king in the House of Lancaster, reigning from 1399 to 1413. During this play, he battles uprisings by British nobles.

- **Prince Henry**: Older son of the king. Known as Prince Hal, or simply Hal, to his friends, he is carefree and fun-loving, keeping company with a band of rascals. But when the time comes to fight the rebel forces, he distinguishes himself in battle.

- **John of Lancaster**: Younger son of the king.

- **Henry Percy (the Younger)**: Son of the Earl of Northumberland (the elder Henry Percy), a rebel leader. Young Henry is often called Hotspur, a name that symbolizes his pluck and temperament as a warrior and opponent of Prince Henry.

- **Henry Percy (the Elder)**: Earl of Northumberland. He opposes the king after first supporting him and forms an alliance with a Welsh leader, Owen Glendower.

- **Thomas Percy**: Earl of Worcester and Hotspur’s uncle.

- **Lady Percy**: Wife of Hotspur.

- **Edmund Mortimer**: Earl of March. He believes he has a claim on the throne.

- **Owen Glendower**: Welsh rebel leader.

- **Lady Mortimer**: Wife of Edmund Mortimer and daughter of Glendower.

- **Archibald**: Earl of Douglas. He leads the Scottish army as an ally of the Earl of Northumberland.

- **Richard Scroop**: Archbishop of York and ally of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earl of Westmoreland</td>
<td>Nobleman in the king's army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Walter Blunt</td>
<td>Nobleman in the king's army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Michael</td>
<td>Supporter of the archbishop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Richard Vernon</td>
<td>A rebel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir John Falstaff</td>
<td>Bosom pal of Prince Henry and one of the great comic characters in English literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poins</td>
<td>Drinking companion of Prince Henry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadshill, Peto, Bardolph</td>
<td>Drinking companions of Falstaff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistress Quickly</td>
<td>Hostess of the Boar's-Head Tavern in London's Eastcheap section. Prince Henry, Falstaff, and their drinking friends are among the tavern's best customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>A waiter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Characters</td>
<td>Lords, officers, sheriff, vintner (wine merchant), chamberlain, drawers (tapsters or bartenders), carriers, travelers, attendants, ostler (hostler, a person at an inn or a stable who keeps charge of horses).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Background of the Play**

**Setting:** England, late 1300's: London, Rochester, highway near Gadshill, Warkworth Castle, Bangor, military camp near Shrewsbury, public road near Coventry, and York

**Theme 1:** *Battlefield valor shapes tomorrow's leaders.* Prince Hal's courageous deeds in war help mold him into a respected leader. This motif recurs throughout literature and history, as demonstrated in ancient times by Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar and in modern times by Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy.

**Theme 2:** *Even the best of men sometimes have checkered pasts.* Like many modern politicians, Prince Hal has engaged in reprehensible and censurable conduct, thanks to his association with the disreputable Falstaff.

**Theme 3:** *Domestic violence strikes not only families but also entire kingdoms.* Henry IV uses his army to fight citizens of his own country. In modern times, governments have often done the same, rightly or wrongly, in Russia, Northern Ireland, Vietnam, and other countries.

**Plot Summary**

**Rebel Armies** mass to overthrow King Henry IV, who made many enemies before gaining the throne. Owen Glendower, a Welsh rebel, poses a threat in the west while Archibald, the Earl of Douglas, poses a threat in the north. When
Edmund Mortimer, the Earl of March, leads an English army against Glendower, Glendower defeats him and takes him prisoner. However, another English army led by Henry Percy (known as Hotspur) defeats Archibald and offers to trade prisoners to gain the release of Mortimer, Hotspur's brother-in-law. The ever-suspicious King Henry condemns Hotspur's plan, pointing out that Mortimer has found time to woo and wed Glendower's daughter in the enemy camp and therefore "hath wittily betray'd the lives of those that he did lead to fight..."

Infuriated, Hotspur refuses to release the prisoners: "An if the devil come and roar for them," Hotspur says, "I will not send them."

So angry is Hotspur that he joins the rebellion against Henry. Meanwhile, Prince Hal—King Henry's irresponsible, fun-loving son—is out among the ruffians of London with a fat old knight, Sir John Falstaff. Falstaff is a braggart and buffoon who enjoys all the pleasures of the flesh—eating, drinking and wenching—and is taking Hal along for the ride. "I am the veriest varlet that ever chewed with a tooth," Falstaff declares as he plans to rob some travellers. While Hal and Falstaff are making merry in the Boar's-Head Tavern in London, one of the king's nobles delivers a message reporting news of the rebellion and commanding Hal to return to court in the morning to see his father, the king. Falstaff, realizing that Hal must go to war, says, "Are thou not horrible afraid?" Hal says, "Not a whit, I' faith; I lack some of thy instinct." The next day, King Henry scolds his son for his "inordinate and low desires" and reprimands him for the "rude society" he keeps. Hal then promises, "I shall hereafter...be more myself."

**When Henry** hears that some of the rebels, including Hotspur, are marshaling their forces in the west, at the town of Shrewsbury, he commissions Hal to command part of the army which the king himself will lead. In turn, Prince Hal commissions Falstaff to raise and lead a regiment of foot soldiers against the rebels. However, Falstaff drafts only cowards who have money, knowing full well they will offer to buy their way out of military service. When they hand over three hundred pounds each to win their right to return home, Falstaff pockets all of the money except a small portion with which to hire ruffians as stand-ins. Later, as Prince Hal inspects Falstaff's recruits, he says, "I never did see such pitiful rascals." Falstaff says they'll do just fine because "They'll fit a pit as well as better."

Meanwhile, in an eleven-hour effort to prevent hostilities, King Henry offers the rebels a general pardon, but Hotspur and his forces come out fighting. As the battle rages, Hal and Hotspur seek each other out. When they find each other, Hal kills Hotspur. But Hal does not rejoice, for he recognizes that there was greatness in Hotspur. Hal salutes his fallen foe, saying "Fare thee well, great heart!" All of Falstaff's men die in the battle. Not wishing to meet their fate, Falstaff lies down and pretends to be dead. When he arises later, he says, "The better part of valour is discretion; in the which better part, I have saved my life." Coming upon the corpse of Hotspur, he eyes it up and down suspiciously, wondering whether Hotspur may still be alive. In a fit of bravery he stabes the
corpse and decides to take credit for having slain the warrior. He then picks up the corpse and heaves it onto his shoulder, as a hunter would a dead stag, and carries it off.

When Prince Hal happens by, Falstaff throws the corpse down and says, "There is Percy: if your father will do me any honour, so; if not, let him kill the next Percy himself. I look to be either earl or duke, I can assure you." Hal then announces that it was he who slew Hotspur while the fat old knight was lying in a ditch. Falstaff replies, "I grant you I was down and out of breath; and so was he: but we rose both at an instant and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock. If I may be believed, so; if not, let them that should reward valour bear the sin upon their own heads." In the distance, a trumpet blares a retreat, and Hal declares the battle over and the victory won. As Hal leaves for another part of the battlefield, Falstaff follows, saying, "He that rewards me, God reward him! If I do grow great, I'll grow less; for I'll purge, and leave sack, and live cleanly as a nobleman should do."

The two rebel leaders, Worcester and Vernon, are taken prisoner and summarily executed. However, a third prisoner—the valorous Archibald, Earl of Douglas—is released by the generous Prince Hal. King Henry and Hal then leave for Wales to confront rebels under the command of Owen Glendower and the Earl of March. At the same time, Prince John of Lancaster, Hal's younger brother, heads toward York to do battle with rebel forces led by the Earl of Northumberland (Hotspur's father). The play ends when King Henry declares, "Rebellion in this land shall lose his sway, meeting the cheque of such another day: And since this business so fair is done, let us not leave till all our own be won."


SELF-ASSESSMENT TASKS

Discuss three themes of Henry the Fourth, Part One.
CONCLUSION

The English history play, a genre Shakespeare virtually invented, was perhaps the most distinctive cultural production of the Elizabethan Age. Shakespeare turned the chronicle accounts of medieval dynastic struggles into vivid examinations of politics, power, family, war, and kingship. The plays’ relevance to Elizabethan political concerns was so apparent as to be positively dangerous. In the past century, these plays have again become central in Shakespeare’s work: both as compelling dramas in themselves, and as opportunities for staging provocative questions about social conflict.
UNIT 7
TYPES OF EXAMINATION QUESTIONS ON SHAKESPEARE AND RENAISSANCE DRAMA

Introduction

This unit provides you with samples of examination questions pertaining to Shakespeare and Renaissance plays and playwrights. It also provides you with samples of examination questions and suggested answers.

Unit Objectives

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. identify ways to study for your Shakespeare and Renaissance examination,
2. identify the purpose and types of examination questions, and
3. discuss and provide critical answers to your examination questions.

TOPICS

Topic 1: The purpose of examination questions
Topic 2: Types of Examination questions
Topic 3: General Approach to study Renaissance Drama
TOPIC 1 : THE PURPOSE OF EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

In order for you to obtain good results in this course, it is important for you to understand the different types of questions that are likely to be set, the purpose of each type of question, and what constitutes an appropriate answer to each.

The questions set are designed to test:
1. your knowledge of the plot and characters of the drama read in this course;
2. your knowledge of skills and concepts relating to literary criticism;
3. your understanding of the thematic concerns of the drama and to relay them to contemporary setting;
4. your ability to agree or disagree with the statements given in the texts;
5. your ability to explicate the given text so as to relay meaning to readers.

TOPIC 2 : TYPES OF EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

1. SECTION A

You are likely to encounter several different types of questions in Section A of your examination paper. In this section, the answers are brief as indicated by the marks given for each answer.

Example 1

Answer ALL questions briefly. Please write down your answers on the question paper. Each blank carries 1 mark.

Questions pertaining to The Tragical History of Dr Faustus:

(a) The person who gets horns on his head after doubting Faustus’ power is ..............................................................

(b) Most of Faustus, monologues are written in the form of ..............................................................

(c) The two magicians who teach Faustus the art of magic at the beginning of the play are ............................................and .............................................

Comments:

The answers to these questions require your knowledge of the plot and characters of the story.

Example 2
Answer **ALL** questions briefly. Please write down your answers on the question paper. Each question carries 1 mark.

Questions pertaining to *Othello* (1-17):

1. Who recruits Iago to woo Desdemona for himself?
2. What nation threatens the Venetian stronghold at Cyprus?
3. Who does Othello allow to bring Desdemona to Cyprus?

**Comments:**

The answers to these questions require your knowledge of the plot and characters of the story.

**Example 3**

Identify the following excerpts. For identification, give title of the work (1/2 mark), name of author (1/2 mark), and speaker of the excerpt (1 mark).

A. This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother,
   Which thou hast takest from me. When thou cam’st first,
   Thou strok’st me, and made mush of me; wouldst give me
   Water with berries in ’t; and teach me how,
   To name the bigger light, and how the less,
   That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee,

B. She lov’d me for the dangers I had pass’d,
   And I lov’d her, that she did pity them.
   This only is the witchcraft I have us’d.

C. To both these sisters have I sworn my love;
   Each jealous of the other, as the stung
   Are of the adder. Which of them shall I take?
   Both? One? Or neither? Neither can be enjoy’d
   If both remain alive:

**Comments:**

The answers to these questions require your knowledge of the plot and characters of the story.
Example 4

Identify and elaborate two of the following excerpts. For identification, give title of the work (1/2 mark), name of author (1/2 mark), and speaker of the excerpt (1 mark). For elaboration, discuss at which point of the play does this incident take place and what is its significance to the play as a whole (3 marks).

1. My brother and thy uncle, call'd Antonio--
I pray thee, mark me—that a brother should
Be so perfidious—he whom next thyself
Of all the world I loved and to him put
The manage of my state; as at that time
Through all the signories it was the first
And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed
In dignity, and for the liberal arts
Without a parallel; those being all my study,
The government I cast upon my brother
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies. Thy false uncle—
Dost thou attend me?

2. This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou has takest from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me, and made mush of me; wouldst give me
Water with berries in 't; and teach me how,
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee,

Comments:
The answers to these questions require your knowledge of the plot and characters of the story.

Example 5

Answer questions 1-3 based on the excerpt below:

What an opacous body had that moon
That last chang'd on us! Here's beauty chang'd
To ugly whoredom, here servant obedience
To a master sin, imperious murder.
I, a suppos'd husband, chang'd embraces
With wantonness, but that was paid before;
Your change is come too, from an ignorant wrath
To knowing friendship. Are there any more on's?

The name of the character as described in the excerpt above refers to:

1. Here's beauty changd
   To ugly whoresom. = ........................................ (1 mark)

2. here servant obedience
   To a master sin. improper murder. = ................................ (1 mark)

3. I, a suppos'd husband, chang'd embraces
   With wantonness = ............................................. (1 mark)

Comments:

The answers to these questions require your knowledge of the plot and characters of the story.

Example 6

Choose ONE best answer from the alternatives A-D given below for each of the question.

Questions pertaining to Othello:
1. What pattern does the handkerchief have embroidered into it?
   (A) Strawberries
   (B) Dots
   (C) Leaves
   (D) Daggers

2. How is the Turkish fleet thwarted?
   (A) In battle with Othello's fleet
   (B) By a storm
   (C) Mutiny
   (D) In battle with ships from Rhodes

Comments:

The answers to these questions require your knowledge of the plot and characters of the story.
2. **SECTION B**

You are likely to encounter several different types of questions in **Section B** of your examination paper. In this section, the answers are longer as indicated by the marks given for the answer.

**Example 1**

Write a short essay on only **ONE** of the following (20 marks). Your answer should be in about **350** words.

1. According to *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, "foil" means a character whose qualities or actions serve to emphasize those of the protagonist or some other character by providing a strong contrast with them. Discuss in detail the use of foil in **ONE** of the plays studied this semester.

2. Describe the use of parody in **ONE** of the plays read in this course.

**Comments:**

The answer to this type of question requires your knowledge of the concepts used and discussed in the plays. If the definition is not given in the question, such as in question 2 above, you need to provide the definition when answering the question and apply it to the chosen play.

**Example 2**

Write an essay on only **ONE** of the following in about 350-400 words (20 marks).

For each of the excerpt below, please relate your answer to a relevant theme in the play.

1. Soft, lady, soft;
   The last is not yet paid for. Oh, this act
   Has put me into spirit; I was as greedy on't
   As the parch'd earth of moisture when the clouds weep.
   Did you not mark I wrought myself into't?
   Nay, sued and kneel'd for't? Why was all that pains took?
   You see I have thrown contempt upon your gold;
   Not that I want it [not], for I do piteously:
   In order I will come unto't and make use on't.
   But 'twas not held so precious to begin with,
   For I place wealth after the heels of pleasure,
And were I not resolv'd in my belief
That thy virginity were perfect in thee,
I should but take my recompense with grudging,
As if I had but half my hopes I agreed for.

2. In this last tempest, I perceive these lords
   At this encounter do so much admire
   That they devour their reason and scarce think
   Their eyes do offices of truth, their words
   Are natural breath: but, howsoe'er you have
   Been justled from your senses, know for certain
   That I am Prospero and that very duke
   Which was thrust forth of Milan, who most strangely
   Upon this shore, where you were wreck'd, was landed,
   To be the lord on't. No more yet of this;
   For 'tis a chronicle of day by day,
   Not a relation for a breakfast nor
   Befitting this first meeting. Welcome, sir;
   This cell's my court: here have I few attendants
   And subjects none abroad: pray you, look in.
   My dukedom since you have given me again,
   I will requite you with as good a thing;
   At least bring forth a wonder, to content ye
   As much as me my dukedom.

Comments:

The answers to these questions require your knowledge of the main characters of the drama and their theme(s). You should be able to relate this excerpt to the relevant theme of the play.

Example 3

The act of compelling a woman into an unwanted marriage is not only unfair, cruel and socially evil: it is also potentially damning. Indeed, Beatrice, in The Changeling, desires to marry Alsemero but "must be a bride" to Alonso de Piraquo; thus she can only obtain her choice through the damming act of murder. Discuss whether you agree or disagree with these statements by using proofs from the texts.

Comments:

The answer to this question requires your knowledge of the main characters in the play and its story line. You need to put your stand, whether you agree or disagree with the statement posed. Then, you need to provide points or argument from the play to support your answers.
Example 4

Compare and contrast the use of magic in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*.

Comments:
The answer to this question requires your knowledge of both the two texts. You should be able to discriminate the similarities and differences of the use of magic by Dr Faustus and Prospero.

Example 5

For this question, you need to refer to Illustration A as attached. First of all, identify the play and the scene from which this picture is taken. You also need to describe everything that you manage to see in the illustration. In your answer, elaborate the significance of this scene and how does it contribute to the development of the play’s plot.

Illustration A

Comments:
The answer to this question requires you to be able to identify the illustrated scene and to describe what you see in relation to the text. You should be able to
ascertain the importance of the illustrated scene and elaborate its contribution to the development of the plot in the play.

GENERAL STUDY TIPS:
After studying each play, you should be prepared to answer questions about:

- The names, identities, character traits of all the characters in the play (you should know who is who, to the extent that you can identify the character given an example of his/her/their speech)
- Details concerning what happen throughout the play and how certain scenes advance the plot or develop character

TOPIC 3: GENERAL APPROACH TO STUDY RENAISSANCE DRAMA

Below is first and foremost, the simplest guide to reading any Shakespeare and Renaissance plays.

1) Step I: Read a good plot synopsis. There are countless plot summaries available, but many are simply too brief to provide detailed scene-by-scene accounts. Look for a synopsis that incorporates passages from the play directly into the discussion. Although you may not understand the passages completely at first, when you read the play later on you will know exactly what is happening in the story. I recommend the Cliff Notes which contains excellent scene-by-scene summaries of all Shakespeare's plays and some Renaissance drama. For online plot summaries, you may go to Spark Notes or Classic Notes websites.

2) Step II: Find an annotated copy of the work you would like to read. Even if you already have a copy at home or at school, if it is not properly annotated you should invest in another edition. Look for a copy that has detailed annotations at the bottom of each page or on the page opposite Shakespeare's text. When you find an edition that has annotations, skim over a passage at random and identify any words that you do not understand. If they are not all defined at the bottom of the page, put that edition back on the shelf. Often editors overlook words that might pose a problem to first-time Shakespeare readers. I find that even some of the most popular editions have this flaw, so don't be
deceived by well-known names. If you are ordering by mail or online you do not have the luxury of glancing through the glossary. In this case, I would choose an edition from one of the following series: The Oxford Classics, Alan Durband's *Shakespeare Made Easy*.

3) Step III: Get comfortable and read once through the play. In this quick preliminary reading you should focus on learning the meanings of difficult words, and, as you read, you should start to become familiar with the personalities of the characters. When you are finished your first reading, you will be ready for step four.

4) Step IV: Rent, buy, or borrow from your local library the BBC production of the play. The BBC Shakespeare series is an amazing resource which includes the complete text of each drama. Grab your copy of the play and read along with the video. Through the performances of the tremendous actors featured on the BBC productions, the speeches will come to life for you, and passages that were unintelligible before will become clear. If you do not have access to the BBC series, you might have to do a little research to find a good alternative video production that is as close to the original play as possible.

5) Step V: It is time to read the play again. By now you should have a solid understanding of the key passages, and hence you can concentrate on larger themes represented in the play. It is time to ask yourself questions like:

- What are the main events of importance?
- Which characters are involved in the sub-plot and how does the sub-plot relate to the chief plot of the play?
- How do the characters relate to one another?
- What motivates the central characters?
- What does the play tell us about life and our ability to control our own destiny?

 Do not be discouraged if you must re-read crucial passages several times. Even professors often need to return to key lines. Each time you read a passage you will gain a deeper understanding of the play as a whole. I would also recommend reading general commentaries on the play, especially if you need more ideas for essay topics. There is no reason to fear the Bard. Although it takes a little work to master Shakespeare's language, full comprehension is within the grasp of all students. If you want to expand your general knowledge of Shakespeare's lexicon, be sure to read The Elizabethan Glossary online.
CONCLUSION

By the end of this unit it is hoped that you will have an idea of what to expect in your examination. This will help you how to study and score good marks for your examination.